



MACHIAVELLI
on Liberty & Conflict

EDITED BY DAVID JOHNSTON, NADIA URBINATI,
AND CAMILA VERGARA

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INTRODUCTION

DAVID JOHNSTON, NADIA URBINATI, AND CAMILA VERGARA

Centenaries come unsolicited, but their celebrations are carefully devised. Celebrations of anniversaries of events, authors, and works are representative of the times, and places, in which they occur. Celebrations of anniversaries acquired momentum along with the establishment of the nation-states in the nineteenth century. This was particularly true in Italy, as the work of the great authors of the past had been for centuries the only or most visible monument of the unity of the country. In the age of the Italian Risorgimento, Niccolò Machiavelli became an emblem of national unification in an explicitly intended way. In 1859, the provisional government of Tuscany initiated the process of annexation to the newly born Kingdom of Italy “by decreeing a new and complete edition of Machiavelli’s works.” Its decision provoked a harsh reaction from the French government (opposing Italian unification for strategic reasons), which expressed its “indignation” at the fact that the new Italy was glorifying “a monster of perfidy” (Villari 1878, I:v–vi). Hence Felix Gilbert wrote that “Machiavelli’s teachings are so rich that in them each succeeding century can find answers for the political issues which are its main concern, and the myth of Machiavelli can grow and vary without losing contact with the personality which inspired it” (1953, 137). The intersection between Machiavelli’s texts and the men and women who read and used them through the centuries has prompted a variety of dissenting interpretations, so that Machiavelli could and still can be used to serve the ideology of the “man of providence” and to sponsor a civic and republican conception of liberty that would also be able to justify tyrannicide and revolt. Moreover, his *Florentine Histories* have inspired socialists and theorists of class conflict by asserting a direct association between wealth and dishonesty to the point of declaring property to be theft and identifying its

concentration in the hands of a few wealthy and powerful people a reason for discord and, finally, the death of political liberty.

The 2013 anniversary of *The Prince* has been thus an excellent opportunity to examine critically and at length Machiavellian studies through both the reconstruction of the historical foundations and meanings of Machiavelli's texts and the legacy of Machiavelli's thought in contemporary interpretations of liberty and political power. This anniversary comes after some other, similar celebrations and a hugely authoritative and rich tradition of scholarship on Machiavelli, humanism, and the Renaissance that dates back at least to the sixteenth century. It may thus be useful to situate the Columbia celebration within the broader historical context of previous celebrations. We shall begin with events that were held in the years of the unification of Italy. We know of course that Machiavelli's thought shaped generations of thinkers and political leaders well before the nineteenth century. *The Prince*—which exiled Italians for reason of religious persecution translated into Latin in the sixteenth century, thus facilitating its circulation—had an immediate impact on the European Reformers and the English Revolution. It inspired the renaissance of modern materialism in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, circulating as a clandestine text among the French "libertines" and illuminating the debates on reason of state, tacitism, and the construction of modern sovereignty up to the American founders, the French revolutionaries, and the philosophers of the Enlightenment, both in its Scottish and its French branches. *The Prince* was revered by Jean-Jacques Rousseau as a republican text unveiling the nature of tyranny to the people, and Hegel hoped for a new Theseus of the German nation in an explicit praise of Machiavelli's vision of the role of state founders. Machiavelli and Machiavellism (and anti-Machiavellism) constitute the weave of political history and the political thought of modern and contemporary world history.

Aware of this enormous body of thought, we designed our introduction consciously to be limited to the academic scholarship within the "celebratory" tradition that started together with the construction of the nation-state. This book is the outcome of a celebration of the five hundredth anniversary of *The Prince* at Columbia University and thus part of that celebration tradition. We would like to thank the Italian Academy for Advanced Studies at Columbia University, the Embassy of Italy in Washington, DC, the Columbia Seminar on Studies in Political and Social Thought, the Department of Political Science at Columbia University, and the Heyman Center for the Humanities for their support of this conference, which was held on December 6 and 7, 2013, at the Italian Academy

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I

The 1869 celebration of the quatercentenary of Machiavelli's birth was a starting point in the "celebratory" tradition, which oriented interpretation and scholarship in a durable manner. That celebration coincided with the final stage of the Italian Risorgimento, as the geographical unification of the peninsula had been perfected in 1866 and its capital city was established in Florence, which is geographically situated between Turin (Piedmont's city center and the original site of the House of Savoy) and Rome (which until 1870 was part of the Papal States). Florence was a symbolic city both for the country and for Machiavelli. To the Italians of the age of the Risorgimento, the political meaning of Machiavelli was imbued with a strong patriotism, albeit consciously inscribed within an ideal horizon that was European, not nationalist. After Greece had attained independence from the Ottoman Empire, Italy and Germany were the two large countries of the continent that brought to completion their unification in the second half of the century. In Italy, furthermore, the Risorgimento was a process both of independence and of unification—thus all in all, in 1869 the country of Machiavelli represented a full actualization of chapter 26 of his *Prince*, and the promoters of the celebrations were fully aware of it.

It is fair to say that the nineteenth century marked the renaissance of scholarship on Machiavelli and early modern Italian history, both of which the committee for the quatercentenary celebrations conceived as essential chapters in a truly European political history. The 1869 centenary occurred in an age in which the postimperial order whose inception Machiavelli had already detected was almost accomplished, as territorial states were covering almost the entire continent. The national basis of state legitimacy, the construction of educational institutions, the birth of historical studies as an academic and autonomous discipline, and the "business" of the celebrations of great authors and works of the past were part and parcel of a broader endeavor that had the nation-state at its core. For all these historical and ideological reasons, the celebrations were a starting point that prompted a remarkable work of search, collection, analysis, and publication of Machiavelli's papers, most of which were placed

at public disposal in the National Library of Florence while the national publication of his papers, documents, and work began.

The heart of the celebrations of 1869 was a contest that its committee launched for the selection of the best monograph, a “broad work on the life, times, thought and work of Machiavelli” (Sartorello 2010, 3; 2009). Competing scholars were invited to study Machiavelli and his historical times in Europe, Italy, and Florence according to three main aims: to reconstruct his cultural and political milieu and in particular the Republic of Florence; to inquire about the “influences of the Ancient Greeks and Romans” on Machiavelli’s thought; and to assess “how and how much” Machiavelli’s work “participated in the liberation and unification of Italy and the progresses of the European society in general” (3–4). In less than ten years, from 1874 to 1883, several important books were written that complied with those guidelines (although only three of them participated in the competition launched by the committee), by Francesco de Sanctis, Carlo Gioda, Francesco Nitti, Jean-Félix Nourrisson, Gaspar Amico, Pasquale Villari, Francesco Mordenti, and Oreste Tommasini (the winner of the competition).

The centenary was wholly in the shadow of the Risorgimento’s myth of politics as an ethical enterprise, a constructive power of national independence, the essential condition to have a progressive and free society. Although the republican model had been defeated in Italy and in Europe with the suppression of the democratic revolutions of 1848 and 1849, and although Italian unification was achieved by a monarch, the process that brought about national self-determination retained the significance of an ethical enterprise that was collective and inspired by republican ideals (Procacci 1965). Within that patriotic context the impact of the work of Sismonde de Sismondi was remarkable, especially his view of political freedom as a process of the constitutionalization of government and the precondition for social well-being and cultural creativity. Thus historians included the Swiss Sismondi, whose work was a landmark for Giuseppe Mazzini and other leaders of the Risorgimento, in the Italian cultural and civil tradition as a “luminous” example of the republican idea that “the cause of the character of a people is its government, that, in other words, civic energy or dissolution are at the origins of every age of greatness or decadence” (Chabod 1967, 149–50).

Sismondi (who began working on his *Recherches sur les constitutions des peuples libres* in 1796 while living in Tuscany) was the first scholar to develop a historical interpretation that made the medieval city-states of Italy the cradle of modern Europe. He contributed to the creation of the

myth of an Italian nation that preexisted its independence; moreover, he inspired a moral and civil historiography whose echo is to be detected also in the work of some great scholars of the mid-nineteenth century, such as George Grote's volumes on Switzerland and ancient Greece and John Stuart Mill's *Considerations on Representative Government*. Among the "benefits of freedom" that the Italian city-states enjoyed were the long-lasting effects of the creative energies they released, so that the artistic treasures of the Renaissance were not the product of the Signoria or the papacy but of the previous republican age. Within this romantic reading (as it was then called), which can be detected also in De Sanctis's and Villari's works on Machiavelli (certainly the major contributions in the nineteenth century), the medieval age of the *comuni*, which for the eighteenth century philosophers had been a time of darkness, became the inspiring core of modern liberty and civilization. This comprehensive vision of the creative function of political self-government was an important source of inspiration for the 1869 celebrations.

In advancing the idea that political government is the determining factor in a people's history, Sismondi amended Montesquieu's naturalism with Machiavelli's idea that the political order, rather than climate, race, or geography, has the power to shape the moral character of a people (Sofia 2001). By the same token, the loss of freedom, with the tyrannies of the sixteenth century and monarchical absolutism, was the main cause of decline, cultural and social as well as political and moral. This interpretation brought Sismondi to amend what he took to be two eighteenth-century biases: one favoring large and centralized states over small and decentralized states, with the ensuing exaltation of the Leviathan as the basic condition for stability and progress; and the other against the Middle Ages as an age of backwardness that the Renaissance supplanted. As for the former, as with Edward Gibbon, whose work inspired Sismondi's *Histoire de la chute de l'empire romain*, Sismondi thought that the main cause of the fall of Roman civilization was imperial despotism, rather than barbarian invasions.¹ As for the latter, it is interesting to see that Sismondi launched a powerful attack against Renaissance-philia, which was already well represented by William Roscoe's *The Life of Lorenzo de' Medici Called the Magnificent* (1796) and *Life and Pontificate of Leo the Tenth* (1805). Siding with Voltaire, Roscoe had idealized Medici's enlightened modernity, but Sismondi argued in his *Histoire des républiques italiennes* that political liberty actually perished under the Medici and along with it the glory of Florence. Since political liberty, not centralized executives, was the engine of progress and civilization, the Renaissance marked

the beginning of Italy's decadence. Conversely, the Italian free cities of the twelve century became the "classical age" of political liberty and the cradle of modern Europe.

In sum, the republican Sismondi maintained the existence of a direct link between liberty, virtues, and social prosperity on the one hand, and tyranny, despotism, and moral and social decline on the other. His main object of interest was the people in their social, ethical, and cultural manifestations, and political government as the decisive means of organizing and nurturing them. Machiavelli inspired Sismondi's reading as a republican author who, as with Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Vittorio Alfieri, and Ugo Foscolo, revealed the perversity of tyranny as he lived in a time and a city in which the transition from the republic to the Signoria of the Medici was taking place, with immediate consequences for his own life and liberty (Rosa 1964). Machiavelli's political ideas were made to reflect that age of transition, its contradictions and ambiguities. They foresaw realistically the growing role of medium-large states, and yet they retained still an ideal of political liberty that was the heir of the communal life then in decline.

Sismondi moved Voltaire's paradigm of the dark age from the Middle Age to the Renaissance, thus suggesting with Johann Gottfried Herder that when humanist scholars started imitating the Greeks and the Romans in the attempt to refine their rough habits, they ended up disassociating cultural and artistic life from civic and political life, private from political liberty. The historian who mostly inspired this idea of disassociation was another Swiss, Jacob Burckhardt, whose work on the Italian Renaissance was translated into Italian in 1876 and had its early impact in the interpretative work of Francesco De Sanctis, the author of seminal essays on Machiavelli and Guicciardini. Burckhardt created the "category" of the Renaissance as an "organic block" that comprised the fourteenth, fifteenth, and part of the sixteenth centuries and that ended being identified with Italian society (Chabod 1950, 132). To him, Italy was not "the society of liberty and the age of municipal government" as with Sismondi, but "the society of tyrannies" and of the state as a "work of art." At the origin of modern Europe there was thus a kind of liberty that could exist without political liberty and self-government—"liberty from," one might say, paraphrasing Isaiah Berlin. In Burckhardt's reading, modern politics was made to reside not in the early modern republics, but in the artistic constructivism of a prince, a "Machiavellic" leader who alone could solve the problems associated with getting and preserving state power (Burckhardt 1921). Thus, with the awareness of the civic decadence of the Renaissance, the role of Machiavelli became more and more ambiguous, split

between that of a preceptor of liberty in the old style and that of a realist whose first-hand experience of politics forced him to lower his expectations about the virtue of the political man. A few years after the completion of the Risorgimento, early modern Italy and modern Italy seemed to be dramatically divided: the former a symbol of liberty, the latter the symbol of a missed statecraft and decline of freedom.

These two avenues, which we sketched through the images proposed by Sismondi and Burckhardt, coexisted in the mind and the work of the scholars who wrote on the wake of the 1869 anniversary. Once the Italian state was created, politics as “the art of the state” became more and more predominant as the leading paradigm according to which Machiavelli’s work and times were read and studied. Consequently, since Italy was not the cradle of the territorial state or of modern politics—although it contributed to it with the Signoria—the perspective according to which the role of Italy was assessed in modern Europe changed in a remarkable way. The implication of that generalization was massive and destined to have the future on its side: whereas in the republican horizon, Italy’s municipal duecento, trecento, and quattrocento were at the source of post-Roman Europe and modern society in all respects, within the “art of the state” paradigm Italy was essentially a political failure, its contribution to modern Europe consisting in artistic and literary culture, not politics. Within a Europe made of states, Italy was absent. Failing to achieve territorial unification when sovereign states became determinant in defining the destiny of Europe and the world was equated with not being part of the political thought of modernity. Furthermore, to the political historians of the nineteenth century, certainly to the Hegelians, the Reformation was the spiritual source of modern political liberty, not the Renaissance, whose splendor corresponded with the cynical aridity of a political practice devoid of all religious life.

Within that context Machiavelli was pivotal and ambiguous at once: on the one hand, his criticism of Catholicism as the death of a pristine Christianity pointed to a recognition of an ethical role of religion, without which no civil liberty seemed to him able to endure; but on the other hand, his admiration for the pagan religion of the Roman republic for fostering civil practices and patriotic duties nurtured a sentiment of instrumentality of religion and anticlericalism that disturbed generations of historians and interpreters (Cantimori 1992). Pasquale Villari was the first important historian to dwell on this critical analysis in his *Niccolò Machiavelli e i suoi tempi*.

To bring to an end this overview on the two main trajectories that

flowed from the celebrations in 1869, we may say that to those scholars who retained Sismondi's message, the truth of the *Principe* was in chapter 26, a unique page in the Italian history of the Renaissance, and in the chapters in which he argued that giving armies to the people was the necessary condition for them to achieve and preserve their liberty. To those who leaned instead towards Burckhardt's paradigm, Machiavelli was essentially an unsolvable enigma, since along with that patriotic last chapter and his call for "armi proprie" he had also put forward a conception of politics that was essentially based on political calculus, deception, and a disenchanting art of statecraft. Patriotic and nationalist sentiments guided both readings, which were to inspire much scholarship on Machiavelli and the Renaissance. A more recent echo of these two lines of interpretations can be found in Quentin Skinner's opening of his *Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, one of the aims of which was, Skinner wrote, to "offer an outline account of the principal texts of late medieval and early modern political thought" starting with Dante, Marsilio of Padua, Machiavelli, and Guicciardini, and proceeding through the French constitutionalists of the sixteenth century. Skinner wanted to amend an interpretation of modern political thought that situated the origins of modern European politics (thus both constitutionalist theories and absolutist theories) in the years of Reformation and the conflicts thence precipitated in the sixteenth century. He thus decided to begin his history "in the late thirteenth century, and carry the story down to the end of the sixteenth, because it was during that period, I shall seek to show, that the main elements of a recognizably modern concept of the State were gradually acquired" (Skinner 1978, I:ix). Yet Skinner changed more than echoed the two readings we outlined above as he did not conclude with that old divorce but attempted to achieve a unified history of political modernity, which started—both in its republican and in its absolutism form—at the end of the trecento and in the quattrocento. As a matter of fact, Skinner's *Foundations* created a better environment to understand Machiavelli's thought, which breathed both kinds of air.

A way out of that dualism in Machiavelli and humanism scholarship that the celebrations of 1869 prompted was represented by the paradigm of politics as the "art of the state." Beginning with the end of the nineteenth century, realism became the dominant vision of politics propelled and sustained by the renaissance of idealism. As we saw above, De Sanctis had already portrayed Machiavelli as the "discoverer" of the "cruel logical world" governed by the law of force (De Sanctis 1952, 66). In De Sanctis's eyes, this made Machiavelli a tragic figure, as he understood and bore the

fact that politics needed to be autonomous from morals in order to be effective. The nationalist turn in late-nineteenth-century European nation-states translated into military aggression and colonialism abroad and equilibrium of powers in the old continent, thus inaugurating the golden age of peace by *realpolitik*. Nationalism legitimized the realist paradigm as fully rational and free from the prior romantic idealization of politics, with no tragic side. Hence a new assessment of Machiavelli's reading was reached that made his *Prince* the founding text of modern politics, and him the first political theorist of modernity. The reading of Benedetto Croce, which became exemplary of that new course, shaped the research of several generations of scholars and defined the intellectual climate surrounding the quatercentenary of Machiavelli's death in 1927.

The post-World War I destabilization of liberal constitutional regimes in continental Europe brought the transition of the two nation-states that had achieved national unification in mid-nineteenth century, Italy and Germany, toward despotic and totalitarian regimes. Croce, who became very soon the reference point of an intellectual resistance against fascist illiberal politics, tried to prompt "an Italian approach to Machiavelli" that would "differ in many ways from those prevailing in Anglo-American countries," as Alessandro Passerin D'Entrèves wrote in 1958. Somehow, the divide between continental and Atlantic interpretations on Machiavelli and the Renaissance may thus be made to start fully in the age between the two world wars. In the tradition of *Rechtsgeschichte* and *Verfassungsgeschichte*, Germany and Italy were the cradles of the paradigm of politics as statecraft, with the seminal contribution of Friedrich Meinecke's *Weltbürgertum und Nationalstaat* (1908) and *Idee der Staatsräson in der neueren Geschichte* (1925),² and Benedetto Croce's *Elementi di politica* (1925). Florence and the *segretario fiorentino* were studied not only within the perspective of the end of the Middle Age and the municipal tradition but as the origins of the modern state.

The romantic idealization with the unsolvable dualism of a Machiavelli who was transformed by republicans (from Rousseau to Alfieri) into the advocate of liberty, and a Machiavelli who theorized the immoral doctrine of justification and excuse of violence and treachery in the name of "the 'divine spark of patriotism'" (De Sanctis) was set aside in the realist age in the name of a "matter-of-fact and scientific" vision of power. "Here indeed the most startling claim was that made by Croce, that the 'true and proper foundation of a philosophy of politics' was the work of an Italian" (Passerin D'Entrèves 1958, xii). Croce reversed the age-long denunciation of Machiavelli's immorality and recovered for Italy a place of honor in mod-

ern political thought when he made that immorality the greatest achievement in the conceptualization of politics. The foundation of modernity, wrote Croce in a language that was not far away from Carl Schmitt's, lay in Machiavelli's "discovery" of "the necessity and autonomy of politics, which is beyond or, rather, below good and evil, which has its own laws against which it is useless to rebel, politics that cannot be exorcised and driven from this world with holy water" (Croce 1945, 59). Although Italy did not equal the leading European nations in achieving statehood, it produced the doctrine of statehood. In Hegelian terms, one might say that to Croce Italy embodied through Machiavelli the Idea of modern politics, the truth of the real.

The impact of the paradigm of the "autonomy of politics" as the "nature of politics" was enormous and destined to enjoy a long future, uniting generations of scholars belonging to different ideological traditions and transcending the age of fascism. The outbreak of World War II and the terror associated with the religion of the state inspired Ernest Cassirer's study on *The Myth of The State* (1946) and Gerhard Ritter's classical work on *Die Dämonie der Macht* (1948). War and the totalitarian perversion of politics shook the doctrine of realism without completely withering it away. The best example of that unfinished revision was represented by Federico Chabod, one of the greatest historians of the Renaissance and scholars of Machiavelli, to whom we owe the dating of *The Prince* between July and December 1513. A follower of Croce's interpretation, his participation in the Italian resistance against Nazi-Fascism made him experience directly that politics was not truly outside the domain of morals or "below moral good and evil." Yet although he revised his early interpretation he did not dismiss it. In the age of a new Risorgimento (as the resistance was named in Italy), Chabod went back, as it were, to the interpretation that had marked the four hundredth anniversary of Machiavelli's birth. "In contrast to the separation between political and cultural history which had characterized the latest phase of Italian Machiavelli and Renaissance studies, Chabod shifted the emphasis back to the close connection between the two" (Passerin D'Entrèves 1958, xiii). *The Prince*, that is, was now the "expression, almost a synthesis of Italian life throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries . . . the age-long process of development which leads from the downfall of the old, Communal freedom to the triumph of the princely, the absolute State" (Chabod 1950, 154).

In explaining the distance between his position and that of the old romantic historiography on Machiavelli and the Renaissance, Chabod argued that the "moral considerations which were too dear to them" had no

significance to him, who wanted to avoid any judgment of condemnation or justification, and simply to situate Machiavelli in his own time. Historical contextualism entailed explaining rather than evaluating or judging. But how could Chabod have written the following sentence had he renounced making evaluative judgments? "*The Prince* is at once a synthesis and a condemnation of two centuries of Italian history; and far more than its supposed immorality, what should have stirred the emotions of the commentators was the thought of the boundless misery which was overtaking our civilization" (Chabod 1958, 105). Passerin D'Entrèves commented: "Unless I am entirely mistaken, there is contained in these lines a judgment, indeed a 'moral' judgment, which should allay the suspicion that Italians take a cynical pride in the statecraft of the Florentine Secretary" (1958, xv).

Leo Strauss went beyond Croce and Chabod to say that Machiavelli was "the founder of modern political philosophy," that he broke with "the whole tradition of political philosophy" in order to discover "a whole new moral continent" (Strauss 1959, 40). Strauss was a German refugee scholar from Nazi Germany who came to the United States and taught at the New School for Social Research (1938–49) and the University of Chicago (1949–67). In his time in America he made himself the founder of a school of thought, called "Straussian," of which one major feature was his interpretation of Machiavelli.

This interpretation, one like none other, was set forth in *Thoughts on Machiavelli* (1958). He begins it by professing that he is "inclined" to the old-fashioned opinion that Machiavelli was a "teacher of evil." This opinion is inadequate, however, and one must make a "considerate ascent" from it beyond reflexive disgust. But it is a necessary beginning if one wants to appreciate Machiavelli for "the intrepidity of his thought, the grandeur of his vision, and the graceful subtlety of his speech" (Strauss 1958, 9, 13). Strauss argues that Machiavelli was a philosopher who was not content with contemplation but had a practical agenda requiring that he himself become a prince in charge of a movement with the goal of creating the new moral continent. His evil maxims are intended to "bring common benefit to everyone" (D 1), so that the new continent is still in its way "moral" and still preserves in a new "virtue" (*virtù*) the nobility in princes that he otherwise sought to deny and destroy. In his telling, Machiavelli's wholesale reliance on reason, conjoined with his fervent commitment to the liberation of Italy, led him to reject conventional and Christian values, and to hold the Catholic Church responsible for the religious and moral corruption of Italy and for its loss of political virtue.

In the anglophone world, where it has had its greatest impact, Strauss's argument has been subjected to two major lines of attack, one led by Sheldon Wolin, the other by Quentin Skinner. Wolin did not deny Machiavelli's willingness to recommend that the conventional and the Christian virtues be set aside when necessary to achieve political objectives. However, the objectives Machiavelli endorsed were not limited to the liberation and glorification of Italy. Wolin called attention to Machiavelli's emphasis on the importance of the (superficially paradoxical) use of violence to minimize violence, as illustrated in the hair-raising story told early in *The Prince* of Cesare Borgia's deceitful manipulation and destruction of Remirro de Orco as a means of quelling the pattern of everyday violence that had become endemic in the territory for which de Orco was responsible. For Wolin, Machiavelli was not a purveyor of the crude doctrine that "the end justifies the means." Rather, Machiavelli's discussion and sometime endorsement of illicit means is underpinned by poignant recognition that in some circumstances, the only way to achieve the most admirable ends is by means that will leave one with dirty hands (Wolin 1960).

Quentin Skinner has attacked Strauss's argument from an entirely different angle. Skinner does not dispute Strauss's claim that in his discussion of the virtues and elsewhere, Machiavelli seeks to undermine what he takes to be a prevalent understanding of Christian virtues and values. In his telling, however, these discussions are based on firm adherence to an understanding of virtues and values Machiavelli shares with thinkers in a classical republican tradition of thought. For Skinner, Machiavelli sought to show that widely held understandings of Christian virtues are in fact corrupted understandings. He also sought, in place of these corrupted understandings, to articulate and to defend the virtues as they were understood by classical republican thinkers.³ It is true that Machiavelli held the Catholic Church responsible for the religious and moral corruption of Italy. But is it not also true that the Catholic Church, at the top and through much of its hierarchy, was in fact thoroughly corrupt and corrupting? It is not a mere coincidence that Martin Luther was vehemently protesting numerous established church practices in the same years during which Machiavelli composed his most celebrated writings (not by chance had De Sanctis named Machiavelli the "Lutero italiano") (Cantimori 1992, xxxiv).

Returning to the realist conception of politics, which actually made the incompatibility of religious ethics with politics paradigmatical, an important implication of the hegemony of Croce's theory of the autonomy of politics, especially on the Italian scholarship on Machiavelli, was that the *Discourses* were given much less attention in comparison to *The Prince*.

The emphasis on Machiavelli, the theorist of absolutism thanks to which Italy was given a place of honor in modern European politics, entailed forgetting completely that there was also a "Machiavelli the republican, longing for the free institutions of ancient Rome or of the Swiss cities of his own days" (Passerin D'Entrèves 1958, xv). The difference between the Italian Machiavelli and Anglo-American scholarship that Passerin D'Entrèves alluded to emerged precisely in relation to the issues of the composition of the *Discourses* and their place in Machiavelli's conception of politics. These questions, whose discussion would have a tremendous impact in later Machiavelli scholarship, were posed and discussed beginning in painstaking works published by Felix Gilbert and Hans Baron in 1953 and 1955, respectively.

"It is probably fair to say," Gilbert wrote, "that in the case of Machiavelli the change in evaluation which critical historical scholarship has brought about has meant a particularly radical break with the picture which previous centuries had created. This development is reflected in the fact that, while to former centuries Machiavelli had been chiefly the author of the *Prince*, students of our century have given their main attention to the *Discorsi* as containing the essence of Machiavelli's political teachings. Nevertheless, the traditional emphasis on the *Prince* has exerted influence on recent scholarship still to the extent that, despite the assumption of the decisive significance of the *Discorsi*, they have not been considered in isolation, but have been studied chiefly in their relation to the *Prince*" (Gilbert 1953, 139). Studying the *Discourses* in their structure and method allowed Gilbert to revise the date of their composition (standardly assumed to be between 1513, when the *The Prince* was composed, and 1517). Gilbert proposed instead a dating that would make the *Discourses* more autonomous from the *The Prince*: several chronological indications suggested him to indicate "the year 1517 for the composition of the *Discorsi*" (1953, 139). The new dating convinced Gilbert that "Machiavelli had been working on a treatise on republics when he was composing the *Prince*, and that he used this manuscript when he gave the *Discorsi* their final version and realized the necessity of providing them with a fuller introduction" (150). "For while in the past *The Prince* and the *Discorsi* have been considered as having been composed at the same time and therefore as using the same methodological approach, our analysis eliminates the possibility of a simultaneous conception" (153). The chronological and methodological differences between the two works "can be considered, therefore, as a first sign of Machiavelli's inclination to accept orthodox humanism and thus the contrast between the political realism

of *The Prince* and the political idealism of the *Discorsi* would appear to be the result of an intellectual development rather than an expression of a tension in Machiavelli's mind" (156). Later on, Gilbert demonstrated that the cycle of corruption and decline was the linking theme of Machiavelli's two works, a theme unavoidably associated with the dialectic between antiquity and modernity and between redemption and restoration (of Italy, not only of the good political order) (Gilbert 1972).

In Baron's *Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance* (1955), the decline of civil liberty was reinterpreted in a way that the view of modern history as absolutism supplanting old republican age would not allow: the generation that witnessed the crisis of "civil liberty" did not turn to a fatal loss or disappear. Although republics were over and "Tyranny was marching toward the period when monarchical absolutism would reign supreme," the surviving city-states succeeded "in limiting the triumphant progress of Tyranny in Renaissance Italy." The failure to create a centralized monarchy in north and central Italy compatible with "the political and cultural structure of sixteenth-century France and Spain" was somehow a fortunate fact since "the republican freedom of the city-state remained a vital element in the Italian Renaissance" (Baron 1955, xxvi). Baron's research meant to "suggest the crudity of the view that by the end of the fourteenth century the time for civic liberty was over and Tyranny was the only possible road into the future" (xxvii). Rejecting the cliché that had for so long shaped the interpretation of Machiavelli and the Italian Renaissance was not an ideological move but the outcome of a work of interpretation that relied upon "sources published but neglected and sources still unpublished," which showed Baron "an unexpected pattern." "Memoirs and the minutes of city councils tell of civic conduct and convictions such as are usually thought to have disappeared with the medieval Commune" (xxvii). To that political and civil culture Baron gave the name of "civic Humanism" and discovered in it a "close affinity to the outlook and sentiment of the city of the Greek *polis*." It was a republican and quasi-democratic Machiavelli that emerged from Baron's pages, representative of a generation that resisted the Medicean predominance and did not abjure "the role of civic freedom" that in the quattrocento had opposed the *forma popularis* of government to the monarchical one represented by the signore of Milan, Giangaleazzo Visconti, an antagonism that "again came to the fore" in the struggle against the Medicean principate. "Machiavelli's philosophy of history was based on the persuasion that political *virtù*, to achieve its full growth, had always needed the active citizenship extant in small free states" (428). The ideal of a "citizen in army," which

Baron supported with a commentary on the classical readings familiar to Machiavelli's contemporaries, from Livy, Aristotle, Cicero, Polybius, and Plutarch, added to his argument of a link between Greece, Rome, and Florence (430–33). Whereas Burckhardt had constructed the category of Renaissance, Baron constructed that of humanism, which in his words was "an organism" or "an intellectual movement already basically complete in the Trecento and merely adapting its outlook during the Quattrocento" (460). Thus, it was not the Renaissance that was at the origin of modernity, as the realist school held. Rather, humanism, with its civic vision of politics and cultural life and the confrontation between monarchical and republican order, was a prior source of modernity. Ten years after the end of World War II, Baron's work sounded like, and wanted to be, a programmatic work of history of political ideas that was primed to animate new researches in historiography and political theory as well.

The tradition of *Rechtsgeschichte* and *Verfassungsgeschichte* cannot be contained within the crude paradigm of reason of state and politics as the "art of the state." Holding the state central to modernity entailed for historians the use of positive methods of historiography to reconstruct institutions, procedures, forms of powers, and the creation of political language and ideologies. Nicolai Rubinstein played a pivotal role in this reconstruction and, further, in promoting the encounter of the German historical school with the Anglo-American tradition on the terrain of the studies of the Renaissance and, within it, of Machiavelli. Rubinstein, who like Baron went into exile in England in the years of Nazism, approached the analysis of the institutions of the Republic of Florence as part of his broader interest, in the tradition of Max Weber, in the formation of the legal order of the state in reaction against the particularistic structure of the feudal system. The state and its institutions were to him a shield against the anarchy of factions and political conflicts, against the plague of the democratic and tumultuous movements that characterized the Republic of Florence. Unlike Baron, who situated the contrast between the republic and the *principato* at the center of early modern Europe, Rubinstein stressed the compatibility of the Medici regime with the structure and procedures of the republican constitution (Rubinstein 1952). In Rubinstein's mind, before the fourteenth century there was no political thought, certainly not in the Italian communes of the Middle Age; both the theoretical reflection and political historiography originated in humanism and in the gradual formation of a state or legal order. This position, which was at the core of Rubinstein's lecture at the Warburg Institute in 1942 ("The Beginning of Political Thought in Florence"), was later modified when he

discovered the political literature belonging in the Aristotelian and Thomistic tradition (Remigio de' Girolami and Tolomeo da Lucca), a discovery that led him to the political interpretation of Ambrogio Lorenzetti's frescos in Siena (Rubinstein 1958).⁴

Rubinstein's studies of the Florentine Republic redirected scholars' attention to the theme of constitutionalism. They showed, for instance, that the Medici were able to emerge and dominate the political life of the city, within an electoral system that was already well established and a network of clientele that was already ingrained in the republic. Continuity and rupture—as shown by the power held by the *balia* to make extraordinary decisions that were in all respects forms of emergency power—were characteristic of the Republic of Florence, and the “government of the leader” was instituted, since the time of Cosimo de' Medici, by tacit consent without any constitutional process of legitimacy (Fubini 2005, 21).

Rubinstein's researches on the role and selection methods of the ruling class partook of the tradition inaugurated by scholars of the circulation of elites, from Gaetano Mosca to Vilfredo Pareto. He aimed to oppose the classist interpretation of which Gaetano Salvemini had been an early and authoritative representative. Salvemini's *Magnati e popolani in Firenze dal 1280 al 1295* (1899) treated Machiavelli's conceptualization of factional conflicts in the Republic of Florence as a zero-sum game in which the winners used the power of making laws to weaken the social and economic power of their adversaries. Salvemini analyzed the economic and social structure of the two main parties, the *magnati* and the *popolani*. With an archival analysis of the minutes, reports, and official documents of the Florentine commune since the mid-thirteenth century, he showed that all fundamental questions from fiscal policy to military organization, the regulation of rents and commerce, were the outcomes of that struggle between the powerful (*magnati*) and the less powerful (*popolo*). Restating Machiavelli, Salvemini wanted to prove that the dynamic social and cultural life of Florence (and all Italian city-states) depended upon the alternation in power between the *grandi* and the *popolo*. “If the Grandi had always ruled, accumulation of commercial capital would be impossible, and large production of goods and large commerce would also be impossible, and our cities would remain small villages upon which few landed nobles would have absolute authority and few artisans would produce goods only for local consumption” (Salvemini 1899, 59). Salvemini applied Machiavelli's paradigm to devise a method of historical analysis in which the social dynamic of classes and interests translated into the legal order, shaped institutional innovations, and led the juristic mechanisms in civil and

criminal law. Salvemini's pioneering work in early modern and Renaissance historiography was inspired by the economical-judicial approach of historical materialism and would reactivate a new wave of researches after the Second World War, and particularly during the 1970s (Najemy 2000).⁵

Rubinstein's reconstruction of the way in which existing procedures allowed the Medici to achieve power was an invitation to cast the relationship between absolutism and republicanism in a new light, more attentive to the constitutional and institutional arrangements than to political ideas. The result was to call attention to the relationship between the vision of political liberty and the "*buoni ordini*," a knot that was central in Machiavelli's work and that marked the political history of early modern and modern Europe, a training in constitutionalism that passed through several stages of experimentation, from the humanist republics to the English revolution and the revolutions of the eighteenth century. In the early decades after World War II, Machiavelli's thought and the tradition of republicanism acquired new significance within this broader horizon of constitutional history and was more closely linked to the interpretation of liberty, civil and political. The debates in the 1960s on civil rights and the limits of the liberal state were not irrelevant in prompting a theoretical debate that would find in Machiavelli and humanism a source of inspiration in the search for a vision of liberty that was not identified with individual freedom from interference but claimed to be the core identity of the citizen.

The celebration of the quincentenary of Machiavelli's birth in 1969 mirrored this novel set of themes while revisiting and revising the constellations of topics and questions that had become the large and capacious body of the scholarship on Machiavelli during the previous century. Within the "ocean of concepts" in Machiavelli's philosophy, two have been singled out to represent the 1969 centenary as a celebration attentive to politics and rhetoric: "his ideas of *virtù* and of history" (Geerken 1976, 360). Concerning *virtù* as a complex concept involving both a pattern of behavior and a constellation of qualities, practical and intellectual, several trajectories emerged from the numerous works the 1969 centenary propelled, although all of them adhered to a series of fatal polarizations such "as private/public, moral/immoral, individual/collective, ancient/modern, and classical/Christian" (362). The work of Gennaro Sasso offered perhaps one of the most comprehensive examinations of Machiavelli's philosophy in relation to the conception of virtue as a knot of abilities and qualities the political man must possess to preserve political institutions or, alternatively, to destroy them. This complex knowledge of a practical kind (*ef-*

fettuale) is not understanding in a strictly intellectual sense, but a humanist and classical grasp of reality based on the reflections on past events in the light of the problems to be solved in the present. Thus Machiavelli's readings of Roman and Florentine history were exemplary of a method and style of knowing in which plans and strategies were tested. The challenge that *virtù* has to face (*fortuna*) is precisely that of keeping institutions (laws) and actual reality in equilibrium (Sasso 1993).

John H. Geerken wrote that "the problem of Machiavelli," which Croce had some decades earlier synthesized in the paradigm of the "necessity and autonomy of politics" from morality, was the "*Urproblem* of Machiavelli's studies" and the topic of one of the "most interesting" of the quincennial papers, Isaiah Berlin's "The Originality of Machiavelli." According to the famous argument made by Berlin, it would be a mistake to suppose that there are two realms, each of them autonomous, that of politics and that of morality, as Croce had suggested. To the contrary, Machiavelli subscribed to both "morality" and "politics," although his morality was not Christian, but pagan and heroic, like ancient religion-and-morality. Machiavelli's view was pluralistic, not monistic, and belonged to the Greco-Roman universe, not to the universe of the Judeo-Christian religion. The reconceptualization entailed that the polarity we have to look for in his writings is not that between private and public but between public and communal, and not between ideal and real but between "situational and circumstantial" (Geerken 1976, 365). "There are two worlds, that of personal morality and that of public organization. There are two ethical codes, both ultimate; not two 'autonomous' regions, one of 'ethics,' another of 'politics,' but two (for him) exhaustive alternatives between two conflicting systems of value" (Berlin 1972, 183). Berlin's solution followed a capacious literature on the question of the role and content of religion in Machiavelli's life and world. Paquale Villari was the first important interpreter of Machiavelli to explicitly confess his distress at the lack of religiosity in Machiavelli's life and work and, consequently, with his amoral conception of politics. Yet while Machiavelli scourged the Roman Catholic Church and held it responsible for the decline of religious beliefs and the corruption of political virtues, his works reveal his deep familiarity with the Hebrew Scriptures (the Old Testament) as well as with St. Augustine, St. Thomas, and the Christian literature and philosophy that permeated the life of his times and city. Thus his first great biographer, Roberto Ridolfi (1963), followed by Sebastian de Grazia (1989), detected a religious piety in Machiavelli's thought, and recently, Maurizio Viroli (2010) has argued more radically that he had a positive commitment

to Christianity, which did not consist simply in the acceptance of some established practices, and which was engrafted within the Florentine tradition of “republican Christianity” that merged Christian piety with commitments to the ethics of work and the engagement for the safety and liberty of the fatherland. We are thus still within a political domain of life in which beliefs and bonds achieve strength and even legitimacy not solely by a vision of the world that is strictly rational. Thus Ronald Beiner has observed that a “vision of politics that was through-and-through secular” did not satisfy Machiavelli because his civic republicanism required that personal life not be wholly absorbed by the concerns with one’s individual existence alone (Beiner 2011, 303).

The 1969 celebrations coincided with J. G. A. Pocock’s development of a distinctive methodology for the study of the history of ideas. Pocock singled out “languages,” by which he meant idioms, rhetorics, specific vocabularies, and the like, as objects of inquiry distinct from the individual texts and author-centered bodies of work that had heretofore dominated scholarly work in the history of ideas. For Pocock, the languages available to a person define the set of possibilities for action available to him or her. Actions that are not contemplated by or comprehensible within a language are literally inconceivable—and are therefore virtually impossible to take—for persons whose understanding of the world is circumscribed by that language (or ensemble of languages). Pocock’s methodology was one of several approaches to the history of ideas that emphasized the contexts, as distinct from the texts alone, of ideas and writings. Together with the work of John Dunn and Quentin Skinner, his approach was characteristic of a school of thought that came to be called the “Cambridge School” of the history of ideas.

Pocock attempted to apply this approach in his magisterial and influential work *The Machiavellian Moment: Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (1975). Following Hans Baron in many respects, Pocock argued that the habits of thought and action Baron had identified as civic humanism had roots even older than those Baron had found, extending back in a long tradition of republican thought that can be traced as far back as Aristotle. In Pocock’s telling, the specific challenge of Florentine republicanism was the problem of adapting the ancient model of the Aristotelian *polis* to the modern and Christian eschatological understanding of time and temporal finitude. According to this view, the Aristotelian *polis* provided Florentine republicans with a set of categories, concepts, and assumptions—a language—through which they could form their own notions of political and social order. But the Florentines were also keenly

aware of the tendencies toward disruption, decline, and corruption to which political and social orders are subject, tendencies not encompassed adequately in Aristotle's studies. Accordingly, the Florentine republicans' thinking was dominated by concerns about virtue, on the one hand, a subject about which they had inherited a great deal from Aristotle's original analysis, and corruption, on the other. Pocock pointed to the prevalence of the language of virtue and corruption in the writings of Machiavelli and some of his contemporaries. For him, this vocabulary and idiom of republicanism is the most interesting and salient aspect of Machiavelli's thought, as well as its most productive component.

Together with Bernard Bailyn's earlier work on *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (1967) and other scholarship, Pocock's work helped to transform the received understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of the revolution and the founding of the American republic. Whereas these events, and the character of the American constitution, had once been understood overwhelmingly as products of early liberal or protoliberal thinking emphasizing rights and private freedoms, Pocock and his intellectual allies emphasized the public, virtue-instilling and virtue-sustaining aims of the revolutionaries and founders. James Harrington and Algernon Sidney, who had for many years been ignored by scholars of the American founding, acquired eminent roles in the story of those events. And while Machiavelli had rarely been ignored, he was recast by the "republican revival" in American historical and political thinking into a seminal and heroic figure, a role quite different from that of the villain he played for most people in the north Atlantic world prior to this work of historical revision.

Like Gilbert's and Baron's, Pocock's interpretation suggested a sharp break between the Machiavelli of *The Prince* and that of the *Discourses*, and resulted in a treatment of *The Prince* as an aberration from Machiavelli's principal concerns. In geopolitical terms, it is poles apart from the readings of Meinecke, Croce, Strauss, and others who were immersed in the politics of nationalism, imperial decline, and state formation in Europe in the tumultuous twentieth century. It is worth noting that Pocock, who was born in England but raised in New Zealand, and has lived most of his adult life in the United States, had little direct exposure or vulnerability to the political upheavals and issues that were central to most of the twentieth-century thinkers of European origin who have shaped the modern discourse about Machiavelli.

In addition to the realist and statist interpretation of Machiavelli inaugurated by Croce—which posits a separation between ethics and pol-

itics, and understands the latter as purely instrumental for the achievement and maintenance of power—and the republican interpretation commenced by Baron and consolidated by Skinner and Pocock—in which politics is grounded on civic humanism, and freedom is achieved within a stable constitutional regime—a third relevant current of interpretation of Machiavelli's work, developed in the aftermath of the 1969 celebrations, emphasizes the role of the multitude and the inherently dynamic nature of politics based on conflict. In this radical reading—which made an early appearance in the already mentioned *Magnati e popolani* by Salvemini—Machiavelli appears as the harbinger of revolt and revolution, an observer and theorist who recorded and acknowledged the struggle between oligarchic and popular orders, envisioning a new interpretative framework in which the people played the essential role of containing power and guarding over political institutions and liberty. Exemplary of what we can call revolutionary realism was Antonio Gramsci's work, which acquired momentum in the late 1960s and through the 1970s, although it was composed in the 1930s.

Compared with the academic schools of interpretation we have sketched above, Gramsci's interpretation of Machiavelli is an important exception, as Gramsci was perhaps the only contemporary political (not academic) leader who went consciously back to Machiavelli's *The Prince* to find inspiration for the solution of an exquisitely political problem he faced in his time: the transformation of the "catastrophic crisis" in the aftermath of the First World War into a possibility for a new founding of politics (Gramsci 2007, 166). Gramsci, who read Machiavelli while imprisoned by the Italian Fascist state, recast "*il novello Principe*" as a collective leader (the political party) that would need to involve the masses as consenting protagonists of an emancipatory project. Thus Gramsci treated Machiavelli as an intellectual who was able to show "concretely how the historical forces ought to have worked in order to be effective" but was not himself a leader. In distinguishing between "the scientist of politics and the active politician" Gramsci wanted to recover the role of the latter and make it a collective "creator, an awakener" that did not create "from nothing nor move in the turbid void of his own desires and dreams" (163–64). The Prince is the party and thus, like a man of action, "creates an "active and operating politics" (*politica attiva e operante*) whose knowledge is "the embodiment of the people [. . .] as hegemonic force that initiates and carries forward a moral and intellectual reform that lays the basis for the *democrazia cittadina*" (Fontana 1993, 73). Seen from this perspective, there seems to be no contradiction within Machiavelli's main

works; while *The Prince* is the moment of force in which a new political structure is put in place, the *Discourses* signals the moment of consent understood as the establishment of the collective will of the people as a hegemonic force.

Gramsci's reading of *The Prince* as a blueprint for a new constituent power had a relevant impact among both scholars of Machiavelli and political theorists (Lefort 1972; Esposito 1984). In the attempt to develop a post-Gramscian and populist interpretation of early modern tradition, in his *Il potere costituente* (1992), Antonio Negri depicted Machiavelli not only as a harbinger of revolution but also as a theorist of the constituent power. According to Negri, Machiavelli discovered a constituent principle as a power molded into the crisis it springs from, a principle that materializes in a principedom constituted "ex novo, from armed virtue" by a new prince who not only is the author of the state, but also of "logic and language, of ethics and law" (Negri 1999, 52). In Negri's reading, "the prince is democracy" and the "*buoni ordini*" or constitution is for Machiavelli "always the opening of the revolutionary process of the multitude" (80).

Departing from Negri's kind of radicalization of the collective subject as completely opposed to the constituted order, Louis Althusser in his posthumously published study entitled *Machiavel et nous* (1995) argued that Machiavelli's conception of the people shows that the constituent and constituted powers are internally related. The people in Machiavelli is, according to Althusser, the source of resistance to institutionalization, and its power is so intended as to "(counter)institute the point of view of the political as exceeding any form of government and any political practice of form-giving" (Vatter 2004, 26). Because Machiavelli's new political, interactive method of inquiry is inherently partisan and based on the aleatory relation between *virtù* and *fortuna*—which makes him the first theorist of conjuncture—the people as collective subject is revealed as an active agent of innovation and resistance that operates both inside and outside the institutions. Because for Althusser Machiavelli's main concern is the problem of endurance of the state, his interpretation, which brings together the princely and popular moments, opens the door to an institutional analysis of Machiavelli's republican model that is different from that inaugurated by the Cambridge School. The most recent attempt in this direction has been undertaken by John P. McCormick, who argues in *Machiavelian Democracy* (2011) against the continuity of Machiavelli's project with classical "electoral" and "senatorial" models of republicanism, in which ordinary citizens have only limited power to affect and control the governing elites. In McCormick's interpretation, "Machiavelli championed a

reconstructed and in significant ways democratized Roman constitutional model" in which civic contestation is institutionalized in "class-specific, popularly empowering, and elite-constraining institutions" that raise the class consciousness of common citizens and allow for the effective patrolling of elites (McCormick 2011, 9–16).

II

The international conference celebrating the five hundredth anniversary of Machiavelli's *Il Principe* (1513–2013), in which many of the papers we collect in this volume were delivered, was held under the auspices of the Presidency of the Italian Republic and with the title "Liberty and Conflict: Machiavelli on Politics and Power." The conference did not have any national tradition to celebrate and sought to be representative of the global *republique des lettres*, which has developed in recent decades around the ideas inspired or advanced by Machiavelli's life and work. In particular, we wanted this conference and this volume to be an opportunity to record the most representative lines of research and interpretation on Machiavelli's *The Prince*. There were four themes around which the speakers were invited to elaborate their contribution to the conference, and the four sections of this volume are based upon this initial partition.

1. *Between Antiquity and Modernity*—Machiavelli's place in the history of political thought has long been controversial. Some consider him the last of the ancients, while others regard him as the initiator of a distinctly modern conception of politics. Among the issues at stake in this virtual debate is the impact of two disparate traditions—the classical tradition of Aristotle, Polybius, Cicero, Livy, and others, and the Christian tradition of St. Augustine, Petrarch, and Dante—on the making of modern politics and political philosophy. In Machiavelli's work we are able to observe an exceptionally revealing scene in the drama of the transformation of politics from the ancient to the modern world.

The essays in this section scrutinize several aspects of this transformation.

Harvey Mansfield puts forth a challenge to interpretations of Machiavelli's conception of necessity by arguing that Machiavelli originated a new standard of necessity based upon "effectual truth" (*verità effettuale*), one that is not necessarily opposed to a presumption of the good, "is not always compelling and does not always do away with choice." Effectual truth, different from imagined truth based on principles of goodness, is

consequentialist, recognized through the results of political action. Politics is grounded on necessity conceived as the realization of effectual truth, and thus political actions are “good” if they produce the desired effects. In Mansfield’s analysis of Machiavelli, the normative ground of politics in the *Discourses* is the moment of founding, which requires “a return to the beginnings and to the original fear that underlies the complacency of civilization.” Even though necessity is grounded on the foundation of liberty, due to the weakness of the liberal spirit, a good republic demands a “permanent revival.” The founding is thus conceived as a source of “good effects” and Machiavelli as professing “the necessity to replace enslavement by freedom, and to do so by all means necessary.”

Giovanni Giorgini also poses a challenge to interpretations of the role Machiavelli assigns to morality in politics. But in contrast to Mansfield, Giorgini argues Machiavelli is not sponsoring a new morality or seeking to exempt leaders from ordinary moral codes, but instead connects politics to the “distinct and discrete dimension of duty,” which is determined by circumstances and the actions needed to address exceptional cases. “Evil remains evil in his thought, and dirty hands are dirty; the problem, then, consists in identifying the circumstances and conditions that require a statesman to dirty his hands without becoming an evil person or turn into a bad ruler.” Seen from this angle, Machiavelli belongs to that long tradition of political thinkers who argued for education as the source of political renewal. For Giorgini, Machiavelli’s overriding aim was to form a new kind of statesman to meet the extraordinary challenges of his age. The good Machiavellian statesman, provided he has the proper education and inclinations—a priority to act for the common good and preserve the state—must then be ready to “dirty his hands when extreme situations require it; in all this he must remain a ‘good man’ while using evil means to reach his good end.”

Because authors’ arguments are always in some way directed against their opponents, it seems crucial to understand who Machiavelli’s interlocutors were and the common assumptions he was trying to debunk or build upon to advance his own ideas. In his contribution to the volume, Gabriele Pedullà counters the current interpretation of Gennaro Sasso (1978), who claims Machiavelli’s arguments were written in response to anti-Roman opponents who wanted instead to follow the aristocratic Venetian model. By examining previously overlooked ancient, medieval, and humanistic sources, Pedullà argues this interpretation is anachronistic, and “if it ever existed, the alleged Florentine ‘aristocratic anti-Roman tradition’ that Sasso mentions left no trace.” To the contrary, Pedullà shows

there is no sign of opposition between Rome and Venice before the *Discourses* and that the reference to Venetian institutions was used to legitimize the radical experiment of the Great Council. It is only after Machiavelli's embrace of Rome as a model based on conflict that Guicciardini trades the expansionist and tumultuous Rome for the stable Venice as a desirable model. "In other words, Guicciardini's anti-Roman antithesis constantly presupposes the Machiavellian thesis in every detail." According to Pedullà, the opposition between Rome and Venice put forward in *Discourses* I.6 was thus not responding to an aristocratic, anti-Roman position but constituting the origin of this opposition, which "is yet another confirmation of the Florentine thinker's success in reshaping the political categories of his time."

Finally, Miguel Vatter turns to the discussion of Machiavelli's conception of civil religion and its relation to politics. He challenges traditional interpretations of Machiavelli because, on the one hand, they fail to distinguish between the "political" use of religion and civil religion as "prophetology," and on the other, they rely on a restricted perspective of religion that does not take into account the rediscovery of pre-Christian "ancient theology" during Machiavelli's time. Vatter argues that it is through a combination of "ancient theology" and "prophetology" that politics and religion are articulated as the foundation of Machiavelli's republican constitutionalism. The implications of this alternative conception of civil religion in Machiavelli would demand, according to Vatter, a revision of two widespread, opposing beliefs in the current debate on secularization: that democratic constitutionalism "can do without a religious foundation" and that constitutionalism is based on secularized concepts drawn from Christian theology.

2. *The Prince and the Politics of Necessity*—In *The Prince*, Machiavelli developed a challenging conception of what some have called a tragic view of politics focused more on conflict, strategic behavior, and the consequences of human action rather than on ideals. This vision was in tension with Christian ideas about a good and virtuous life for leaders and magistrates. In the eyes of many readers, Machiavelli had opened a chasm between the pursuit of virtue on the one hand and success in obtaining and holding power on the other.

The contributions in this section question current understandings of Machiavelli's conception of princely virtues and of the role played by instrumentality in Machiavelli's vision of politics.

Quentin Skinner challenges interpretations of *The Prince* as a "repudiation of the classical ideal of *virtus*" and argues instead that Machia-

velli embraced the humanist princely virtues of liberality, clemency, and the keeping of good faith. What rulers need to depart from is not princely virtues but “what these virtues are generally *held* or *taken* to prescribe.” By tracing the critique of “rhetorical redescription”—how virtues are denigrated and vices excused through language manipulation—to ancient Greek and Roman texts available to Machiavelli, Skinner makes the case that for Machiavelli princely virtues are essential to avoid being hated and despised by the people. “Properly understood, the princely virtues are among the qualities that go to make up the *virtù* of a truly *virtuoso* prince, thereby helping him to fulfill his primary duty of maintaining the state in a condition of security and peace.” Under Skinner’s interpretation, Machiavelli effectively appropriates and redefines princely virtues by grounding them on the prince’s duty to preserve the state. “The term *virtù* thus comes to be used by Machiavelli to denote whatever range of attributes—moral or otherwise—actually enable a prince to maintain his state.”

While Skinner aims at understanding Machiavelli’s conception of *virtù* in *The Prince*, Erica Benner revisits the discussion surrounding its instrumentality. Benner argues Machiavelli oscillates between two types of political realism, based on the same conception of human nature: one that is determined by the inherent untrustworthiness of human beings and the consequent need for “unilateral amorality” to secure the state, and another that, acknowledging human weakness, is able to envision and establish “nonnatural relations of trust” and a safer route to power through “collaborative realism.” According to Benner’s reading of Machiavelli, even though he has been widely interpreted as sponsoring a realism based on unilateral amorality, he makes stronger arguments for collaborative realism because of the persistent argument for the necessity for continuous support to achieve security. “If individuals and states have better chances of preserving themselves by ordering new, collaborative relationships, then Machiavelli’s political realism might be more hospitable to moral concerns than the first reading admits.” In *The Prince* Machiavelli is thus seeking to elucidate the right policies to enable that “obligations based on mutual trust can be built up between people who start off distrusting each other.”

The mutual trust on which Machiavelli bases, according to Benner, his collaborative realism is the central theme of Stephen Holmes’s contribution to this volume. According to Holmes, the thread running through *The Prince* is Machiavelli’s concern with emergency preparedness understood as risk mitigation, “the way virtuosi insure themselves, to the extent possible, against the vagaries of fortune.” In addition to the ex-

traordinary personal *virtù* of the ruler, “regime survival in a hostile environment” also demands “obstinate, noncalculating, never-say-die loyalty of supporters, a loyalty that will not dissolve when *tempi avversi* strike.” Popular loyalty, which cannot be separated from the perceived loyalty of the ruler to the many, is thus the key to emergency preparedness, the “best fortress” in times of adversity. Therefore, savvy rulers are always forced to be good to the people through constant exercise of prudent self-restraint. While the resulting limited state is stronger than an unlimited state because it can mobilize unflinching public support, only adversity allows “men of *virtù* to exercise and exhibit their inherent prowess” and transform popular loyalty into authority. Adversity is thus a necessary condition for glory as “political action can only be as spectacular and praiseworthy as the challenges to which it responds.” However, because sustained adversity such as war inevitably tends to create a standing army of loyal supporters as a way to free *virtù* from fortune’s grip, in Rome it resulted in Caesarism and dead emperors. Thus, paradoxically, increased control over unpredictable conditions effectively undermined the rulers’ dependence on popular support and the foundations of their strength.

Finally, Paul Rahe offers a new reading of *The Prince* based on the neglected chapter “Of Ecclesiastical Principalities,” which according to Rahe is “crucial to its author’s larger purpose.” By introducing in chapter 19 the soldiers as a “third *umore*” akin to the Christian clergy, Machiavelli claims that only a principality based upon a disciplined army of believers is secure and prosperous. For Machiavelli “the ecclesiastical polity is the central mystery of modern politics” and *priestcraft*, which aims at the control of people’s minds, is what princes need to master in order to be effective. This is why Machiavelli should be thought of as a theorist of modern tyranny, as “a political philosopher who revolutionized our understanding of the possibilities inherent in one-man rule.” According to Rahe, the insights Machiavelli put forth in the ecclesiastical polity are crucial for understanding modern totalitarian principalities that rely on a disciplined army and propaganda aimed at “occupying men’s minds.”

3. *Class Struggle, Financial Power, and Extraordinary Authority in the Republic*—Another set of highly contested issues in Machiavelli scholarship concerns the relationship between leaders and their authority on the one hand and the populace of a republic on the other. Machiavelli was among the first thinkers in the modern era to recognize the role of popular opinion in the making and continuation of leadership, and he was one of the few to explore extensively both the constructive and the destructive potential of conflict in the making of a republic and the maintenance

of its liberty and vitality. The three essays in this section develop three claims about the relationship among political leadership, popular power, and liberty according to Machiavelli.

Despite his praise of the conflict between the *umori* that in Rome resulted in freedom, Machiavelli criticizes the factional conflict produced by the Gracchi reforms for being the “catalyst of republican decline.” Benedetto Fontana addresses the paradox of Machiavelli’s critiques of the Gracchi by arguing that Machiavelli censures the methods—the “various procedural and institutional devices within the confines of constitutional practice”—the Gracchi used to renew the republic, but not their intentions. While Machiavelli saw the weakening of the free peasant-farmer as a social and political group, and the increased importance of slave labor in the economy, as antithetical to republican rule, the Gracchi’s strategies to address immiseration were ineffective: “they were not able to maintain this [popular] support, nor were they able to undermine the power and the resources of their senatorial opponents. The latter were better organized and better armed, and also more determined and willing to resort to extra-constitutional—and to extraordinary—methods.”

One significant political strategy that the Gracchi did not use to renew the republic was arming the people, which is the central theme in Jérémie Barthas’s analysis of Machiavelli’s effort to establish the autonomy of the Republic of Florence from the financial power of the *grandi* through a project of mass conscription. Barthas argues that even though the Great Council had ratifying power over the budget and other financial bills, “the financial system itself remained oriented toward extraordinary finances, in the same way that the military system, which inherently depended on the financial one, was based on the extraordinary use of mercenary troops under the authority of a magistrature itself also extraordinary in principle.” Thus the Machiavellian concept of “people in arms” should be understood as a strategy to gain liberty by decoupling a military system based on mercenary forces from a financial system based on public debt, through the introduction of an “ordinary and socialized mode of defense” that would effectively loosen the grip of the financial oligarchy over popular government.

In addition to institutional conflict and a citizen army, according to Machiavelli a well-ordered republic, if it wants to remain free, needs to establish the magistracy of dictatorship: the institution to which republics turn in moments of emergency. Because of their institutional plurality, republics tend to act and react slowly and thus are ill suited to deal with extraordinary conditions that demand expediency. Marco Geuna analyzes

Machiavelli's considerations on the subject of dictatorship and argues that this magistracy is the "ordinary way" uncorrupted republics should deal with extraordinary circumstances, and thus the office of dictator is for Machiavelli an inherently preservative institution, without which freedom is not entirely secured. Geuna shows that, following the presentation of the magistracy of dictatorship put forward by Cicero and Livy, Machiavelli describes dictators as having "wide-ranging authority, but one that was constitutionally regulated." Although dictatorial power presupposed the suspension of other magistracies and individual citizen's constitutional guarantees, it was temporal and could not alter the fundamental structure of the state. Machiavelli thus reveals dictators as crucial for preserving the republic, as "ordinary solutions, constitutional remedies, to emergency situations."

4. *Machiavellian Politics Beyond Machiavelli*—Machiavelli has been claimed as an iconic figure both by defenders of realpolitik, who typically turn to institutional design and the balance of power to address political concerns, and by champions of civic republicanism, who emphasize the role of character and civic virtues in maintaining the unity, liberty, and sense of purpose of a political association. How is it possible for a political association, which is composed of individuals who are inclined to pursue their private interests and many of whom are driven by a desire for affluence, to maintain a focus on the public good? Five hundred years after the completion of *The Prince*, Machiavelli's deliberations about this question remain thought-provoking and germane.

The essays in this final section explore the legacy of Machiavelli within the republican tradition of political thought and, ultimately, the relevance of his thoughts to enduring political issues.

Jean-Fabian Spitz offers internal and external critiques of the Skinnerian interpretation of Machiavelli. In an internal critique of Skinner's reading, Spitz argues that although Skinner's project is to refute the liberal configuration of the relation between civic duties, law, and freedom, he is unable to move beyond the juridical approach to freedom as a guarantee of rights, and "commits the sin of anachronism by shifting from the Machiavellian thesis of the opposition between the two humors to the contemporary idea of the presence of a plurality of interest groups within a society." In addition, Skinner's reduction of virtue to rationality and external behavior, paired with his lack of recognition of social equality as a necessary condition for freedom, leads him to dismiss corruption—a core Machiavellian concern—as irrational. Spitz further analyzes these alleged shortcomings by engaging with an external critique that claims Machiavelli

conceives of liberty not as the effect of institutions but as their cause, so that liberty cannot be reduced to a stabilized institutional form. Because for Machiavelli freedom results from the conflict between the “desire for freedom” and the “desire for power,” it is not achieved through the “reciprocal neutralization of two equally dangerous humors” but demands the political preeminence of the people over the elites.

Through an intensive textual analysis of the *Florentine Histories*, John McCormick attempts to dispel the alleged conservative turn in Machiavelli’s late writings. According to McCormick, the details of Machiavelli’s historical account of the respective actions of the Florentine people and nobles “decisively undermine any general, evaluative statements on Machiavelli’s part that overtly criticize the people and that signal a new-found sympathy for the nobles.” Moreover, the literary-rhetorical method in which “deeds trump words” that Machiavelli uses “serves to substantially reinforce, rather than in any way undermine, Machiavelli’s previously expressed democratic republicanism.” The debunking of the conservative turn allows McCormick to shift the focus to the three interrelated reasons Machiavelli gives for the inferiority of the Florentine Republic compared to the ancient Roman experience: the different dispositions toward reformers and their institutional innovations, the pernicious influence of Christianity on virtue, and the proliferation of artificial versus “natural” types of social division within modern republics.

In his contribution to this section, Luca Baccelli challenges the traditional readings of “Machiavelli the realist” and “Machiavelli the republican,” arguing that neither of them captures Machiavelli’s preoccupation with political innovation as a source of freedom. According to Baccelli, Machiavelli’s realism needs to be qualified with his specific strand of republicanism based on his partisan perspective in favor of the people, his theory of conflict as productive of freedom, and his inclusive and democratic conception of the rule of law, based upon the constituent power of the multitude. From this perspective, Machiavelli stands out as a “radical innovator, from both an epistemic and a political point of view” because of his vindication of “the epistemological superiority of a partisan point of view” and his endorsement of conflict as good for the republic, a “revolutionary thesis [that] marks a discontinuity in the history of Western political thought in which social and political conflict is traditionally seen as an illness of the political body.”

Michele Battini explores in Machiavelli the relation between military and political reform, force and consent, through the interpretations of three representative Italian scholars of the twentieth century: Federico

Chabod, Antonio Gramsci, and Adriano Sofri. Battini analyzes in Machiavelli's works the relationship between his conception of *armi proprie* and his reflections on the reform of the institutions of the Republic of Florence. Following Barthes's analysis of Machiavelli's mass conscription strategy to provide increasing financial autonomy to the republic, Battini argues that the successful organization of a modern army made of citizens needed, in addition to the expropriation of oligarchic control over the public debt, "the social and patriotic unity of the countryside, the people of the city, and the superior classes." The *armi proprie* only exists then if soldiers are "formed, trained, and persuaded that the reasons for which they fight are their own reasons, interests, and needs." Consequently, the military reform Machiavelli advanced meant not only the transformation of the relation between the government and the financial system but also of the conception of citizenship and "the integration in the government of the urban people and the people of the countryside, whose convinced participation can make more prudent both the military and the political leadership."

Finally, Marie Gaille analyzes Louis Althusser's reading of Machiavelli and the challenge it poses to political theory: the development of a conjuncture-embedded form of thought. In Althusser's interpretation, Machiavelli appears as the first theorist of conjuncture, as sponsoring a new approach to political thinking in which the theorist is aware not only of the singularities of each situation but also of "how they transform a general and abstract formulation into a peculiar one." He stresses the difference between a Marxist approach to the foundation of the state, based on the market economy and class struggle, and the Machiavellian perspective, focused on the "aleatory" dimension of new beginnings. According to Gaille, it is in this Machiavellian methodology that Althusser finds a new method—conjuncture-embedded thought—and its implications for political theory as "the emergence of an imperative, as strong as the Kantian moral one, according to which the conjuncture must determine the content and orientation of theory."

If Althusser is right, and Machiavelli is putting forward a new type of methodology for political theory, one embedded in the context and its singularities, our analysis of Machiavelli's writings should also be rooted in our current context and the singularities that bridge the particular and the theoretical. The papers we have collected in this volume should then be analyzed through the conjuncture in which the five-hundred-year anniversary celebration of Machiavelli is embedded. This reengagement with Machiavelli's works, in the wake of the 2007–2012 financial crisis

and in the midst of a Eurozone debt crisis that has forced austerity measures across southern Europe,⁶ highlights the importance Machiavelli places on social equality and the inevitable threat of corruption coming from the powerful few. The global increase in political corruption⁷ is reflected in scholars' attention to Machiavelli's assessment of corruption as an inevitable cooptation of institutions and lawmaking by the *grandi*, and the ways it can be counteracted through the actions by dictators and new princes, and the establishment of popular institutions. This is the prism through which some of the papers assess Machiavelli's conception of necessity, virtue, and duty. One could argue that, even though this renewed engagement with the Florentine Secretary's works shows that the Skinnerian interpretation of Machiavelli as a theorist of liberty is well established, the foundations of liberty and the republic in Machiavelli are now at the center of scholarly analysis, tending to a reinterpretation of Machiavelli as a "popular" or "democratic" republican, for whom social equality and popular empowerment are necessary conditions for liberty.

NOTES

1. "Roman decadence, after she lost her liberty, has been the first object of our interest. We have seen what was the effect of three centuries of despotism on the people, the wealth, the public spirit, the mores, and on the real force of the empire" (Sismondi 2006, 507).

2. Translated into English with the title *Machiavellism: The Doctrine of Reason d'Etat and Its Place in Modern History*.

3. See Quentin Skinner's contribution to this volume (chapter 5).

4. The contribution of Rubinstein to the studies of the Renaissance, and thus the context of Machiavelli's life and thought, was enormous also because of his leading role in the publication of the letters of Lorenzo il Magnifico. In 1955 an international conference took place in Rome in which the idea was launched of an international venture for the study of the Renaissance. In a meeting held in Florence in 1956 the representatives of the Istituto Nazionale di Studi sul Rinascimento, the Warburg Institute of London, and the Renaissance Society of America (to be joined later on by the Harvard Center at Villa I Tatti) created in Palazzo Strozzi, a focal leading project led by Rubinstein of collecting and publishing the letters of Lorenzo il Magnifico (Mallet 2005).

5. At the opposite side of Salvemini, Nicolaj Ottokar, along with Croce and Rubinstein, represented the historical school that pivoted on the centrality of politics, political elite formations, and institutions (Ottokar 1935).

6. Greece, Italy, Portugal, and Spain.

7. While the 2010 Corruption Perceptions Index—which ranks countries according to their perceived levels of public-sector corruption—showed that nearly two-thirds of

the 176 countries in the index scored below five, on a scale from 10 (highly clean) to 0 (highly corrupt), and that according to six out of ten people surveyed by Transparency International, corruption was increasing, a change in the survey's methodology and measurement scale increased countries' scores overall and made the CPI scores before 2012 not comparable over time. Nevertheless, the reports agree the results indicate a "serious corruption problem." (<https://www.transparency.org>)

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PART I

Between Antiquity and Modernity

Machiavelli on Necessity

HARVEY C. MANSFIELD

“Hence it is necessary for a prince, if he wants to maintain himself, to learn to be able not to be good, and to use this and not use it according to necessity.” *The Prince*, chapter 15

The following brief study of Machiavelli’s notion of necessity does not pretend to exhaust the subject and will discuss a few familiar passages from *The Prince* and the *Discourses on Livy* in order to set forth in outline the complexity of that notion.¹ His appeal to necessity is designed overall to simplify not just our politics and morality but our thinking in general. Necessity will give us access to the truth without having to sort out dialectical disputes or to consult high-minded rationalizations. Our judgments and the policies of princes will have a clearer standard than ever before by which to see the world and act in it through the foggy confusion fostered by religion and philosophy. Yet in “fact”—a word not quite invented but prepared by Machiavelli—necessity is not so simple as it first appears.

I begin from the last sentence of Machiavelli’s clarion call to modern morality and modern politics quoted above, taken from the paragraph in chapter 15 of *The Prince* in which he says how and why he departs from “the orders of others.” In this sentence he identifies his departure as moving to a new standard of necessity, and he makes it emphatic by using “necessary” twice and in two different meanings, the first as what one is compelled to do, the second as the standard for choice, “according to” which one must act when one appears to have a choice. When not compelled by necessity, it appears, one must choose it.² This double meaning is the first item of complexity in necessity: that necessity is not always compelling and does not in every case do away with choice.

Machiavelli gives a reason for adopting the focus of necessity in the exercise of one's choices: "A man who wants to make a profession of good in all regards must come to ruin among so many who are not good" (P 15.61). A *man*, one notes, not only a prince; the scope of this statement is not confined to politics. Indeed, the focus may be beyond politics as well as, or more than, politics, for he says that his intent is "to write something useful to whoever understands it." This person could be a political scientist or philosopher like himself, and he immediately mentions the "many who have imagined republics and principalities that have never been seen or known to exist in truth." These are the ones whose orders he departs from; one thinks of the "orders" in Plato's *Republic* (if a king could rule a republic) and St. Augustine's *City of God* (if God could be a prince). The advice he is about to give applies to philosophers and ordinary citizens as well as to princes. Machiavelli will divulge a universal rule of behavior, a new one.

"A profession of good" is the standard Machiavelli departs from. It represents a choice made regardless of necessity, even in defiance of necessity, as when one acts, and defends one's action, by professing that it is good regardless of the sacrifice of one's own well-being and the risk of coming to ruin. For let us not suppose that the reason Machiavelli gives for following necessity, that it will bring you to ruin if you don't, is brand new and has never occurred before to humans facing difficult choices. Making a sacrifice, taking a risk, is what is known as nobility, though Machiavelli does not mention it here. Plato and Aristotle seem clearly to be Machiavelli's adversaries, particularly Aristotle, who begins his *Politics* by declaring that political science must "speak nobly" in order to be true.³ Machiavelli, to put it mildly, is no friend of the "gentlemen" (*kaloik'agathoi*, "the noble and good") on which Aristotle's *Politics* rests and to whom it is addressed.⁴ Also included in the category of those nobly resisting necessity might be Christian martyrs. Though it may well be true that noble examples are rare, they are impressive and are able to set the standard by which the gentlemen and ordinary people too judge others and themselves. Despite its focus on the noble few, this standard has made itself universal, encompassing all humans, by taking advantage of human admiration for the best. Machiavelli departs from this standard and creates a new one to replace it.

Now in the old standard, what is the reason for making a *profession* of good, rather than merely *doing* good? A noble deed might seem to shine by itself, just as doing a good deed is doing it in order to be good, not for some cause or incentive outside its goodness. In speaking of a "profession of good," however, Machiavelli implies that the profession is needed. Good-

ness does not stand on its own unaided; it needs the support of a profession that makes it possible or reasonable to attempt. If you are good, what is the guarantee that others, particularly the “many who are not good,” will make it reasonable to be good? Will the wicked not gladly proceed to take advantage of you? You must therefore presuppose a good society, one not in the hands of rascals and rogues, that will make it possible for you to be good without coming to ruin. And the good society must be compatible with human nature, which too must be good, and then the goodness of human nature must be compatible with, or comforted by, the goodness of nonhuman nature, the whole. For what can human goodness accomplish on its own, so to speak, without nature’s cooperation? Nature must contribute an environment in which good men can thrive, powerful inclinations toward good in the human soul, and a regularity of motions and seasons permitting good men to live in confidence and understanding rather than fear for survival in blind ignorance.

So Machiavelli rightly extends the required reason behind doing good to a “profession,” that is, an explanation of the contextual support, and that profession of good must be “in all regards.” The reassurance that what morality needs is a profession of the whole, is clearly a philosophical task. If Machiavelli is going to dispute the profession of good that philosophers, especially Plato and Aristotle, the classic ones, have provided, he will have to cover the same ground in order to show that he is right and they are wrong. He will have to make a profession of necessity in all regards counter to the profession of good in all regards.

One may quickly compare Aristotle the professor of good with Machiavelli the professor of necessity. Whereas Aristotle starts his *Nicomachean Ethics* from the existence and practice of moral people, implying that morality exists, is viable, and is a going concern that one merely has to examine rather than create,⁵ Machiavelli begins this critical passage with a critique of morality, denying that it is viable and asserting that it will bring you to ruin. To ruin! Rather than begin from the assumption that moral people exist, he tells you that you will suffer for being “among so many who are not good.” Machiavelli did not live in a secular age like ours in which it is assumed that ruin in this world will not be redeemed in the next world; in his circumstance, and with his ever-present awareness, his statement of sure ruin implies a flat denial of redemption rather than mere disregard of that possibility. Together with Christianity, he disagrees with Aristotle that morality exists and adopts the Christian view of the sinfulness of the world, but he seems to foreclose the redemption in the next world promised by Christianity. The redeemer he promises in

The Prince is a worldly one for Italy (P 26.105). In *The Prince* and the *Discourses on Livy* Machiavelli speaks of "the world" rather than of "this world," which implies another world beyond this one.

Necessity, then, has the character of a presumption. Machiavelli, in making his departure, fears he may be "held presumptuous," and in fact he has a presumption, the presumption of necessity as opposed to the rival presumption of the good. As a presumption, necessity is not a determination that in each case, one who chooses the good will inevitably come to ruin. With luck a good man might be safe from the many who are not good and prosperous to boot, but one cannot count on such luck. For the good man it is in a strong sense fitting (*conviene*) that he come to ruin for holding the wrong presumption. He deserves it. Machiavelli does not *ex-pel* fortune but he also does not *suffer* it.⁶ Prudence for him is not to take account of risk when necessary but rather to do so in principle, always avoiding evil by presuming that it will be encountered. Thus this passage anticipates his nearly explicit statement that one must do evil to the other fellow before he does it to you (D 1.52.1). You may not succeed, to be sure, because the contingency of things may go against you. Perhaps the good person will not be punished for his goodness. But with the correct presumption you have a better chance.

The presumption of necessity is supported by the impending presence of ruin, as the profession of good is not. Who wants to come to ruin? When confronting the stark face of necessity, almost everyone is easily persuaded, or, since persuasion may not be necessary, easily moved toward safety regardless of imaginative persuasions to do otherwise. If necessity is not apparent, it can be made so, and often with actions better than words. Its being apparent, or easy to make apparent, is part of the simplicity that gives it power and makes its truth "effectual." Necessity has the spontaneity of animal nature behind it, whereas the good needs to be thought about and deliberated. So the presumption of necessity is less presumptuous than the presumption of good. One could ask what the presumption of good would provide if it were not for necessity enlisted on the side of the good. One could also ask what the presumption of necessity would do without the presumption that necessity brings good. Machiavelli takes pains to show that those who presume on the power of good actually try to endow the good with necessity when they promise preservation with a profession of good. The higher presumption of good, he points out, depends on the lower presumption of necessity; the higher good depends on the lower good. It might seem that Machiavelli does not, and does not have to, deny the higher good, the good life beyond the necessity

of preserving one's life. He merely shows that the good life depends on being alive. But this means that the good life, or a life devoted to nobility, is not possible—among so many who are not good. To stay alive one must learn how to be not good, and use this knowledge according to necessity. “Nobility” is a delusion that depends on a life beyond life that does not exist; it is an imaginary form of self-preservation. Machiavelli will teach those who desire nobility how truly to attain it and assure it.

Here, speaking so emphatically of necessity, Machiavelli takes a long step in the direction of scientific determinism, but he does not go the whole way. By retaining the need for good fortune, he holds to human freedom and virtue in the management of fortune. Machiavellian prudence will be rewarded, typically but not necessarily in every case. What will not be rewarded is the prudence that serves only the good and that cooperates with nobility and welcomes the help of prayer. This is the prudence of Aristotle, which he distinguishes from cunning (*deinotēs*) in the service of evil. But for Machiavelli prudence seems to be the same as “shrewdness” (*astuzia*), not distinct from it as with Aristotle.⁷ Reason in practice, and so also in theory, is not on the side of goodness.

Machiavelli shows his awareness of the need to go beyond morality in order to question it by speaking of a new sort of truth that will settle the dispute over morality, the “effectual truth” (*verità effettuale*). The effectual truth is opposed to the imagined truth stated in professions of goodness, and it is shown in effects. For example, Machiavelli shows near the beginning of the *Discourses on Livy* that the disputes between the nobles and the plebs in the Roman republic should not be condemned, as did writers under the influence of classical political science, including Livy. This criticism was based on an imagined possible harmony between the two typical parties in every republic, but Machiavelli contends that in their effects the disputes were the cause of Rome's becoming strong and free (D 4–6). The “effects” were the outcome in practice, as we would now say, in *effect* or in *fact*, of conflicting opinions that might be resolved on the level of imagined theory but in the world as it is would be resolved only as they made men act. In this case the superiority or nobility of the nobles was not deferred to by the plebs but understood as oppressive and opposed, and the result was a contentious republic that had the power to expand and the prudence to satisfy or at least to appease the people.

In *The Prince* Machiavelli's discussion of morality after announcing the idea of “effectual truth” explains that the various virtues, called “qualities” in chapter 15, take effect in the ways in which they are “held” (*tenuto*) to be, not as they are. For example, liberality may be presumed

to be the prudent action of a noble prince benefitting his people, but it ends up, in effect, as illustrating the maxim that a prince should be mealy with his gifts and make them with other people's money, not his own. Liberality is what it will be held to be—its effectual truth—not what it is imagined to be (P 16.64). This sort of truth will later be known as empirical because it is based on “fact.” To the ancients, a fact was a *that* (*hoti*) to which one could point, but that comes and goes, and is not truth, which is permanent. *Facta* (*erga* in Greek) were deeds as opposed to speeches, not truth as opposed to imagination, as for Machiavelli.⁸

Machiavelli's profession of necessity develops a context in which necessity will be understood and appreciated rather than ignored, set aside, or suppressed, as happens with professions of good. This context is the “world,” which he constantly invokes, together with the “worldly things” of which it is composed.⁹ The world, we have seen, rejects the invisible next world of Christian belief and theology, together with the intelligible world of classical rationalism. The world is visible, and it can be known regardless of any invisible world of Platonic ideas hovering above it or Aristotle's essences making it intelligible. The world consists of simple and mixed bodies, the simple bodies of nature and the mixed bodies of nature and human forming (D 2.5.2). There are no natural forms to be seen, only forms of human conception to be “introduced.”¹⁰ The prudence of a prince can put his form on the material of his principality (P 26.102), in the political deed that Machiavelli offers to describe human knowing. A prince knows what he is doing when he is introducing his “form,” which is making his presence, that is, his truth, effectual. Knowledge of the world is not distinct from acting upon it, for the world's necessities, when understood, open the way for the prince's intervention into it. The neutrality of “worldly things,” which are permanent though not intelligible, permits and promotes the enterprises of princes and captains.

The world is a “whole” on its own, as the world of sense. It is not a whole with parts, as it is composed of unintelligible “things” that behave according to necessity. Necessity is divided into necessities, especially in regard to humans, where each human being has his own necessity for which he must exercise his own arms. We are all set against one another in a manner later to be formalized in Thomas Hobbes's state of nature. But there are also groupings of men very relevant to politics, particularly the division of “humor” between those who desire to command other men and those who desire not to be commanded.¹¹ A humor is a medical term that refers to exhalations arising from the body, not the soul, hence indicating a typical necessity rather than a typical choice. Such are necessities

apparent in behavior to be compared with rulers and ruled in Aristotle's political science, in which those qualities can be found within the soul and begin from it. One sees that for Machiavelli, rule is necessarily repressive and hence necessarily obnoxious to the ruled. The two necessities are contrary, and given the necessity of rule, or of commanding, they cannot be made harmonious in a whole, a regime, in which a common purpose or way of life can be fostered and pursued.¹²

Conflict between the two parties of nobles and plebs in the Roman republic made it "free" as well as strong. It was indeed "the first cause" of keeping it free (D 1.4.1). Freedom can be found in both the princely and the popular humor—as the freedom to command for princes, ultimately "to be alone" at the top, and as the freedom to oppose or resist being commanded for the people. Each humor, each aspect of freedom, is felt as a necessity that determines behavior rather than a moral choice that guides it. Thus a "free way of life" (*vivere libero*) is one of disunion; the Roman republic, according to Machiavelli, had an accidental rather than a planned or founded perfection that was gained through the experience and adjustment of conflict, not from the brain of a founder. Or perhaps Machiavelli's brainy re-description of Livy's history constitutes a founding of freedom presented as the two fundamental operational necessities working against each other to produce an unintended common good (D 2.2.1). "The cause of disunion in republics is usually idleness and peace; the cause of union is fear and war" (D 2.25.1). Human freedom is presented as against other humans and opposed to fortune, nature, or the divine. Human assertiveness in making reasonable claims is presented as irrational human obstinacy (*ostinazione*, D 2.16.1). The nobility of freedom is reduced to its raw materials, deprived of its aspiration, and robbed of its tragedy.

What is necessary for the princely humor is anathema to the popular one. But as always for Machiavelli, there is a "remedy." It is possible for prudent princes to make the people believe that their being commanded by princes is actually obeying themselves. Government by others can be made to appear as government by oneself, hence free, when it is represented as indirect government that merely executes the will of others and does not impose its own will. The model for indirect government is the church, which claims merely to execute God's will and asks for nothing more than willing obedience to God.¹³ Thus the contrary necessities of princes and peoples can be overcome by prudent use of fraud, for fraud is a necessary feature of all government.¹⁴ With fraud, a regime can seem to be a harmonious whole despite its necessary conflicts. With religious fraud the whole of things can be induced to make sense to all—to those who

know as well as those who believe. This is the effectual truth of the whole according to the classical and Christian traditions. For in the classical tradition the familiar, visible world holds problems that need clarification in thought and in the Christian dispensation the earthly world is racked with sin. Both try to make greater sense of the visible through the invisible. This general attempt Machiavelli rejects. When he speaks of "hidden causes," it is of forces within the world as appreciated by "knowers of the world."¹⁵

Yet Machiavelli does not dispense with the word or even the notion of "sin." On the contrary, he appropriates it from Christianity and uses it to his purpose. In *The Prince* "sin" is used twice in an allusion to Savonarola, who is unnamed but said to be speaking the truth when he said that "our sins" were the cause of Italy's being invaded by a foreign power. Machiavelli corrects him, declaring that the sins were not the ones he described but "the ones I have told of," and these were "the sins of princes" (P 12.49). Having thus assumed responsibility from a heretic for redeeming the sins of Italy, he then in the *Discourses* uses "sin" thirteen times in order to supply his understanding of the word to replace the authoritative Christian one. First, he generalizes the rebellious preaching of Savonarola as a deed of citizens who "sin against the free state" (D 1.7.1), then excuses princes who are prompted to "sin" out of ingratitude (D 1.29.1), as done out of necessity, then denounces the "sin" of not punishing ambitious captains (D 1.31.2) and identifies such sins as "errors" (D 1.31.2, 2.18.3, 3.29.1). If peoples sin, it is only because they have been made to do so by princes (D 1.58.3, 2.18.3, 2.23.3, 3.29.1). In sum, it is the people who believe in sin as an offense to God, an invisible explanation of a visible deed.¹⁶ This is their necessity, which princes must understand and respect. To do so, to punish or "correct" (as errors) the "sins" that regard the state, one will need the help of "a prudent individual" (*uno prudente*, D 3.49.3, cf. 1.18.4). This would be Machiavelli himself, speaking in the last chapter of the *Discourses*. He understands that necessity cannot do away with the moral explanation as sin that moral people necessarily hold to.

If the world can be known, and knowledge is of permanent things, does that mean that the world is eternal? This would place Machiavelli in the ambit of Aristotle, for whom the world of joined matter and form is eternal since the natural forms are eternal. But Machiavelli seems to deny that the forms of nature are eternal; rather, there are certain patterns of behavior such as the princely and popular humors. The "simple and mixed bodies" he speaks of, a division of bodies, would appear to signify materialism, suggesting a source in Lucretius, whose poem Machiavelli himself copied

by hand. But Lucretius said that the world is not eternal; it is merely a temporary, chance formation of atoms, which are alone eternal. Machiavelli is serious about politics and the knowledge of politics, as Lucretius is not. Perhaps the eternity of the world, inferred so as to make it knowable to himself and later Machiavellians, was accepted by him simply because it was opposed to the creation of the world asserted in Christianity. He was with Aristotle so that the world could be known, and with Lucretius so that he could deny intelligible natures in the world.

Necessity, for Machiavelli, is expressed in the world of sense. Perhaps it is not necessarily expressed there, but Machiavelli inflates necessity beyond its normal confines. In that world ruin for the body is graver than perfection or salvation for the soul, which does not exist in it. Knowing that world requires learning how not to be good among the many who are not good. This means adopting the goal and practices of acquiring. "And truly it is a very natural and ordinary thing to desire to acquire. . . ." (P 3.14) Moral condemnation of it is effectual only when one attempts to acquire and fails. One might believe, and Machiavelli at first says, that a hereditary prince, who hardly disturbs the people he rules, is a "natural prince" because he has "less cause and less necessity to offend" (P 2.7). But in view of the natural and ordinary necessity to acquire, Machiavelli corrects his view of the natural prince; it is not the hereditary prince but the new prince. On his arrival in power, the new prince cannot help offending both his enemies whom he has displaced and his friends whom he may disappoint (P. 3.8; cf. D 1.7.2). The necessity to acquire applies to the hereditary prince as well, because he must take care to stay ahead of those whose desire to acquire will operate against him. He must anticipate them and do to them first what they plan to do to him. Maintaining his state will necessarily require the same means as used by others to displace him, and anticipation becomes the rule of those who hold an acquisition as much as those who seek to gain one (D 1.6.4, 1.5.2). The fear of losing generates the same ambition as the desire to acquire, but to greater effect since the holder of the state has greater means (D 1.5.2).

How new must the new prince be? How far does the necessity to acquire extend? It seems at first that the new prince must depend on his "opportunity" to acquire, for example that Moses found the people of Israel oppressed by the Egyptians (P 6.23). But on further reflection we are told that a prince can build his own "foundations" so as to make his own opportunity (P 6.25, 7.27, 32). Those foundations might consist of the customs and opinions of his time as enshrined in religion, particularly the Christianity Machiavelli found in his own time, which thought so little of

the "honor of the world" that he thought necessary to defend (D 2.2.2). A prince would then have to change the thinking of his people, creating for them a new "sect" and becoming himself the "prophet" of that sect.¹⁷ The best way to do this might be not to create a new sect but to take the existing sect and transform it to one's own purpose. This is what Machiavelli did to Christianity, as he shows by citing the example of David and Goliath in chapter 13 of *The Prince* (P 13.56). There he says that David insisted on using his own arms against Goliath, his sling and his knife. But of course the Bible says that David went into battle armed only with the sling; the knife he picked up from Goliath and used it to cut off his head. "One's own arms"—for Machiavelli makes the phrase into a motto—include the arm of your enemy used against him. He becomes a sort of prince himself whose new foundations reject and replace the reliance of man on God, as stated by David before engaging Goliath, with man's own freedom and independence.¹⁸ This is how far "necessity" extends: the necessity to replace enslavement by freedom, and to do so by all means necessary.

The necessity to acquire compels one to use force and fraud, especially fraud. Those who rise "from small beginnings to sublime ranks," and Machiavelli cites as his exemplar the Romans, always find it necessary to use fraud and are "the less worthy of reproach the more it is covert" (P 7.32; D 2.13.2). Obviously they cannot use "open force" at first, when they are weak, but they could excuse themselves from blame for using fraud by remembering that the power they displace also rose to its height by the same means. And as with the necessity to acquire in order to maintain, so with the necessity for fraud: a powerful prince needs to use fraud to protect himself against the fraud that will be used against him. Thus, because acquiring means acquiring from others, or in competition with others, secrecy becomes essential to politics.

When anticipation is the rule, one cannot afford to let others, that is, one's enemies, know what is being planned against them. The characteristic mode of behavior becomes conspiracy, not only in politics but in all society influenced by politics, including friendship. The first sentence of chapter 15 of *The Prince* announces the topic of a prince's relations "with subjects and with friends." The reasoning in the paragraph extends, however, to what "a man" must do, which is not to rely on a profession of good, and then it returns to what is necessary for "a prince." The moral "qualities" next considered (in P 15, continuing to 23) are explained by how they are "held," that is, by their effect, so that one learns the nature of liberality (P 16), for example, from the politics of a liberal prince. Morality by its effects is politicized, and the refuge from the rigors of politics of a private

life is denied, particularly in the case of “men who have quality” and who might prefer “to live quietly and without quarrel,” a formulation reminding of the Epicurean motto of “live unnoticed” (D 3.2). Such men will have to be ambitious despite their preference and may have to resort to playing crazy. One must make oneself mad and praise, speak, see, and do things “against your intent in order to please the prince.” It is a “very wise thing” to live a life of conspiracy and a necessity that must be judged particularly by the few who might prefer the contemplative life.¹⁹

In both *The Prince* and the *Discourses on Livy*, Machiavelli’s master writings because they are the only ones he describes, at the beginning, as containing everything he knows,²⁰ the longest chapter is on conspiracy (P 19 and D 3.6, the latter hugely larger than any other chapter and containing its own outline). Conspiracy is pervasive and comprehensive in politics; it can be used by a ruling prince as well as against him, and by a republic as well as against it. Machiavelli not only justifies conspiracy, as did other writers, but also shows how to execute one, explaining how to act in the three stages of before, during, and after the event. To execute a conspiracy is to execute the object of it—two related meanings of *esecuzione*. Of course the secret of a conspiracy comes out at its completion, but the effect of such a deed is much greater for its having been kept secret beforehand. The suddenness of execution (*ad uno tratto*, “with one stroke”) adds to the attention it receives, for example the “spectacle” of Cesare Borgia’s murder of his henchman Remirro de Orco (P 7.29–30). Its “ferocity” left the people “satisfied and stupefied,” their hatred for Remirro purged from their spirits. As opposed to tragedy, which purges the spirits of an audience so as to teach them a lesson, Machiavelli’s purging is merely cathartic and to the advantage of the prince.

That religion is a kind of purging is shown by Machiavelli’s worldly reduction of it. For him, morality and religion are effectively the same because morality cannot prove that humans are able to afford to be moral without recourse to divinity in the next world. The god must be there to punish and reward, and to do so he makes commands on humans who as such are imperfect sinners. Yet most humans—the people—are imperfect sinners because they are too weak to sin without fearing the consequences. So they must have religion—but they cannot live by it. The necessity of living by religion is counteracted by the necessary impossibility of doing so. Men being sinners, they cannot live without sinning. So they need a church and a priesthood that both enforces the commands of religion and provides the relief of forgiveness from those commands. Necessity must be applied by sacrifices and must necessarily be relaxed and purged by

atonements. In Machiavelli's play *Mandragola* the priest Brother Timothy plays a crucial role in the seduction of the beautiful and moral Lucrezia by offering relief from God's sanctions. He cites God's approval in the Bible of incest for Lot and his daughters as a present-day license for adultery done to produce an heir.²¹ God's necessity to repopulate the world justifies the (comically) corresponding human necessity to reproduce, though the deed must be kept secret. Machiavelli's play is the unfolding of a conspiracy made possible by the conspiracy with necessity—*human* necessity—that is religion.

For Machiavelli, religion is not the overcoming of the world's necessities that it claims to be. In its promises as well as in its demands it accords with the necessity arising from human weakness. It is not concerned with goodness, or not so much as it is concerned as with predicting and controlling the future, hence providing security for human weakness. More than finding remedies for their faults humans want to know what is in store for them as they are; they prefer security to reform. Religion is essentially an attempt to master fortune, but "the present religion," as he describes Christianity (D 1.pr.), does this in the interest of priests who do not believe in it. His own replacement or reformation of Christianity, putting it under the mastery of the princes of the world, does no more disrespect to Christianity than Christianity has done to itself. Christianity, he says, "shows the truth and the true way," a careful statement that falls definitively short of saying that it is true (D 2.2.2, 3.1.4, cf. 1.12.2). Christianity will indeed show the truth and the true way as Machiavelli appropriates it to his own use in accordance with its "effectual truth" as modes and orders of human government with which, as we have seen, he will redeem the sinfulness of the world. His own atheism will take advantage of the atheism of Christian priests who "do not fear the punishment that they do not see and do not believe" (D 3.1.4). But it will not be able to abolish religion and will not try.

Religion and pre-Machiavellian morality will continue in the world as the necessary dissatisfaction with its uncertainties and the unpredictability of fortune. Machiavelli surely encourages cynicism about morality, but he knows that he cannot convince most people to abandon morality. Resistance to necessity in the form of morality is as necessary as the failure of morality. "Goodness is not enough" (*la bontà non basta*, D 3.30.1), but it will not disappear. Hence Machiavelli does not attempt to construct a universal new morality as did later thinkers on the basis of a universal right of self-preservation. According to him virtue for the princes will always have to contend with goodness for peoples (see D 1.18.3–4). The pros-

pect that he might be known as Old Nick and his advice become notorious as Machiavelli would neither have deterred nor surprised him.

The Machiavelli scholars who try to save his reputation will succeed with those many who are as credulous, and in their way as moral, as they are.²² But Machiavelli himself would have excused them, because they operate on a necessity he understands perhaps better than they. It should be noted that Machiavelli does not so much justify as excuse evil.²³ He himself, so to speak personally, "excuses" the homicide of Remus by Romulus as well as the failure of Piero Soderini to anticipate the evil that the Medici did to him (D 1.9.2, 5; 1.52.2). The primacy of forgiveness over justice in Machiavelli's thought reveals his desire to replace, and assume, the office of the giver of forgiveness, and betrays the permanent tinge of Christianity to his anti-Christian thought.

A special challenge for the credulous scholars is the Machiavellian speech of an unnamed leader of the plebeian Ciompi rebellion in Florence, which because of its repeated reliance on "necessity" deserves (and bears) close examination here (FH 3.13). The orator speaks, it is said, "to inspire the others," but he says that he teaches what necessity requires.²⁴ Apparently necessity sometimes needs to be inspired in those to whom it applies; necessity does not necessarily make itself effectual but has to be taught in a striking way. He begins by saying that if he had to deliberate whether to take up arms, burn and rob homes, and despoil churches, he would agree "to put quiet poverty ahead of perilous gain." No moral qualm at these deeds would occur to him! But speaking now in the midst of rebellion, he says that we have no choice but to multiply the evils already committed and add more companions in them so that more will suffer, because universal injuries are borne more patiently than particular ones. Thus can we gain pardon more easily as well as "live with more freedom and more satisfaction than we have in the past." Here a gallon of whitewash is needed to save Machiavelli as the champion of republican freedom and virtue.

The orator goes on to disparage the nobles who oppose the plebs. Don't be dismayed by their antiquity of blood, he exclaims: "Strip all of us naked, you will see that we are all alike." Forget conscience and possible infamy, for where, as with us, there is "fear of hunger and prison, there cannot and should not be fear of hell." And then he generalizes grandly: "For faithful servants are always servants and good men are always poor." "God and nature" have put us where we are, in the midst of exposure to wickedness. So "one should use force whenever the occasion for it is given to us." This is a course of action, "I confess," says the orator, that is bold and dangerous, but when necessity presses, boldness is judged prudence.

"Spirited men never take account of the danger in great things, for those enterprises that are begun with danger always end with reward."

The original claim that this circumstance is special, the initial concession that one should hesitate over "perilous gain," are entirely withdrawn. To be in the midst of a plebeian rebellion is not exceptional but reveals the essential situation of man: all of us stripped naked, exposed to danger and wickedness. Here is Hobbes's state of nature, and not just in embryo but born alive and kicking. The nature of man's situation is taken from the extreme case and made universal to cover all normal cases. In fact, the concept of "normal" as opposed to abnormal is reversed so that the abnormal, formerly the exception, becomes the rule. Here too the future course of modern science is previewed: the nature of man is taken from nature stripped of convention, as it were in a laboratory experiment when nature is tortured and everything normally hidden emerges. In the practice of experiment scientific fact is disclosed as opposed to ordinary observations made complacently without benefit of the pressure of necessity. We should also notice the ambition of the orator for great things and his willingness to face great danger in enterprises with the expectation of reward.²⁵

The plebeian orator who "inspires" the mob by appealing to necessity shows again the unexpected complexity of Machiavelli's profession of that notion. Humans must not only choose necessity but also be inspired to choose it. That politics is ruled by necessity does not at all mean that political things must be accepted as they are with resignation, leading to disdain for the political life and the search for "quiet poverty" in contemplation, perhaps, that the orator momentarily considered attractive.²⁶ Instead, Machiavelli seeks to inspire (*inanimare*) his readers with a spiritedness (*animo*) that will lead them to virtue (*virtù*) in the sort of active acquisition that he defines as the political life. *Animo* easily recalls the *thumos* by which the classical political scientists referred to the spirited part of the soul. Machiavelli does not mention the soul in *The Prince* and the *Discourses on Livy*, his two chief works, and he seems to treat *animo* as his replacement for soul, substituting *animo* for *anima*.

In the notable example of the criminal Agathocles who became "king" (P 8.34) he speaks of his "virtue of spirit and body" (*virtù di animo e corpo*), in a manner to make one think that *animo* replaces *anima*. *Animo*, one may suppose, is an exhalation from the body, representing its spirited defensiveness yet expressed in the necessity of acquiring. In Machiavelli's usage it is very far from what Marx and Engels called "the icy water of egotistical calculation" but not so far from what Max Weber called "the

spirit of capitalism" and many today call the spirit of entrepreneurship, of which one element is calculation.²⁷ Machiavelli's notion of acquiring is political and moral rather than economic, and for him spiritedness issues in a new virtue available to the wicked like Agathocles. Machiavelli's account of this successful criminal in *The Prince* says that one cannot call his wicked deeds virtue, a remark seized on by many who argue his moral brief. But then he goes on to speak of "the virtue of Agathocles" in the very next sentence, immediately violating his own prohibition as if he were in a position to flaunt his inconsistency.²⁸

Necessity animates the prince so as to require him to become a new prince and in doing so to consider in cold blood—yet spiritedly!—the costs and benefits of wickedness. Standing in the way of the new prince, however, might be the attachments of a city—let us say a republic—that is "accustomed to living free." In such republics "there is greater life, greater hatred, greater desire for revenge," and the prince is told by Machiavelli that "the most secure path is to eliminate them or live in them" (P 5.21).²⁹ He does not hesitate to endorse the practice of the Romans, citing destruction of republics by the Roman republic, as the example for princes (P 5.20). But the popular humor he cites, occurring "in every city . . . that the people desire neither to be commanded nor oppressed by the great," shows that they always stand in the way of the new prince, whether organized in a republic or not. One necessity gets in the way of another, the necessity to command versus the necessity not to be commanded, and the new prince must have the virtue (in the new acquisitive sense) to overcome the second necessity in order to follow the first. Although the necessity in the popular humor is not limited to republics, still it is useful to be reminded that the "republican virtue" piously recommended by scholars on Machiavelli's behalf is animated by hatred and desire for revenge. These sentiments might seem to be the sort of luxury that necessity would teach anyone to do without, but he welcomes them under necessity's excusing capacity. Although he says quite definitely that a prince must avoid being hated by the people, he concludes that since a prince cannot fail to be hated by someone, he should prefer being hated by the people rather than by his soldiers (P 17.67–8, 19.75–6).

The necessity for *animo* is further complicated by the complacency of routine that all the achievements of virtue induce. Machiavelli presents this untoward consequence of virtue in a well-known passage in his *Florentine Histories* discussing the fourth of his seven inquiries in that book (FH 5.1). There seems to be a cycle in history in which "virtue gives birth to quiet, quiet to leisure, leisure to disorder, disorder to ruin," and

then from ruin a rise in reverse through the stages. The danger of leisure is paramount, and especially the use of leisure for philosophy illustrated in the protest by Cato against the corrupting presence of philosophy in Rome. Applying this dilemma between what is good for a republic and what is good for philosophy to his time, and to the difference between the "virtue and greatness" of the ancients and the weakness of the moderns, Machiavelli closes with a suggestion. "Perhaps," he says, it may be no less useful to know the modern weakness than the ancient strength, because if the latter excites "the liberal spirits" (*i liberali animi*) to follow, the former will excite such spirits to avoid and eliminate it. That is a statement of Machiavelli's liberal spirit, and apparently he has a remedy for avoiding the cyclical necessity of virtue and disorder.

The general program for a lasting or even permanent revival out of weakness is supplied in his *Discourses on Livy*. There he concludes that "nothing is more necessary" in any common way of life "than to give back to it the reputation it had in its beginnings" (D 3.1.6). Necessity leads out of necessity when prudently understood as requiring a return to the beginnings and to the original fear that underlies the complacency of civilization. This return has to be a political act, a sensational change of regime that catches attention as opposed to the steady accumulation of property that later Machiavellians, agreeing with Machiavelli as to the necessity to acquire, substituted for the riskiness of Machiavellian virtue.³⁰ As virtue is risky, the goal of virtue is glory, which one might say is a semblance of nobility. In the sense of glory, nobility is not opposed to necessity but rather gained through necessity, an insight for which Machiavelli praises "certain moral philosophers" he does not name (D 1.4–5, 43; 2.12.3; 3.12.1). Fraud, for example, might seem to be necessary though "detestable," but no, fraud in managing war is glorious (D 3.40.1).³¹ Machiavelli's use of fraud, one might propose, is the highest degree of his glory.

So understood, Machiavelli can return his profession of necessity to the profession of good, the latter having been duly limited and disciplined. The new prince must arm his subjects, not all of them because that is not possible, but some of them. Which should he choose? On thinking it through, he will see that it is easier to gain to himself those who had been content with the previous state, his former enemies, rather than with his former friends, who had their own reason for becoming so and would be more demanding of him (P 20.83, 86). In Machiavelli's own case, he would, one supposes, be thinking of Christian priests as his new friends. Such a course may not be perfect, but one can never seek to avoid one inconvenience without running into another, and prudence consists in picking the

less bad inconvenience as good (P 21.91). The next chapter of *The Prince* on the secretaries to the prince discusses only one case, that of a minister who is more excellent than the prince he advises. One knows of necessity, Machiavelli says, that this prince was either in the first rank of inventiveness or the second, being able to recognize good deeds though incapable of conceiving them. This minister “cannot hope to deceive him and remains good himself” (P 22.92).

At least in the case of a minister advising a prince, then, it is necessary for the minister to appear good and faithful. Machiavelli as adviser to princes is of necessity faithless to any particular one of them, because his advice is general or universal and can be used by the enemies of any prince whom he advises. But Machiavelli is himself also under the necessity of proving to be good for the princes he advises and not merely offering irresponsible advice in order to make himself look good. We see that necessity is judged, in the end, by how much good it leads to—even if the good in this case is only apparent. Machiavelli the professor of necessity is obliged to profess the necessity of the good.

NOTES

1. For an earlier treatment, see Harvey C. Mansfield, *Machiavelli's Virtue* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 55–78.

2. See D 1.1, 4–6; citations from Machiavelli's *Discourses on Livy* are to book, chapter, and paragraph, using the translation of Harvey C. Mansfield and Nathan Tarcov (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996). Citations to *The Prince* are to chapter and page in the translation of Harvey C. Mansfield (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2nd ed., 1998), and those to the *Florentine Histories* are to the translation of Laura Banfield and Harvey C. Mansfield (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).

3. Aristotle, *Politics* 1252a9.

4. D 1.6.1; D 1.55.3–4, 6; D 3.22.6; P 7.28, 31; P 12.51; FH 3.13.

5. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1094a1–27, 1094b7–12; cf. *Politics* 1252a1–7.

6. Pierre Manent, *Naissances de la politique moderne* (Paris: Payot, 1977), 35.

7. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 6, 1144a23–29. In *The Prince* astuteness is associated with greatness; in P 15.62 it is paired with honesty in the contrast of human “qualities,” and Severus (the model criminal founder of P 19.79, 82) is said to be a “very astute fox” as well as a “very fierce” lion. Prudence seems to be more public, less hidden, than astuteness (D 1.6.4; 1.41); in P 23.95, a prince is said to be “very prudent” who by chance might “submit himself to one alone who might govern him in everything, who is a very prudent man.” Machiavelli may consider himself very prudent not to allow himself

to be considered, in his own case, very astute. But this does not amount to Aristotle's distinction between prudence and cunning. One might say that prudence is the teaching of astuteness (see the "astuteness of Hercules" in D 2.12.2). "Human astuteness and malignity" may or may not have a limit (D 2.5.2).

8. See David Wootton, *The Invention of Science* (New York: HarperCollins, 2015), 252–54; Harvey C. Mansfield, "Machiavelli's Enterprise," in *Machiavelli's Legacy*, ed. Timothy Fuller (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 26.

9. See especially references to "the whole world" in P 3.9, 19.81; D 3.11.2, cf. D 2.2.2 (the "honor of the world"). Also "knowing the world," P 18.70; D 3.31.3; and not knowing it, D 1.38.3, 3.31.3. And "worldly things," D DL.3.

10. Forms are imposed on matter rather than recognized in it; see P 6.23, 26.102, 104. See also Leo Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli* (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1958), 337n118.

11. P 9.39; D 1.4.1, 1.5.2, 1.7.1; FH 3.1.

12. Mikael Hornqvist speaks of an "apparent necessity" that applies to the ignorant as distinct from the prudent; see *Machiavelli and Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 136. But according to the "effectual truth," necessity is as it appears; so the ignorant are not deluded as to their own necessity. Their necessity is as real as that of the princes who deceive them. See Claude Lefort, *Le travail de l'oeuvre Machiavel* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972), 227.

13. See Machiavelli's *Mandragola* 3.3, a scene in which Brother Timothy gets "a woman" to will for herself what he says God wills.

14. P 7.32; D 2.13.1–2. What Erica Benner calls "the rhetoric of necessity" includes religion and what Machiavelli calls "fraud"; *Machiavelli's Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 136.

15. D 1.3.1, 1.58.3, 2.32.1. On knowing the world see P 18.70; D 3.31.

16. Note the widespread use of "offend" in Machiavelli's works where one would expect "injure," for example P 7.33 or D 3.6.2, where both terms occur.

17. The word "sect" (*setta*) occurs once in *The Prince* and twenty times in the *Discourses*, seven times in one chapter, D 2.5. On the prince as prophet see P 6.28; and for the distinction between armed and unarmed prophets, we are told that a prince can become armed if he knows the "art of war," P 14.58, together with P 13.56 on David and Goliath.

18. 1 Samuel 17:37, 45.

19. A conspirator can gain adherents during his conspiracy by telling them that they must either join it or be reported to the prince for belonging to it. This tactic puts them under "the necessity that does not allow time" (*la necessità che non dà tempo*, D 3.6.10–11), a necessity that affects Machiavelli's own conspiracy. See Harvey C. Mansfield, *Machiavelli's New Modes and Orders* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 331.

20. An observation stressed by Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 17.

21. *Mandragola*, 3.3–9. See Harvey C. Mansfield, "The Cuckold in Machiavelli's *Mandragola*," in *The Comedy and Tragedy of Machiavelli*, ed. Vickie B. Sullivan (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 17–20.

22. With this insult I excuse my friends: Benner, *Machiavelli's Ethics*, chap. 4;

John P. McCormick, *Machiavellian Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 4; Maurizio Viroli, *Machiavelli* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 24.

23. Justice is identified with necessity in P 26.103; D 1.2.5, 3.1.2.

24. The unnamed orator is surely Michele di Lando, who is identified and praised to the skies for his goodness (*bontà*) [by contrast to the “Duke of Athens” in FH 3.16–18], goodness that “never allowed a thought to enter his mind that might be contrary to the universal good.” One wonders whether goodness so ambitiously defined might yet be compatible with the unnamed orator’s urging of wickedness.

25. “And it should be considered that nothing is more difficult to handle, more doubtful of success, nor more dangerous to manage, than to put oneself at the head of introducing new orders.” P 6.23; cf. D 3.35.1.

26. See Marsilius of Padua on the notion of “voluntary poverty,” *Defender of the Peace* 2:12–14. The word “sect” occurs thirteen times in this work.

27. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, ed. Frederic Bender (New York: Norton, 1988), 57; Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Stephen Kalberg (Los Angeles: Roxbury, 2002), 13–37. See also Joseph A. Schumpeter on “creative destruction,” *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, (New York: Harper, 1950), 81–6.

28. Erica Benner steps carefully over Machiavelli’s impudence; *Machiavelli’s Prince: A New Reading* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 113.

29. The alternative open to a prince of eliminating or living in the republics he conquers in P 5 makes one think of the alternative of fear and love in P 17, and then enables one to see another instance of Machiavelli’s appropriation of Christianity.

30. “Economism is Machiavellianism come of age”; Strauss, *What is Political Philosophy?* (Glencoe, IL.: The Free Press, 1959), 49.

31. Thus what is necessary can also be understood as the “more honorable part,” D 1.7.4.

Machiavelli on Good and Evil: The Problem of Dirty Hands Revisited

GIOVANNI GIORGINI

I. MACHIAVELLI'S COMMITMENT

The problem of “dirty hands”¹ concerns the role of morality in politics, namely whether (and in what measure) it is admissible to use evil means in order to achieve noble ends or something conceived as the overarching “common good.” This was not a new problem first identified by Machiavelli’s acute and discerning eye in the sixteenth century; indeed, it is almost as old as politics: to mention only two famous examples, Cain, after being banned from Eden for killing his brother Abel, established the city of Enoch; and Romulus killed Remus in the very act of founding Rome.

The problem of “dirty hands” in Machiavelli cannot be separated from the question of what his intention was in writing his political works and especially *The Prince*, which has just turned 500 and which allegedly started political modernity: that is to say a new era in which politics is supposed to have become separated, or autonomous, from the moral and religious realm, answering only to considerations of effectiveness in a consequentialist perspective. I shall maintain that Machiavelli did *not* discount the role of morality in politics but believed that politics had a distinct and discrete dimension of duty, and in certain exceptional cases—which we may call the “state of emergency”—moral and religious allegiances and political duties could clash without any possibility of reconciliation. In these cases the dramatic side of politics is fully revealed, for the statesman confronts nothing less than a tragic dilemma, because *every* decision he makes will entail guilt.² Machiavelli was acutely aware of this tragic dimension of politics and therefore warned the reader and prospective statesman that he must be ready to “damn his own soul” when

he enters the political realm; for in cases of dire emergency the statesman must put the safety of the state above all other consideration and therefore must do things that are evil, immoral, and impious. This point is of fundamental significance in order to appreciate the seriousness and the dramatic tone of Machiavelli's thought: Machiavelli was *not* the bearer of a new morality, nor did he believe that princes and politicians have a special dispensation from ordinary morality. Evil remains evil in his thought, and dirty hands are dirty. The problem, then, consists in identifying the circumstances and conditions that require a statesman to dirty his hands without becoming an evil person or turn into a bad ruler. For Machiavelli this was very much a problem of political education, because only the wise and prudent statesman can identify correctly the problem he is facing and can decide about the appropriate course of action, and that calls for the right political education. Seen from this perspective, Machiavelli belongs with full title to that long tradition of political thinkers who put their hopes of political renewal in the education of a new, and different, kind of statesmen—a tradition that starts with Plato and includes such thinkers as Xenophon, Aristotle, Cicero, Augustine, and Aquinas but also authors of treatises *de regimine principum* and civic humanists who wrote works on "the perfect prince," the *specula principis*, such as Bracciolini, Alberti, Patrizi, Platina, and Pontano.³ By emphasizing Machiavelli's connection and belonging to a long-established tradition⁴ in Western political thought I do not mean to diminish his originality and importance; on the contrary, I wish to show that, precisely because Machiavelli was well-versed in that tradition, he believed that he had to confront it and devise an alternative solution. Machiavelli believed that that tradition, especially in its Christian manifestation, had failed to educate statesmen who were up to their task. And the results were apparent in the present condition of his homeland, which he describes as "more enslaved than the Hebrews, more servile than the Persians, more dispersed than the Athenians, without a head, without order, beaten, despoiled, torn, pillaged, and having endured ruin of every sort."⁵ It is important to recall, however, that these famous lines belong to the last chapter of *The Prince*; they are part of an "Exhortation to seize Italy and to free her from the barbarians": the tone is not of despair but rather of incitement to action; the dire times are ripe for a "redeemer" and Machiavelli is persuaded that in general "the occasion is of short duration."⁶

I believe that Machiavelli had many purposes in his mind when he began writing *The Prince* in spring 1513, but one of them was overriding. He intended to educate a new kind of statesman according to what he

had learned through his readings and his fourteen years in office in the chancery of the Florentine Republic so that the statesman could meet the extraordinary challenges of the age and be prepared in advance for the extraordinary demands of high-level political activity. In order to fulfill this task, as we may surmise from his letter exchange with Francesco Vettori, Machiavelli had to ingratiate himself with the Medici family by showing his talent in politics, the only field in which he deemed himself to be expert.⁷ Like every talented writer trying to catch the reader's attention, Machiavelli made his promise and stated his commitment right at the beginning of his work, in the dedicatory letter of *The Prince*: having declared that his dearest and worthiest possession is "the knowledge of the actions of great men"—which he learned "from long experience with modern things and a continuous reading of ancient ones"—he promised to the young Lorenzo de' Medici that he would be able "to *understand* in a very short time all that I have learned and understood in so many years and with so many hardships and dangers for myself."⁸ I think Machiavelli's choice of the word is simply perfect: *intendere* is both to grasp and to understand⁹ and refers to the ability that the prince must be able to grasp and understand what is of the utmost importance for a statesman, the most basic principles and purpose of the art of state. The little book he offers may be short and coming from a person in reduced circumstances and enduring "a great and continuous malignity of fortune,"¹⁰ but it deals with the most important things concerning the art of state.

It is noteworthy that Machiavelli deems it important to stress repeatedly that the advice he offers comes from a combination of practical experience and literary knowledge: theory and action combined.¹¹ He wanted to distance himself from those authors who "have imagined republics and principalities that have never been seen or known to exist in truth,"¹² such as Plato and Augustine; at the same time, he did not want to pass for an illiterate, uncultured writer who generalizes his practical experience. The combination of theory and practice is the key to success in political education, as the examples of Xenophon, Cicero, and Plutarch, politicians and men of letters, testify. In the background there are the aforementioned "great men," the statesmen who performed "great deeds" in the service of their countries, who act as exemplars for the new prince. The importance of the examples of the past, the exemplarity of "great men," has a central role in Machiavelli's political vision: since human nature is in his view fixed, and since history therefore tends to repeat itself, the possibility to imitate the example of the great statesmen of the past is actual and real. Moreover, if we read such educational biographies as Xenophon's

Ciropaedia and Plutarch's *Lives*, we realize that the great statesmen of the past did exactly this: they chose eminent men as models to imitate. Machiavelli's vision of history and of human nature, together with his knowledge of classic authors, came together to persuade him that the only hope for his wretched homeland consisted in devising a new kind of education for prospective statesmen, an education that, in an apparent paradox, revived the ancients against the moderns.

I find it scarcely credible that after more than 500 years we can still read that Machiavelli was the evil counsellor of princes and tyrants alike, who gave them recommendations on how to preserve their power by all means. Well, to be fair, he has been depicted in many unpronounceable guises, including a combination of a phallic narcissist and a primary sadist!¹³ Indeed, if we think of the meaning of the word "Machiavellian," we are reminded that in popular usage Machiavelli is still a "teacher of evil"¹⁴ who maintained that "the end justifies the means."¹⁵ How can we overlook the "great men" and the "great deeds" so prominent in his text? We may find a confirmation of this enduring prejudice not only in the specialized scholarly works on Machiavelli but also in the popular literature and especially in the self-help genre: we are thus delighted to discover a Machiavelli for ladies, one for managers, one for dandies seeking counsels for dressing, and even one for philanderers, just to mention a few examples.¹⁶ Whereas what Machiavelli has in mind in every chapter and page of his Aristotelian-style treatise on statesmanship is rather to educate a new kind of statesman so that he may accomplish something great,¹⁷ if he meets the right circumstances and "heaven" is on his side.¹⁸ In order to do so he must have something like a North Star guiding him through the perilous seas toward his set destination and this cannot be the Christian teaching "I am the way, the truth, and the light" with the consequent virtues—Machiavelli rejected that. This guiding light must be the awareness that the greatest act a statesman can perform is to save his own country from destruction either by external or internal forces: namely conquest by a foreign power, or anarchy caused by domestic factions. The form of this teaching may appear dramatic, and it has in fact given rise to criticism from the most pious or least attentive readers,¹⁹ but this is because dramatic are also the circumstances: in general, because when the state is threatened with destruction, this is the most dangerous moment for a ruler and for the citizens; specifically, in Machiavelli's own times, the acquisition, loss, and ruin of a state were events that had happened many times to Italian and foreign princes.

This teaching—the statesman's first and foremost task is to save the

state—recurs in many places in Machiavelli's works and is stated repeatedly in *The Prince*, with different takes and variations. I thus propose to read *The Prince* as a compendium of statesmanship, a summary of Machiavelli's knowledge and experience meant to give a prospective statesman a permanent education, to form a virtuous *hexis* in him, if we wish to use an Aristotelian expression. It is not a set of recommendations for specific situations but rather an educational work in the tradition of Aristotle, Cicero, and Plutarch. And in such an educational work aimed at the permanent *Bildung* of a statesman, this is lesson number one, the starting point of politics: saving and maintaining the state must be the first preoccupation of the prudent politician who loves his country. We may add that if the prudent politician succeeds in creating and maintaining a state, he will provide his fellow citizens with the external conditions required in order to live peacefully, take care of their interests, and pursue a moral and religious life that will grant them not only earthly goods but also eternal salvation. In order to do this, Machiavelli contends, the statesman must be ready to give up his "soul," namely personal salvation, for love of the country and of his fellow citizens. It may sound paradoxical, but Machiavelli's "murderous" doctrine is not so distant from the Platonic view that the philosopher must sacrifice his personal happiness in favour of that of the entire community, and a very significant offspring of the statesman's action to save the state is the salvation of the souls of his fellow citizens, which is impossible in a context of war and anarchy. All this is very different from saying that the ruler must preserve his own power: Machiavelli always maintains that what matters is the state, because without it, nothing—no peace, no leisure, no civil life, no security, no morality, no freedom—is possible; mere life is barely possible. The state is the common good, therefore saving the state means preserving the common good. Often the two purposes—to save the state and to preserve one's own power—are obviously intertwined for the ruler, but this is a secondary consideration for Machiavelli, who always insists on the necessity to save the state. In this respect we can say that *The Prince* is a variation on the theme of the *Notzustand*, the state of necessity—a fundamental topic in the history of political thought and a situation already perfectly identified by the Greek historian Thucydides in his Melian Dialogue.²⁰

It is at this level that we encounter Machiavelli's most dramatic lesson to his readers: the "seriousness of politics."²¹ Politics is a serious matter; it is that realm of human activity where decisions are made that affect countless numbers of people, whose life or death, happiness or misery, may be at stake, and who depend on the statesman's capacity to make the

right, albeit dramatic, decision. A man who enters politics, Machiavelli believed, must be aware that he is entering a path that may lead him to damn his own soul.²² With Machiavelli's dramatic turn, ruling responsibly and personal salvation are for the first time seen as discrete targets: being "good" has different meanings when it comes to the state or to the soul; a "good" prince will very often turn out to be a bad Christian and an evil human being.²³ We may add another consideration here. In a letter to his friend Francesco Vettori Machiavelli famously wrote "I love my native city more than my soul"; this sentence is even more telling—and perhaps replete with dark forebodings—since Machiavelli died two months later.²⁴ In mentioning the destiny of his soul together with that of his *patria* Machiavelli revived an old *topos*. It is interesting to notice, in fact, that the relationship between politics, or the constitution (*politeia*), and the soul had been long established in Greek political thought. The analogy between the macrocosm of the city and the microcosm of the soul lies at the foundation of Plato's *Republic* and supports his claim that *kallipolis* is the only city built according to human nature. In the *Laws* Plato's Athenian Stranger could intelligibly claim that politics is "the art whose task is caring for souls" (*Laws* 1, 650b) because politics oversees the correct arrangement of the human soul.²⁵ Moreover, in a *scholium* to this work we find a definition of "constitution" (*politeia*) as "the one way of life of a whole polis," while Isocrates spoke of the community's *politeia* as "the city's soul."²⁶

Machiavelli does not deny the existence of this relationship, but he believes that in taking care of the state the politician may imperil his own soul. Between the Greek world and Machiavelli's, Christianity appeared, with its insistence that actions in this world serve the purpose to give us access to beatitude in the next world: thus the importance of politics is clearly diminished. Machiavelli wants to restore the balance and give politics its proper place in this world. In this sense "*The Prince* is a profoundly educational work, a constant lesson in seriousness," as Nicola Matteucci remarked.²⁷ The irresistible allure of this work stems from its combination of apparent realism (the famous *incipit* of chapter 15) and hidden idealism, which is revealed in the moral invectives against the Italian princes and all other rulers who did not care for the common good and allowed their states to be ruined. Politics is a *Beruf*, to use the word of a great political realist strongly influenced by Machiavelli, a "profession" but also a "vocation," a "calling."²⁸ Machiavelli had an amazingly high consideration of politics because he knew from experience that a statesman may put together or undo a state, may accomplish the deed for which

human beings are hailed as heroes, namely create or save a state, or may do the worst possible action, let his state be destroyed because of his ineptitude or selfish desire for power or lack of love for the community. If we keep this consideration in mind, that politics is an extremely serious matter and that saving the state is the overarching good, we are in the best position to examine the problem of dirty hands in Machiavelli.

II. MACHIAVELLI'S PREDECESSORS: TWO TRADITIONS

As I already stated, the problem of dirty hands was old, almost as old as politics itself, and had been faced and examined by eminent authors. Machiavelli knew and faced two traditions of addressing this question, which were quite influential in his age. One was linked to a classical author who had regained prominence in the previous century thanks to new translations and, especially in Florence, through the work of Marsilius Ficinus and his Florentine Academy: Plato.²⁹ It may sound strange to compare two such different authors—the alleged father of political idealism, Plato, and perhaps *the* master of political realism, Machiavelli—and emphasize the influence of the former on the latter, but Plato was much more of a realist than we usually surmise: his entire theory of the best regime is based on a realistic appreciation of human nature and of the political circumstances of his days. Moreover, Plato deplored the idea of being considered a mere “word-monger” and tried to implement his theory of the best regime by going personally to the tyrants of Syracuse (three times!) in the hope to persuade them and then falling back on founding a philosophical-political school, the Academy, where he trained future philosophers and politicians.³⁰ Conversely, Machiavelli’s realism is dappled by his love for the country and by his moral indignation at the fickle and selfish Italian rulers, to the point that he loses sight of what is politically feasible. He counsels Pope Leo X (Giovanni de’ Medici) to give up absolute rule in Florence and create instead a mixed government, a free living “vera republica,” quoting explicitly Aristotle and Plato as predecessors in such counselling.³¹ The odds that Leo X would follow Machiavelli’s advice equal the odds that Dionysius (the Elder or the Younger) would give up their tyranny and implement *kallipolis* in Syracuse. In the end, after their practical attempts came to naught, Plato and Machiavelli relied on their ability to educate virtue to prospective statesmen; they both found in political education the key for implementing their political visions. In fact, already Henry Neville, in his *Plato redivivus* (1681), considered “the divine Machiavel” the heir to “the divine Plato” in that he wrote as a physician who

tried to heal the moral and political disorders of human beings and political institutions, just like his Greek predecessor.³²

Both authors identified the source of these disorders in men's different and conflicting visions of the good and saw in factional strife (*stasis*) the deadly disease of the body politic.³³ To be sure, Machiavelli praises civil conflict "against the opinion of many" (*Discourses* 1.4) but only in a "well-ordered republic," namely where there are good laws that "channel" the diverging aspirations of the people and of the aristocrats, where there are courts to which any citizen can appeal and accuse a magistrate or a powerful aristocrat,³⁴ and where citizens are well educated and never act against the common good. Only in these circumstances is civil conflict beneficial, as in the case of the Roman republic; otherwise, it turns into factional strife that destroys the liberty and the power of the state, as happened in Florence. Machiavelli lived in a political landscape very similar to Plato's, who saw contemporary cities struggling with internal conflicts between oligarchs and democrats and threatened by foreign entities such as the Great King and Philip of Macedon. Similarly, in Machiavelli's time Florence and other Italian cities were torn by civil strife between the ruling elite and the people, which caused mourning, destruction, regime change, and finally loss of independence at the hands of the kings of France and Spain. Florence, for instance, always had "defective regimes" according to Machiavelli because reforms "have been made not for the fulfillment of the common good, but for the strengthening and the security of one party," thus causing instability and the sudden surrender to Charles VIII.³⁵

Likewise, Plato was persuaded that all political arrangements of his age were flawed because they all inevitably saw the rule of one part or faction against another: one ruled, the other served—as the name of the regimes clearly revealed: "rule of the people" (*demokratia*), "rule of the best" (*aristokratia*), "rule of the few" (*oligarchia*); the happiness of one part was achieved at the expense of the other. As the sophist Thrasymachus aptly observed, or rather snarled at a dismayed Socrates, "justice is the advantage of the stronger," by which he meant the established government: every ruler makes laws that are advantageous to his part and calls this "justice"; accordingly, justice is "the good of someone else" (*allogrion agathon*). It takes Socrates nine (out of ten) books in the *Republic* to refute Thrasymachus, and in the end the essence of his reasoning remains intact although Socrates, by introducing the dimension of the Forms and thus an objective realm of truth, shows that the philosophers, who know the real good for their fellow citizens, rule for the common good and succeed in making all citizens happy. In order to refute Thrasymachus, however, Soc-

rates has at the same time to lay down a theory of knowledge, an educational plan for the youth, dispositions about what artists can or cannot do, and, finally and most importantly, a design for a city that is one and not many (because exempt from civil strife), unified by moderation (*sophrosyne*), a virtue possessed by all citizens. This is a city completely different from all other existing political arrangements because in it human beings (who are presupposed to be different and with diverse images of happiness) live harmoniously and flourish as much as their nature allows them. However, in order to build and maintain the “beautiful city,” the philosopher-kings must perform certain distasteful duties: they lie (although it is a “noble lie” because it is justified by the good end it serves, namely maintaining harmony in the city) to their fellow citizens about their different natures, in order to justify their ordering in different classes;³⁶ they expel to the countryside everyone over the age of ten;³⁷ they watch over children from a very young age and select those who have the appropriate intellectual and moral qualities and deserve philosophical education while at the same time demoting the others to other classes;³⁸ they arrange marriages and preside over the “matching” of citizens with eugenic intent;³⁹ they take morality and religion seriously and therefore severely punish deviant behavior and atheism, even with the death penalty in the most stubborn cases.⁴⁰ In so doing they do not care about written laws, deeming more important the “force of their art,”⁴¹ and use all sort of means to persuade and even “enchant” the citizens.⁴²

In Plato, then, we find already perfectly described the problem of using evil means in order to achieve an all-important good end—the transition from the worst to a good, or rather the best, form of government—together with an educational project aimed at creating a ruler capable of doing evil things for the common good of the city. The solution to this most important and prickly problem is entrusted to an educational project that involves first the ruling class and then the entire citizenry. Plato was well aware that such methods were debatable and had some of his characters object to their use. But his answer was that this was the only way to put an end to the conflicts that plagued all existing cities and to finally bring about a political arrangement whereby *all* citizens could be happy.⁴³ Nor was he unaware of the fact that a malign critic could retort that similar methods had already been used in the past—by tyrants. The question for Plato was then how to distinguish a philosopher-king from a tyrant, the true statesman from someone holding only the exteriority of power; this was not an easy task because judging merely from the appearances—namely the means employed—the two looked very much alike. It

is very similar to the difference between the philosopher and the sophist: the two bear a very close resemblance, but they are quite different, indeed completely opposite, just like the dog and the wolf.⁴⁴ Plato was persuaded that there was a huge distance and a fundamental difference between the philosopher-king and the tyrant, since the former possessed the *politike episteme* or *techne politike*: political science or the art of politics. This enabled the philosopher to truly know what is good for the citizens of his city; being the possessor of an art, the true statesman is like a physician, who may purge bodies and even cut limbs but always for the true benefit of the patient,⁴⁵ as contrasted to the tyrant who aims only at his own benefit. Plato was persuaded that in the end the citizens would realize the difference between a city ruled by a philosopher and one ruled by a tyrant in terms of happiness by looking at the results: in a tyrannical city no one, not even the tyrant, is happy and the distance in their respective happiness can even be measured; the philosopher is 729 times happier than a tyrant!⁴⁶

Moreover, Plato had already identified one of the central problems that would consume Machiavelli: the relationship between the ruler's virtue and chance, which includes all the external circumstances beyond the agent's control; how necessary is a favourable occasion, which must combine with the philosopher's art, in order to realize the best regime?⁴⁷ This question was already addressed in Plato's first great political work, the *Republic*, in the last lines of book 9, which are of fundamental importance because they concern the possibility to realize in practice the perfect city: here Socrates states that only some "divine chance" (*theia tyche*) will enable the philosophers to enter politics.⁴⁸ The myth of the reversed cosmos in the *Politicus* reminds us that there are times and rhythms in the universe and that god never abandons it lest it falls into the "boundless sea of dissimilarity"—its destiny of dissolution.⁴⁹ Finally, in the *Laws*, which is the work where Plato's religious piety is most clearly revealed, we read that "no mortal ever legislates anything, but almost all human affairs are matters of chance"; and a little further on: "in all things god—and together with god, chance (*tyche*) and opportunity (*kairos*)—pilots all the human things"; in the third place there is art (*techne*). It follows that "no human being ever legislates anything, but chances (*tychai*) and accidents (*symphorai*) of every sort, occurring in all kinds of ways, legislate everything for us."⁵⁰ Besides being virtuous, the statesman (or tyrant) who wishes to implement the best regime must therefore be "lucky," according to Plato, and accompanied by a "lucky chance" (*tyche*) that helps him find a wise philosopher legislator. This relationship between virtue and chance

is tackled by Machiavelli in the last two chapters of *The Prince*, not without hesitations and vacillations, since being “loved by heaven” emerges as a fundamental requisite for successful political action.

“Let us do evil, that good may come” is a statement slanderously attributed to the Christians and rejected by Paul in his *Letter to the Romans* (3:8); for Paul no end, not even spreading the word of Christ and the Good News, could justify sinning. There are moral absolutes (that is to say moral norms that have no exceptions) and no situation can ever absolve committing an evil deed for the sake of an alleged higher good.⁵¹ In his vision, taking care of one’s soul, preparing for the afterlife by realizing that Christ is God and the Truth, is the supreme consideration, and therefore it is not difficult to outline a hierarchy of goods: damning one’s soul by sinning is the worst possible choice of action for a Christian and for a good human being in general. The relationship between power and salvation had been a central preoccupation in early Christianity. Already in Mark’s Gospel Jesus emphatically asks: “For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Mark 8:36–7). This teaching, which emphasizes the superiority of what is eternal over what is transient, the importance of the afterlife in comparison to earthly life, and places the individual soul and salvation above politics and power, will remain the central tenet of Christianity.⁵² There are no tragic conflicts in Paul’s Christian perspective because these arise only when two equally important goods, two equally reasonable arguments supporting them, collide. Greek tragedy presents us with such dramatic conflicts because the Greeks did not have the notion of a supreme and overriding consideration, and therefore equally arguable visions of the good were conceivable and could collide. In Sophocles’s *Antigone*, for instance, the reasons of the dead and those of the living, the decree of the city and the eternal laws, confront each other and clash dramatically exactly because they have equally valid arguments supporting them. Antigone may claim—and indeed she does—that she has infringed upon the law of the city in order to obey a higher imperative, “not to infringe upon the unwritten, unfaltering laws of the gods, which have existed not from today nor from yesterday but since eternity.”⁵³ In her view, by burying her brother and thus disobeying Creon’s decree, she did something bad according to human law in order that some higher good may result. Creon, on the other hand, is inflexible in defending the law and order of the city because the community represents for him the highest good, a rather ordinary opinion in fifth-century Greece. Greek tragedy puts on stage *dike* against *dike* and shows us that in making a decision something

is inevitably lost: characters such as Agamemnon in his choice about Iphigenia, Orestes in the moment of his matricide, and Zeus in his punishment of Prometheus all show that they lost something by their decision, motivated by valid, albeit unilateral, reasons.

Machiavelli reveals his understanding of the tragic side of politics in his acknowledging that what is lost in decision making is innocence. It is not possible to rule and remain innocent—as Saint-Just would remark—and guilty knowledge is the bitter fruit of political experience.⁵⁴ Machiavelli knew Christian teaching very well, and he was also more than acquainted with classical Greek political thought. These two traditions provided him with very contrasting intimations concerning the question of dirty hands in politics, and Machiavelli sided with the classics.⁵⁵ In Machiavelli's view Christian doctrine, with its emphasis on the importance of using this life as a preparation for salvation and eternal life, with its vision of a final Judgment that will overturn the verdict of this world about glory and fortune, cannot grasp the great responsibility that the statesman has towards his fellow citizens. Machiavelli believed it was unrealistic and irresponsible to deem it possible to remain morally unstained when one accepted the task to rule a state. Hence his ferocious criticism of Christianity (or that version of it that emphasizes otherworldly goods and the Roman Church): it bears a twofold responsibility, that of making men less "lovers of liberty," together with providing "evil examples" with its corruption. Moreover, Christianity and the Roman Church are politically ineffective, besides providing a wrong educational example, because they lack a political project for Italy.⁵⁶ It is noteworthy that Machiavelli made "virtue" the focus of his political vision: a notion of "virtue" completely redefined and in sharp contrast with the Christian virtues, a "virtue" that is utterly political and that in certain dramatic circumstances collides with the cardinal virtues and the other teachings of Christianity due to the duties and responsibilities that characterize the political realm.

Machiavelli intends thus to warn the prospective political leader that if he wants to be a good statesman almost certainly he will not be a good Christian; he will have to account for the fact that even if he succeeds in doing "great things" for his country, this will take a toll on his soul. This sense of duty and responsibility in Machiavelli, together with its dramatic element, was well caught by that refined reader of his works Max Weber, who contrasted the "ethic of conviction" with the "ethic of responsibility"; Weber described the former as a variation on the notion that "the Christian acts rightly and leaves the outcome to God," while the latter gravely reminds the politician that "one is answerable for the (foresee-

able) consequences of one's actions."⁵⁷ With bitter irony Weber observed that "the believer in the ethic of conviction cannot accept the ethical irrationality of the world" and brought up the example of a trade unionist who acts according to this ethic and, facing the disastrous results of his policy, does not feel responsible and accuses "the world, or the stupidity of the other people, or the divine will who created them stupid." In Weber's vision these two kinds of ethical approaches are not incompatible but rather complement each other and, put together, mould the man with "political vocation." In the dramatic circumstances in which he was writing, in Germany after the defeat in World War I, Weber had perfectly caught Machiavelli's problem: "The man who is concerned for the welfare of his soul and the salvation of the souls of others does not seek these aims along the path of politics. Politics has quite different goals, which can only be achieved by force."⁵⁸

III. MACHIAVELLI AND DIRTY HANDS

The central treatment of the problem of dirty hands in Machiavelli may be found in *Discourses* 1.18. Here Machiavelli examines the question of whether it is possible to maintain a "free state" in a "corrupt city," namely whether it is possible to maintain a republican government in a city where there is factional strife unrestrained by laws and institutions. Machiavelli says right at the beginning that it is nearly impossible to give a definite rule on this matter because one should examine each case according to the degree of corruption; we may conclude that if he thought it was possible to proceed that way, or wanted to opt for a treatment of the question of that kind, he would have written a treatise of casuistry or a manual of precepts designed to answer specific questions. But Machiavelli adds that, for argument's sake (since it is good to examine all sides of the question), he will examine the extreme case of "a most corrupt city" so that the example could be most clear: what he intends to do is to give a general rule which will contribute to the education of the statesman; he leaves it up to him to correctly apply this teaching according to the circumstances. To illustrate his case he takes the example of Rome, which made new laws to rein in the growing corruption of the citizens but did not change the "ordini," the political arrangements of the state: the result was thus a failure. In order to keep her freedom Rome should have changed her political arrangements because a "corrupt matter" requires different laws and institutions as compared to a good, healthy city. This change of arrangements may be done in two different ways: either little by little, or all at one stroke. Both

enterprises, however, are according to Machiavelli "almost impossible." In order to renovate the institutions little by little it is necessary to find a "prudent man" who sees the problem arising "from afar," in its very beginning, but such men are very rare and, in any case, would have a hard time persuading their fellow citizens who are used to living in a corrupt environment. Also, renovating the institutions all at once, when everyone is aware of their corruption, is highly problematic because it cannot be done in the ordinary way, namely through amending the laws, because they, in their ineffectiveness, are exactly the source of the problem. This case requires to "have recourse to the extraordinary, that is to say to violence and arms": it requires becoming prince of the city in order to be able to act without restraint. And here is the highest challenge for a statesman: "Because the reordering of a city for a political way of life presupposes a good man, and becoming prince of a republic by violence presupposes a bad man." Machiavelli is well aware of the dimension of the problem, "la grandezza della cosa," of trying to create a republic in a situation of corruption where there is "inequality" among citizens, namely when there are aristocrats who consider themselves above the law.⁵⁹ Machiavelli's conclusion is that it is therefore extremely rare that a "good man" will want to become prince using "evil ways," albeit with a good end in mind, and conversely that an evil man who has become prince in an evil manner will want to use his authority well. It is thus extremely difficult to maintain a republic in corrupt cities without veering towards "a kingly state," where the strong hand of the prince (the "kingly hand") may succeed in reining in the insolence of those who do not want to obey the laws (usually the aristocrats, who have private militia, "rule over castles," and feel they are above the laws).⁶⁰

Machiavelli's historical examples of those who succeeded in combining evil means with a good end are most interesting and very telling. The Spartan king Cleomenes, who killed all the Ephors, and Romulus, who killed his brother and Titus Tatius the Sabine, both avowedly used evil means but with a noble end: to preserve their cities free and great, thus for the common good and not for personal gain. Cleomenes and Romulus had already been quoted in an earlier chapter (*Discourses* 1.9) where Machiavelli stated as a "general rule," the need to have sole power in order to create a republic or a kingdom. Specifically about Romulus's crime, Machiavelli commented that although "the deed accuses him, the effect excuses him": Romulus belongs to the category of "prudent orderer of a republic" who wishes to be useful to the "common good" and the "common fatherland."⁶¹ These will never be blamed by any wise man for using

extraordinary means in order to reach their ends. Once the state is safe and secure, once he has succeeded in increasing its power, the prudent statesman has accomplished his task and should avoid trying to have successors; Machiavelli thinks that the case of a virtuous and prudent prince is a very rare occurrence and thus he should smoothly lead to the establishment of "free living," namely of a republic, and to the reappearance of ordinary means—the good laws given by the virtuous prince. If, then, Machiavelli's intent was to provide the necessary education to create a "good" politician, capable of making the right decisions to preserve and aggrandize his country, with the persuasion that saving the state is the first and foremost task of a statesman, it is only reasonable and logical that he emphasized so much the importance of arms, and specifically of a civic militia. For the citizen bearing arms in defense of his country is another version of the "good man": both would give their lives (and their souls) in order to save their country.

We may pause here to ponder two considerations. First, noteworthy in Machiavelli's account is the importance of examples of the past. They serve the purpose of reminding the reader that such deeds are possible, that certain human beings are surely rare but not impossible to find, and that the world has clearly changed but not in such a dramatic way to make this exemplarity of the past useless and impossible to attain or replicate. Indeed, one of Machiavelli's deepest convictions is that to believe that it is impossible to imitate the examples of the past equals to believe that "heaven, sun, elements, men had varied in motion, order, and power from what they were in antiquity."⁶² Secondly, it is evident that the task Machiavelli set for himself was to try to educate such a type of prudent and virtuous man, capable of dirtying his hands while remaining a good human being because his motivation for action would be love of country and the common good. Evidently Machiavelli believed that such an operation was possible and that such virtue was still present somewhere in Italy. As the Italian literary critic Francesco Flora once observed, if Machiavelli had not believed in human nature, his discourses on the exemplarity of the ancients would only amount to futile meanderings.⁶³

IV. MACHIAVELLI'S SOLUTION

We are now in the best position to understand the nature and dimensions of the problem Machiavelli set for himself. Since political matters are always in motion and even the best political arrangement cannot remain good and stable forever, in the life of a city or state there inevitably comes

a time when a prudent man, who loves his country and wants to act for the common good against internal corruption or an external enemy, is required. Such a prudent man must be aware that in order to perform his task and save the state he may have to use extraordinary means and thus be cruel and violent and act against the laws, human and divine. This is exactly the problem examined in the central chapters of *The Prince*, which are deliberately devoted to the qualities that the new prince must possess in order to be effective in his task to create and preserve the state: "He [the prince] needs to have a spirit disposed to change as the winds of fortune and variations of things command him, and as I said above, not depart from good, when possible, but know how to enter into evil, when forced by necessity."⁶⁴ This is the drama of politics revealed by Machiavelli, this combination of apparent absolute power and necessity: the statesman, and especially someone who aspires to become a prince, must know that his power to operate for the common good of the community goes together with the necessity "to maintain his State, of acting against faith, against charity, against humanity, against religion."⁶⁵ This aspect of necessity is a consequence of the ordering of the world (which is obviously beyond men's control) and of human nature; it is in the nature of human beings to desire more and more power because of ambition, because of "discontent" (*mala contentezza*), and as a remedy to their inborn *insecuritas*.⁶⁶ Thus, the desire for more power and the inclination to aggrandize the state are absolutely natural;⁶⁷ just as natural is the outcome: ever-recurring conflict. In this important aspect of Machiavelli's thought we can detect the influence of Thucydides and of his notion of a "necessary human nature" that will always make war necessary.⁶⁸ The new statesman will also learn from Machiavelli the importance of knowing human nature, and the (*quondam*) Florentine secretary will disclose everything he has learned on this matter.⁶⁹

Machiavelli was not the herald of a new moral theory, nor did he believe that rulers had a special dispensation from ordinary morality: evil remains evil, and therefore the statesman will dirty his hands while accomplishing his high task. In order to do this, he requires an appropriate education that turns him into a "good man," namely providing him with clear priorities. The most important is the conviction that he must act in the interests of the common good and that the preservation of the state must therefore be his first priority; the statesman must know that politics is a serious matter because the happiness or unhappiness, and sometimes even the life or death, of his fellow citizens depend on his decisions. Therefore he must be ready to dirty his hands when extreme situations

require it; in all this he must remain a “good man” while using evil means to reach his good end. Paradoxically, this political education may be construed as an education in “how not to be good,” in the ability to dirty one’s hands but always for the overarching end, the only one that makes all means honourable: saving the state.⁷⁰ From this perspective the following statement that we read in *The Prince* becomes highly significant: “Hence it is necessary to a prince, if he wants to maintain himself, to learn to be able not to be good, and use this and not use it according to necessity.”⁷¹ It is important to insist on this element of political *necessity* that forces the statesman to be “not good” in certain circumstances in order to correctly appreciate the dramatic aspect of Machiavelli’s message to his reader and prospective statesman: to be sure, not keeping one’s word, shifting alliance according to one’s convenience, killing treacherously one’s enemies, letting one’s lieutenant be found quartered in the piazza at Cesena after entrusting him with the task of bringing peace and order into that land, are all evil deeds and remain such; therefore the statesman will answer for them with his soul on Judgment Day. Such actions, however, are sometimes required in politics, and thus those who are not ready to dirty their hands for their country or wish always to act like good Christian believers should refrain from having public offices. Machiavelli’s lesson to prospective politicians about power thus sounds like a caveat, a warning about the political constraints the exercise of their power will encounter: far from being able to do whatever they wish, the real statesmen must comply with what their responsibilities require of them. In extreme cases the sacrifice of their body for the homeland is not sufficient; they have to give up their soul.

Machiavelli knew for a fact that such a combination of good and evil is extremely difficult and rare because he had first-hand experience of a “good man” who proved unable to have recourse to extraordinary means and violence in order to save his city: his name was Piero Soderini and the city was Florence.⁷² Soderini’s inability to force his nature and “enter into evil” for the sake of his homeland by making the cruel and extraordinary decisions necessary to save the Florentine Republic brought about the ruin of the republican regime in Florence and the end of civic freedom there—an example of how good means brought about a bad end for the entire community. I am persuaded that Machiavelli considered Soderini the perfect example, *per contrarium*, of the necessity of a new type of political education. Although Soderini was a prudent man and knew it was necessary to be resolute against some of his aristocratic enemies, he believed that “with patience and goodness” (twice repeated in a few lines in *Discourses* 3.3) he

could win over his enemies; he was convinced that with time and fortune, with goodness and by benefiting some of them, he could get rid of the envy of his aristocratic opponents. But “he did not know that one cannot wait for the time, goodness is not enough, fortune varies, and malignity does not find a gift that appeases it.”⁷³ His “prudence,” however, made him aware that “If he wished to strike his opponents vigorously and to beat down his adversaries, he would have needed to take up extraordinary authority and break up civil equality together with the laws.”⁷⁴ This meant having recourse to extraordinary, namely extralegal, and evil means that, nonetheless, would not have turned him into an “evil man,” a tyrant: for Soderini was acting for the highest purpose, “for the safety of the homeland and not for his own ambition.” Therefore, since his actions and his intention had to be judged by the end, it would have clearly appeared that he should be praised rather than blamed for placing the well-being of his country before that of his soul.⁷⁵ With hindsight Machiavelli will then observe that Soderini’s Florence lacked an institution to which someone who wished to accuse a citizen could appeal: without such a legal and institutional channel accusations become slanders and destroy “free living” and the state because citizens have recourse to “extraordinary modes.”⁷⁶

The figure of Piero Soderini epitomizes and perfectly illustrates the problem addressed by Machiavelli—a problem, I wish to stress, that he experienced first hand in the many long nights he spent awake with Soderini while trying to devise a solution to Florence’s problems and the enmity and envy that surrounded the *gonfaloniere*. Soderini did not lack the virtue of prudence, which can be learned also through Aristotle and the classics; he lacked a new virtue of character identified by Machiavelli, a virtue that enables politicians to perceive correctly the supreme target they have as statesmen and the consequent responsibilities. These entail being able to be “not good” in certain extreme circumstances while remaining a “good man” devoted to one’s country.

V. MACHIAVELLI AND THE ART OF POLITICS

For Machiavelli politics is an art, which has to be learned through readings as well as through experience, in the “workshop”—so to speak—of practice. Of this art he believes himself to be a master, as he proudly states in a letter to Francesco Vettori written from his countryside exile.⁷⁷ Machiavelli believes that love for his country bids him to educate statesmen capable of realizing what he himself failed to do due to adverse circumstances. He appeals to someone “more loved by heaven” and aims at

giving “rules,” well knowing that they have to be adapted to each practical situation the statesman encounters. Even more fundamental, however, is the teaching that lies at the foundation of Machiavelli’s works and recurs throughout them: the notion that the categorical imperative for the statesman is to save the state by all means and that this may entail not only dirtying one’s hands but also damning one’s soul. The general teaching provided by Machiavelli should enable the good politician to “see afar” (*veder discosto*), to envisage the possible perils, although the actual, specific ones cannot be precisely predicted. General recommendations contribute to our political education; it is not possible to give specific recommendations abstracting from the circumstances; one should evaluate separately every single circumstance and then proceed with determination counting on one’s acquired prudence.⁷⁸ This too is, obviously, a “general recommendation.”

This quality of discernment is of fundamental importance for the true statesman, and Machiavelli’s intent is to mould the perfect statesman, endowed with such virtue that will enable him to withstand the change of fortune by adapting to it. Fortune should then be construed as the nemesis of wisdom, coresponsible for human actions and the coauthor of history, for it is the encounter and the match, or *riscontro*, of human virtue and fortune that determines historical occurrences. The *savio*, the wise man, is Machiavelli’s equivalent to the Aristotelian *phronimos*, the perfectly virtuous man who is capable of making the right decision in practical matters.

An excellent illustration of this aspect of Machiavelli’s thought, which brings us directly to the heart of the problem that occupied this man of action who never stopped trying to devise a general theory drawn from the events he witnessed, is the letter he wrote from Perugia to Giovan Battista Soderini in September 1506, generally referred to as the *Ghiribizzi al Soderino*.⁷⁹ Here we famously find many of the ideas that Machiavelli was to develop later in his major works. Among them, one is of fundamental significance for our purpose: the notion that success in political action depends on the *riscontro* (“match”) between a man and his times. Machiavelli takes his bearings from the observation of the different, sometimes contrasting ways that lead human beings to success or to failure in their political enterprises. He does not want to give in to resignation and attribute to “heaven and the will of the fates” the final result of man’s actions—as he reiterates in *The Prince* 25—and therefore proposes an alternative vision: human beings are different in their intellects and imaginations just as they are different in their faces, and as a result

each man behaves according to his intellect and imagination. Since patterns of events and political arrangements change too, the result of human action depends on the alignment or misalignment of one's behavior with the times: "The man who matches his way of doing things with the conditions of the times is successful; the man whose actions are at odds with the times and the pattern of events is unsuccessful." Machiavelli's solution thus consists in "conforming to one's *riscontro*," namely in acknowledging that human action inevitably takes place in specific circumstances and it is therefore necessary to adapt one's conduct to what he will call "the quality of the times":

And truly, anyone wise enough to understand the times and the pattern of events and able to adapt himself to those would always have good fortune or would always keep himself from bad fortune; and it would come to be true that the wise man could rule over the stars and the Fates. But such wise men are not to be found: in the first place, men are shortsighted; in the second place, they are unable to master their own natures; thus it follows that Fortune changes and controls men and keeps them under her yoke.

These considerations are revived in his two major works, notably in *The Prince* 25, where Machiavelli suggests adapting one's behavior to what the circumstances require: "I believe, further, that he is happy who adapts his mode of proceeding to the qualities of the times; and similarly, he is unhappy whose procedure is in disaccord with the times." In *The Prince* 25 the two possible ways of proceeding are labelled as "impetuous" (*impetuoso*) and "cautious" (*rispettivo*). Both adjectives—it is worth noticing—refer to an active behavior because *rispettivo* does not indicate acquiescence to fortune:⁸⁰ acting cautiously characterizes a prudent bidding of one's time, using diplomacy instead of waging war, the search for negotiation and compromise (which is not a "middle way," most harmful and always to be discarded as an option).⁸¹

In the *Discourses* there is a further deepening of the question. In this work Machiavelli first repeats the theory of the *riscontro*: "I have often considered that the cause of the bad and of the good fortune of men is the matching of the mode of one's proceeding with the times. For one sees that some men proceed in their works with impetuosity, some with hesitation and caution."⁸² This vision is made more complex and refined by the insertion of an Aristotelian insight based on the notion of "right measure": "And because in both of these modes suitable limits are passed, since one

cannot observe the true way, in both one errs."⁸³ Machiavelli maintains here that there is in general a "true way," namely a correct and appropriate way of acting, but since it is difficult to identify and follow, it is necessary to adapt one's behavior to the circumstances, trying to make as few mistakes as possible. The lesson is simple, but its implementation is most difficult: in order to succeed in politics it is necessary to have a twofold virtue, an intellectual and an ethical virtue, if we wish to use Aristotelian terminology. A politician must be able to identify correctly the features of the specific circumstances and see what kind of action they require. But here a problem immediately arises since men are in general "shortsighted"; they lack that virtue of discernment that enables them to see danger from afar and to identify exactly the peculiarities of the practical situation in which they operate, that "eye of the soul" that judges correctly, which is a possession of the *phronimos* man according to Aristotle.⁸⁴ Furthermore, it is necessary to have such a nature capable of adapting to different circumstances, or rather a "second nature" created through education, able to overcome the lack of flexibility determined by one's inborn character as well as force of habit, which inclines us to persevere in behavior that led us to success in the past regardless of the changed circumstances. It is to be noted that Machiavelli does not say that these *savii* do not exist anymore but rather that it is difficult to find them; he states that they cannot be found in his days. The reason is to be found in the lack of political education, or rather in the wrong political education Italian citizens and statesmen received.

Wisdom and the necessary qualities to become *savio* are developed through a process of political education that is not different from that depicted by the classics, such as Aristotle, Cicero, and Seneca, but also Xenophon and Plutarch, and revived by Petrarch and many subsequent civic humanists. Machiavelli laments in many passages the "feeble education" and the lack of historical knowledge of his contemporaries, which have the consequence of creating "feeble men" who are unable to face "adversities and hard times."⁸⁵ One should note, however, that the general tone of the *Ghiribizzi* is not despair and surrender to the power of fate but rather exhortation and faith in the wise man's capacity to judge. In a marginal annotation to this text Machiavelli wrote a significant note: "Never counsel anyone nor take counsel from anyone, except for a general counsel: let anyone do what his disposition tells him in a bold way." It is the same conclusion that Machiavelli reached in *The Prince* 25, a conclusion strikingly inconsistent with the general argument of that dense chapter: after stating that he himself had been inclined to attribute to fortune an

overwhelming influence on human affairs because of the events “beyond any human conjecture” he had witnessed, Machiavelli equates the power of fortune to that of human virtue; then, after a long argument where he maintains that the prince must be so prudent as to adapt his behavior to the “quality of the times,” he concludes that it is better to be “impetuous” than “cautious” because “fortune is a woman, and it is necessary, if one wants to hold her down, to beat her and strike her down.” This conclusion comes after an authorial intervention in the first person: “I judge this to be good”⁸⁶—to stress Machiavelli’s personal conviction on this important matter. In this final inconsistency, which shows that he is not only a philosopher, emerges the originality of Machiavelli as compared to the classics or his contemporary Platonic authors:⁸⁷ after discussing god, fortune, and the right occasion, once the educational process is completed, it is time for action.

Machiavelli’s “innovation” lies in reviving the classical tradition, of Platonic and Ciceronian ancestry, which put the well-being of the state above the well-being of the individual (and of his soul). Machiavelli believed in the capacity of human beings to overcome fortune, in their ability to do “great things”—namely to create, patch together, and aggrandize a state, thus showing that they have virtue and aim at the common good and therefore are “good men.” It is common to speak of Machiavelli’s anthropological pessimism, of his grim view of human nature.⁸⁸ However, if Machiavelli had not believed in human beings, if he had not assumed that such “good men” still existed, his statements and his actions would be utterly groundless and meaningless.

NOTES

1. The problem is old, as I shall argue, but the expression is inspired by J. P. Sartre’s play *Les mains sales* (Paris: Les Temps Moderns, 1948).

2. For an introduction to the problem of “dirty hands” see the insightful classic M. Walzer, “Political Action: The Problem of Dirty Hands,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 2 (1973): 160–80. On tragic dilemmas see M. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); and B. Williams, *Moral Luck* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

3. I am thinking of such works as Poggio Bracciolini, *De infelicitate principum* (1440); Leon Battista Alberti, *Momus* (ante 1450) and *De iciarchia* (1468); Francesco

Patrizi, *De regno et regni institutione* (1482) and *De institutione republicae* (1471 manuscript; 1494 print); Bartolomeo Platina, *De principe* (1470); Giovanni Pontano, *De principe* (1465).

4. For a quick introduction to the genre see the well-informed entry “Mirrors for Princes” by Roberto Lambertini in *Encyclopedia of Medieval Philosophy*, ed. H. Lagerlund (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011): 791–97; also R. Hariman, “Composing Modernity in Machiavelli’s Prince,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 50 (1989): 3–29; J. Khoury, “Machiavelli’s Prince: The *Speculum Principis* Genre Turned Upside Down” in *Literary Form, Philosophical Content: Historical Studies of Philosophical Genres*, ed. J. A. Lavery and L. Groarke (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2010), 126–41. One may also refer to the two works that systematically analyzed the subject for the first time: A. H. Gilbert, *Machiavelli’s Prince and Its Forerunners* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1938); and F. Gilbert, “The Humanist Concept of the Prince and *The Prince* of Machiavelli,” *Journal of Modern History* 11 (1939): 449–83.

5. N. Machiavelli, *The Prince* 26. For the Italian text I used the edition by Corrado Vivanti: N. Machiavelli, *Opere*, 3 vols. (Turin: Einaudi, 1997). For the English translation I used N. Machiavelli, *The Prince*, translated with an introduction by H. C. Mansfield (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); *Discourses on Livy*, translated by H. C. Mansfield and N. Tarcov (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); *Machiavelli: The Chief Works and Others*, ed. A. Gilbert, 3 vols. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1989).

6. “L’occasione ha poca vita”: Letter to the Ten, 9 August 1510.

7. See letter to Francesco Vettori, 9 April 1513.

8. Near the end of the dedicatory letter Machiavelli compares himself to a draughtsman, who climbs mountains and descends into valleys according to necessity in order to better sketch landscapes; in his metaphor the valley stands for the people while the mountain represents the prince: Machiavelli is implicitly maintaining that he, like the draughtsman, can change position and is therefore superior to both prince and people, just like the art he embodies—political philosophy. I owe this insight to S. Wolin, *Politics and Vision* (New York: Little Brown, 1960).

9. In fact, as refined a translator as Harvey Mansfield deems it necessary to render Machiavelli’s “*conosciuto*” with two verbs: “learnt and understood” (*The Prince*, pp. 3–4).

10. *Prince*, dedicatory letter.

11. Ibid: “a long experience with modern things and a continuous reading of ancient ones”; *Discourses*, dedicatory letter: “the long practice and continuous reading of the ways of the world”; *Discourses*, proem: “the knowledge of the ancient and modern things”; *Art of War*, proem: “judging by what I saw and read.”

12. *Prince* 15.

13. See the ineffable D. McIntosh, “The Modernity of Machiavelli,” *Political Theory* 12 (1984): 184–203, for whom Machiavelli’s “virtu” (*sic*) should be rendered as “machismo” (194).

14. The statement that Machiavelli was a “teacher of evil” recurs in the opening sentence of Leo Strauss’s *Thoughts on Machiavelli* (1958). In fact, Strauss’s subtle and sophisticated interpretation is based on his persuasion that Machiavelli was a real philosopher and, as such, questioned and sapped the beliefs of his age: in Strauss’s vision

there is an inevitable tension between the city and the philosopher, whose unending quest for truth is always perceived as subverting traditional morality. In this specific case, Machiavelli's diabolical plan consisted in using Livy as an authority against Christianity and in then attacking Livy and the classics to make room for his own view that political order emerges from an original crime. See L. Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli* (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1958), 1.

15. A sentence that Machiavelli notoriously never wrote. What he actually wrote was that the prince must "win and maintain the State: the means will always be judged honourable, and will be praised by everyone" (*Prince* 18); namely, one end—the common, overarching good—justifies all means. An accurate examination of the relation between means and ends in Machiavelli may be found in E. Benner, *Machiavelli's Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009). There are many interesting observations on this point also in Benner's recent *Machiavelli's "Prince"* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

16. See, for instance, H. Rubin, *The Princessa: Machiavelli for Women* (New York: Doubleday, 1997); A. McAlpine, *The New Machiavelli: The Art of Politics in Business* (New York: Wiley, 2000); J. Powell, *The New Machiavelli: How to Wield Power in the Modern World* (London: Bodley Head, 2010); J. M. Volpe, *The New Machiavellians: Political Consultants in Contemporary American Theory and Practice* (Kansas City: ProQuest, 2010); N. Casanova, *The Machiavellian's Guide to Womanizing* (London: Headline Books, 1996).

17. The "great things" of which the central chapters (15–18) of the *Prince* are replete: this expression recurs many times in Machiavelli's description of the qualities required of the new prince in order to accomplish great deeds.

18. This is the classic theme of *kairos*, which in Machiavelli's rendering is transfigured into the man "more loved by heaven": see *Discourses* II, proem; *Prince* 26.

19. See S. Anglo, *Machiavelli: The First Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); G. Giorgini, "Five Hundred Years of Italian Scholarship on Machiavelli's *Prince*," *Review of Politics* 75 (2013): 625–40.

20. See the dramatic exchange between the Athenian generals and the Melian envoys in Thucydides 5.85–113. There the Athenians remind their interlocutors that the subject at hand that they are discussing is not justice, a topic that can be examined only when the parties are on an equal footing in terms of power or have similar necessities, but rather the *soteria tes poleos*, saving their own city: there is no time for edifying discourses or to show one's ability to speak when the survival of the city is at stake. There is another less known episode in Thucydides that is just as revealing; this is the exchange between the Athenians who took refuge in a temple in Boeotia and the Boeotians who told them to leave the sacred place and stop their impious behavior: the Athenians retort that when men are forced by necessity even the gods have a lenient eye on them (Thucydides 4.97–98).

21. Nicola Matteucci has strongly emphasized this aspect of Machiavelli's thought. See his "Niccolò Machiavelli," in *Alla ricerca dell'ordine politico* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1984), 31–67.

22. In the *Florentine Histories* the city's magistrates are highly praised for their warfare against Pope Gregory XI: "they were called Saints even though they had little

regard for censures, had despoiled the churches of their goods, and had compelled the clergy to celebrate the offices—so much more did those citizens then esteem their fatherland than their souls (*più la patria che l'anima*): *Florentine Histories* 3.7.

23. I disagree with Clifford Orwin's refined and ingenious interpretation to the extent that Machiavelli has a "frankly utilitarian" approach to virtue: "whatever politics demands is virtuous"; in this perspective there is a gap only between what politics demands and what appears—but is not—good and virtuous. Orwin accordingly denies the existence of a tragic element in Machiavelli. See C. Orwin, "Machiavelli's Unchristian Charity," *American Political Science Review* 72 (1978): 1217–28.

24. Letter to Francesco Vettori, 16 April 1527.

25. See G. Giorgini, "Plato and the Ailing Soul of the Tyrant," in *Le philosophe, le roi, le tyran. Etudes sur les figures royale et tyrannique dans la pensée politique grecque et sa postérité*, ed. S. Gastaldi- J-F. Pradeau (Sankt Augustin : Academia Verlag, 2009), 111–27.

26. See Scholia to Plato, *Laws* 1.625a, in *Scholia Platonica*, ed. W. Chase Greene et al. (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1981); Isocrates, "Areopagiticus," in *Isocrates II*, ed. G. Norlin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press—Loeb, 1929), 7.14. See also Isocrates, *Panathenaiticus* 12.138, where it is said that "every constitution is the soul of the city, having as much power over it as the mind over the body." Finally, Aristotle, *Politics* 1295a40, where the constitution is described as "a certain mode of life of a city"; Demosthenes, *Against Timocrates* 24.210, who describes the laws as "the character of a city."

27. N. Matteucci, "Niccolò Machiavelli," in *Alla ricerca dell'ordine politico*, 63.

28. I am thinking of Max Weber's conference *Politik als Beruf* (1919); see M. Weber, *Selections in Translation*, ed. W. G. Runciman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 212–25.

29. On the Plato renaissance in Florentine culture see A. Brown, "Platonism in Fifteenth-Century Florence," in *The Medici in Florence. The Exercise and Language of Power* (Florence: Olschki, 1992), 215–45; J. Hankins, *Plato in the Italian Renaissance* (Leiden: Brill, 1990) and *Humanism and Platonism in the Italian Renaissance* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2003–4); M. Vegetti, ed., *I Decembrio e la tradizione della Repubblica di Platone tra Medioevo e Umanesimo* (Naples: Bibliopolis, 2005). Finally, A. Field, *The Origins of the Platonic Academy of Florence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).

30. See Plato, *Seventh Letter* 328c-d.

31. *A Discourse on Remodelling the Government of Florence* § 104: "And so much has this glory been esteemed by men seeking for nothing other than glory that when unable to form a republic in reality, they have done it in writing, as Aristotle, Plato and many others. . . ."

32. H. Neville, *Plato Redivivus, or, a Dialogue Concerning Government* (London: Printed by S. I. and Sold by R. Dew, 1681).

33. See Plato, *Republic*, where civil conflict (*stasis*) is in many places described as a disease (*nosema*).

34. The possibility to accuse any citizen to the people or to a magistrate or council

is for Machiavelli the most useful and necessary “guard of the liberty” of a city (*Discourses* 1.7). On the political significance of such institutions for “free living” in a republic see J. P. McCormick, “Machiavelli’s Political Trials and ‘The Free Way of Life,’” *Political Theory* 35 (2007): 385–411. The argument is further developed and expanded in his *Machiavellian Democracy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

35. See Machiavelli’s *A Discourse on Remodelling the Government of Florence* and the *Art of War*.

36. The “noble lie” (*Republic* 3.414b) with its educational purpose, which explicitly treats the subjects as children who should be told edifying tales (2.377a–378e), has always been found rebarbative and unacceptable especially by interpreters with liberal leanings; see for all the classic K. Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (London: Routledge, 1945). The original and fundamental work in this interpretative tradition is G. Grote, *Plato and the Other Companions of Sokrates* (London: J. Murray, 1865).

37. Plato, *Republic* 7.541a.

38. Plato, *Republic* 3.414c.

39. Plato, *Republic* 8.546d.

40. The judges will “put to death those who are incurably evil and corrupt in their soul,” we read in *Republic* 3, 410a. On the punishment of atheism see *Laws*, book 10, and *Politicus* 293d and 309a.

41. Plato, *Politicus* 297a.

42. Plato, *Laws* 903b; see also 664b. On this see S. Gastaldi, “Legge e retorica: I proemi delle *Leggi* di Platone,” *Quaderni di Storia* 10 (1984): 69–109.

43. This is the central message of Plato’s *Republic* and *Seventh Letter*.

44. This is what emerges from the dialectical examination of the two figures in the *Sophist*. On the sophist depicted as a wolf and on the warning to beware of appearances see Plato, *Sophist* 231a.

45. See Plato, *Politicus* 293b–c.

46. Plato, *Republic* 9.587e ff. On this number see G. Giorgini, *I doni di Pandora* (Bologna: Bonomo, 2002), chapter 4.

47. I am not the first interpreter to notice this; see the perceptive and elegant account of E. Wind, “Platonic Tyranny and the Renaissance Fortuna,” in *The Eloquence of Symbols* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993).

48. Plato, *Republic* 9.592a.

49. Plato, *Politicus* 273d.

50. Plato, *Laws* 4.709 a–c.

51. A good treatment of this issue may be found in J. Finnis, *Moral Absolutes* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1991).

52. This fact is duly blamed by Machiavelli; see for instance *Discourses* 2.2.

53. Sophocles, *Antigone*, vv. 453–55. On the “legal drama” staged in this tragedy see T. Ziolkowski, *The Mirror of Justice: Literary Reflections of Legal Crises* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), chapter 8.

54. See the beautiful and very refined observations of S. Hampshire, *Innocence and Experience* (London: Penguin, 1989), chapter 5.

55. Isaiah Berlin caught very well how serious this choice in favour of the classics

is for Machiavelli. In his "The Originality of Machiavelli," in *Against the Current* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979), 45–79, he maintains that Machiavelli rejected Christian ethics in favour of an alternative moral universe: he "opts for an alternative realm of ends" (55).

56. *Discourses* 2.2.

57. M. Weber, *Politics as a Vocation*, 219. Weber warned that the politician must be aware "of the tragic element with which all action, and especially political action, is in fact intertwined" (214).

58. *Ibid.*, 223.

59. *Discourses* 1.55. It is very interesting that Machiavelli begins the following chapter (1.56) with the bewildered expression, very unusual for him, "Whence it arises I do not know" ("Donde ei si nasca io non so") and goes on to maintain that foreboding signs appear before great events befall a city or place. There may be a reference to Cicero's *De divinatione* 1.64 here and to his idea that "the air is full of immortal souls on which appear, so to speak, the marks of truth." Mansfield and Tarcov refer also to Pietro Pomponazzi, *Tractatus de immortalitate animae* 14 (1516) as a possible source. On this see the interesting observations by A. S. Duff, "Republicanism and the Problem of Ambition: The Critique of Cicero in Machiavelli's *Discourses*," *Journal of Politics* (2011): 1–13.

60. *Discourses* 1.55.

61. *Ibid.* 1.19 on Romulus's prudence. Machiavelli's judgment on Romulus is deliberately in sharp contrast to what Cicero had maintained in his *De officiis* 3.41; for Cicero, when Romulus "decided that it was more expedient for him to reign alone than to share the throne with another, he slew his brother": he showed no piety or humanity and committed a terrible crime, blinded by a false appearance of utility.

62. *Discourses* 1, proem. Cf. 1.11; 1.39; 2, proem; 3.43. See also what Machiavelli already stated in his *On the Method of Dealing with the Rebellious People of the Valdichiana*: "I have been told that history is the teacher of our actions and especially of those of princes; and the world has always been identically inhabited by men who always had the same passions [. . .]." Finally, *Art of War* 1.

63. F. Flora, *Storia della letteratura italiana* [1940], 5 vols. (Milan: Mondadori, 1972), 2: 417.

64. *Prince* 18.

65. *Ibid.* See also *Prince* 19, where Machiavelli states that "a prince who wants to maintain his State is often forced not to be good."

66. See for instance *Prince* 3, where we read that "men willingly change their lords in the belief that they will fare better." See also *Prince* 4 and the proem of *Discourses* 2 on men's everlasting discontent for what they possess and their desire for novelty without any reasonable cause.

67. See *Prince* 3: "And truly it is a very natural and ordinary thing to desire to acquire, and always, when men do it who can, they will be praised or not blamed."

68. I am especially thinking of the *anankaia physis* described in Thucydides 5.105 and of the "law of nature" there exposed, "valid for the entire eternity": the stronger rules and does what he wants and the weaker gives in.

69. There are many interesting observations on this topic in P. Vincieri, *Natura*

umana e dominio (Ravenna: Longo, 1984). See also his *Machiavelli: Il divenire e la virtù* (Genoa: Il Melangolo, 2011).

70. See *Prince* 18, where we read “So let a prince win and maintain his State: the means will always be judged honourable, and will be praised by everyone.”

71. *Prince* 15. Note that in this chapter and in the subsequent one Machiavelli speaks of the “vices without which it is difficult to save one’s State” (15) and the “vices which enable him [the prince] to rule” (16): vice remains vice and the prince is not morally absolved.

72. On Piero Soderini see R. Pesman, “Machiavelli, Piero Soderini, and the Republic of 1494–1512,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Machiavelli*, ed J. Najemy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 48–63. Also S. Bertelli, “Machiavelli and Soderini,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 28 (1975): 1–16.

73. *Discourses* 3.30. The model to imitate in these circumstances, for “whoever reads the Bible judiciously,” is Moses: he was “forced to kill infinite men” who were moved only by envy in order to implement his plans.

74. *Discourses* 3.3.

75. *Ibid.*

76. *Ibid.* 1.7; cf. 1.8.

77. Letter to Francesco Vettori, 9 April 1513: “Yet if I could speak with you, I couldn’t help filling your head with castles in Spain [*castellucci*], because fortune has determined that since I don’t know how to talk about the silk business or the wool business or about profits and losses, I must talk about the State; I must either make a vow of silence or discuss that.”

78. See for instance *Discourses* 1.18 and *Prince* 20.

79. For the text see *Opere di Niccolò Machiavelli*, 2:135–38; English translation in *Machiavelli and his Friends: Their Personal Correspondence*, ed. J. B. Atkinson and D. Sices (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1996), 134–36. See also M. Martelli, “‘I Ghiribizzi’ a Giovan Battista Soderini,” *Rinascimento* 9 (1969): 147–80; R. Ridolfi and P. Ghiglieri, “I Ghiribizzi al Soderini,” *La Bibliofilia* 72 (1970): 53–74; C. Ginzburg, “Diventare Machiavelli: Per una nuova lettura dei *Ghiribizzi al Soderini*,” *Quaderni Storici* 121 (2006): 151–64.

80. This fact emerges most clearly by analyzing Machiavelli’s reasoning in *Discourses* 2.29. Here he starts by saying that certain “accidents” clearly show “the power of heaven over human affairs.” But after a few examples Machiavelli adds that fortune needs a man of great virtue in order to accomplish great deeds and concludes that men can follow the ways of fortune without opposing her and should never despair because her ways are unknown and could lead to a positive conclusion.

81. See *Discourses* 1.26, 2.23, 3.2, 3.21, 3.40; *Prince* 26.

82. *Discourses* 3.9.

83. *Ibid.*

84. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 6.13.1144a30; cf. 6.5.1140b8, 6.12.1143b13.

85. *Discourses* 3.27.

86. I here depart from Mansfield’s translation, which renders “Io iudico bene questo” as “I judge this indeed” (p. 101): I prefer to lay more stress on the “bene,” on the

fact that Machiavelli speaks in the first person to stress which is the "good," the right, choice.

87. See, for instance, Marsilius Ficinus's famous letter "On Fortune" sent to Giovanni Rucellai (1460–62), in which Ficinus maintained that the prudent man should not conceive of Fortune as a hostile force that operates against his foresight, because both have their origin in God. See A. Perosa, *Studi di filologia umanistica*, 3 vols (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2000), I: 114–16.

88. See S. Zeppi, "Il pessimismo antropologico nel Machiavelli del periodo anteriore ai *Discorsi*," *Filosofia politica* 6 (1992): 193–242.

Machiavelli and the Critics of Rome: Rereading *Discourses* I.4

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The fourth chapter of book 1 of the *Discourses* opens with a peremptory statement: "I must not fail to discuss the tumults that broke out in Rome between the death of the Tarquins and the creation of the tribunes, nor yet to mention certain facts which militate against the view of those who allege that the republic of Rome was so tumultuous and so full of confusion that, had not good fortune and military virtue counterbalanced these defects, its conditions would have been worse than that of any other republic."¹

Machiavelli's judgment is clear, yet at the same time quite impenetrable for today's reader. Following the humanists' approach—who hid their targets under a generic *quidam*, *plerique*, *multi*, or *nonnulli*—only seldom does Machiavelli explicitly mention the authors he intends to confute, and especially when dealing with modern ones, he prefers to allude to them through generic (and sometimes enigmatic) formulas.

In all likelihood Machiavelli's interlocutors understood without much difficulty whom he was referring to. For the modern-day reader, however, these allusions are often cryptic and hard to decipher, but certainly not without importance. This is particularly true here, as the whole political and intellectual project of the *Discourses* depends on the confutation of what was a rather harsh critique of Roman institutions. In fact, if Rome really was a "tumultuous republic," that is to say a republic constantly rattled by internal fighting, its constitution could not be easily put forward as a model for the moderns to imitate, thus undermining Machiavelli's ambitious project from the start.

Around thirty-five years ago, in an essay that has become a classic,²

Gennaro Sasso tried to finally give a name to Machiavelli's opponents. The conclusions of his research are essentially four:

- a) The claim that Rome's greatness is due to its good fortune comes from Plutarch's *De Romanorum fortuna*, as Machiavelli himself states in *Disc. 2.1*: "Many are of the opinion, and amongst them Plutarch, a writer of great weight, that the Roman people was indebted for the empire it acquired rather to fortune than to virtue."³
- b) The main attack concerns Rome's tumults, but it is difficult to precisely identify Machiavelli's target. Fortunately there is "at least one explicit and direct document of what appeared to Machiavelli as a *communis opinio*," this document being the *De civitate Dei*, where Augustine lists the Roman republic's "miserias," such as "internal divisions and disagreements amongst the citizens" (3.17).
- c) A second proof of the anti-Roman tradition can be found in the dedicatory letter of George of Trebizond's Latin translation of Plato's *Laws* (1452), where it is said that Rome "never remained the same, constant in its form, but changed every day like a chameleon, so that it seemed as if that empire was one, because of the location and of the urban structure more than of the unity of its people. Therefore, as it mutated daily and remained divided, it never was a community of citizens; and that is why I ask myself if we should define as a city a place where nobody could peacefully live in their own homes, where internal wars and seditions were always so vicious that external wars would be greeted as a relief, and many would become soldiers to live a tranquil life. On the contrary the republic of Venice, site of justice and master of peace, never chose war if not to protect its peace, and never chose war over peace."⁴
- d) Sasso suggests that chapter 1.4 of the *Discourses* has to be read in light of chapter 1.6, where Machiavelli opposes the Roman constitutional model to the Venetian one. The adversaries of Rome that Machiavelli has in mind should be therefore identified with the Florentine aristocrats that supported the Venetian government, and these pages would be addressed to them. Specifically, in this passage Machiavelli would be polemicizing against Bernardo Rucellai, the great humanist and politician who admired the institutions of Venice, the "Serenissima," and is today mostly remembered as the founder of the circle of the Orti Oricellari, where—after the death of their founder and the return of the Medici—Machiavelli

discussed politics with a group of young aristocrats and gave the *Discourses* the form that has reached us.

Sasso's reconstruction has been adopted in ensuing commentaries, and it eventually became part of every critical apparatus that comes with the *Discourses*. Nevertheless, his judgment might need to be integrated with some supplementary testimonies and therefore substantially corrected. And this is what I intend to do in the following pages, examining for the first time numerous previously overlooked ancient, medieval, and humanistic sources on this topic.

I. ROME'S FORTUNE (AND MILITARY VIRTUE)

After more than thirty years, Sasso's reconstruction of the diatribe on the Romans' fortune remains valid in its essential features, even if one can bring some new tesserae to his picture. For instance the conspicuous presence of Plutarch's *De fortuna Romanorum* in Florence at that time could be further investigated, beginning with *De urbe Roma*, Bernardo Rucellai's antiquarian treatise.⁵ Or, more importantly, from Leon Battista Alberti's *Libri della famiglia* we could quote a confutation, very similar to Machiavelli's, of the idea that Roman predominance in the Mediterranean was due merely to good fortune:

The marvelous empire without limits, this lordship over all people acquired by Latin forces, obtained by our diligent efforts, increased by our Latin armies, can it be said to have been granted us as a gift of fortune?

Shall we admit that what our character won for us we owe to fortune? Shall we ascribe to fortune the prudence and moderation of Fabius, whose delaying and passive tactics saved our almost captured Latin liberty? What of the justice of Tarquin, who, to maintain military discipline, refused a pardon to his son? What of the purity of a man who, content with a farmer's life, preferred honesty to any amount of gold? What of the stern justice of Fabricius, the temperance of Cato, the fortitude of Horatio Cocles, the sufferings of Mutius, the faith and piety of Regulus, the patriotism of Curtius? What of the other remarkable, excellent, and incredible virtues of soul that were praised and honored among the ancients? Shall we ascribe to fortune sacred qualities which worked no less than iron and violence to let our noble Ital-

ian ancestors subdue the people of every barbarous region? With these did they subjugate the proud and stubborn barbarian enemies of Latin liberty, glory, and name.

Shall we view fortune, then as the teacher of morals, the moderator of conduct, and the guardian of our most sacred traditions? Shall we consider subject to fortune's fickle and arbitrary will these standards which men, with mature wisdom and with hard and painful efforts, set up for themselves? How can we say that fortune, with her equivocal ways and her inconstancy, can ruin and destroy the very works which we most want to subordinate to our own watchfulness and reason, and not to another's whim? How shall we admit that we fervently and laboriously strive to maintain belongs to fortune rather than to us? It is not in fortune's power, it is not as easy as some foolish people believe, to conquer one who really does not want to be conquered. Fortune has in her hands only the man who submits to her.⁶

Despite the significant accord between the two texts, and the striking similarities of their arguments, we do not need to postulate that Machiavelli had read Alberti's work. Rather, for a better understanding of the *Discourses*, it should be noted that in the Tuscan environment, since the mid-fifteenth century, it was already necessary to defend the Romans from the accusation of having built their entire empire thanks to a persistent fortune.

Nevertheless, the passage in *Disc. 1.4* says something more. Alongside the thesis that explains all the Romans' achievements as a result of mere fortune, there is the contention that a special "military virtue" was the only reason for their success. Thus far, neither Sasso nor any other scholar has tried to identify who is behind this accusation, which, just like the other ones, could have invalidated the entire project of the *Discourses*. Yet the issue is too important to be overlooked if we want to understand the difficulty of Machiavelli's neo-Roman project.

Generally speaking, in the ancient sources we find two different explanations for Roman supremacy. First, in principle, the Greek authors stressed the constitution and the *leges* (laws), while the Romans foregrounded *mores* (customs); secondly, the Romans rejected the idea that the empire was a result of mere military organization (*disciplina*) or mere good fortune (using the conciliatory saying "ex virtute fortunam"). In this perspective, discipline and fortune played only a part in their success, together with virtues such as religiosity (*pietas*), justice (*iustitia*), and frugality (*temperantia*), if not Stoic providence (*fatum*).⁸

The fifteenth-century humanists—essentially echoing the ancients—agreed that the Romans' expertise in war could not have been the only cause of their empire. Mostly in brief passages, these authors repeat that strength without justice is not enough to assure supremacy, or that the architects of Rome's triumphs were its speakers and jurists, as much as its generals and soldiers. From this point of view, the fourth chapter of book 1, in other respects one of the most controversial and surprising passages of Machiavelli's work, appears quite conventional. Refuting the idea that "military virtue" on its own can make a state invincible, Machiavelli recycles the opinion of Giovanni Cavalcanti, Leon Battista Alberti, Matteo Palmieri, or Bartolomeo Platina—authors sometimes very far from each other in terms of biography and intellectual background but ready to agree on this single point: without the joint action of "force" and "justice," "arms" and "virtue," *arma* and *consilia*, the Roman Empire simply would not have existed.⁹

Therefore, the thesis that Machiavelli refutes does not seem to have many supporters in either the classic or the humanistic texts.¹⁰ Yet at least a few can be named. The first is probably the Roman historian Valerius Maximus, who in the *Dictorum et factorum memorabilium libri* (possibly the most popular ancient history book at the beginning of the sixteenth century), after having defined "the strong bond of military discipline" as the "chief glory and mainstay of the Roman Empire" (1.7 praefatio), seals his list of exemplary cases with an interesting general observation:

By vigorously maintaining military discipline, the Roman Empire became the master of Italy; it gained power over many cities, great kings, and mighty nations; it opened up the straits of the Black Sea; it broke through the barriers of the Alps and the Taurus Mountains and occupied them; and although it had started off in the tiny cottage of Romulus, it became the leader of the entire world.¹¹

Secondly, there is Cicero's *Pro Murena*, where we find a more exhaustive explanation. Here the "dignitas rei militaris" (dignity of military service) is explicitly compared and placed before the "iuris civilis gloria" (glory of jurisprudence). But we have to consider that the specific occasion entirely justifies the particular tone and content of the oration by Cicero, who was engaged in defense of the consul who had been elected for the following year and accused of electoral fraud by Servius Sulpicius Rufus (who had lost the same elections to him). Since Murena had been Lucius Lucullus's lieutenant in the war against Mithridates, Cicero constructed

his argument entirely on the comparison between the “urbana militia” of Servius (renowned as a lawyer) and the more worthy career of Murena, who had served his homeland in the army.

And surely—I must say what I feel—military ability counts for more than ability in any other field. For it is this which has given the Roman people the brilliant name they have; it is this which has bestowed everlasting glory upon our city; it is this which has induced the world to submit to our command. All our city affairs, all these fine pursuits of ours, the applause and the hard work here in the forum, all lie beneath the guardianship and protection of military strength.¹²

This is clearly an *argumentum ad hominem*, aimed to convince the jury (although, throughout his life, Cicero would actually be an advocate of the toga’s primacy over the sword). Nevertheless—extrapolated from its specific context—the passage could have offered an authoritative argument in favor of military virtue and might have also been understood that way. And this is why Cicero is a second potential target for *Disc. 1.4*.

Finally, there is a third candidate: Vegetius, author of a treatise of military theory that had extraordinary success throughout the Middle Ages and early modernity and that Machiavelli knew very well. The first chapter of the *Epitoma*, entitled “The Romans subdued every population only thanks to military exercise,” sounds like it is about to reveal all there is to know on the empire’s supremacy. Yet, as in Cicero’s case, upon a closer look we realize that Vegetius does not postulate the superiority of martial virtue over other virtues, nor does he intend to offer a whole interpretation of the origins of the Roman Empire. Vegetius writes:

We find that the Romans owed the conquest of the world to no other cause than continual military training, exact observance of discipline in their camps and unwearied cultivation of the other arts of war. Without these, what chance would the inconsiderable numbers of the Roman armies have had against the multitudes of the Gauls? Or with what success would their small size have been opposed to the prodigious stature of the Germans? The Spaniards surpassed us not only in numbers, but in physical strength. We were always inferior to the Africans in wealth and unequal to them in deception and stratagem. And the Greeks, indisputably, were far superior to us in skill in arts and all kinds of knowledge.¹³

What's at stake here is rather the central role of "ars" (technique) and of "exercitium" (exercise) as opposed to "multitude" (number) and "virtus indocta" (plain courage), that is to say, the need to educate brute force through discipline. Moving from an idea already expressed in a Pseudo-Quintilianic oration (*Declamationes* 3.14), Vegetius merely concludes that Rome's military culture, rather than the size of the soldiers and of the armies, had been decisive. And Machiavelli would fully approve this idea in his *Arte della guerra*.

This being said, is it possible to infer that Machiavelli included Cicero and Vegetius among those who attributed the empire's greatness entirely to martial virtues? This could be so: in the *Discourses* and *The Prince* he sometimes takes the theses that are his polemical targets to their extremes. At the same time, Machiavelli's stretches, though they often need to be explained, are never gratuitous. In this case the decisive element comes from a modern work that Machiavelli knew quite well: Flavio Biondo's *Roma triumphans*.

In fact, the discussion about the origin of Rome's success—which often appeared, as we have seen, in the writings of the fifteenth-century humanists—has a special relevance in Biondo's work. Before finally giving an answer, Biondo presents the question as a real historiographical dilemma. More than once he appears convinced that no institution (neither civil nor military) would have been sufficient to guarantee Roman supremacy in the Mediterranean if its citizens had not been righteous, moderate, and frugal.¹⁴ And when he picks up the issue again at the beginning of the sixth book—precisely where the analysis of the city's military institutions begins—Biondo writes:

We should now continue the description of the State's administration with Rome's military institutions. If it is true that the State's greatness doubtlessly began and was increased with the use of force and weapons, and by the soldier's ingenuity, it is also true that the force of the cohorts, of the legions, of the cavalry troops and of their military leaders, would have been useless if the Senate, the people and the wisest men and those of great value—who had been rightly elected as magistrates, as we have seen—had not safeguarded and reformed for the better, governing righteously, cautiously and humanely, the cities and the provinces that they had previously assaulted, defeated and conquered; although the magistrates that administer the State from within, without weapons, and [lead] the war outside with weapons are more or less

the same ones. Just as the subject matter of the previous three books could be defined as the unarmed administration of the republic, the one we are now considering could be accordingly defined as the armed administration. And the latter has been conducted thanks to laws, institutions, and customs not inferior to those of the former. We could therefore say that the strictness of the discipline has been fostered by the observance of the laws thanks to the external wars more than the internal peace. In fact, if at home or in the city sometime few or many have committed a crime against the state, very often there has been a small punishment, if any; but rarely the consul, the commander and the legions themselves have made a serious mistake without being punished by the enemy.¹⁵

Now, it is within this reasoning, which celebrates the Romans' moral and political virtues, that Cicero and Vegetius are evoked as the promoters of the thesis regarding the primacy of weapons. Quoted out of context, right after the passage where the *Roma triumphans* labels as "inanes et superfluas" (useless) "vires" (strength) without "sapientia" (knowledge) and "gravitas" (gravity), the words quoted by Biondo end up presenting Cicero and Vegetius as defenders of that interpretation of Roman history that attributes every success to "rei militaris virtus" (military virtue). So, while Biondo is promoting a sort of inclusive logic that explains Rome's success with multiple causes—such as customs and laws, civil as well as military institutions, valor in war and justice in peace (customs and *temperantia* having paramount importance)—he cites Cicero and Vegetius as the theorists of the priority of military skill.

This is not necessary to think that Machiavelli was encouraged by *Roma triumphans* to read in Cicero's and Vegetius's words something more than an argument *ad hominem* devised to win the case (Cicero) or a merely technical concern (Vegetius). But it is certainly noteworthy that Biondo was the first modern author to single out (and criticize) a common way of thinking, by putting their texts together. Like the other humanists (as well as Machiavelli, later on) Biondo supports the inclusive logic of the *et et* instead of the exclusive *aut aut*. Yet, compared to other fifteenth-century texts, for the first time *Roma triumphans* allows plenty of space also for the opposite solution, intended as an effective historiographical hypothesis on the origins of the empire. And so, although Machiavelli certainly had the intellectual tools and the culture to reach these conclusions without Biondo's suggestion, it is after all likely that the *Roma*

triumphans—often a very important source for the *Discourses*¹⁶—did encourage him to find in Cicero and Vegetius a serious explanation for the Roman success. So, if we might think Machiavelli would have given such weight to the opening of the *Epitoma* and to the eulogy of the militia in the *Pro Murena* even without Biondo, we still have to acknowledge at least the affinity between the *Discourses* and the most recent acquisition of antiquarian research.

II. ROME'S TUMULTS

In his essay on the targets of *Disc.* I.4, Sasso states that “it is not easy, but actually very hard, to determine the specific object of Machiavelli’s polemic.” This is true if we limit our research only to classical texts (even if in a previous essay I have shown that the argument against Roman tumults has a very important place in the *Roman Antiquities* written by the Greek historian and rhetorician Dionysius of Halicarnassus).¹⁷ But if we look at the authors chronologically closer to Machiavelli, it becomes obvious, on the contrary, that the *Discourses* are confronting a very common negative topos, according to which Rome was invincible on the outside but extremely vulnerable on the inside, due to constant seditions.

For instance, looking at the Florentines amongst Machiavelli’s contemporaries, this assessment is expressed, in its straightforward version, by Cristoforo Landino in his renowned *Comento sopra la Commedia*. In his commentary to canto 14 of the *Inferno* the author writes, regarding the statue of Empire present in Dante’s poem, that “iron represented the Roman’s empire: those who occupied all other empires thanks to their military virtue. The soil mixed with iron in the statue’s feet showed civil discord in the Roman republic, because just as terra cotta does not mix well with iron, in civil discord there never is an actual union between citizens.”¹⁸

As we will see, Landino is not alone. Sasso (on this single point rightly) showed that Augustine’s *De civitate Dei* played a crucial role in the definition of Rome as a “tumultuous republic.” Augustine wrote his book to prove that the terrible sack of Rome by Alaric’s Visigoths (410 AD) should not be ascribed to the Christians or to the relinquishment of ancient pagan religious practices. For this reason the *De civitate Dei* retraces the most ancient history in order to demonstrate that Rome had already gone through equally terrifying troubles, and the city’s divinities had done nothing to protect it. In this harsh condemnation of the entire pagan expe-

rience—together with the plagues, the military losses, and the famines—Augustine naturally turns to internal hostilities. This happens not only in the single chapter discussed by Sasso (3.17) but throughout the first half of the *De civitate Dei*, and especially in the third book, where we find a constant denunciation of Rome's civil wars. Here we read a detailed excursus on the brutalities committed by citizens against other citizens after the Gracchi. And pretending he does not intend to dwell on Rome's failures, Augustine, with the patience of an entomologist, actually makes a long catalogue of the various species and subspecies of internal hostilities (*De civitate Dei* 3.23) and notes throughout the book that no military defeat had ever caused the suffering and devastation that the Romans inflicted on their own citizens (3.29). Along these lines, Romulus killing Remus (2.14, 3.6–7, 3.12, 15.5), the rape of the Sabine women (2.17, 3.13), the killing of Titus Tatius (3.13), the war against Alba Longa (3.14), and the clash between the Horatii and the Curiatii (3.14) are all interpreted as signs and presages of a dangerous tendency to fratricide.

Nevertheless, Augustine did not speak in isolation. With him, we should remember the other church fathers engaged in a cultural battle against the pagans. Amongst them stand out authors such as Arnobius (who wrote the *Adversus nationes*, almost one hundred years before the *De civitate Dei*, coining the formula “Roma seditiosa semper” in 7.47), or Paulus Orosius, with his *Historiarum libri adversus paganos* (5.1, 5.24). The meaning of these attacks is quite clear: for the Christian controversialists, Rome's condemnation entailed the condemnation of politics and *vita activa* as a whole.

The issue was a burning one. The early humanists, beginning with Francesco Petrarca, had to deal with this authoritative Augustinian tradition if they wanted to protect their passion for pagan literature from criticism. It is no coincidence that Petrarch composed the *Disceptatio super quibusdam que contra urbis Rome gloriam dicta videntur a multis*, collected in the *Familiars*, in order to defend his (never fulfilled) intention of permanently moving to Rome. Petrarch only rapidly alludes to it being a city haunted by internal hostilities (“I shall not speak of the civil wars and the belligerence of the ever-unsatisfied masses; I omit the many evils that city has in common with the entire world”¹⁹) and, more importantly, explicitly assigns Augustine to the head of the anti-Roman tradition of his own time: “I am omitting other critics who have insulted the Roman name for they are not few in antiquity, in the recent past, and even in our own age. Many of them—as their words reveal—are motivated not so much by the desire for truth as by their hatred and envy of the city. In my

opinion they do not deserve an answer; they deserve to be destroyed by their own poison."²⁰

Even in the fifteenth century things had not changed. Augustine's indictment of the pagan world, including his criticism of Rome's propensity for tumults, was echoed by some of the major humanists. A few passages from *De miseria humanae conditionis*, one of Poggio Bracciolini's most important works, composed in 1455 and strongly influenced by the *De civitate Dei's* lesson, suffice:

I will not acknowledge that the Romans' virtue, highly praised by writers, has been free from this misery, since they have been ungrateful toward those who fostered their fortune, toward their protectors, toward their guides, and so turbulent in their internal relationships, so evil with their own citizens, so unjust in appraising virtues. We read that Marcus Coriolanus, Camillus, many Scipios liberators of the homeland, were either expelled from the city by decree of the unjust plebs, or imprisoned and killed. [. . .] What kind of happiness has there ever been in the city that has been so cruel with its deserving citizens, that has always been torn with internal fights, that has made its greatness setting fires, stealing, robbing, and massacring its own and other citizens? Rome has always lived a miserable existence, and especially during the civil wars it has been torn apart by the violence and the excess of the dictators, the consuls, and the triumvirs. Deprived of its most eminent citizens, weakened by the proscription and the slaughter of many excellent men, after losing its freedom and being submitted to the power of a single man, after having experienced the detestable cruelty of freaks of nature rather than emperors, in the end it collapsed entirely.²¹

In the second book Poggio reinforces the message:

In fact [Rome] was never free from private conflicts, internal fights, familiar disputes, internal or external wars. While it obeyed the kings, to the point that they loathed the citizens' virtue, and Brutus was forced to hide his magnanimity pretending to be crazy. And once it was free, you know of the secession of the plebs, you know of their prolonged wars with the patricians and of the conflicts between them that escalated into murder, you know of the seditious actions of the tribunes, you know of the exiles of the best citizens that deserved a reward from the State, so that Rome appears to have always been troubled by wars

or internal fights. [. . .] Why talk about such violent and nefarious civil wars that tore it apart? The massive bloodshed, the illness, and the great blaze that they caused in Rome, in Italy, and almost all around the world is hard to believe. Too often there have been conflicts between armed citizens that have ended up in a massacre.²²

Rome's tumults remained a rather common theme at the beginning of the sixteenth century, in the controversy between enthusiasts of the *studia humanitatis* and the more intransigent sectors of the church.²³ Yet the Romans' propensity for internal conflicts was also referred to with other intentions. The same authors and the same texts, Augustine above all, could be used, for instance, as proof of the republic's difficulties in governing itself and therefore of the clear superiority of princely rule. At least from the thirteenth century, the argument that Rome, and any republic in general, lacked the concord necessary for cohabitation is employed by the promoters of monocratic government—from the mirror-for-princes published between Italy and the court of France (for instance, by Thomas Aquinas in his *De Regimine Principum* 1.5–6) to the writings in defense of the emperor's wavering prerogatives. And throughout the fourteenth century the same claim had become quite frequent in the propaganda of those lords who had taken office in the small urban centers of northern Italy, before finally establishing itself in the works of the humanists less sensitive to the values of republican freedom.

Considering the great geographic, cultural, and chronological variety of the testimonies, I will limit myself to three examples, one for each kind of this criticism, and all published in the fifteenth century: a philoseigneurial treatise, a philoimperial treatise, and a treatise aimed at demonstrating the superiority of monarchy to other forms of government.

The first writing in chronological order is the *Dramatologia de eligibili vite genere*, drafted at the beginning of the fifteenth century. The author, the humanist and jurist Giovanni Conversini of Padua—who was then at the service of the lords of Carrara—imagines a dialogue on the perfect constitution, between a man from Venice and one from Padua. In these pages, despite the warm praise of neighboring Venice, Conversini uses Rome's turbulent history to exalt the qualities of a one-man government, as opposed to the anarchy of the communal world. Heralded by a malicious apophasis ("I shall not mention the partisan passions, the concealed hatred, the envy for the fellow citizens' awards, the passion for which brings men to harbor the worst feelings"²⁴), the usual accusation against the republics and, more specifically, Rome then emerges:

The empire was established and developed thanks to the kings of Rome. And then, when the presumptuous citizens decided that it was unworthy to obey to a presumptuous king, the administration of the state was left to the people. O God, how great was the unrest and the storm that hit the city, firstly because of the Tribunes of the Plebs, then because of the Military Tribunes, and right afterwards for the insolence of those Decemviri that were engaged in overpowering the people and the city. We must admit that the Roman people under the command of the consuls carried out great feats, even if they were often looked upon and ridiculed. Yet its power and its honor were fostered and grew incomparably greater under the Caesars.²⁵

It is unlikely that Machiavelli could or would have wanted to open a dialogue with an almost forgotten author of over a century earlier, but texts like that of Conversini point out the existence of a precise tradition. And the same probably goes for two other works, chosen to exemplify the anti-Roman prince-friendly polemic—although these are closer to the *Discourses*, both chronologically and geographically. The first is signed by Enea Silvio Piccolomini. In 1446, the future Pope Pius II, as chancellor at the service of the emperor Frederick III, was busy finding an agreement with Pope Eugene IV that would ease the conflict troubling the Christian world. In the context of a general rethinking of the relationships between the pope and the emperor and those between the pope and the bishops—which marks the years immediately following the Council of Basel—Enea Silvio composed an extremely interesting letter, *De ortu et auctoritate Imperii Romani*. In these pages, together with a predictable eulogy of the imperial power, we find the usual accusations of seditiousness towards the Roman republic.

Since the beginning, Rome has been governed by a king and it obeyed seven sovereigns, who, it seems, had absolute power. After their banishment, two consuls were chosen, and it was established by law that they would have had the highest powers. Although they could constrain the citizens and arrest them, they could not sentence anybody to death, as Romans could appeal to the popular assembly against their rulings. Under this government there were a great number of tumults and, due to the frequent frictions between the plebs and the senators, the city's constitution changed. So there was sometimes a government of Decemviri, sometimes of Tribunes, and more often of Consuls. Subsequently, since the population had grown and violent wars broke out

and the neighbors threatened the city, out of need it was decided to institute a magistrate with superior powers. And these became dictators, who were not subjected to appeal, and could order death sentences. But their power was temporary. In fact nature was paving the way to the best form of government of all. [. . .] Finally, since neither the people, nor the senate, nor the other magistrates were able to govern righteously Rome's provinces, it was necessary for the State to deliberate by means of one single man. And once a Prince was chosen, he was given the right to have every decision ratified. And it is well known that Julius Caesar began this practice. Thanks to him the governments of the States have been given to emperors ever since.²⁶

With the third example we move to Florence, during the last decade of the fifteenth century. It is a very peculiar text that has received attention only recently: the *De comparatione reipublicae ac regni* by the humanist Aurelio Lippo Brandolini. In the autumn of 1489, Brandolini had moved to Budapest following the invitation of the Hungarian sovereign Matthias Corvinus. There he had begun drafting his dialogue, but after a few months the king unexpectedly died and Brandolini returned home, where he decided to modify the work he had done and offer his treatise to Lorenzo de' Medici. The result is a text completely unrelated to Florentine political tradition, laced with prince-friendly arguments that have nothing to do with the Medici's standard propaganda—as Cosimo, Piero, and Lorenzo preferred to present themselves as the most heartfelt defenders of communal freedom. It is within this context that Brandolini's critique of Rome's tumults should be read.

A commonwealth cannot have many leaders at once, like a body with many heads, for leadership cannot brook an equal and peer. So when many people desire to take over the leadership, the result is that the city splits into factions and rises up in arms against itself and in a short time destroys itself with its own forces.

This is a phenomenon which like many others may be best and most clearly observed in the Roman commonwealth. For so long as it was under the kings, it preserved the highest degree of peace and concord, once they were driven out and it lost that best and upright leadership of the kings, although it created two consuls in the place of one king and an annual magistrate in the place of a perpetual king—as though they bear witness that there was no other true and legitimate

leadership—they were unable to endure the arrangement for long, and by creating now decemvirs, now tribunes with consular power, now another plebeian consul, they were never at peace, until by the actions of Nature herself, who longed for the best leadership of one man, the commonwealth came at last again into the power of one man as a result of enormous civil war. And for as long as it remained in the power of a single excellent prince, it experienced no civil wars or discords; but when a plurality of men first wished to enjoy preeminence in it, as in the times of Vitellius and Severus, it fell again into civil wars.²⁷

A few pages later Brandolini repeats his admonition:

Nearly all republics have infamous reputations in this respect. For where, I ask you, is there more, and more serious, political violence, where are there more frequent and more destructive civil wars, where are there greater tumults than those that arise in a republic? Where do interregna more often occur in public affairs? Where are there more frequent alterations in the kinds of magistracies and in the whole constitution? I'll pass over the republics of the Athenians, Spartans, and Thebans, which all destroyed themselves by changes of magistracy on a daily basis and by incessant political violence. Place before your eyes, please, the Roman republic, the greatest and most long-lived of them all. Good God! How much political violence is experienced! How numerous will you find to be the intestine discords, the civil wars, the instability of public offices, the periods of anarchy—in short, tumults of every kind! Yet it too did not arrive at its five hundredth year as a free republic.²⁸

Yet the seigneurial-friendly treatises do not cover all of the humanists' employment of the polemic against Rome's tumults. There still is a third strand, already identified by Sasso, who pointed out the presence of anti-Roman arguments in George of Trebizond. Sasso provides no other examples of humanists who are ready to discredit Rome because of its tumults in order to praise, by contrast, Venetian concord. Nevertheless there is at least one other relevant author (probably more relevant from a Florentine perspective). It is the same Bracciolini who had attacked Rome in the *De miseria humanae conditionis* and who after four years repeated an identical reproof in an oration, *In laudem reipublicae Venetorum*, presented to the Venetian Senate as a sort of "calling card" in 1459, when he was thinking about leaving Florence.

The Roman republic was the greatest of all time, and it has been celebrated with great praise. It beat or equaled all the others in eloquence and richness of expressions, and it surpassed them all in military virtue. Many excellent and illustrious men flourished in many fields. But who is not aware of how many and what great conflicts, how many fights, quarrels, and seditions, troubled its population since the conquest of freedom, and how many and what great clashes were triggered between the city and the plebs, and between the Patricians and the Consuls against the Tribunes of the Plebs? And eventually there was enmity, hatred, and more than civil wars, robberies, banishment of citizens, exiles of aristocrats, numerous tumults, like the constant waves during a storm at sea. I'd rather not speak about the robberies of the Consuls, of the Praetors, and of the other Magistrates, about the sacrileges, the rapes, the massacres, the devastation of the cities, the depravation and the greed of the soldiers. I shall leave out the terrible tyranny exercised on the citizens, the misdeeds committed in the provinces with disgraceful license. Cicero himself confirms that the settlements of the soldiers have destroyed more allied cities than the weapons of the enemies. I will not say anything about the numerous conspiracies against the State, and the entire world, assigned to the Romans' greed. Why talk about the Verres, Clodii, Catilinae and of the other conspirators who came into being for the failure of Rome and its provinces? In truth, I can affirm that for many centuries it could have been called not a state but an ungodly banditry and a bloody tyranny, when the laws and the customs, the fathers' institutions, and the judgments were useless, and instead amongst them were force, iron, and massacres in the forum and in the temples of the gods, because of the Tribunes' conspiracies. Cicero himself objects that there is no State, no justice, no senate, and everything is decided by Caesar's nod. At the time of the first Romans, the republic deserved its name; yet also back then one could count the secession of the plebs, the ambition of the Decemviri, the exiles of Coriolanus and Camillus.²⁹

Petrarch, Conversini, Piccolomini, Bracciolini, George of Trebizond, Bracciolini, Landino, Zanobi Acciaiuoli: the list is only partial, but Rome's tumultuous character appears at every latitude and at every longitude in the humanist tradition of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

III. THE CRITIQUE OF ROME AND MYTH OF VENICE IN MACHIAVELLI'S FLORENCE

The list of testimonies above is certainly incomplete, and yet it demonstrates the extreme adaptability of the same anti-Roman argument. So, at this point the general frame is quite clear. References to Rome's tumultuous nature can be traced back to three main families of arguments:

- a) those against the vanity of any earthly glory;
- b) those against the weakness of the republics, compared to more stable principalities;
- c) those against a particular republic (Rome) founded on force, in comparison with another republic that built its greatness on internal concord and on the rigorous administration of justice (Venice).

Given this, who is Machiavelli against? Sasso affirms that in *Disc.* 1.4 his target is the Venetian tradition. But, in light of what we have said, it seems impossible to clearly separate the three threads. As we have seen in Bracciolini's case, different threads can be interwoven in the same author—not to mention that Sasso's explanation does not apply to testimonies, like that of Landino, that are not, strictly speaking, political treatises, which proves that the topos of tumultuous Rome had the vastest circulation. For the purpose of interpreting *Disc.* 1.4, it is in fact significant that an anti-Roman tradition based on Rome's internal conflicts was widespread within humanist thought. It shouldn't therefore be surprising that a work composed to spur the moderns to a thorough imitation of the institutions of Romulus and Scipio's city (that is, the *Discourses*) would have had to preemptively dispel these accusations, in all three forms. Machiavelli *had* to start from here.

Nevertheless, we should analyze Sasso's argument in detail. Machiavelli's small sympathy for the Venetian constitution—which was the Florentine aristocracy's optimal model during the republic of 1494–1512—is well known, as is the fact that he, a few pages after defending Rome from its detractors, sets the city of Brutus and Scipio against Sparta and the "Serenissima." Although all three republics had mixed constitutions, they would be inscribed in two opposing families: on one side the popular republics, open to foreigners, troubled by social conflict (but not in self-destructive forms) and militarily aggressive (like Rome); on the other, the aristocratic republics, closed toward foreigners, without internal con-

flicts but unable to effectively conduct politics of conquest (like Sparta and Venice).

With these premises, it is easy to understand why—following George from Trebizond's testimonies—Sasso reads the sentences of *Disc.* 1.4 as a polemic against the philo-Venetian aristocrats and against one of the main advocates of a reformation of Florentine institutions on the model of those of the "Serenissima," namely Rucellai. The hypothesis is appealing and is widely credited still today. Yet, there are several reasons to deny that in this chapter Machiavelli's specific target was the founder of the Orti Oricellari. Rucellai was a fervent admirer of Rome and of its institutions (not less than of Venice); he was the author of a treatise on the Capitoline magistracies—which he had drafted with the precise intention of encouraging the Florentines to follow the ancients' lesson—as well as the author of a systematic archeological reconstruction of classical Rome, and he was also famous for his large collection of ancient statues. For these reasons his contemporaries perceived him to be a great connoisseur of Roman culture, as Pietro Crinito refers to Rucellai in *De honesta disciplina* 8.5, 21.4, 22.12. Even if *De magistratibus Romanorum veterum commentarius* never got through to us, the *De Urbe Roma* is enough to give us an idea of the enthusiasm Rucellai nurtured for the ancient city and its institutions. For instance, in a very important passage of his work he turns to Polybius's testimony to defend Rome from the accusation of having always been in the hands of the Tribunes and troubled by civil wars (which is the same concern that Machiavelli has in *Disc.* 1.4). Here Rucellai writes:

But this more than anything needs to be investigated: that while the ancients dedicated their time to the commonwealth, they administered the empire obtained with these arts, so that—according to Livy—no republic has ever been larger, more religious, and full of good examples, in a way that greed and obsession with luxury spread out so late. And certainly I do not disapprove the opinion of Polybius of Megalopolis, who not only claims that the Roman republic surpasses all the others but also that a more perfect constitution cannot be imagined. Nevertheless there are those who, once arrived at the times of the Gracchi, of Cinna, of Sulla and similar ones, cannot contain their emotions and blame the Consuls that had too much power, or the turbulent Tribunes, and vituperate against the State's structure itself. But if they only interpreted correctly the sixth book of Polybius's *Histories*, they would judge Rome's power in a very different way. Yet mortals' nature does not let us easily separate its virtues from its inherent vices, which

would make me think that, while those ancients shaped a constitution that would itself radiate virtue, it also generated vices.³⁰

The admiration for Scipio's city is explicitly stated in the very first pages of the *De Urbe Roma*. Rucellai thereby intends to "clarify those obscure aspects of the Romans' ventures and, within my possibilities, offer to the reader every order they employed to govern the State, so that it could be of use for all the citizens, or at least those that will come in the next generations, or those who live in other countries."³¹ So it is very unlikely that Machiavelli could have mistaken the man who saw in Rome's example the ideal medicine to all Florentine problems for a potential opponent of the project of the *Discourses*. Sasso himself, knowing and quoting this passage by Rucellai, realizes that something is wrong in this reconstruction. This is why, after having assigned to Machiavelli an unsustainable opinion, Sasso finds himself compelled to reproach the same Machiavelli for "a hard and deforming polemic spike" that had brought him to skew Rucellai's opinions. At the same time, Sasso does not give up the idea that Machiavelli, even if mistaken, was right after all:

That is doubtlessly it. Rucellai was philo-Venetian without being anti-Roman; so from this point of view Machiavelli's polemic was unjust. Unjust, yet, at a closer look, not without reason, as it has been briefly said. [. . .] In Machiavelli there was no difference between the critique of Venice and the praise of the Roman republic [. . .] Accordingly, between the critique of Rome and the praise of Venice, there must have been, in his views, unity, identity and the same theoretical origin. [. . .] The promoters of Venice had to be also critics of Rome, the critics of Rome had to be also promoters of Venice.³²

Sasso's solution (assigning to the *Discourses* a fake target and then figuring out why Machiavelli would have gone against someone who should have seemed an ally to him) already had several evident weak spots when it was proposed; now, in light of the aforementioned occurrences of the tumultuous Rome topos, it seems even less acceptable. If Rucellai is not the target of Rome's apology in *Disc.* 1.4, Sasso's entire thesis has to be reassessed. We therefore must question the effective existence of the Florentine "aristocratic anti-Roman tradition" he identifies.

To do so we need to focus first of all—contrary to what Sasso suggests—on the fact that, during the republic of the Great Council (1494–1512), the admirers of the "Serenissima" did not necessarily belong to the

oligarchic families. Scholars who have investigated the first phase of the so-called “myth of Venice” have gathered many testimonies of admiration for its institutions in fifteenth-century Florence, and especially in those environments that were reluctant to accept the Medici’s predominance in the city. Moreover, the broad consent that the lagoon city had earned should prevent us from seeing this attitude as exclusive to the aristocracy. For instance, we should not forget that right after the Medici’s banishment, the reference to Venetian institutions was used to legitimize the radical experiment of the Great Council, an extremely wide popular participation in the government of the city, now open to more than three thousand citizens. This means that in Florence, at that particular time, it was possible to appeal to the Venetian constitution, as Savonarola did in 1494, without having the least intention of handing over the council to a few families through a restricted senate. In other words, one could be philo-Venetian without being philoaristocratic.

After the fall of Savonarola in 1498, internal conflict centered on constitutional reform. The great families of the city’s elite lobbied for a change that more closely followed the Venetian model, through the adoption of a small Senate and the election of a gonfalonnier of justice for life, like the doge of Venice. After endless disagreements, only this second aspect was accepted, in 1502. And, as it appears from the thousands of pages of acts and files recently published, even during the hardest times of the conflict, neither Rucellai nor any of the aristocrats who promoted the Venetian model expressed judgments against Rome.³³ While in these oratorical disputes the institutions of Florence are constantly criticized for their inefficiency, Rome is referred to in public discussions as the model to follow no less often than Venice.

In Florence at the time of Machiavelli, admiration for the institutions of the “Serenissima” does not seem to have entailed a devaluation of Rome; if it ever existed, the alleged Florentine “aristocratic anti-Roman tradition” that Sasso mentions left no trace, as not a single anti-Roman philo-Venetian (that is, anti-Roman because philo-Venetian) can be found in Florence at that time. So, in these years the polemic against the ancient republic seems to be limited to the most fervent followers of Savonarola—and exclusively for religious reasons (along the lines of Augustine and the other church fathers).

Therefore, the impression is that Sasso, and the scholars who have followed him, have been misled by the heuristic power of Machiavelli’s binary opposition—an opposition that did not actually exist before *Disc.* 1.6. The readers of Paolo Paruta and Jean Bodin, Torquato Tasso and James

Harrington, Scipione Ammirato and Philip Sidney (just to name a few) know how widespread the opposition between Saint Mark's lion and the Capitoline wolf became in the political culture of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, influencing in turn the way twentieth-century scholars interpreted the pre-Machiavellian tradition. However, before the *Discourses*, the boundaries between the two republics were not so clear and impermeable. We have already seen how the potential ambiguity of the Florentine use of the Venetian myth—which in the same years would be employed by the supporters of a popular government as much as by those of an aristocratic government—appears only in a retrospective analysis: that is to say, after the classification of the “Serenissima”—thanks to the *Discourses*—as a mixed republic of aristocratic ascendance. And still in the first years of the sixteenth century we find combinations that after Machiavelli would have been more and more unlikely: promoters of the Roman political institutions among the aristocracy as well as admirers of Venice among those with more popular tendencies. But, even after, the process would not be immediate: still in the third decade of the sixteenth century a friend and disciple of Machiavelli such as Donato Giannotti would be at the same time philo-Venetian, philo-Roman, and philopopular, with no contradictions whatsoever.

Sasso, moreover, is certainly not alone in his mistake. With some variations, the same tendency to anachronism can be found in the work of many scholars who have written about the fortune of Florence's and Venice's institutions in the beginning of the sixteenth century. The bold conceptualization of the *Discourses* must have unconsciously induced them to look for the same radical alternative between Rome and Venice, even in the political thinkers of the fifteenth century. The first “victim” of this approach was Savonarola as the real mastermind of the 1494 reformation. Very often historians have accused him of being ingenuous and unsystematic³⁴ and have referred to his projects of constitutional reformation as “distortions,” “discrepancies,” “mistakes,” “misinformation.”³⁵ With these prejudices it has been natural to regard Savonarola a poor friar, unaware of worldly issues, and naïvely caught up in the conflicts of a foreign city. But is it possible to criticize Savonarola, if he does not speak Machiavelli's language and if he still views Venice as a potential example of popular constitution? If for a moment we set aside Machiavelli's classifications, Savonarola will appear an original, and undoubtedly brave, politician: far from the clueless amateur that many—under the influence of the *Discourses*' dichotomy—have labeled him. The choice of getting rid of the doge and the Senate of the Pregadi in order to focus on the Great

Council—proposed in the ever-popular *Predica su Aggeo* on December 21, 1494—appears as a conscious act of constitutional engineering, aimed primarily at building a stable consensus among the population to prevent the Medici's return once and for all.

The tendency of modern historians to look at the political tradition of the fifteenth century through Machiavelli's lens is particularly insidious, but it is not surprising, as its origins go back to the very first circulation of the *Discourses* and possibly to Francesco Guicciardini himself. The chronological order of his works is here decisive. Before reading Machiavelli, Guicciardini shares with his contemporaries a nuanced and somewhat shifting judgment on the Venetian institutions. For instance, in the *Storia fiorentina* (drafted between 1508 and 1510) Guicciardini unhesitatingly accuses Savonarola of wanting to institute a "popular government in Venetian fashion, which is in this world more natural than any other one." ("Popular in Venetian fashion":³⁶ quite a peculiar expression from a strictly Machiavellian perspective!) And again, a few years later, in the *Discorso di Logrogno* (drafted in 1512), there is no sign of the opposition between Rome and Venice, and the two republics are actually both referred to as models that should be, under different aspects, imitated (symptomatically, Rome mostly because of its popular militia). The clear change displayed in the following works was in all likelihood influenced by the *Discourses*: that is to say, the first work where the inevitable nexus between a mixed constitution inclined toward the people, extended citizenship, tumults, and conquest is unequivocally articulated for the first time. Only after reading Machiavelli will Guicciardini stop referring to the Roman model, firmly opting for the social stability of Venice as opposed to the expansive capability of Rome. The result of this shift is that, in the *Dialogo del reggimento di Firenze* (concluded around 1526) and in the *Considerazioni* (drafted in 1530), it will be the *Discourses'* opposition that will give Guicciardini all the arguments to start an entirely new anti-Roman tradition, significantly very different from the one described in the second paragraph of this essay. In other words, Guicciardini's anti-Roman antithesis constantly presupposes the Machiavellian thesis in every detail.

From that point onward, Florence's recent history will also be read in light of a binary partition that—in hindsight—probably appeared to Guicciardini an inevitable and foregone conclusion. In the *Storia d'Italia*, for instance, explaining the discussions that went on in Florence after the Medici's banishment, Guicciardini (who is writing after 1535) chooses to formulate the speeches of the two orators, who speak against or in favor of the Great Council, on a conceptual basis derived directly from the *Dis-*

courses. Neither the popular Pagolantonio Soderini nor the aristocratic Guido Vespucci supports Machiavelli's thesis (the necessity of imitating the Romans instead of the Venetians), to the point that Soderini refers exclusively to the Venetian model. Nevertheless, all the concepts that Guicciardini puts in their mouths come doubtlessly from Machiavelli, starting with the discussion of how Venice's location has favored its stability and concord. Accordingly, when Guicciardini attributes to Guido Vespucci basically the same anti-Roman arguments that we find in *Disc.* 1.4, we must conclude that we are in front of an a posteriori rework and not of a reliable testimony of the actual debate that happened in 1494.

Have the people ever wielded absolute rule over this city, without it being full of discord, without it being entirely torn asunder, and finally, without the state being quickly overthrown? And even if we wish to look for examples elsewhere, why do we recall that when Rome instituted an entirely popular government so much tumult resulted that, had it not been for military readiness and skill, the life of that republic would have been brief indeed?³⁷

Guicciardini's testimony is important not only because it certifies the early tendency to apply Machiavellian concepts to fifteenth-century history but also because here the categories derived from the *Discourses* are not yet statically reproduced. In fact, even if Guido Vespucci refuses the Roman model, he does not embrace Pagolantonio Soderini's thesis in favor of Venetian institutions. The only anti-Roman Florentine aristocrat we have found (moreover after, and not before, the *Discourses*, if we think that the year in which Guicciardini writes his *Storia d'Italia* is clearly more significant than the year in which the debate has presumably taken place) is completely deaf to the fascination of the myth of Venice: not even Guicciardini's Guido Vespucci corresponds to the profile issued by Sasso. But this merely confirms that with the *Storia d'Italia* we still did not leave the workshop of Machiavellian concepts, so to speak, which continued to appear porous and fluctuating and would find stability only with the next generation of readers, who did not doubt that the Roman and Venetian constitutions were mutually exclusive.

The extraordinary attention that authors such as Guicciardini and Giannotti paid to the antithesis between these two models of republic—trying to offer solutions to what Machiavelli had posited as an unresolvable antinomy—should on its own be sufficient evidence of the turn that the alternative presented in *Disc.* 1.6 brought into Renaissance political

thought. Yet this is even more obvious once we acknowledge that the same analysis of the two cities' orders and military organization could have also taken different routes. In other words, the frontal opposition between Venice and Rome was at that point only one of many possible outcomes.

As a simple hypothesis, nothing would have prevented Machiavelli from highlighting their common elements instead of their differences: focusing, for instance, on their mixed constitutions (as partially occurs in *Disc.* 1.2) or on the legendary passion for justice of their ruling classes (with a moralizing approach especially dear to the fifteenth-century humanists). But other oppositions may have also been possible: perhaps (why not?) based on the geopolitical distinction between terrestrial empire (Rome and Sparta) and maritime power (Athens and Venice). In this case it would have been enough to further develop Aristotle's thoughts on the importance of location, already touched upon in *Disc.* 1.1.

Things went differently, but this does not authorize us to use any teleology that leads directly to Machiavelli when we deal with the fifteenth-century anti-Roman tradition. The extraordinary success of the opposition between Rome and Venice put forward in *Disc.* 1.6 has provided it a posteriori with an obviousness that it did not have originally. Yet we might recognize that the (presumably natural) incompatibility between the Roman and Venetian models is just one of the many ideas that we owe to the *Discourses*. And the fact that we do not easily acknowledge it, and instead project Machiavelli's categories back onto the humanistic tradition, is yet another confirmation of the Florentine thinker's success in reshaping the political categories of his time.

NOTES

1. Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Discourses*, trans. Leslie Walker (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1950), 218.

2. Gennaro Sasso, *Machiavelli e i detrattori, antichi e nuovi, di Roma: Per l'interpretazione di Discorsi 1.4* (1978), in *Machiavelli e gli antichi* (Milan: Ricciardi, 1987), I:401–536.

3. *Ibid.*, 357.

4. George of Trebizond's text is reproduced as an appendix to Franco Gaeta, "Giorgio di Trebisonda, le 'Leggi' di Platone e la costituzione di Venezia," *Bullettino dell'Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medio Evo*, 82 (1970): 498–501.

5. Bernardo Rucellai, *De Urbe Roma*, in *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores: Accessiones Florentinae*, ed. Ludovico Antonio Muratori (Florence: Algrini e Pisoni, 1770), 2.808 and 2.1124.

6. Leon Battista Alberti, *The Family in Renaissance Florence*, trans. Renée Neu Walkins (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1969), 27–28.

7. According to the renowned formula of Cato's *Origines*, brought down to us by Aulus Gellius, *Noctes Atticae* 3.7: "Dii immortales tribuno militum fortunam ex virtute eius dedere."

8. Levi Robert Lind's broad overview is as informed in the ancient section as it is superficial in the modern: "Concept, Action, and Character: the Reason for Rome's Greatness," *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 103 (1972): 235–83.

9. In addition to the aforementioned passage from Alberti, see also Giovanni Cavalcanti, *Trattato politico-morale*, ed. Marcella T. Grendler (Geneva: Droz, 1973), 152; Matteo Palmieri, *Vita civile*, ed. Gino Belloni (Florence: Istituto Nazionale di Studi sul Rinascimento, 1982), 131; Bartolomeo Platina, *De optimo cive*, ed. Felice Battaglia (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1942), 232. The issue had already been discussed with several references to classic texts but without reaching an original synthesis in the fourteenth-century text *Romuleo*, written by Benvenuto of Imola (ed. Giuseppe Guatteri, Bologna: Romagnoli, 1867, 7–13). An exception is Giovanni Garzoni's *De eruditione principum* (ed. Alessandra Mantovani, Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2014, 78): "Military skills assured the Roman people eternal glory and the leadership over the whole world," but his treatise had little circulation (as only four manuscripts survived), and it is difficult to think that Machiavelli was arguing only with this little-known humanist.

10. The historians who put similar opinions in their characters' mouths are another issue. I'm thinking in particular of Livy, *Ab Urbe condita* 87 and of Lampridius in the life of Alexandrus Severus, in his *Historia Augusta*, 53.5.

11. Valerius Maximus, *Memorable Deeds and Sayings*, trans. Henry John Walker (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2004), 2.8, praefatio.

12. Cicero, *Pro Murena*, in *Defence Speeches*, trans. D. H. Berry (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 9–10.22.

13. Flavius Vegetius Renatus, *De re militari*, trans. John Clarke (London: Griffin, 1767), 1.1.

14. Flavio Biondo, *Roma triumphans*, in *Opera*, (Basilea: Froben, 1559), 125.

15. *Ibid.*, 126.

16. As I have demonstrated in Gabriele Pedullà, *Machiavelli in tumulto* (Rome: Bulzoni, 2011), 91–92 and 348–58 (an English edition is forthcoming from Cambridge University Press).

17. *Ibid.*, 460–84.

18. Cristoforo Landino, *Comento sopra la Commedia*, ed. Paolo Procaccioli (Rome: Salerno, 2001), 680.

19. Francesco Petrarca, *Letters on Familiar Matters: Rerum familiarium libri IX–XVI*, ed. Aldo S. Bernardo (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), 15.9.3, 275.

20. *Ibid.*, 15.9.12.

21. Poggio Bracciolini, *De miseria humanae conditionis*, in *Opera omnia*, ed. Riccardo Fubini (Turin: La bottega di Erasmo, 1964–69), I:97.

22. *Ibid.*, 124.

23. The denigration of the vices of pagan Rome (tumults included) in order to

highlight the virtues of Christian Rome was especially diffuse in the religious oratory of the first part of the sixteenth century. John W. O' Malley lists at least four orations constructed upon the comparison of the two Romes in *Praise and Blame in Renaissance Rome: Rhetoric, Doctrine, and Reform in the Sacred Orators of the Papal Court (1450-1521)* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1979), 208. Especially speaking in this context is the Savonarolian Zanobi Acciaiuoli.

24. Giovanni Conversini, *Dragmaologia de eligibili vite genere*, ed. Helen Lanneau Eaker (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Press, 1980), 124.

25. *Ibid.*

26. Enea Silvio Piccolomini, *De ortu et auctoritate Imperii Romani*, in Gerhard Kallen, *Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini als Publizist* (Stuttgart, 1939), 58-60.

27. Aurelio Lippo Bandolini, *De comparatione reipublicae ac regni*, ed. James Hankins (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 3.37-38, pp. 193-95.

28. *Ibid.*, 3.66-67, pp. 220-21.

29. Poggio Bracciolini, *Oratio in laudem reipublicae Venetorum*, in *Opera omnia*, 4:927-28.

30. Bernardo Rucellai, *De Urbe Roma*, ca. 949.

31. *Ibid.*, ca. 783.

32. Gennaro Sasso, *Machiavelli e i detrattori*, 532-33.

33. *Consulte e Pratiche*, ed. Denis Fachard (Geneva: Droz, 1988-2002). For Rucellai see for instance his speech of July 5, 1502.

34. Felix Gilbert, "The Venetian Constitution in Florentine Political Thought," in *Florentine Studies*, ed. Nicolai Rubenstein (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 463-500.

35. Franco Gaeta, "L'idea di Venezia," in *Storia della cultura veneta*, ed. Girolamo Arnaldi and Manlio Pastore Stocchi, (Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 1976), III:597.

36. Francesco Guicciardini, *Storia fiorentina* 12.

37. Francesco Guicciardini, *The History of Italy*, ed. Sidney Alexander (New York: The Macmillian Company, 1969), 2.2, p. 82.

Machiavelli, “Ancient Theology,” and the Problem of Civil Religion

MIGUEL VATTER

I. INTRODUCTION

The image of Machiavelli as a libertine has undergone considerable revision in the last two decades, and plenty of secondary literature is dedicated to establish the “constructive meaning” he gave to religion.¹ In particular, the thesis that Machiavelli is an advocate of a purely “instrumental” use of religion to advance secular political ends has given way to an interpretation of Machiavelli as a founder of a modern and republican understanding of civil religion, adopted and developed after him by the likes of Spinoza, Montesquieu, Rousseau, and Jefferson.² Recently the question of whether republicanism and its tradition of constitutionalism is theologically informed or relies on religious assumptions has been a major theme of the debate on “postsecularism.”

However, the discussion on Machiavelli’s conception of civil religion, and by extension on the role of religion in modern republicanism, remains marred by two related shortcomings. The first of these has to do with the frequent failure to distinguish between two meanings of the term “civil religion,” both of which are operative in Machiavelli’s texts: civil religion as the “political” use of religion and civil religion as “prophetology.” The first meaning is associated with the Roman idea of *theologia civilis* (Varro) and is often equated with ineffective superstitions that may be instrumentalized by those who know better. Recent interpreters have argued that Machiavelli’s critical stance toward this idea of religion is owed to his reception of Lucretius’s *De rerum natura*.³ The second meaning of civil religion is associated with medieval Arabic and Jewish philosophical conceptions of revealed religion. Here, religion is understood as a fundamental part of political science rather than metaphysics, and civil religion itself

is seen as the foundation of the well-being of a commonwealth. In this second sense, by definition, religion can be neither mere superstition nor merely instrumental and therefore cannot be properly dealt with by referring to Machiavelli's purported debts to Lucretius and Epicureanism.

The second shortcoming in the current discussion has to do with the restricted perspective within which the relation between religion and politics in Machiavelli's thought is analyzed. Much of the secondary literature is circumscribed to Christian and Roman religions, omitting from consideration the Florentine and Italian reception of other non-Christian monotheisms (be they pagan or Semitic), the reception of Arabic and Jewish medieval political philosophy,⁴ and the new Platonism brought to Renaissance Italy by the so-called "diaspora" of Byzantine philosophers.⁵ By taking into account these other contexts, one sees that the culture of Ficino's, Savonarola's, and Machiavelli's Florence is deeply marked by the rediscovery of a pre-Christian "ancient theology" as well as by the reception of Arabic and Jewish "prophetology," not only reducible to the effects of Latin Averroism.⁶

While Machiavelli rejects the combination of religion and politics found in Western Christendom after Augustine, in this chapter I argue that he favours a different combination of both as articulated by "ancient theology." This doctrine arrives in Florence in the fifteenth century through the Byzantine Platonist Gemistos Plethon and is discussed by the likes of Ficino and Pico, but traces of the doctrine are also found in medieval Arabic and Jewish philosophy that was variously received in Italian culture since Brunetto Latini and Dante, and especially in the Aristotelian circles of Padua. Although Machiavelli applies his understanding of civil religion to a discussion of Christian and Roman religions, his account is not developed out of these sources. Instead, I show that Machiavelli's call to reinterpret Christianity according to "virtue," as well as his famous reading of the Roman religion established by Numa, emerge thanks to a unique combination of Arabic and Jewish prophetology and "ancient theology." These discourses help to explain why Machiavelli assigns a foundational role to religion in his republican constitutionalism.

II. CIVIL RELIGION VERSUS SPIRITUAL RELIGION: ON RELIGION AS EDUCATION INTO POLITICAL LIFE

Machiavelli rejects what I shall here call a "spiritual" conception of religion, whereas he finds that republicanism requires the support of a "civil" conception of religion. Perhaps, more accurately, one should not speak of

two kinds of religion but of two kinds of "interpretations" of religion: a civil interpretation versus a spiritual interpretation. By "spiritual" interpretation I refer to the idea of religion concerned with guiding the "soul" (*anima*) from "this" world to "another" world or "beyond" in which it continues to have an "afterlife."⁷ Spiritual religion is associated with the Roman Catholic and Orthodox forms given to Christianity, which place the government of priests above the self-government of citizens, pastoral power over political power, and, as a consequence, weaken and disarm the people. The "true way" of Christianity has "rendered the world weak and given it prey to criminal men" because it has taught "that the collectivity of men, so as to go to paradise, think more of enduring their beatings than of avenging them" (*Discourses* 2.2).⁸

Spiritual religion orients government towards the pursuit of otherworldly happiness that is at odds with the public happiness of the earthly city. By way of contrast, "the ancient religion did not beatify men if they were not full of worldly glory, as were captains of armies and princes of republics. Our religion has glorified humble and contemplative more than active men" (*Discourses* 2.2). By interpreting Christianity as a "spiritual" religion rather than following the principles of "the ancient religion," Machiavelli thinks that the church and its priesthood is responsible for the fact that "we Italians . . . have become without religion and wicked" (*Discourses* 1.12). In *Discourses* 2.2 Machiavelli begins by praising the love of freedom and hatred of tyrants and kings that characterized ancient peoples and nations at the time of the early Roman republic. He then turns to the question of why there are fewer republics and "lovers of freedom" in modern times, after the rise of the Roman Empire and its "translation" to Christianity. His answer is the difference "between our education and the ancient, founded on the difference between our religion and the ancient" (*Discourses* 2.2). Machiavelli does not oppose "our religion" to ancient religions in the plural, but to a unitary phenomenon ("the ancient" religion), which I take to be a clear reference to the belief, newly circulated by Ficino and Pico among others in Medicean Florence, according to which different pagan religions were characterized by one underlying "ancient theology" that received different expressions in different civilizations.

Machiavelli's use of the term "education" to think about the Christian religion in a comparative fashion is interesting.⁹ Among other reasons, Machiavelli's use of this term to designate a religion already contains the dualism between religion as a teaching (instruction) and religion as a law. This understanding of religion is found in the Jewish tradition (corresponding to the two senses of the Torah in Deuteronomy 17:18–19), but

it is also present in the Platonic understanding of religion.¹⁰ Thus, Machiavelli approaches the Christian religion from a comparativist perspective, where the concept of education allows his analysis to move beyond the horizon of revealed religions and consider the relation of “pagan” religions not only to the Hellenistic conception of education (*paideia*) but perhaps to more ancient educations as well (Egyptian, Persian, Chinese).

Machiavelli grounds the importance of a wide comparative perspective to other civilizations through the idea of an *anima mundi*, or “world soul”: “the wicked and the good vary from province to province, as is seen by one who has knowledge of those ancient kingdoms, which varied from one to another because of the variations of customs, though the world remained the same. There was this difference only: that where it [the world soul] had first placed its virtue in Assyria, it put it in Media, then in Persia, until it came to be in Italy and Rome” (*Discourses 2*, preface).¹¹ This passage situates Machiavelli’s approach to the problem of religion within a Hellenistic, cosmopolitical perspective, in which the central task was to make compatible the Greek *paideia* (whose climax is found in Aristotle’s teachings) with the Oriental “education” (both Persian and Hebrew). It is in the milieu of Hellenism that the idea of an “ancient theology” first emerges, and its syncretistic intention is best illustrated by the exoteric saying of Numenius: “What is Plato but Moses talking Attic Greek?”¹² This was also the context in which Clement of Alexandria and Eusebius gave Christianity its first political theology.

III. CHRISTIAN POLITICAL THEOLOGY AND THE RETURN OF PAGANISM IN THE RENAISSANCE

Machiavelli held out the hope that the return to ancient religion could reform Christianity: “And although the world appears to be made effeminate and heaven disarmed, it arises without doubt from *the cowardice of the men who have interpreted our religion according to idleness and not according to virtue*. For if they considered how it permits us the exaltation and defence of the fatherland, they would see that it wishes us to love and honour it and to prepare ourselves to be such that we can defend it” (*Discourses 2.2*, emphasis mine). Beiner and Viroli have recently offered two distinct hypotheses as to how Machiavelli conceived of Christianity as a civil religion and gave it an interpretation “according to virtue.” Viroli argues that Machiavelli is continuing a tradition of “republican Christianity,” whose orientation is essentially Thomistic, even Augustinian, since it models political action on the Christian virtue of “charity” rather than

on the "ferocious" defence of liberty characteristic of the ancient pagans. For Beiner, Machiavelli thought that Christianity needed "to be paganized" (Beiner 2011, 19–20). He suggests that the juxtaposition of Numa, founder of Roman religion, and Savonarola in *Discourses* I.11 envisages "the possibility of unifying Italy through the agency of an ecclesiastical principality" (Beiner 2011, 27).

However, in *Discourses* I.12 Machiavelli says that "if such a religion [the Roman one of Numa] had been maintained by the princes of the Christian republic as was ordered by its giver [Jesus], the Christian states and republics would be more united, much happier than they are." The "Christian republic" to which Machiavelli refers is obviously different from the Roman Catholic Church ("Chiesa romana") or "ecclesiastical principality" of Beiner just as it bears no resemblance to Viroli's "republican Christianity." Machiavelli's claim is paradoxical: it suggests that the religion of this early "Christian republic" is more similar to the Roman religion than to the "imperial" religion of the Catholic Church after the so-called Donation of Constantine leads to the development of Christian political theology. Another interpreter explains this obscure passage as follows: "the princes of the Christian republic should have maintained the religion that was given it by its 'giver' [viz. Jesus]: a religion that is as Christian as it is similar to the pagan religion given to Rome by Numa."¹³ This explanation moves in the right direction, as long as one adds that the only discourse available to Machiavelli in which there is a possible coincidence of Jesus with Numa is precisely that of the *prisca theologia* introduced by Plethon in Florence and developed by Ficino and others, where Jesus figures as one of many "ancient theologians." Machiavelli seems to be indicating that only this alternative theory of ancient religion should be used to reinterpret the meaning of Jesus's gospel for politics in a direction opposed to the one of the church fathers.

Gemistos Plethon arrived in Italy as part of the Byzantine delegation sent to the Ferrara-Florence Council of 1438–39 to argue for the unification of the Catholic and the Orthodox Churches in order to resist the advance of Mehmet II and launch a crusade against the Turks.¹⁴ In a break from the proceedings of the council, he accepted an invitation from Cosimo de' Medici to give one or more lectures on Plato in Florence. Plethon's entrance to Florence was welcomed by none other than Leonardo Bruni, then chancellor of the republic and translator of Aristotle's *Politics* as well as of Plato's *Letters*. Scholars do not know the content of Plethon's lectures in Florence, nor what may have caught Cosimo's attention about these lectures. What is known is that Ficino, many years later, in his preface to

the translation of Plotinus dedicated to Lorenzo il Magnifico, famously said that Cosimo assigned him the project of translating the Chaldaic Oracles as well as all of Plato's works into Latin because he was inspired by Plethon's philosophy.¹⁵ Be that as it may, Ficino and Pico did engage with Plethon's project to revive an ancient theology, or *prisca theologia*, whose founder was said to be Zoroaster and whose descendants, among the Greeks, were Solon, Pythagoras, and Plato; among the Jews, Moses and Jesus; and among the Romans, Numa.¹⁶

While in Italy, Plethon also composed a small treatise on the difference between Plato and Aristotle (*De Differentiis*) intended to reorient Latin philosophy away from its Aristotelianism and toward Platonism.¹⁷ Ficino understood his own project to be the recovery of Platonism and neo-Platonism in order to reformulate Christian theology in a non-Scholastic fashion and in that way also counteract the hegemony exerted by the great Aristotelian commentators, Alexander of Aphrodisias and Averroes, in the Paduan schools.¹⁸ Despite their doctrinal differences, Plethon and Ficino were both eager to formulate a new theology that could bridge the Greek cosmological principle of the eternity of the world (perhaps best presented by the above Aristotelian commentators) with the monotheistic conception of a providential and creative God, more compatible with Plato and with Christianity, but which would avoid the Aristotelian political monotheism characteristic of Eusebian political theology as well as the neo-Aristotelian understanding of the superiority of the church over the state found in Thomistic philosophy.¹⁹

Additionally, the reception of Plethon's Platonism in Florence could have spurred an encounter and a confrontation between two distinct conceptions of divine providence, a Platonic and a Christian one.²⁰ Whereas in the latter, worldly political power is meant to function as the sword of the church's spiritual authority (more so with the rise of papal theocracy in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries), in Plethon's Platonic theology the earthly representatives of the one eternal God (Zeus) are philosopher-legislators who receive their ideas or enlightenment through the divine intellect, or *nous* (represented in Plethon's civil theology by Poseidon, an equivalent of God's "second person" or Son), and translate these ideas into politics by means of the creation of a civil religion and of a constitutional regime. On this account, divine providence is manifested through the kind of political legislation put forward by the advocates of ancient theology, ranging from Zoroaster through Moses to Lycurgus, Numa, and Plato himself.

If Plethon suggested anything of this to Cosimo in his lectures, then he was offering him the keys to an alternative political theology whose

arcana imperii would no longer be administered by Christian priests but by Platonic philosophers (to be trained in that nebulous "Platonic Academy" that Lorenzo de' Medici's "Golden Age" is said to have fostered, and that was said to have continued in the Orti Oricellari during Machiavelli's active period in politics).²¹ It is not difficult to imagine why such an anti-ecclesiastical theocratic ideal could have appealed to Cosimo de' Medici, especially in light of developments that he could not foresee but of which he did perhaps dream, namely, the conquest of Peter's throne by members of his "fatal" family during Machiavelli's lifetime.

IV. THE TWO FACES OF ROMAN RELIGION: NUMA AS ANCIENT THEOLOGIAN

For Machiavelli the Roman civil religion provided an instruction concerning the pursuit of public happiness: "the religion introduced by Numa was among the *first causes of the happiness of that city*. For it caused good orders; good orders make good fortune; and from good fortune arose the happy successes of enterprises. As the observance of the divine cult is the cause of the greatness of republics, so disdain for it is the cause of their ruin. For where the fear of God fails, it must either that the kingdom comes to ruin or that it is sustained by the fear of a prince, which supplies the defects of religion" (*Discourses* 1.11). This passage states clearly that the corruption of republican freedom comes from not attending to the kind of civil religion introduced by Numa in Rome. Additionally, it posits a causal chain leading from Numa's civil religion to constitutionalism ("good orders") to worldly military success ("greatness") such that the "fear of God" underpins a republican political life, whereas its decay leads to a monarchic regime.

But Machiavelli's Numa is neither Augustine's nor Cicero's Numa.²² For Augustine, Numa provided Romans with a "civil theology" that lacks the seriousness of the "natural theology" of the pagan philosophers (especially the Platonists) and is ultimately merely a jumble of useless superstitions because none of these occasional gods is capable of granting "eternal life" to those who believe in them.²³ Like Cicero before him and Machiavelli after him, Augustine was also aware of the possibility that these superstitions were "noble lies" used by the few to dominate the many.²⁴ But just this fact indicates that Machiavelli would not have built his republican civil religion on such weak foundations. If such a "civil theology" had already been overwhelmed by Christianity, then why would Machiavelli bother to recover it?

In reality, for Machiavelli Numa's religion can itself receive two different interpretations. As misused by the Roman nobility and priesthood to keep in check the power of the Roman people, Numa's religion is a "noble lie" in the sense of the lies or superstitions manipulated by elites. But this is not the original and deeper meaning that Machiavelli reads into Numa's religion, which, after all, he claims to have made possible the constitution of an armed people (not just an armed nobility, as was the case with Romulus) and which was therefore the reason why Numa was more important than Romulus for the development of the Roman republic (*Discourses* 1.11).²⁵ On this other interpretation of Numa, his "noble lies" acquire an entirely different meaning: Platonic rather than Epicurean. Whereas according to the Epicurean perspective, the "noble lies" are simply indicators of the untrue, superstitious nature of all religion, from the Platonic perspective, religion is an "imitation" of philosophy, a way in which philosophical insights can become accessible to the many who are not yet philosophically educated. Machiavelli's Numa is a figure that is interpreted as a founder of a republican civil religion because he is identified as an exponent of the ancient, philosophical conception of *nomoi*, or what Varro calls "natural theology," rather than an exponent of what Varro calls "civil theology." This was, at least, the position adopted by Plutarch, who placed Numa together with other ancient theologians like "Zaleucus, Minos, Zoroaster and Lycurgus, who piloted kingdoms and formulated constitutions."²⁶

Such an interpretation of pagan religion was recovered by Marsilius of Padua in the *Defensor pacis*: "the various philosophers who invented those religions or legislations [*nomoi*] may not have perceived or believed in the resurrection of men and the life that is called eternal, they nevertheless developed and encouraged the fiction of its existence . . . in order to induce in men a reverence and a fear of God and a desire to avoid the vices and cultivate the virtues."²⁷ By placing on a continuous spectrum Muhammad with Zarathustra ("the Persian"), Moses with Pythagoras, Jesus with Plato, Marsilius's treatment of the "religion" of the philosopher-legislators is unmistakably taking up a signature motif of the "ancient theology." Numa was just another link in the chain leading from Zarathustra to Plato.

In chapter 6 of *The Prince* Machiavelli associates the way of proceeding of ancient theologians like Numa with Moses, who was also dealing with an enslaved people still under the effect of monarchic rule and not yet constituted into an armed republic. In the *Discourses on Livy* he generalizes this way of proceeding to all founders of republics who needed to claim to have spoken to God: "And truly there was never any orderer

of extraordinary laws for a people who did not have recourse to God, because otherwise they would not have been accepted. For a prudent individual knows many goods that do not have in themselves evident reasons with which one can persuade others" (*Discourses* 1.11). These passages are often read as containing a veiled critique of Moses, as if linking Moses to Numa's conversation with nymphs or Savonarola's conversations with God was intended to demean the Mosaic revelation.²⁸ However, if Numa is understood as belonging to the tradition of ancient theology, another reading is possible. Numa then appears much closer to Moses than the Christian understanding of the opposition between paganism and monotheism allows for, in the sense that Numa's legislation comes from wisdom and hence is philosophical and "Platonic."²⁹

The real question is whether Machiavelli interprets revealed religion (Moses's *shari'a*) from the perspective of "civil religion" (Numa's *nomoi*) or, vice versa, whether he reconstructs the concept of civil religion (Numa) from the perspective of prophetology (Moses).³⁰ My hypothesis is that Machiavelli adopts both strategies. When he seeks to criticize Christianity and bring forward the alternative idea of civil religion (viz. "ancient theology"), he emphasizes the continuity between ancient philosophical legislators like Lycurgus and Numa and prophetic legislators like Moses, Jesus, or Muhammad. When he is intent on arguing for the kind of civil religion that is most adequate for a modern *republican* political life, he exploits the distinction between Moses's prophetic and Numa's philosophic religion, as I show below.

What is gained by understanding Numa as an ancient theologian in continuity with a prophet like Moses? In the first place, it explains how religion is to be connected to the art of war and thus sheds light on how to understand Machiavelli's talk of armed and disarmed "prophets," as well as armed and disarmed "heaven." The first to have undertaken this enterprise in relation to revealed religion seems to have been al-Farabi. For reasons related to the self-understanding of the Islamic *umma*, Arabic *falasifa* turned to finding a link between Muhammad's revelations and the "ancient theology" in order to understand how best to conjugate the "arts of peace" and the "arts of war."³¹ Hence, much in anticipation of Machiavelli's advice that "a prince must have no other object or thought, nor take anything as his art save warfare and its institutions and training" (*The Prince*, chap. 14), al-Farabi argues that the prince needs to cultivate "the craft of war, that is, the faculty that enables him to excel in organizing and leading armies and utilizing war implements and warlike people to conquer the nations and cities that do not submit to doing what will pro-

cure them that happiness for whose acquisition man is made."³² Needless to say, for al-Farabi this happiness is not "spiritual" but "civil": he is talking about public happiness not "eternal" happiness. The problem of war and peace accounts for the basic gesture of al-Farabi's prophetology, which is to treat divine revelation as a topic of political science rather than theology. Not differently, as Najemy's reading of *Discourses* 1.13–14 shows, for Machiavelli the crucial skill was that of "interpreting" religion "according to necessity": those who interpret religion "prudently" must be both military commanders and students of philosophy, as required by al-Farabi but also as exemplified by Cicero's picture of Scipio Africanus in his Platonic dialogues.³³

For al-Farabi, revealed religion is a form of rhetorical instruction designed to establish a political way of life among the many: "the methods of persuasion and imaginative representation are employed in the instruction of the vulgar and the multitude" (Alfarabi 2001, i, 37, 5–10). Similarly, Machiavelli explicitly speaks of "wise men" and those who are "more prudent and more knowing of natural things" as being individuals who respect religion and use the "credulousness" or "superstition" of the many in respect to the belief in miracles only in order to lead them to rational political ends that they may not have otherwise followed (*Discourses* 1.12). This conception of religion as an education into political or civil life is based on what al-Farabi calls "the superior science," which he says "existed anciently among the Chaldeans . . . subsequently reaching the people of Egypt, from there transmitted to the Greeks, where it remained until it was transmitted to the Syrians and then to the Arabs" (Alfarabi 2001, i, 38, 15). Unequivocally, al-Farabi here refers to what the Renaissance would call "ancient theology" and emphasizes its connection to Platonic political philosophy by saying that, in this tradition, the use of the theoretical and deliberative sciences is ultimately not for the benefit of the philosopher, but "for the benefit of others."³⁴ In other words, for the Arabic *falasifā* a "highest wisdom" (or "theology") that is not employed politically (viz. prophetologically) to establish a constitution that allows all people to pursue the most perfect form of earthly happiness is merely sophistry.

Lastly, this conception of prophetology undermines the priority of the church over the state. Al-Farabi argues that the legitimate content of revealed law is to be addressed through political science because "religion sets their images [of philosophical ideas] by means of similitudes of them taken from corporeal principles and *imitates them by their likenesses among political offices. It imitates the divine acts by means of the functions of political offices*" (Alfarabi 2001, i, 41, 1–5, emphasis mine).³⁵ In

other words, *imitatio Dei* is only possible through actions that express the political nature of human beings. As Maimonides would later establish, the humanly knowable divine attributes are all ethicopolitical in character. From this follows directly the claim that to live politically or as free citizens is the same as to lead a religious life. If, as al-Farabi, Maimonides, and Marsilius seem to argue, the point of revealed law is to establish a true polity whose goal is the earthly happiness of the human species through the cultivation of its higher faculties, if the essence of divine revelation is religion in the philosophical sense of ancient theology, then it follows that the ideal or divine polity will not feature a church, or a hierocracy, as superior and separate from the state composed by the laity, as called for in the Augustinian and Thomist models. This conclusion is in harmony with Machiavelli's stated goal of undoing the deleterious political effects of the Roman Catholic Church in Italy.³⁶

V. FROM THE ART OF WAR TO REPUBLICAN CONSTITUTIONALISM: ARMED PROPHETS AND MESSIANIC REDEEMERS

For Machiavelli, a civil religion has to articulate the relation between "good laws and good arms" that make up "the principal foundations that all states must have" (*The Prince* 12). In the *Discourses*, he argues that "where there is religion, arms can easily be introduced, and where there are arms and not religion, the latter can be introduced only with difficulty" (*Discourses* 1.11). Thus, if it is true that for Machiavelli "the business of founding states reposes on the more basic business of founding religions"³⁷ this is so only for a civil religion that contains a teaching on how to bind together the art of war with constitutionalism and its "art of peace."³⁸ There are several reasons why the Roman civil religion may not lead as far down this road as the civil religion of the Hebrew Republic, and this requires Machiavelli to exploit the second strategy that plays on the distinction between ancient *nomoi* (Numa) and revealed *shari'a* (Moses).

If one reads the Bible "sensibly" (*sensatamente*) (*Discourses* 3.30), it is possible to understand the Hebrew Republic established by Moses as an expansionary and military republic based on a civil religion whose constitution establishes a prohibition of monarchy. Both Savonarola and Machiavelli, in their efforts to establish a republican government in Florence, appealed to this Hebrew republican ideal, where God relates to His People not through a personal, human representative (emperor, king, or pope) but through a covenant with an assembled people-in-arms in which the uni-

tary constituent power of the people is divided by the constitution into different governmental powers, each checking the other, as illustrated by the so-called doctrine of the "Three Crowns."³⁹

It is not difficult to see the silhouette of the Mosaic constitution appearing behind Machiavelli's treatment of Numa. Machiavelli says Numa's religion led to "good orders," and soon thereafter he adds: "thus it is the safety of a republic or kingdom to have not one prince who governs prudently while he lives, but one individual who orders it so that it is also maintained when he dies" (*Discourses* 1.12). Machiavelli here distinguishes the prince (king) from the figure of a prophet-legislator who gives a constitutional order. His fundamental point is that civil religion must lead to a constitutional arrangement, otherwise it is not well used. The internal connection between Machiavelli's conception of civil religion and constitutionalism, with the Mosaic constitution as paradigmatic, is also hinted at in *Discourses* 1.10: "Among all men praised, the most praised are those who have been heads and orderers of religions. Next, then, are those who have founded either republics or kingdoms." Since "orderers of religion," as I have shown above, refers to a civil religion that expresses its teaching in a political constitution, Machiavelli's point is not simply that there is a "religious or quasi-religious aspect of belief to every founding"⁴⁰ but that the prophetic giver of a constitution stands higher than the founder of a state (whose species can be either a republic or kingdom) because a free way of life ultimately depends on the constitutional arrangement of state power.⁴¹

Machiavelli argues that the "fear of God" lies at the basis of the Roman conception of the oath, which has a fundamental military sense, and from there stands as a condition of possibility for the respect of laws: "the citizens feared to break an oath much more than the laws, like those who esteemed the power of God more than that of men" (*Discourses* 1.11). In *The Prince* Machiavelli makes the same point by signalling that mercenary arms are precisely characterized by their lack of the "fear of God" (*The Prince* 13). The distinction between oath and law follows from the basic Roman idea of law as what is consented to by the assemblies of an armed people: because the oath is constitutive of such an armed people, it is also the condition of the law. Roman jurisprudence depends on Roman religion, which in turn depends on the Roman constitution. Indeed, Machiavelli conceives of the "fear of God" that lies at the basis of the respect for oaths by distinguishing the "power" of God (*la potenza di Dio*) and the power of human beings: whereas the latter is addressed by *theologia civilis*, the former is an object of *theologia naturalis*. The distinction

between divine and human powers is religious and constitutional at the same time. Using theological language already in use in the thirteenth century, one can say that the power of individual rulers and the authority of their offices is a "constituted" power, whereas the power of God, analogous to the assembly of the people as a whole, is a "constituent" power.⁴²

The concept of divine power as analogous to constituent power seems to go counter to the Epicurean construal of religion.⁴³ Instead, the connection between the "fear of God" (viz. the respect for the constituent power) and the belief in God's omnipotence bears more than a family resemblance to the role of these terms within the Biblical conception of the covenant that sets up the Hebrew Republic. After all, in the Hebrew religion, the "fear of God" is one thing that is not commanded by God at Mt. Sinai: this "fear" stands for God's wish to be worshipped by a *free* people, and this freedom (which is also a freedom from superstition, from idol worshipping) is a fundamental condition of possibility of their pact, that is, of their political constitution, and is constitutive of the Hebrew meaning of divine providence.⁴⁴

As every reader of *The Prince* senses, and recent studies have confirmed, the distinction between an armed people and a disarmed people (i.e., a people that depends on mercenary arms) is one of the fundamental guiding threads of the book, reflecting the critical importance Machiavelli gave to the popular militia during his political career. Given Machiavelli's basic argument that good laws follow from good arms, which in turn follow from good religion, and assuming additionally that civil religions are good to the extent that they underpin constitutional governments, it is no surprise that in chapter 6 of *The Prince* Machiavelli posits an analogous distinction between armed and disarmed prophets. "Machiavelli used Moses not to make fundamentally ironic points about religion to an audience already imbued with anticlericalism but to personify and dramatize his claim that the military and the prophetic can be effectively conjoined."⁴⁵ But the point for Machiavelli is that this conjunction of good religion with good arms depends on the prophet being a giver of extraordinary or constitutional law. The parallelism between armed peoples and armed prophets united by the bond of republican constitutionalism is the fundamental trait of Machiavelli's prophetology: his Moses is the one of "ancient theology," where he functions as the crucial ring joining together the "pagan" series from Zoroaster to Plato with the attempt to give an interpretation of divine revelation in accordance with military virtue found in Arabic and Jewish prophetology.

Such a reading of Moses according to medieval prophetology was

not foreign to Florentine culture in Machiavelli's time. A confirmation of this constitutionalist reading of the armed prophet can be seen in the prophetology of Yohann Alemanno, the most influential Jewish philosopher in Medici Florence and a close associate of Pico. In their studies of Alemanno, Melamed and Lelli show that in the *Laudatio* of the Florentine constitution written for Lorenzo il Magnifico, Alemanno relies on a citation from Averroes's *Commentary on Plato's Republic*: "Hence these names are, as it were, synonymous—i.e. philosopher, king, Lawgiver, and also is *Imam*, since *imam* in Arabic means one who is followed in his actions."⁴⁶ The term *imam* is also a possible translation of the Hebrew *messiah*. Immediately after this Averroistic citation of Plato, Alemanno adds: "Such should be then the interpretation of the verse of the Torah: 'he [the king] shall write for himself a Torah scroll and he shall read therein all the days of his life' [*Deuteronomy* 17:18–19]."⁴⁷ The citation of Averroes's commentary on Plato's *Republic* to elucidate the sense of a passage from *Deuteronomy* that traditionally establishes the model of the "Three Crowns" (Torah, king, Levites) of the Hebrew Republic betrays the fluid relation, in the philosophical culture of Medici Florence, between Arabic prophetology and Mosaic constitutionalism. Lelli suggests that Alemanno interprets Moses "Platonically" as a philosopher-king in order to connect with the favorite self-image of Medicean government. However, and more provocatively, Alemanno's citation of Averroes as an illustration of the constitutional conception of the "Three Crowns" may also have been intended to show that "Moses is portrayed like a tyrant, who did not follow God's orders and was removed from his appointment as a ruler. . . . Could this be referred to the Savonarolian thought, envisaging a prophetic republic of Florence, all the more so when we consider that the Dominican friar's attempt to consecrate the city of Florence to God's power took place exactly in the same period as the composition of Alemanno's *Hay ha-'olamin?*"⁴⁸

Lelli's hypothesis is suggestive because it may help to shed new light on the sense of Machiavelli's adoption of messianic language in chapter 26 of *The Prince*. Several interpreters have identified the new redeemer of Italy in that chapter with a "new Moses";⁴⁹ however, they may have downplayed the tensions between the figures of Moses ("founder") and of the messiah ("redeemer"), both in Judaism and in Christianity. Lelli's reading of Alemanno's subtle transition from Medici principality to Savonarolian republic suggests that Moses by himself may not have been sufficient as a political symbol to bridge the Medici's civil principality and Savonarola's

"Christian" republic and lead to a constitutional solution that would satisfy both parties.

In his late political texts like the *Discursus florentinarum rerum* and the *Minuta di provvisione per la riforma dello stato di Firenze* Machiavelli elaborated a form of constitution that, in its mixture of three classes of citizens, is Platonic in inspiration and could appeal to the Medici papacy while, at the same time, recovering the Savonarolan democratic great council.⁵⁰ Machiavelli's constitutionalism sought to bring together and overcome in a new synthesis the Platonic philosopher-king and the messianic redeemer. Politically, this meant making room in his constitutionalism for a quasi-monarchic moment as well as for a messianic conception of equality: in both cases (king or messiah), it was necessary to move beyond the pure form of a Mosaic constitution. What other figure could symbolize this passage?

In chapters 6 and 26 of *The Prince* Machiavelli thinks of Moses together with other founders like Cyrus and Theseus. The tendency in most interpretations is to "secularize" Machiavelli's intentions by implying that the religious appeal to God (symbolized by Moses) is purely "functional" to the political project of state building (symbolized by Cyrus). Another possibility, however, is to realize that Machiavelli may be trying to give his Mosaic prophethood an orientation that is both Platonic and messianic. Cyrus is a key figure for the Platonic tradition and the so-called "mirror of princes" genre, which Gilbert dated back to Xenophon's *Education of Cyrus*, a text that Machiavelli cites several times, along with its companion piece, *Hiero, or On Tyranny*. At the same time, and this is the reference that is important in this context, Cyrus is praised in the Hebrew Bible (Isaiah 45:1, Ezra 1:1-2) as a *messiah* for having liberated the Jews from their Babylonian exile and for encouraging them to rebuild the Temple of Jerusalem. So, when Machiavelli writes: "let us consider Cyrus . . . if their particular actions and orders are considered they will appear no different from those of Moses, who had so great a teacher" (*The Prince* 6), it is not a question of lowering the status of Moses as much as elevating Cyrus as a bridge between Moses, Plato, and Jesus. Machiavelli is likely to have known that the Persian Cyrus was considered to have been a follower of Zoroaster, and this belief illuminates Machiavelli's list of armed prophets in another light, so that now all of them, with the exception of Romulus (who needed Numa), belong to the pantheon of "ancient theology" and its philosopher-legislators. Thus, a "new" Moses does not mean repeating the Mosaic constitution, but it may refer to a new messiah in analogy with the

figure of Cyrus as interpreted in the Jewish tradition and in the ancient theology.

When, in *Discourses* 3.1, Machiavelli has to give two current examples of "return to beginnings," that is, two illustrations of a constitutional revolution, he cites the seemingly antithetical examples of Cosimo de' Medici and of Saint Francis and Saint Dominic, thereby reinscribing in his republican constitutionalism both a Platonic and a messianic moment. Machiavelli's reference to Cosimo de' Medici in the discussion of "return to beginnings" of *Discourses* 3.1 is not intended to bring back the Platonism articulated by humanists linked to the Medici and the Florentine aristocracy, like Scala and Crinito,⁵¹ which turned on the ideal of a philosopher-king wise enough to "rule over the stars," as much as to orient the Medici towards the "second sailing" of the *Statesman* and the *Laws*, toward a reading of Platonism strongly characterized by adherence to a constitutional organization of the state. This was the Platonism emphasized both by Plethon and by Arabic and Jewish prophetology.⁵² Unlike in Christian theology, the doctrines of "ancient theology" and medieval Arabic and Jewish philosophy taught that if the human species was "political" by nature and the world was in itself eternal, then there was some sense in which the "earthly city" was also "perpetual." This belief is echoed in Machiavelli's teaching of "return to beginnings" (*Discourses* 3.1) according to which "if a republic were so happy that it often had one who with his example might renew the laws, and not only restrain it from running to ruin but pull it back, it would be perpetual" (*Discourses* 3.22).

The idea that the course of time can be "pulled back" in a moment of profound constitutional reform or revolution (a "return to beginnings") that renews political life was a conception of political rebirth illustrated by the myth of Saturn in the *Statesman* and *Laws*. But mediated through the messianic interpretations of Virgil's *Fourth Eclogue*, the idea of a "return to beginnings" also played a role in the kind of *renovatio* of Christianity that both St. Francis and Savonarola attempted to achieve. Both were referred to as "new Moses," and both were engaged in messianic discourses. The new mendicant orders of the Franciscans and Dominicans were widely viewed as having ushered a new age, or *saeculum*, that would bring to an end the Petrine Church, or "ecclesiastical principality," valid only for the age of the dispensation of the "Person of Christ," and inaugurate what Joachim of Fiore called a "Third Age" in accordance to the dispensation of the Third Person or Holy Spirit. In such a dispensation, the meaning of divine revelation would no longer be interpreted and administered solely by the priestly hierarchy but rather would be opened up to the

freedom of interpretation of each, in imitation of the "life of Jesus."⁵³ In this way, Virgil's *Fourth Eclogue* served to bring back the myth of Saturn in the Renaissance and provided the main illustration of the belief in an "ancient religion" that had preceded "our religion" and that would return in due course. And return it did, at least in the mind of those American revolutionaries who "decided to vary Virgil's line from *magnus ordo saeculorum* to *novus ordo saeculorum*" to signal that their republican revolution "was no longer a matter of founding 'Rome anew' but of founding a 'new Rome.'"⁵⁴

VI. CONCLUSION

If this reconstruction of the intricate weaving of motifs drawn from the conception of "ancient theology" and from Arabic and Jewish prophetology in Machiavelli's conception of civil religion is correct, then it would require a thorough-going revision of two widespread beliefs in the current debate on secularization and "postsecularism." On the one hand, the belief according to which the values of modern republicanism (or democratic constitutionalism) can do without a religious foundation is valid only if by religion one means those "spiritual" interpretations of religion that require setting an institutional intermediary (viz. a church or priestly hierarchy) between God and the democratic self-organization of a people through a constitution. However, it is a misleading belief if it denies the foundational role played by a civil religion as reconstructed by Machiavelli through principles drawn from "ancient theology" and from Arabic and Jewish prophetology. On the other hand, the opposite belief according to which modern republicanism or constitutionalism or even democracy are based on "secularized" concepts drawn from Christian theology, or to legal innovations developed within the medieval Christian Church (the so-called papal legal revolution), is equally misleading, while the importance of the messianic idea for the development of political egalitarianism remains valid.

NOTES

1. Sasso already argued that religion in Machiavelli "is no longer a structure of domination . . . but the deep foundation of the life of the state" (Sasso 1993, 553). See also Vasoli 2006, 595, 624.

2. On Machiavelli and civil religion, see Beiner 2011 and Viroli 2014, 2010.
3. Brown 2010 and Rahe 2007.
4. Springborg 1992; Melamed 2003.
5. Syros 2010.
6. For the tradition of “ancient theology” see Walker 1972 and Lelli 2000. On medieval Arabic and Jewish prophethood in general, see Strauss 1997.
7. On Machiavelli’s ironies with respect to priests and the afterlife, see Bottoni 2003 and Norton 1983.
8. I use Mansfield’s translation for *Discourses on Livy* (Machiavelli 1996) and Connell’s translation for *The Prince* (Machiavelli 2005). On Machiavelli’s anticlericalism see Cutinelli-Rendina 1998.
9. On the concept of education in Machiavelli, see Frosini 2013, 532–34.
10. On Plato, see Strauss 1975; on the Torah, also in relation to Machiavelli, see now Hammill 2012, chap. 2 *passim*.
11. On the *anima mundi* explained in the context of “ancient theology” see Ficino 4.1. On the eternity of the world in Machiavelli see Sasso 1987, I.4.
12. Walker 1972: 12. See also Goodenough 1969, Momigliano 1990, and Fraenkel 2012. For the Jewish equivalent of Numenius’s saying, see Josephus, *Contra Apionem* 2.281: “Our earliest imitators were the Greek philosophers, who, though manifestly observing the laws of their own countries, yet in their moral behavior and speculation were Moses’s disciples.”
13. Barbuto 2008, 104.
14. On Plethon’s political and philosophical thought, see Masai 1956, Woodhouse 1986, and Siniosoglou 2011.
15. See now the introduction by Moreno Neri to Plethon 2010 and Blum 2009, chaps. 6–7.
16. Vasoli 1999.
17. For the translation of this text and commentary, see Woodhouse 1986, 192–214. On the debates it gave rise to within Byzantine philosophy, see Karamanolis 2002, and on Plethon’s influence or lack thereof in Italian humanism see Monfasani 1995.
18. Hankins 2003.
19. On Aristotelian political monotheism and Christian political theology, see Peterson 2011.
20. Compare Romandini 2006 with Hankins 2006.
21. On the Orti Oricellari as location, first, of philo-Medicean Platonic political philosophizing and then, *post res perditas*, of Machiavellian political philosophizing, see Barthas 2010.
22. On the various interpretations of Numa in the western tradition, see Silk 2004.
23. Augustine 1984, 6.1, 12; and Augustine 1984, 6.5, 8.8.
24. Cicero 1994, bk. 3 *passim*; and Augustine 1984, 6.2–7.
25. On the “prudent” use of religion, see Najemy 1999 and Vasoli 2006, 602, who insist on the need for the generals to safeguard the essential relation between religion and the art of war against both those who disdain religion as mere superstition as well as from the priestly and noble misuse of religion.
26. Plutarch 1914, 4.7. I owe this reference to Miguel Ángel Granada, who reminded

me that Machiavelli was already reading into Plutarch's *Lives* in 1502 at the time of his encounter with Cesare Borgia.

27. Padua 2005, I,5,II. On the understanding of religion as *nomoi* see Syros 2011. On Marsilius's interpretation of religion and the modern state, see Aznar 2010. On Machiavelli's knowledge of Marsilio, see Toscano 1981 and Aznar 2007.

28. "Machiavelli's subversion of pagan religion reveals itself as a veiled attempt to subvert revealed religion, whether Judaic, Islamic, or Christian" (Fontana 1999, 647).

29. This would seem to be the point of the story, recounted by Livy and reported by Augustine, according to which Numa had written down "the reasons for his religious institutions" that the Senate decided to consign to the flames rather than to make public (*de civ. Dei* 7.34).

30. On the distinction between revealed *shari'a* and philosophic *nomoi* in the Arabic *falasifā* and in Maimonides, see Stroumsa 2009 and Syros 2011.

31. "Islam more than any other world religion made a virtue out of war, but it also regulated it" (Black 2001, 12). "Islam meaning submission to God and 'entry into a covenant of peace'" (*ibid.*, 13).

32. Alfarabi 2001, I.32.5–10.

33. "The crux of Machiavelli's view of Roman religion: complete respect for the ceremonies, prayers, and rituals, not out of cynical concern for appearances, but because that respect was the foundation of obedience to the laws, of *educazione*, of loyal and disciplined armies, in short of *civiltà*; and at the same time skillful interpretation, as necessity requires, of the strictures and demands of religion—the same freedom of interpretation to which he will appeal in his critique of Christianity in *Discourses* 2.2" (Najemy 1999, 675).

34. Alfarabi 2001, I.39.10; and Strauss 1995, 132–33.

35. On these passages in al-Farabi, see now the exchange between Campanini 2011 and Butterworth 2011, although neither author gives due weight to the tradition of "ancient theology" in al-Farabi and this leads them to confusions with respect to the idea of "political theology."

36. For another comparative reading of al-Farabi and Machiavelli, see Steiris 2014. However, Steiris does not place al-Farabi's idea of religion within the tradition of "ancient theology."

37. Beiner 2011, 19.

38. This connection between constitutionalism and art of war is clearly identified in Holmes 2012, 196–97.

39. For a republican reading of the Mosaic constitution, see Trigano 1991; for a discussion of the monarchic readings of the same, see Nelson 2010. On the Hebrew Republic in Machiavelli see Vatter 2013.

40. Tarcov 2014, 202.

41. On this point, and in general on Machiavelli's understanding of constituent power, see Del Lucchese 2014.

42. Oakley 1998 and Holmes 1988.

43. Geuna 2013 shows that the great military importance that Machiavelli gives to the fear of God as basis of the oath is hardly compatible with Epicureanism.

44. On these themes, see Hartman 2006.

45. Geerken 1999, 595. For Machiavelli's several discussions of Moses, and the importance of Moses for Florentine political thought in that period, see Brown 1992b, Lynch 2008, and Hammill 2012. On the much discussed identification of Savonarola with Moses, see Weinstein 2011.
46. The citation is from Lerner's English translation of Averroes 1974. Same idea is found in al-Farabi: "the idea of Imam, Philosopher, and Legislator is a single idea" (Alfarabi 2001, 1.57.10–15).
47. Lelli 2012, 5 (unpublished manuscript), citing from Alamanno, *Hay ha-'olamin*, English translation by A. Melamed in Alemanno 1988, 1–34. I thank the author for sharing with me his manuscript. On all these points, see also Melamed 2012, chap. 10.
48. Lelli 2012, 8.
49. "Machiavelli wrote *The Prince* for a new Moses, not for another Cosimo the Elder" (Viroli 2014, 53). See also Geerken 1999, 592; Granada 2015; Beiner 2011, 23ff; and McCormick 2011.
50. Machiavelli 1989, 114. For the democratic character of Machiavelli's late constitutional projects see now Raimondi 2013.
51. Brown 1992a.
52. On the connections between Plethon and both earlier and later Arabic and Iranian philosophy, see the fascinating article by Mavroudi 2013. On Plethon's and Plato's *Laws* see Webb 1989.
53. On all these motifs, see the indispensable Reeves 1969, Taubes 2009, and now Agamben 2013.
54. Arendt 1990, 212.

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PART II

The Prince *and the Politics of Necessity*

Machiavelli and the Misunderstanding of Princely *Virtù*

QUENTIN SKINNER

I

To understand Machiavelli's conception of *virtù* in *The Prince*, we need to begin by examining his views about the goals that rulers should set themselves. The highest end to which they must aspire is that of doing great things that will bring them honor and praise and eventually lead to glory and fame.¹ Chapter 21 is devoted, as the chapter heading explains, to considering "What a prince should do in order to be thought outstanding,"² and Machiavelli lays it down that "above all else a prince should strive in all his actions to give himself the reputation of being a great man."³ By way of illustration he singles out Ferdinand of Aragon, who is said "to have become, for fame and glory, the first king in Christendom"⁴ in consequence of "having always done and ordered great things."⁵ Machiavelli recurs to the theme in his closing *Exhortatio*, in which he optimistically concludes that there has never been a more propitious time in Italy "for a prudent and *virtuoso* prince to introduce a new form of government that will bring honor to himself and good to the body of his subjects."⁶

No ruler, however, can hope to tread the paths of glory unless he has first succeeded in achieving a more basic and prosaic goal. To cite the formula that echoes through *The Prince*, especially in its central chapters, he must manage *mantenere lo stato*, to maintain his status and standing as a prince, and at the same time to preserve the stability of the *stato*, or state.⁷ As Machiavelli tells us at the beginning of chapter 4, his chief concern is with "the difficulties that princes have in managing to maintain a state when they have newly occupied it,"⁸ and he boasts in chapter 24 that, if his advice is followed, "this will enable a new prince to appear a well-

established one," more firm and secure in his state.⁹ As he explains at the beginning of chapter 15, he is writing for anyone "who wishes to maintain himself as a prince."¹⁰ For Machiavelli the fundamental question is always what rulers should do "in order to conquer and maintain the state."¹¹

The general precepts that Machiavelli goes on to offer are couched in negative terms. Rulers must first of all ensure that they do nothing to incur the hatred of their people.¹² If we ask what policies are likely to engender this reaction, Machiavelli answers that "what above all makes a prince hated is being rapacious and a usurper of the property or womenfolk of his subjects."¹³ His other general precept is that rulers should be no less careful to avoid doing anything that may cause them to become despised.¹⁴ If we ask what behavior is liable to have this effect, Machiavelli responds that "what makes a prince contemptible is if he is held to be changeable, light, effeminate, pusillanimous, irresolute."¹⁵ He adds in his most minatory tones that "a prince must guard himself against such conduct as from a reef, and ensure that all his actions exhibit greatness, spiritedness, weightiness, and strength."¹⁶

The danger that Machiavelli underlines throughout his analysis is that, if you become either hated or despised, you will very soon lose your state and probably your life as well. He draws the moral at considerable length in chapter 19, which is entitled "On how contempt and hatred must be avoided."¹⁷ Here he surveys the fortunes of the Roman emperors between the time of Marcus Aurelius and Maximinus. Maximinus's predecessor Alexander was a good man, but he was held to be effeminate, and so fell into contempt and was assassinated.¹⁸ Alexander's predecessor Caracalla was a man of great talent, but he was so cruel that he became hateful to everyone and was murdered by his own bodyguard.¹⁹ Worst of all, Commodus and Maximinus succeeded in becoming hated as well as despised, and both fell victim to successful conspiracies.²⁰

Besides outlining the goals that rulers must set themselves, Machiavelli has much to say about the means by which these goals can be successfully realized. He concedes that no one can hope to establish and maintain a state without enjoying a considerable measure of luck. Some rulers rise to power entirely by *fortuna*, although in this case Machiavelli believes that "while they become princes with little labour, it is only with great labour that they are able to maintain themselves."²¹ The surest means to acquire and successfully hold on to a state is to rely not on *fortuna* but entirely on your own *virtù* as a prince.²² Machiavelli first formulates this central claim in the course of chapter 6, in which he discusses—in the words of his chapter heading—"New principalities acquired by means of

one's own arms and one's own *virtus*."²³ "What I claim," he declares, "is that in wholly new principalities, where there is a new prince, one finds greater or lesser difficulty in maintaining them according to how great or small is the *virtù* of the person by whom they are acquired."²⁴

Machiavelli mentions two rulers whose conduct is said to bear witness to this truth. One is Hiero of Syracuse, about whom Machiavelli speaks in a tone of unequivocal admiration voiced nowhere else in *The Prince*.²⁵ "From being a private citizen, Hiero rose to become prince of Syracuse, and although he endured much labour in acquiring his state he found little difficulty in maintaining it."²⁶ This was because "he was a man of exceptional *virtù*" who owed nothing to *fortuna* except the opportunity to display his great military and political qualities.²⁷ The other ruler whom Machiavelli singles out is the emperor Septimius Severus, "who was always able to govern happily in spite of the burdens he placed on the people."²⁸ As with Hiero, this was because "in Severus there was so much *virtù*" that his armies remained admiring and satisfied, while the people "were to a large degree stupefied and astonished."²⁹ Machiavelli later corroborates his analysis when he asks in chapter 24 why so many Italian rulers of his own time have lost their states. They claim to have suffered bad luck, but Machiavelli retorts that "they ought not to blame *fortuna*, but rather their own indolence and ineffectiveness."³⁰ The truth is, he concludes, "that those defenses alone are good, certain, and durable which depend on yourself and your own *virtù*."³¹

What are the specific attributes that go to make up this quality of *virtus* or *virtù* in a prince? The Roman moralists, in itemising the features of *virtus generalis*, had pointed to four elements that later came to be known as the "cardinal" virtues: wisdom, justice, courage, and temperance. Of all the classical discussions of these qualities, the most widely cited in Renaissance Italy was Cicero's treatment in book 1 of his *De officiis*, a book that Machiavelli had probably known ever since his father repeatedly borrowed a copy of it in the 1470s.³² Cicero begins with wisdom, the virtue "that most closely relates to human nature."³³ Although he speaks of *sapientia*, it is not the Greek ideal of *sophia* or contemplative wisdom that he values but rather that of *phronesis* or practical wisdom, a term that he translates as *prudencia*.³⁴ He goes so far as to state that "it is contrary to moral duty to withdraw from public life into our studies,"³⁵ and insists that "the whole praise of virtue lies in action" and thus in contributing to the prudent conduct of civil affairs.³⁶

Next Cicero turns to the closely associated virtue of justice. He begins by arguing that the basic requirement of just dealing is that we should ren-

der to each his due while making sure that we do no harm to anyone.³⁷ He then explores two specific implications of his argument. The first is that “the foundation of justice is *fides*, that is, constancy and truth in relation to promises and agreements.”³⁸ This commitment is summarized in the maxim *fides conservanda*, that good faith must always be observed.³⁹ Cicero’s other specific concern is with the character of injustice, whether it arises from doing injury or failing to prevent it. This part of his discussion culminates in the claim that “there are two ways in which injustice may be done, either by force or by fraud.”⁴⁰ Both are said to be “entirely alien to man, fraud because it seems to be acting in the manner of a fox, and force in the manner of a lion.”⁴¹ Such behavior is wholly unworthy of the *vir*, the truly manly man who is at the same time the eponymous possessor of *virtus*.

As well as focusing on justice and injustice, the Roman moralists consider a further range of qualities that later came to be classified as the distinctively “princely” virtues. One such attribute is held to be liberality. Cicero includes a section “on kindness and liberality” immediately after his discussion of justice in book 1 of *De officiis*,⁴² but the fullest and most influential handling of the topic can be found in Seneca’s treatise *De beneficiis*, a work endlessly cited by the early Italian writers of handbooks for princes and magistrates.⁴³ The other leading princely virtue is said to be mercy or compassion, the subject of Seneca’s treatise *De clementia*.⁴⁴ This quality was agreed to be peculiarly an attribute of rulers, since its exercise presupposes the prerogative of setting aside justice in the name of a higher good. As Seneca declares, “there is no one in whom clemency is more appropriate than kings and princes.”⁴⁵

Nothing more strongly reflects Machiavelli’s preoccupation with classical humanism than the fact that, when he turns in the central chapters of *The Prince* to examine the qualities that rulers should cultivate, he concentrates on the same princely virtues.⁴⁶ When he asks at the start of chapter 15 “what should be the methods and conduct of a prince in relation to his subjects or allies,”⁴⁷ he begins by mentioning the attributes of liberality, clemency, and the keeping of good faith.⁴⁸ When he proceeds to interrogate the conduct of rulers in greater detail in his next three chapters, he focuses once again on the list of the princely virtues. Chapter 16 is entitled “On liberality and parsimony,”⁴⁹ chapter 17 is entitled “On cruelty and clemency,”⁵⁰ and chapter 18 opens with a consideration of the Ciceronian ideal of *fides*.⁵¹

Despite this close engagement with the humanist tradition, commentators have generally seen in these chapters a complete repudiation of the

classical ideal of *virtus*. The Roman moralists, seconded by the Christian humanists of the Renaissance, had argued that *virtus* is the name of the qualities that enable rulers to govern honorably and successfully. Machiavelli responds, we are told, by claiming that the mark of a truly *virtuoso* prince is to recognise that a ruler's "first duty" is to "avoid those virtues that endanger the state" and to recognise that "the necessity of preserving the state" requires "that a prince depart from the customary virtues."⁵²

This is not how Machiavelli argues, however, in the case of the princely virtues. Here his chief contention is that rulers must stand ready to depart from what these virtues are generally *held* or *taken* to prescribe. He speaks in chapter 15 about how some rulers are *tenuto*, or held, to be liberal and others miserly, and how some are held to be cruel and others compassionate.⁵³ He speaks again at the start of chapter 16 about what are held to be the requirements of liberality⁵⁴ and at the start of chapter 17 about what are similarly held to be the requirements of mercy.⁵⁵ These remarks are coupled with the observation that, in the corrupt world in which we live, the language of virtue and vice has become subject to so much manipulation that many courses of action nowadays held to be virtuous are in fact instances of vice, while many others condemned as vicious are instances of virtue. The outcome, as he complains in chapter 15, is that many things appear to be virtuous when they are not, and many other things only appear to be vices.⁵⁶

The first of these contentions about the virtues—that they will sometimes have to be avoided in the name of maintaining the state—has been extensively discussed. But the second contention—that some apparent virtues are instances of vice—has rarely been examined, and it seems to me that the relationship between the two arguments has never been properly clarified. My strategy in what follows will accordingly be to focus on Machiavelli's second line of thought. I shall first consider its provenance and then its specific contribution to his broader analysis of the virtues and their place in public life.

II

When Machiavelli complains that some virtues are being made to appear as vices, and some vices as virtues, he is referring to a specific rhetorical technique that had been extensively discussed by the classical and Renaissance theorists of eloquence.⁵⁷ Aristotle in his *Art of Rhetoric* had provided the earliest extant analysis of how the terms we use to describe and appraise moral and immoral behavior can be successfully manipulated.

Due to the fact that, as he argues in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, virtue is always a mean between two opposed vices, such commendable attributes as courage and generosity can sometimes give the appearance of being more like rashness and extravagance.⁵⁸ Developing this observation in book 1 of his *Rhetoric*, he suggests that this makes it possible to denigrate virtuous actions by assigning them the names of neighboring vices and to excuse immoral actions by assigning them the names of neighboring virtues.⁵⁹

Machiavelli would not have been able to read this discussion in the original Greek, but he may nevertheless have had some knowledge of Aristotle's text. George of Trebizond, who lived in Florence in the early 1440s, completed at around that time a Latin translation of the *Rhetoric*,⁶⁰ which was printed in Venice as early as 1478⁶¹ and was later included in an Aldine collection of rhetorical texts in 1523.⁶² If we turn to Aristotle's discussion of rhetorical redescription in book 1, we find that one of his examples is designed to show how virtue can be denigrated. As George of Trebizond translates, we can hope to redescribe and thereby condemn a person "who is *moderatus* or restrained, and who exhibits *mitis animi* or calmness of soul" by claiming "that he is merely *timidus* and *insidiator*, cowardly and a deceiver."⁶³ Aristotle is more interested, however, in showing how it is possible for vices to be excused. We can hope to redescribe and thereby commend someone who is *arrogans* or overbearing as *magnificus* and *honestus*, magnificent and honorable.⁶⁴ We can similarly hope to describe someone who is *ferox* or violent as *fortis* or courageous, and someone who is *prodigus* or extravagant as *liberalis* or generous.⁶⁵

This analysis was subsequently elaborated by the Roman rhetoricians, and especially by Quintilian in his *Institutio oratoria*.⁶⁶ It is striking, however, that Quintilian has nothing to say about denigrating the virtues; he treats rhetorical redescription entirely as a means of excusing reprehensible behavior, especially our own behavior, and he labels the technique *paradiastole*.⁶⁷ When he illustrates the use of the device, he repeats two of the examples already given by Aristotle: violence or recklessness can be redescribed and thereby praised as courage, while extravagance can be redescribed and commended as liberality.⁶⁸ To these examples he adds three others that had already been mentioned in earlier rhetorical handbooks: the slanderous can be excused as frank, the deceitful as worldly-wise, the avaricious as thrifty and scrupulous.⁶⁹

Quintilian's way of thinking about rhetorical redescription was the one that largely prevailed. His analysis was repeated word-for-word by Isidore of Seville in his *Etymologies*, perhaps the most widely used encyclopedia of late antiquity, and repeated yet again by Antonio Mancinelli in

his *Carmen de figuris*, one of the earliest Renaissance treatises on *elocutio*.⁷⁰ Both writers speak of *paradiastole*,⁷¹ and both describe it specifically as a device for excusing the vices, especially our own vices. They also reiterate most of Quintilian's examples: the avaricious can be redescribed and thereby commended as thrifty,⁷² the reckless as courageous,⁷³ the extravagant as liberal,⁷⁴ the deceitful as worldly-wise.⁷⁵

Within the Roman tradition, however, there was a strongly contrasting way of thinking about the manipulation of evaluative terms. Some rhetoricians insisted that, instead of redescribing the vices as virtues, our primary rhetorical aim should be that of exposing and denouncing anyone who attempts to play this rhetorical trick.⁷⁶ This is the strategy recommended in the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, the earliest surviving Roman manual on the complete art of eloquence.⁷⁷ The *Ad Herennium* was widely used as a textbook in the schools of quattrocento Italy,⁷⁸ and it has been shown that Machiavelli not only knew the work well but explicitly drew on its account of political deliberation in *The Prince*.⁷⁹ The discussion of rhetorical redescription in the *Ad Herennium* can be found in the main section on deliberative eloquence in book 3.⁸⁰ If one of your adversaries in a public debate claims to have acted justly, you must try to show that what he is calling justice "was in fact weakness, and a lazy and corrupt form of liberality."⁸¹ If he praises himself for having acted wisely, you must try to expose him for having behaved "with inept and garrulous and offensive cleverness."⁸² If he claims to have acted temperately, you must suggest that his behavior exhibited "a lazy and dissolute form of negligence."⁸³ If he seeks to commend himself as courageous, you must say that his conduct revealed "nothing more than a gladiatorial and heedless form of recklessness."⁸⁴

A similar discussion can be found in the handbook of ca. 20 CE attributed to P. Rutilius Lupus and entitled *De figuris*.⁸⁵ Rutilius already gives the name *paradiastole* to the technique of rhetoric redescription, and appears to be the earliest Roman rhetorician to use the term.⁸⁶ But by contrast with later writers (such as Quintilian) who contend that the device is in play whenever we redescribe our vices as virtues, Rutilius agrees with the author of the *Ad Herennium* that the technique in question is that of exposing and denouncing this rhetorical trick. Unlike the author of the *Ad Herennium*, however, Rutilius lays no claim to originality in making the point. He simply refers us to Hyperides, an Attic orator of the fourth century BCE, who had made a speech in denunciation of Aristophon in which he had declared that (as Rutilius translates) "there is no vice in which you are able to glory by praising it as a virtue."⁸⁷ As Rutilius's translation con-

tinues, "you have no hope of proving that you should be understood as wise rather than crafty, or courageous rather than reckless, or careful in family matters rather than niggardly, or severe rather than ill willed."⁸⁸

By drawing on this tradition of rhetorical argument, Rutilius associates himself at the same time with a number of leading philosophers and historians who had similarly denounced the manipulation of moral terms. The earliest to excoriate the abuse had been Thucydides in the passage from book 3 of his history in which he had explained how *stasis* or civil strife arose in Corcyra.⁸⁹ Again, Machiavelli would not have been able to read this account in Greek, but he may well have had access to Lorenzo Valla's Latin translation, completed in 1452 and widely available in manuscript. Valla's text was first printed in 1483, and again in 1513, the year in which Machiavelli drafted *The Prince*.⁹⁰ As an indication of its possible influence on Machiavelli, it is suggestive that he retells in book 2 of the *Discourses* the story of a later massacre in Corcyra narrated by Thucydides in book 4.⁹¹ Thucydides's earlier discussion in book 3 centers on the moment when the pro-Athenian *demos* first rose in revolt against the oligarchy. Thucydides relates how the factions sought to excuse their vicious behavior by redescribing it in commendatory terms.⁹² As Valla translates, "*temeritas* or recklessness came to be called *fortitudo* or courage, while *indignatio* or aggression was ascribed to *virilitas* or manliness."⁹³ By contrast with the rhetoricians, however, Thucydides is no less interested in denouncing the denigration of virtue. One example he gives is that (in Valla's translation) "*cunctatio honesta* or honourable hesitation came to be regarded as *formido* or cowardice."⁹⁴ He also describes how "*modestia* or modesty of demeanor was considered *ignaviae velamentum*, a means of concealing weakness"⁹⁵ and how "*consultatio* or a willingness to deliberate and calculate was seen as *tergiversatio*, deceitfulness and an evasion of responsibility."⁹⁶

Thucydides's account of the ruinous effects of *stasis* appears to have been in Plato's mind when, in book 8 of *The Republic*, he speaks of the lotus-eaters and their success in corrupting the mind of the young oligarch.⁹⁷ As in the case of Thucydides's text, Machiavelli would not have been able to read this passage in Greek. But he could well have known of it, for Marsilio Ficino's Latin translation of *The Republic* had been printed in Florence as early as 1484.⁹⁸ Plato recounts that one of the means by which the lotus-eaters prevailed was by denigrating the virtues. Repeating an example given by Thucydides, Plato speaks (in Ficino's translation) of how they sought to ridicule *temperantia* or moderation by calling it *ignavia* or weakness,⁹⁹ to which he adds that they spoke with detestation of *modestia*

or modesty and condemned it as *illiberalitas* or a failure of generosity.¹⁰⁰ Plato is more concerned, however, with the lotus-eaters' efforts to excuse the vices. Taking another of Thucydides's examples, he speaks of how they redescribed *impudentia* or recklessness as *fortitudo* or courage,¹⁰¹ adding that they similarly commended *petulantia* or insolence as *ingenua educatio* or good breeding,¹⁰² *licentia* or license as *libertas* or freedom,¹⁰³ and *prodigalitas* or extravagance as *magnificentia* or splendid liberality.¹⁰⁴

By way of rounding off this survey, it is worth noting that a similar disgust was later expressed by several of the Roman historians, notably Sallust, Livy, and Tacitus, with all of whose works Machiavelli was closely acquainted. Sometimes they too speak of the damage that can be done by denigrating the virtues. Livy, for example, again echoing one of Thucydides's examples, tells the story of Fabius Maximus's cavalry commander at the time when Fabius was employing his delaying tactics in the face of Hannibal's march on Rome. Livy records that "Hannibal himself was not more enraged by these prudent measures than was the master of horse,"¹⁰⁵ who insisted that Fabius should be regarded "not as a man of deliberation but as lacking in energy, and not as cautious but as a coward."¹⁰⁶ Like Plato, however, the historians are more concerned with the dangers that arise when vices are excused. Sallust in his *Bellum Catilinae* records a speech of Marcus Cato lamenting that "the squandering of the goods of others is nowadays called liberality, while recklessness in wrongdoing is called courage."¹⁰⁷ Tacitus in similar vein records a speech of Piso's denouncing the emperor Otho. Not only did he deceive the people "by imposing his extravagance under the guise of liberality"¹⁰⁸ but "with false names he called severity what was in fact savagery, and parsimony what was in fact avarice."¹⁰⁹

III

I now turn in the light of this survey to reconsider what Machiavelli is doing in the central chapters of *The Prince*. As I have indicated, he develops two distinct but complementary arguments. First he contends that, if you want as a ruler to maintain your state, you will sometimes need to act in defiance of the virtues. He explains at the start of chapter 15 that "there is so much distance between how one lives and how one ought to live that anyone who gives up doing what is done for what ought to be done will learn the more quickly how to destroy rather than how to preserve himself."¹¹⁰ Summarizing in Chapter 28, he concludes that the truly *virtuoso* ruler must therefore be someone who "knows how to enter on evil behav-

ior when this is required."¹¹¹ To Cicero's objection that this will lower us to the level of the beasts he unrepentantly responds that he is guilty as charged. "For a prince it is necessary to know how to make good use of the beast as well as the man,"¹¹² and "from among the beasts the prince should choose the fox and the lion," thereby acknowledging that guile and violence are among the qualities that rulers must cultivate.¹¹³ They need to recognize that one of their duties is "to learn how not to be good."¹¹⁴

One way of paraphrasing this aspect of Machiavelli's thinking would be to say that, in effect, he redefines the concept of *virtù*.¹¹⁵ He agrees that it is only by exercising the qualities of a truly *virtuoso* ruler that a prince can hope to maintain his state. But he no longer equates the status of being a *virtuoso* with the practice of the moral virtues. A *virtuoso* ruler will be prepared to follow the dictates of the virtues whenever possible, but he will chiefly be distinguished by his skill at judging when it may be more appropriate to ignore them. The term *virtù* thus comes to be used by Machiavelli to denote whatever range of attributes—moral or otherwise—actually enable a prince to maintain his state.

While this argument is undoubtedly of great importance to Machiavelli,¹¹⁶ I am more concerned with the supplementary claim he puts forward when he turns to scrutinize the princely virtues of liberality, clemency, and good faith. Here his contention is not that, if you wish to maintain your state, you may need to act in defiance of what these virtues prescribe. As we have seen, what he argues is that you must stand ready to act in defiance of what, in our corrupt and degenerate world, these virtues are *held* or *taken* to prescribe. But this advice is coupled with the suggestion that, if you cultivate a proper understanding of these virtues, and if you follow what they genuinely require, you will find that they can be of great value in helping you to maintain your state.

It is true that this second line of thought is not pursued with complete consistency. Sometimes Machiavelli classifies the observance of good faith as one of the virtues that a ruler must be willing to set aside,¹¹⁷ and when he discusses the virtue of liberality in chapter 26 he appears at one moment to repudiate not merely what is generally held to count as liberality but also the value of the genuine virtue as a means of maintaining the state. He seems, that is, to counsel any ruler who wishes *mantenere lo stato* to avoid all forms of generosity and to cultivate meanness in their place. To follow this alternative course, he admits, will be to embrace a vice. But meanness, he warns, "is one of the vices that enable a prince to rule."¹¹⁸

This is not, however, the argument that Machiavelli chiefly develops

in chapter 16. Rather he mounts an attack on seeming liberality. He begins by considering the type of conduct that is best suited, as he puts it, to winning a prince “the name of being a liberal man.”¹¹⁹ The kind of ruler who is nowadays *tenuto*, or held, to be liberal¹²⁰ is someone “who will consume all his resources in generous works in order to uphold his reputation for liberality.”¹²¹ But to act in this way, Machiavelli retorts, is not in the least to exhibit the virtue of liberality; rather it is to show yourself unwilling “to give up any quality of extravagance.”¹²² Like Plato, and like Sallust and Tacitus, Machiavelli is pointing out and condemning the corruption of those who seek to excuse extravagance by redescribing it as liberality.¹²³

Next Machiavelli undertakes to demonstrate that those who are generally held to be liberal are far from displaying that quality. To follow his somewhat elusive argument, we first need to recall his two general claims about princely *virtù* and the preservation of the state: that the term *virtù* refers to whatever attributes enable a prince to *mantenere lo stato*, and that the quickest way to lose your state is to become hated or despised. Machiavelli now observes that any ruler who consumes his resources in order to uphold a reputation for liberality will soon fall into poverty, at which point he will become despised and “little esteemed by everyone.”¹²⁴ To avoid this danger “he will find it necessary, if he wishes to preserve the name of being a liberal man, to tax his people excessively.”¹²⁵ But this in turn will cause him to appear rapacious, “which will start to make him hated by his subjects.”¹²⁶ If, in short, a prince insists on acting in such a way as to be regarded as liberal, he will soon become hated and despised and will consequently lose his state. As Machiavelli has laid down, however, the kind of liberality that forms part of the *virtù* of a prince must be a quality that helps him to maintain his state. It follows that rulers who behave in such a way as to gain a reputation for being liberal cannot be exhibiting the genuine virtue of liberality. The moral is that, as Machiavelli has already warned in chapter 15, rulers must be careful not to confuse the princely virtues “with other attributes that may appear to be virtues, but will bring you ruin if you embrace them.”¹²⁷ One such attribute is liberality as it is commonly but corruptly understood.¹²⁸

Machiavelli next turns in chapter 17 to examine the princely virtue of clemency, again focusing on the type of behavior that is nowadays *tenuto*, or held, to be compassionate. He contrasts the conduct of Cesare Borgia, whose settlement of the Romagna gave him a reputation for cruelty, with that of the Florentines when civil strife broke out in Pistoia in 1499. Rather than executing the ringleaders with a view to ending the violence, the Florentines decided “in order to avoid the name of cruelty” that they

would not intervene, in consequence of which “they allowed Pistoia to be destroyed.”¹²⁹ Later in the chapter Machiavelli reflects in similar vein on Scipio Africanus, who was celebrated for his clemency, and offers two instances of Scipio’s allegedly compassionate behavior. One was that, when leading Rome’s armies in Spain, “he gave his soldiers more license than was suited to military discipline.”¹³⁰ The other was that, when one of Scipio’s legates destroyed the city of Locri, which had always been faithful to Rome, “the citizens were never avenged, and nor was the insolence of his legate ever punished.”¹³¹

Machiavelli protests that these are not examples of clemency at all.¹³² “If we consider aright,”¹³³ he insists, we shall see that the response of the Florentines to the uprising in Pistoia was an instance of *troppa pietà*, of mere overindulgence.¹³⁴ It would have been “much more compassionate”¹³⁵ if they had executed the ringleaders of the uprising “rather than allowing the entire population to be harmed.”¹³⁶ Likewise with Scipio, whose supposed clemency was again a sign of *troppa pietà* stemming in his case from a *natura facile*, a lax character.¹³⁷ The compassion for which he has so often been praised was in fact “a harmful quality.”¹³⁸

As in his discussion of liberality, Machiavelli next offers to demonstrate that those who are commonly held to be merciful and compassionate are not in fact displaying those qualities. His argument is once again grounded on his contention that *virtù* is the name of the attributes that enable a ruler to maintain his state. If this is so, then the behavior of the Florentines in Pistoia cannot have been an instance of genuine clemency, because the effect was to destroy a community instead of saving it.¹³⁹ Nor was Scipio’s conduct in Spain genuinely clement, because it had the effect of prompting a mutiny and thereby weakening Rome.¹⁴⁰

One of Machiavelli’s aims in both these chapters is to expose the habit of excusing bad and incompetent behavior by redescribing it with the name of a neighboring virtue. If we now turn to chapter 18, we find him no less interested in the disposition to denigrate good behavior by stigmatizing it with the name of a vice. Machiavelli’s chapter heading promises a discussion of “How princes should keep their word”—*Quomodo fides a principibus sit servanda*.¹⁴¹ Here he alludes to Cicero’s maxim *fides conservanda*, that good faith must always be upheld, a commitment that acquired so much importance in Italian Renaissance thought that *fides* was sometimes treated as a fifth and central cardinal virtue.¹⁴² Machiavelli points to the general acceptance of this way of thinking when he notes that “everyone understands how laudable it is for a prince to maintain faith and live with integrity rather than with deceit.”¹⁴³ The princes

we are invited to admire are “those who base their conduct on loyalty and trustworthiness.”¹⁴⁴

To these pieties Machiavelli responds that they embody a dangerous misunderstanding of *fides* and its requirements. To insist on honoring one’s word while living in a world in which men rarely keep their promises is the merest imprudence. “No prudent ruler can observe good faith, and nor ought he to do so, when such observance will turn against him.”¹⁴⁵ The quality of *fides*, understood as a willingness to keep faith under all circumstances, can only be the name of a seeming virtue. It cannot form part of the *virtù* of a prudent prince, since it will often lead him to lose rather than maintain his state. With this insistence on what the Ciceronian virtue of *prudencia* dictates, Machiavelli reiterates a warning already issued by Livy and much earlier by Thucydides: we must never allow prudent calculations to be redescribed and condemned as cowardice or deceitfulness.

IV

Machiavelli is not unaware that his argument about the misunderstanding of the princely virtues leaves him with a difficulty. It may be true that most people are mistaken about the character of these virtues. But they remain strongly attached to their corrupt beliefs, in consequence of which they regularly condemn prudence as deceitfulness, while praising laxity as compassion and extravagance as liberality. This in turn means that if, like Louis XII of France, you refuse to spend lavishly and ostentatiously, you will not only find yourself accused of failing in liberality but will gain for yourself “the infamy of a miser.”¹⁴⁶ Likewise, if you refuse, like Cesare Borgia, to spare those who threaten your rule, you will not only be denounced for lack of clemency but will face the even greater infamy of being thought cruel and inhumane.¹⁴⁷

Machiavelli responds by waving these anxieties aside. There is every reason to hope that in time your subjects will come to recognise that they have been mistaken about the princely virtues, and will give up their destructive beliefs. This is certainly what happened in the face of “the long-standing parsimony”¹⁴⁸ that enabled Louis XII “to wage so many wars without ever having to impose an extraordinary tax on his subjects.”¹⁴⁹ The people were eventually able to see that the king had in fact been behaving “with liberality toward everyone from whom he took nothing, who were infinite, and with miserliness only toward those to whom he gave nothing, who were few.”¹⁵⁰ Machiavelli accordingly feels able to conclude that “if he is prudent, a prince ought not to worry about being given the

name of a miser, because in course of time he will be regarded more and more as a man of liberality."¹⁵¹

A similar paradox is defended in chapter 17 in relation to the alleged cruelties perpetrated by Cesare Borgia at the outset of his rule in the Romagna. By eliminating factions and punishing the excesses of his subordinates "he was able to restore the Romagna, to unite it and return it to peace and good faith."¹⁵² As before, the moral is said to be that "a prince ought not to worry about incurring the infamy of being called a cruel man" if his behavior is such that harsh methods soon cease to be necessary instead of having to be constantly employed.¹⁵³ He will in time be seen to have acted "with far greater compassion" than if he had failed to crush his rivals and thereby allowed disorders to proliferate.¹⁵⁴

The conclusion at which Machiavelli arrives in his discussion of the princely virtues may thus be said to stand in strong contrast with his views about the other moral virtues. As he always makes clear, he considers such attributes as charity, humanity, and religiousness to be wholly good and virtuous qualities.¹⁵⁵ But he makes it equally clear that, if a ruler wishes to *mantenere lo stato*, he will often be obliged to set them aside. Machiavelli evidently wishes to reassure us, however, that in the case of the princely virtues this dilemma does not arise. Here it is not the observance of these virtues that may cause you to lose your state, but only the observance of what they are corruptly and mistakenly taken to prescribe. Properly understood, the princely virtues are among the qualities that go to make up the *virtù* of a truly *virtuoso* prince, thereby helping him to fulfil his primary duty of maintaining the state in a condition of security and peace.



NOTES

I am extremely grateful to Jérémie Barthas, Susan James, William Klein, Peter Stacey, and James Tully, all of whom gave me essential and extensive help.

1. On the importance of doing great things (*gran cose*) see Niccolò Machiavelli, *Il principe*, ed. Giorgio Inglese (Turin: Einaudi, 1995), 16.7, 106; 16.14, 107; 18.1, 115.

2. *Ibid.* 21.1, 146: "Quod principem deceat ut egregius habeatur."

3. *Ibid.* 21.10, 149: "soprattutto uno principe si debbe ingegnare dare di sé in ogni sua azione fama di uomo grande."

4. *Ibid.* 21.2, 147: "è diventato per fama e per gloria el primo re de' cristiani." It might be thought that Machiavelli is here recording what was generally believed, but Erica Benner, "Machiavelli's Ironies: The Language of Praise and Blame in *The Prince*,"

Social Research 81 (2014): 76 finds “suspiciously hyperbolic praise” in the passage and concludes that Machiavelli must be speaking ironically.

5. *Ibid.* 21.7, 148: “sempre ha fatte et ordite cose grandi.”

6. *Ibid.* 28.1, 168: “a uno prudente e virtuoso d’introdurvi forma che facessi onore a lui e bene alla università delli uomini di quella.”

7. For a salutary emphasis on the fact that Machiavelli speaks not merely about how to maintain one’s status as a prince, but also about the apparatus of the state, see Peter Stacey, “Free and Unfree States in Machiavelli’s Political Philosophy,” in *Freedom and the Construction of Europe*, vol. 1, *Religious Freedom and Civil Liberty*, ed. Quentin Skinner and Martin van Gelderen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). Note that, although Machiavelli, *Il principe* 20.30, 145 numbers Caterina Sforza as a *principe* of his time, he generally uses the male pronoun when referring to *principi*, and in this I follow him.

8. Machiavelli, *Il principe* (1995) 4.1, 24: “le difficoltà le quali s’hanno a tenere uno stato occupato di nuovo.”

9. *Ibid.* 24.1, 159: “fanno parere antico uno principe nuovo.”

10. *Ibid.* 15.6, 103: “volendosi uno principe mantenere.”

11. See *ibid.* 18.18, 119: “per . . . vincere e mantenere lo stato.” See also *ibid.* 19.37, 129 on how to “mantenere lo stato.”

12. On the importance of avoiding *odio* see *ibid.* 7.45, 53; 19.18, 124; 19.24, 126.

13. *Ibid.* 19.2, 120: “Odioso soprattutto lo fa, . . . essere rapace et usurpatore della roba e delle donne de’ sudditi.”

14. On the dangers of being *contenendo* see *ibid.* 14.4, 98; 16.11, 107; 23.3, 156.

15. *Ibid.* 19.4, 120: “Contenendo lo fa essere tenuto vario, leggieri, effeminato, pusillanime, irresolutó.”

16. *Ibid.* 19.4, 120–21: “da che uno principe si debbe guardare come da uno scoglio, e ingegnarsi che nelle azioni sue si riconosca grandezza, animosità, gravità, fortezza.”

17. *Ibid.* 19, 120: “De contemptu et odio fugiendo.”

18. *Ibid.* 19.39, 129.

19. *Ibid.* 19.50–53, 132–33.

20. *Ibid.* 19.54–60, 134–35.

21. *Ibid.* 7.1, 38: “con poca fatica diventono, ma con assai si mantengono.”

22. Note that, although in modern Italian the word is usually spelled thus, it appears in *Il principe* (1995) as *virtú*, and in quoting I accordingly follow this usage.

23. Machiavelli, *Il principe* (1995), chap. 6, 32: “De principatibus novis qui armis propriis et virtute acquiruntur.”

24. *Ibid.* 6.4, 32–33: “Dico adunque che ne’ principati tutti nuovi, dove sia uno nuovo principe, si truova a mantenergli piú o meno difficoltà secondo che piú o meno è virtuoso colui che gli acquista.”

25. Benner, “Machiavelli’s Ironies,” 61–84, 79–83 again detects irony: Machiavelli promises to cite great examples, but the prince he most admires was obscure. See also Erica Benner, *Machiavelli’s Prince: A New Reading* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 84–87.

26. Machiavelli, *Il principe* (1995) 6.27 and 6.29, 38: “Costui di privató diventò principe di Siracusa . . . lui durò assai fatica in acquistare e poca in mantenere.”

27. Ibid. 6.28, 38: "E fu di tanta virtù."
28. Ibid. 19.41, 130: "ancora che e' populi fussino da lui gravati."
29. Ibid.: "in Severo fu tanta virtù che . . . questi [populi] rimanevano quodammodo stupidi e attoniti."
30. Ibid. 24.8, 160: "non accusino la fortuna, ma la ignavia loro."
31. Ibid. 24.10, 161: "quelle difese solamente sono buone, sono certe, sono durabili, che dependono da te proprio e da la virtù tua."
32. On Machiavelli's father's classical reading see Bernardo Machiavelli, *Libro di ricordi*, ed. Cesare Olschki (Florence: Le Monnier, 1954), 11, 31, 35, 58, 88, 123, 138.
33. Cicero, *De officiis*, ed. and trans. Walter Miller (London: William Heinemann, 1913), 1.6.18, 18: "maxime naturam attingit humanam."
34. Ibid. 1.5.15, 16.
35. Ibid. 1.6.19, 20: "studio a rebus gerendis abduci contra officium est."
36. Ibid.: "Virtutis enim laus omnis in actione consistit."
37. Ibid. 1.5.15, 16; 1.7.20, 22.
38. Ibid. 1.7.23, 24: "Fundamentum autem est iustitiae fides, id est dictorum conventorumque constantia et veritas." On *fides publica* in Roman legal thought see Marc De Wilde, "Fides publica in Ancient Rome and Its Reception by Grotius and Locke," *Legal History Review* 79 (2011): 455–87.
39. Cicero, *De officiis* 1.13.39, 42. The only exception is when the keeping of a promise would do more harm than good. See Cicero, *De officiis* 1.10.31, 30–34. But if this exception were to be given sufficient latitude, Cicero's doctrine might begin to appear close to Machiavelli's.
40. Ibid. 1.13.41, 44: "Cum autem duobus modis, id est vi aut fraude, fiat iniuria."
41. Ibid.: "fraus quasi vulpeculae, vis leonis videtur; utrumque homine alienissimum."
42. See the section "De beneficentia ac de liberalitate" in *ibid.*, 1.14.42 to 1.18.60, 46–62.
43. See Seneca, "De beneficiis," in *Moral Essays*, trans. and ed. John W. Basore, vol. 3 (London: Harvard University Press, 1935), especially the opening encomium to *liberalitas*, 1.4.2–3, 18. For the use of Seneca's text in Italy from as early as the thirteenth century see Peter Stacey, *Roman Monarchy and the Renaissance Prince* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 100–104.
44. Seneca, "De clementia," in *Moral Essays*, ed. and trans. John W. Basore, vol. 1 (London: William Heinemann, 1928), 356–446.
45. Ibid. 1.3.3, 364: "Nullum tamen clementia ex omnibus magis quam regem aut principem decet." For an analysis of Seneca's treatise see Stacey, *Roman Monarchy*, 30–72.
46. For an analysis of Machiavelli's vocabulary in these chapters see John M. Najemy, "Language and *The Prince*," in *Niccolò Machiavelli's "The Prince": New Interdisciplinary Essays*, ed. Martin Coyle (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 95–103.
47. Machiavelli, *Il principe* (1995) 15.1, 102: "quali debbino essere e' modi e governi di uno principe o co' sudditi o con li amici." For a commentary on these chapters see Benner, *Machiavelli's Prince: A New Reading*, 179–224. Benner refers to Machiavelli's

rhetorical strategies, but without mentioning the figure of *paradiastole*, on which I concentrate in what follows.

48. See Machiavelli, *Il principe* (1995) 15.8–9, 103 on being *liberale* and *donatore*; *piatoso*; and *fedele*.

49. *Ibid.* 16, 104: “De liberalitate et parsimonia.”

50. See *ibid.* 17, 108, which reads “De crudelitate et pietate.” But cf. Niccolò Machiavelli, *Il principe* (Rome: n.p., 1532a) (the *editio princeps*), in which the chapter headings are translated into Italian, which reads (fol. 22r) “Della Crudeltà, et Clemenza.”

51. Machiavelli, *Il principe* (1995) 18.1–11, 115–17.

52. Here I am quoting Philip Bobbitt, *The Garments of Court and Palace: Machiavelli and the World That He Made* (New York: Atlantic Books, 2013), 35, 41, a particularly robust statement of the case.

53. Machiavelli, *Il principe* (1995) 15.8, 103.

54. *Ibid.* 16.1, 104.

55. *Ibid.* 17.1, 108.

56. *Ibid.* 15.12, 104.

57. On the technique involved see Quentin Skinner, “Paradiastole: Redescribing the Vices as Virtues,” in *Renaissance Figures of Speech*, ed. Sylvia Adamson, Gavin Alexander, and Katrin Ettenhuber (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 147–63. On Machiavelli and humanist rhetorical culture see Marco Geuna, “Skinner, Pre-Humanist Rhetorical Culture and Machiavelli,” in *Rethinking the Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, ed. Annabel Brett and James Tully (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 50–73.

58. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co., 1985), 50.

59. Aristotle, *The “Art” of Rhetoric*, ed. and trans. J. H. Freese (London: William Heinemann, 1926), 1.9.28–9, 96–98.

60. John Monfasani, *George of Trebizond: A Biography and a Study of His Rhetoric and Logic* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 1976), 43–45, 55.

61. Lawrence D. Green and James J. Murphy, *Renaissance Rhetoric Short-Title Catalogue, 1460–1700*, 2nd ed. (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2006), 34.

62. This is the edition from which I quote.

63. Aristotle, “In Tres Rhetoricorum Aristotelis Libros ad Theodecten,” in *Rhetoricorum libri quinque*, trans. George of Trebizond (Venice: n.p., 1523), fol. 114v: “ut si moderatum, ac mitioris animi timidum & insidiatorem.”

64. *Ibid.*: “arrogantem, magnificum atque honestum.”

65. *Ibid.*: “ferocem fortem esse, prodigum liberalem.”

66. Quintilian in turn exercised an overwhelming influence on the Italian Renaissance study of rhetoric. See Stacey, *Roman Monarchy*, 212–16.

67. Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, trans. and ed. Donald A. Russell, 5 vols. (London: Harvard University Press, 2001), 9.3.65, 4:138.

68. *Ibid.* 3.7.25, 2:114: “pro temerario fortem, prodigo liberalem.” See also *ibid.* 8.6.36, 3:444: “pro temeritate virtus aut pro luxuria liberalitas.”

69. These examples can already be found in the *De figuris* of Rutilius Lupus

(ca. 20 CE). See Publius Rutilius Lupus, *De figuris sententiarum et elocutionis*, ed. Edward Brooks (Leiden: n.p., 1970), 8. Quintilian repeats Rutilius's first example at 5.13.26, 2:480 (maledicus/liberus); his second at 9.3.65, 4:138 (astutus/sapiens); his third at 4.2.77, 2:256 (avaritia/parsimonia), again at 5.13.26, 2:480 (sordidus/parcus), and again at 9.3.65, 4:138 (inliberalis/diligens).

70. On Mancinelli see Quentin Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 151–52; Stacey, *Roman Monarchy*, 216–17.

71. Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies: Book II: Rhetoric*, trans. and ed. Peter K. Marshall (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1983), 81; Antonio Mancinelli, *Carmen de figuris* (Venice: n.p., 1493), Sig. H, 1r.

72. See Isidore, *Etymologies*, 81 on inliberalis/diligens.

73. See *ibid.* on inconsideratus/fortis and Mancinelli, *Carmen de figuris*, Sig. H, 1r on confidens/fortis.

74. See Mancinelli, *Carmen de figuris*, Sig. H, 1r on prodigus/liberalis.

75. See Isidore, *Etymologies*, 81 and Mancinelli, *Carmen de figuris*, Sig. H, 1r on astutus/sapiens.

76. Richard Tuck, "Hobbes's Moral Philosophy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes*, ed. Tom Sorell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 203–4 excellently draws the distinction, but seems to me to place Quintilian and his followers on the wrong side of it.

77. Harry Caplan, trans. and ed., *Rhetorica ad Herennium* (London: Heinemann, 1954), vii dates it to ca. 80 BCE.

78. On its widespread use and influence see Paul F. Grendler, *Schooling in Renaissance Italy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 212–15. On its use specifically in the schools of quattrocento Florence see Robert Black, *Humanism and Education in Medieval and Renaissance Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 428–34.

79. See Virginia Cox, "Machiavelli and the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*: Deliberative Rhetoric in *The Prince*," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 28 (1997): 1109–41. On deliberative rhetoric in *The Prince* see also Virginia Cox, "Rhetoric and Ethics in Machiavelli," in *The Cambridge Companion to Machiavelli*, ed. John Najemy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 173–89. On the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* and the organisation of *The Prince* see Maurizio Viroli, *Machiavelli* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 75–97.

80. For discussions of this passage see Cox, "Machiavelli and the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*," 1131–32; Skinner, "Paradiastole: Redescribing the Vices as Virtues," 150–51.

81. Caplan, *Rhetorica ad Herennium* 3.3.6, 166: "demonstrabimus ignaviam esse et inertiam ac pravam liberalitatem."

82. *Ibid.*: "ineptam et garrulam et odiosam scientiam esse dicemus."

83. *Ibid.*: "inertiam et dissolutam neglegentiam esse dicemus."

84. *Ibid.*, 168: "gladiatoriam et inconsideratam . . . temeritatem."

85. For discussions of this source see Tuck, "Hobbes's Moral Philosophy," 203–4; Skinner, "Paradiastole: Redescribing the Vices as Virtues," 150–51.

86. Rutilius Lupus, *De figuris sententiarum et elocutionis*, 8.

87. *Ibid.*, quoting Hyperides, "Fragment of a Speech against Aristophon," in *Minor Attic Orators*, trans. and ed. K. J. Maidment and J. O. Burt, vol. 2 (London: Harvard University Press, 1944), 575: "Nullum est enim vitium, quo ut virtutis laude gloriari possis."

88. Rutilius Lupus, *De figuris sententiarum et elocutionis*, 8: "Non enim probas te pro astute sapientem intelligenti, pro confidente fortem, pro inliberali diligentem rei familiaris, pro malivolo severum." As we have seen (see note 69, this chapter), three of these examples were taken up by Quintilian, although with the contrasting intention of recommending that we use the technique to excuse our own vices.

89. Thucydides, *The War of the Peloponnesians and the Athenians*, trans. and ed. Jeremy Mynott (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 3.70–83, 206–14.

90. See Mortimer Chambers, *Translation of Thucydides in Vat. Lat. 1801* (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 2008), 11–14. Chambers notes that the work was reprinted again in 1528 and that Stephanus produced an edition of the Greek text accompanied by Valla's translation in 1564. It is from this version that I quote. On Machiavelli's possible access to Valla's translation see Luciano Canfora, "Tucidide e Machiavelli," *Rinascimento* 37 (1997): 31–32.

91. See Thucydides, *War of the Peloponnesians and the Athenians* 4.46–8, 263–4 and cf. Niccolò Machiavelli, *Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Tito Livio*, ed. Corrado Vivanti (Turin: Einaudi, 2000), 2.2, 140–41.

92. Canfora, "Tucidide e Machiavelli"; Marcello Simonetta, "Machiavelli lettore di Tucidide," *Esperienze Letterarie* 22 (1997): 53–68; and Erica Benner, *Machiavelli's Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 88–97 all examine Machiavelli's apparent debt to Thucydides, although without considering this particular passage. But for a valuable discussion of it see William E. Klein, "Machiavelli, Thucydides, and the Anglo-American Tradition," in *Seeking Real Truths: Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Machiavelli*, ed. Patricia Vilches and Gerald Seaman (Boston: Brill, 2007), 396–400.

93. Thucydides, *De bello Peloponnesiaco libri octo, lidem Latine ex interpretatione Lorenzo Valla, recognita Henricus Stephanus* (Geneva: n.p., 1564), 3.110, 77: "Temeritas enim fortitudo . . . vocabatur . . . indignatio virilitati adscribebatur."

94. *Ibid.*: "considerata cunctatio honesta formido."

95. *Ibid.*: "considerata . . . modestia, ignaviae velamentum." As we have seen, this example was subsequently echoed by Aristotle. Writing as a rhetorician, however, Aristotle's advice (later repeated by Quintilian) is not that we should expose the trick but make use of it.

96. *Ibid.*: "tuto consultare . . . tergiversatio erat." See E. B. Fryde, *Humanism and Renaissance Historiography* (London: The Hambledon Press, 1983), 97–98 and n. for the fact that Valla underlines the significance of these examples for his own times. On the use of Thucydides in the Renaissance see Marianne Pade, "Thucydides' Renaissance Readers," in *Brill's Companion to Thucydides*, ed. Antonios Rengakos and Antonis Tsakmakis (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 779–810.

97. Plato, *The Republic, Books VI–X*, trans. and ed. Paul Shorey (London: Heinemann, 1935), 560c to 561a, 296–300.

98. I use the British Library copy of Plato, "De republica," in *Marsilii ficini florentini in libros Platonis ad Laurentium medicem Virum Magnanimum*, fols. 293v to 376r (Florence: n.p., 1484), in which foliation and date of publication are supplied.

99. Ibid. fol. 355v, col. 1: "Temperantiam vero ignaviam nominantes."

100. Ibid.: "Modestiam . . . illiberalitatem penitus detestantur."

101. Ibid., col. 2: "nominant . . . impudentiam/fortitudinem."

102. Ibid.: "petulantiam ingenuam educationem nominant."

103. Ibid.: "nominant . . . licentiam/libertatem."

104. Ibid.: "nominant . . . prodigalitatem/magnificentiam."

105. Livy, *Ab urbe condita*, Books XXI-XXII, trans. and ed. B. O. Foster (London: n.p., 1929), 22.13.12, 240: "non Hannibalem magis infestum tam sanis consiliis habebat quam magistrum equitum."

106. Ibid., 240-42: "pro cunctatore segnem, pro cauto timidus."

107. Sallust, "Bellum Catilinae," in *Sallust*, trans. and ed. J. C. Rolfe (London: Harvard University Press, 1921), 52.11, 102: "bona aliena largiri liberalitas, malarum rerum audacia fortitudo vocatur." For a discussion of this passage see Quentin Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 162. It is also cited in Benner, *Machiavelli's Prince*, 194. On Sallust's presence in Machiavelli's texts see also Benedetto Fontano, "Sallust and the Politics of Machiavelli," *History of Political Thought* 24 (2003): 86-108.

108. Tacitus, *The Histories*, Books I-III, trans. Clifford H. Moore (London: Harvard University Press, 1925), 1.30, 52: "luxuria specie liberalitatis imponit."

109. Ibid. 1.37, 64: "falsis nominibus severitatem pro saevitia, parsimoniam pro avaritia . . . appellat." For a discussion of this passage see Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric*, 163. It is also cited in Benner, *Machiavelli's Prince*, 188.

110. Machiavelli, *Il principe* (1995) 15.5, 102-3: "gli è tanto discosto da come si vive a come si dovrebbe vivere, che colui che lascia quello che si fa, per quello che si dovrebbe fare, impara più presto la ruina che la perservazione sua."

111. Ibid. 18.15, 118: "sapere entrare nel male, necessitate."

112. Ibid. 18.4, 115: "pertanto a uno principe è necessario sapere bene usare la bestia e lo uomo."

113. Ibid. 18.7, 116: "uno principe . . . debbe di quelle pigliare la golpe e il liono."

114. Ibid. 15.6, 103: "imparare a potere essere non buono."

115. For this way of putting the point see Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics*, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 44.

116. As I argue in Quentin Skinner, *Machiavelli* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 40-46, 51-53.

117. See, for example, Machiavelli, *Il principe* (1995) 18.14, 118.

118. See *ibid.* 16.11, 107, where he declares that to be "misero" is "uno di quelli vizi che lo fanno regnare."

119. Ibid. 16.3, 105: "el nome di liberale."

120. Jérémie Barthas, "Un lapsus machiavélien: *Tenuto/temuto* dans le chapitre XVI du *Prince*," in *Renaissance Studies in Honor of Joseph Connors*, ed. M. Israëls and L. Waldman, vol. 2 (Florence: Harvard University Press, 2013), 89 suggests that, in

the first of its two occurrences here, *tenuto* should be understood as *obbligato*, and only in the second as *riputato*.

121. Machiavelli, *Il principe* (1995) 16.2–3, 105: “consumerà in simili opera tutte le sua facultà [per] mantenere el nome del liberale.”

122. *Ibid.* 16.2, 105: “lasciare indietro alcuna qualità di suntuosità.”

123. Machiavelli was not the first Renaissance Italian writer to pick up this classical point. Barthes, “Un lapsus machiavélien,” 87 notes that Cristoforo Landino in his commentary on Dante (printed in Florence in 1481) had already referred to the difficulty of distinguishing liberality from extravagance.

124. See Machiavelli, *Il principe* (1995) 16.3, 105 on how such a prince will be “poco stimare da ciascuno divenendo povero.”

125. *Ibid.*: “sarà necessitato . . . se si vorrà mantenere el nome del liberale, gravare e’ populi straordinariamente.”

126. *Ibid.*: “comincerà a farlo odioso a’ sudditi.”

127. *Ibid.* 15.12, 104: “qualche cosa che parrà virtù, e seguendola sarebbe la ruina sua.”

128. As Peter Stacey, “Definition, Division, and Difference in Machiavelli’s Political Philosophy,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 75 (2014): 205–6 notes, Machiavelli in his tract of 1503 on how to deal with the rebels in the Valdichiana had argued in similar terms in the course of considering what constitutes the granting of a *benefizio*, or benefit.

129. Machiavelli, *Il principe* (1995) 17.3, 108–9: “per fuggire il nome di crudele, lasciò distruggere Pistoia.”

130. *Ibid.* 17.19, 114: “aveva data alli suoi soldati piú licenza che alla disciplina militare non si conveniva.”

131. *Ibid.* 17.21, 114: “non furno vendicati né fu da lui la insolenzia di quello legato corretta.”

132. Daniel Kapust, “Cato’s Virtues and *The Prince*: Reading Sallust’s *War with Catiline* with Machiavelli’s *The Prince*,” *History of Political Thought* 28 (2007): 444, 447 draws a parallel between Machiavelli’s view of clemency and Sallust’s account of how Cato condemned the *misericordia* of Julius Caesar as merely an apparent virtue.

133. Machiavelli, *Il principe* (1995), 17.3, 108: “si considera bene.”

134. *Ibid.* 17.4, 109.

135. *Ibid.*: “piú pietoso.”

136. See *ibid.* on how the Florentines managed “offendere una universalità intera.”

137. On Scipio, his *natura facile*, and his exercise of *troppa pietà*, see *ibid.* 17.19, 113 and 17.21, 114.

138. See *ibid.* 17.22, 114 on “questa sua qualità dannosa.”

139. *Ibid.* 17.4, 109.

140. *Ibid.* 17.20, 114.

141. *Ibid.* 18, 115: “Quomodo fides a principibus sit servanda.”

142. See, for example, the mid-sixteenth-century portrayal of the cardinal virtues in the apse of the church of Madonna dell’ Orto, Venice. The usual attributes of courage, prudence, justice, and temperance are pictured, but they are associated in turn with *Fides*, which is placed at the center of the iconographical scheme.

143. Machiavelli, *Il principe* (1995) 18.1, 115: "Quanto sia laudabile in uno principe il mantenere la fede e vivere con integrità e non con astuzia, ciascuno lo intende."

144. Ibid.: "quelli che si sono fondati in sua realtà." But here my translation follows the two earliest printings of Machiavelli's text, in which the phrase "fondati in sua realtà" appears as "fondati insù la lealtà." See Machiavelli, *Il principe* (1532a), fol. 23r and Niccolò Machiavelli, *Il principe* (Florence: n.p., 1532b), fol. 26v. For the printer of Machiavelli, *Il principe* (1532a) (Antonio Blado of Rome) see Machiavelli, *Il principe* (1532a), fol. 49v (British Library copy). For the printer of Machiavelli, *Il principe* (1532b) (Bernardo Giunto of Florence) see Machiavelli, *Il principe* (1532b), fol. 66v (British Library copy).

145. Machiavelli, *Il principe* (1995) 18.8, 116: "Non può pertanto uno signore prudente, né debbe, osservare la fede quando tale osservanzia gli torni contro." For a discussion of prudence in Machiavelli see Eugene Garver, "After *virtù*: Rhetoric, Prudence, and Moral Pluralism in Machiavelli," in *Prudence: Classical Virtue, Postmodern Practice*, ed. Robert Hariman (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), esp. 81–86.

146. See Machiavelli, *Il principe* (1995) 16.4, 105 on the "infamia del misero."

147. See *ibid.* 17.2, 108 on how Borgia was "tenuto . . . crudele."

148. See *ibid.* 16.9, 106 on Louis XII and "la lunga parsimonia sua."

149. See *ibid.* on how "El re di Francia presente ha fatto tante guerre senza pore uno dazio straordinariò a' sua."

150. Ibid. 16.6, 106: "viene a usare liberalità a tutti quelli a chi e' non toglie, che sono infiniti, e miseria a tutti coloro a chi e' non dà, che sono pochi."

151. Ibid. 16.5, 105–6: "Uno principe . . . debbe, s'egli è prudente, non si curare del nome del misero; perché col tempo sarà tenuto sempre più liberale."

152. Ibid. 17.2, 108: "aveva racconcia la Romagna, unitola, ridottola in pace e in fede." For a contrasting appraisal see John M. Najemy, "Machiavelli and Cesare Borgia: A Reconsideration of Chapter 7 of *The Prince*," *Review of Politics* 75 (2013): 539–56. Najemy concentrates on chapter 7, thereby conveying the impression that Machiavelli was much more critical of Borgia's policies.

153. Machiavelli, *Il principe*, (1995) 17.4, 109: "Debbe pertanto uno principe non si curare della infamia del crudele."

154. See *ibid.* 17.3, 108 on how Borgia acted in a manner that was "molto più piatoto" than if he had spared those who initially threatened his rule.

155. See *ibid.* 18.14, 118 on *carità, umanità, and religione*.

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The Necessity to Be Not-Good: Machiavelli's Two Realisms

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Most readers of *The Prince* and *Discourses* agree that Machiavelli is a political realist in the following senses: he regards self-preservation as a basic good and holds that to preserve themselves, human beings—whether individuals or collective entities such as peoples, cities, or states—need to acquire and cultivate various forms of power. The end of self-preservation may of course have a moral dimension—if we use “moral” very broadly to mean a concern with standards of right or wrong conduct, including a concern for the claims or interests of others when deciding one’s own course of action. Machiavelli sometimes suggests that a policy of *virtuous* self-preservation should promote the interests of at least some others: at least those of one’s own partisans, or of an entire people or state.

Beyond this, readers disagree about what Machiavelli considers basic human and political realities, and on how much room they leave for moral concerns beyond preserving the survival and power of a particular “self.” On the most usual account of Machiavelli’s realism, one of the fundamental facts of political life is that human beings are naturally untrustworthy. As we read in *The Prince*, men generally are “ungrateful, fickle pretenders and dissemblers, evaders of danger, eager for gain.” Human nature being what it is, “a man who wants to make a profession of good in all regards must come to ruin among so many who are not good.” So “it is necessary to a prince, if he wants to maintain himself, to learn to be able not to be good, and to use this and not use it according to necessity,” or risk falling prey to others who are more adept users of deception, cruelty, even evil.¹ To preserve yourself and your state, Machiavelli seems to tell political leaders, you sometimes have to ignore conventional moral rules that

say: keep your promises, avoid violence and cruelty, and do not take what belongs to others. If you don't molest others, they'll molest you.²

At times Machiavelli seems to endorse the cynical view that since *some* men are untrustworthy, prudent statesmen should presume that *none* can be trusted. They should therefore always be as ready as others to practice deception and hypocrisy. "If all men were good," *The Prince's* author declares in this vein, it would not be good to violate treaties and other promises. "But because they are wicked [*tristi*] and do not observe faith with you, you also do not have to observe it with them."³ A subtler understanding of Machiavelli's realism agrees that it is imprudent to trust other people *without good reason*. But it goes on to ask: What, in his view, is the most effective response to human beings' natural untrustworthiness? Do we have no choice but to outdo everyone else's mendacity and cruelty when we feel threatened? Or does Machiavelli suggest a different option, perhaps more apt for self-preservation: to exert our less-bad capacities for intelligent "ordering" and establish new relationships beyond what we find in our nature—relations that make it reasonable to trust at least some others? If so, and if individuals and states have better chances of preserving themselves by ordering new, collaborative relationships, then Machiavelli's political realism might be more hospitable to moral concerns than the first reading admits.

I. TRUST AND SELF-PRESERVATION IN *THE PRINCE*

One of *The Prince's* most persistent arguments is that both individuals and states *need* other peoples' continuous support to help keep them safe. The book's core middle chapters (10–14) teach new princes how to get their own, initially suspect subjects on their side—and keep them there. Building relations of mutual trust is essential for this. At the end of chapter 9 we read that unless a new prince can "think of a way by which his citizens, always and in every quality of time . . . will always be faithful [*fedeli*] to him," he "will always have, in uncertain times, a shortage of those one can trust [*penuria . . . si possa fidare*]." In other words, both the paucity of reliable supporters and the deadly dangers that flow from it are avoidable. One of the primary tests of any prince's competence is whether he understands, and does, what is needed to avoid them.

At first, Machiavelli tells us in chapter 10, new princes can't trust their subjects to defend them in necessity. But since "it is not easy to attack one who has his town strong and is not hated by the people," a prince

who takes judicious measures to (1) arm well and (2) avoid popular hatred can move from precarious beginnings to security in his new government. As we read on, it turns out that these two aims are best achieved by some of the same means.

Firstly, if a new prince has become ruler over a number of different cities within an empire, he might take lessons from the German Empire, where the imperial power is very weak and the cities “very free,” obeying the emperor “only when they want to.” Since they are not so much “subjects” of the prince as his and each other’s “partners” in matters of common defense, they have less reason to hate him than if he sought to control their governments or failed to consult them in matters of foreign policy. If this loose confederation of the willing is a prime example of good arming, we can infer that new princes who try to control cities by means that disregard their populations’ wishes might well find themselves both badly armed and hated. The better policy is to respect separate cities’ desires for independence, since an empire made up of cities whose ancestral freedoms are threatened by a new prince will be wracked by intractable rebellions like those discussed in *The Prince*, chapter 5.

Secondly, a new prince can avert hatred and simultaneously forge strong arms by attending to the welfare of individual subjects, particularly those of the *popolo* and lowly “pebs.” Most great men and princes mistrust the “multitude” more than any other part of the populace. But if the popular classes often appear to their social superiors as erratic, unreasoning, and ungrateful,⁴ this is largely because the latter treat them with suspicion and give them little respect. Give their men secure work that allows them to feed their families and win public respect, Machiavelli tells his prince, and they’ll become your state’s stoutest defenders—its virtuous “arms.” A basic condition for one’s own defense, then, is material security for the people who help provide it: a well-ordered political economy that ensures a decent living for all a city’s people is among the necessary foundations of a prince’s military power. And this isn’t just a matter of keeping compliant troops fed so that they can serve as cannon fodder. Princes should start viewing them as men on whom their own security depends—and who deserve respect, since their employments, military and industrial, are the very “nerve and life” of their city.⁵

With the right policies, then, obligations based on mutual trust can be built up between people who start off distrusting each other—in this case “new” princes and restive subjects. As we learn in chapters 12 and 13, the best possible defense for any prince or state comes from their own people. But people need to be motivated to fight, especially for new princes

whom they have no good reason to love or trust. If they are able to feed themselves through highly valued work, they'll be more content with their princes and more willing and able to perform their military duties. And princes whose people are "very free," secure in their livelihood, respected, and self-respecting will be harder to attack than those who lack such robust "arms."

At the beginning of chapter 10 Machiavelli declares that those capable of "ruling by themselves" need a *iusto* army. The word *iusto* has connotations of "strength," as some translations render it, but it can also mean "just." Are the good orders Machiavelli describes in his German example also just in a moral sense? In both early and later writings, he does treat the impartiality of the laws as both a basic condition for legal justice and a necessary condition for well-ordered civil defenses.⁶ Though he omits such explicit arguments in *The Prince*, chapters 12–14 suggest that good laws are needed to constitute strong civil arms, while chapter 10 touches on the relation between socioeconomic justice and effective civil defenses. Machiavelli appears to make the case for legal and material justice in purely instrumental, self-regarding terms: a prince should adopt these measures because they serve his personal interest in maintaining power, not out of a concern to respect others' reasonable claims. But readers who reflect on why it pays to treat other people justly—here by giving the plebs respected employments—may come to recognize moral reasons to do so as well. If decent work and public respect motivate people to fight for your state, this is because people are not chattel or mere martial herds. They are human beings who want good reasons to act at others' command, and who have the capacity to reject or rebel against such commands. Any prince who recognizes that human beings generally have these basic desires and capacities will have good moral reasons, as well as self-interested ones, to be concerned about justice—at least when dealing with his own people.

II. OBLIGATIONS AND *VIRTÙ*

Machiavelli makes a further argument in chapter 10 about how princes can improve their chances of preserving themselves in a world full of unscrupulous people. Instead of keeping your subjects weak and dependent on your largesse, he tells them, you ought to make them stronger—materially, in spirit, and in arms. For the best-quality support comes from people who have enough power themselves to make commitments to help you, as you help them: "The nature of men is to be obligated [*obligarsi*] as much by benefits they give as by those they receive." Far from preferring

one-way obligations that make weaker subjects dependent on a strong, beneficent prince, he insists that princes gain more from relationships based on two-way exchange than from subjects' asymmetrical dependence. The latter "come to unite with their prince so much the more, since it appears he has entered an obligation with them [*lui abbia con loro obligo*]" when they sacrifice their possessions and lives to fight for his state. A prince who hopes to make his people "always faithful" should acknowledge the benefits they confer on him. Indeed, he should acknowledge that he needs the people as much as—if not more than—they need him.⁷

The words *obligo-obligare* evoke a firmer, more lasting kind of bond than the transient cooperation that results when people resist a particular, common threat. An obligation is a binding commitment; such commitments depend on some degree of mutual trust. Nonetheless, it might appear that Machiavelli advises his princely and other readers to undertake obligations only for self-interested reasons, never for moral ones. The "Machiavellian" realist is largely unconcerned with the good or bad qualities of his allies, unless those qualities directly harm his own interests. He does not ask whether he should trust other people or governments because of their habitual transparency, constancy, or fairness toward subjects and allies. Still less does he imagine that his own chances of securing firm support will be increased if he behaves in a habitually transparent, consistent, and fair way toward others.

But Machiavelli frequently suggests that these moral habits do matter and supply excellent reasons for people to bind themselves to support others through thick and thin, regardless of their immediate interests. Subjects more readily make long-term commitments to a prince, or citizens to a republic, when they recognize certain praiseworthy qualities in their character or government: when the actions of a new prince "are recognized as virtuous, they take hold of men much more and obligate them much more than ancient blood." Here Machiavelli links *virtù* to acts of "ordering" firm political institutions—*ordinare* is one of Machiavelli's most positive verbs—and "consolidating [them] with good laws, good arms, good friends, and good examples."⁸ Order and strict discipline are also the foundation of trust-inspiring *virtù* in the *Discourses*. Thus on the battlefield

the captain must be esteemed of such a quality that the soldiers trust [*confidino*] in his prudence; and they will always trust if they see him ordered, solicitous, and spirited . . . if he punishes them for errors and *observes promises to them*. Such things are the great cause that the army trusts and, by trusting, wins.⁹

Trust in leaders is a condition for victory, and regularly observing their promises to their men is one way to inspire trust. But surely, some might ask, is it much harder to cultivate such trust abroad, in relation to other peoples or states? Here the Machiavellian realist's sole concern, it seems, is what he might gain or lose through placing trust in others, or by keeping faith himself. He observes particular obligations as long as they bring him specific, positive gains or help him avoid injuries, but not otherwise.

Machiavelli says otherwise in *The Prince*. All states, he suggests in chapter 21, need unwavering allies to support their own safety or freedom. The best allies are those who defend you not just when they stand to make imminent gains—or at least not suffer imminent losses—but even when their support incurs considerable material and military costs. And the surest way to get this kind of steady, high-quality support is to act in ways that inspire well-founded trust in you. Governments and statesmen win loyal allies by showing themselves willing to accept losses and disadvantages along with the benefits of their alliance. If you make clear commitments instead of changing sides according to temporary convenience, Machiavelli tells readers, sticking by friends through defeats as well as victories, you show yourself worthy of trust and win others' firm commitments in return. For there's a more than fair chance that these friends will reciprocate and help you when you're down, since in response to your fidelity they form "an obligation to you and a contract of love [*contratto lo amore*] for you." Even if you're much stronger than your allies, you still need to act in ways that keep them willingly in your camp, since fortunes are famously fickle and can always change. And if your allies are stronger than you, this obligation restrains them from taking advantage of your relative weakness, for "men are never so indecent [*disonesto*]" as to betray your good faith when you've observed it toward them.¹⁰ Reciprocal obligations emerge here as an exceedingly important source of political and military power.

Passages like these paint a more nuanced picture of human nature than the thoroughly pessimistic one set out in *The Prince*, chapter 17. In his diplomatic correspondence Machiavelli makes the same point that, as a general rule, habitual good faith pays and makes one safer, while habits of breaking faith tend to isolate and weaken the perpetrator. He reports to his superiors that he had lectured a two-faced ally, Gianpaolo Baglioni, on "the value and importance of good faith." Since "everyone knew" that Baglioni had undertaken an engagement to Florence, if he violated it they would "charge him with ingratitude and bad faith, and would regard him as a stumbling horse which nobody would ride for fear of getting his neck broken."¹¹ Here and in the passage about trust-inspiring captains cited

above, Machiavelli does appeal to self-interest as a motive for meeting obligations: he invokes Baglioni's future need for allies and the desire of cities and captains to "win." But he implies that those who are *consistently* prudent, orderly, spirited, and strict, and keep faith, are the most trusted and therefore more likely to secure reliable allies and victories. You might win occasional successes by merely displaying these virtues now and then, as your aims and present capabilities require. But if your aim is to maintain or increase your power over time, you do well to demonstrate these virtuous qualities continuously, so that they are seen as a reliable part of your character.

Machiavelli makes a further argument about how the most binding obligations are formed, whether among individuals or states: other people's support is worth more when it is voluntary, not based on force or fear. Allies who support you out of fear are unreliable because too much fear makes people hate you, and when they hate you they conspire against you.¹² The importance of freely willed consent for stable "orders" is often stressed in the *Discourses* and *Florentine Histories*: "Not fortresses but the will [*volontà*] of men maintains them in their states"; "peace is faithful where men are willingly pacified"; "That rule is firmest that is obeyed gladly." In the *Histories* Machiavelli has a prudent character say that had Florence received a conquered city, Volterra, "by accord," she would have gained security from it, but since the city was taken and held by force, it would bring only "weakness and trouble."¹³

III. TWO REALISMS

One can acknowledge these moral sides of Machiavelli's thought without playing down his many undeniably amoral statements. Yet for every statement suggesting that infidelity pays or that men can't be trusted, in *The Prince* or the *Discourses* we can find two or three more that seem to say the opposite. And if we take these arguments as seriously as the more notorious passages about knowing how to enter into evil, it seems far from clear that Machiavelli is committed to the extreme go-it-alone kind of realism so often ascribed to him. His most powerfully developed arguments—as distinct from his jump-off-the-page Machiavellian assertions—suggest that it's unrealistic to think you can preserve yourself without steady support from others. And to get the necessary others on your side and keep them reliably there, you need to act in ways that foster mutual trust over time.

The presence of both positions in the same books raises the question of

how, if at all, they can fit together in a coherent political theory. I will not try to answer this large question here.¹⁴ My aim in the rest of this chapter is simply to suggest that there is a very deep ambivalence about the value of good faith, obligations, and justice in Machiavelli's various writings, posing a serious problem of interpretation that too many readers are eager to gloss over. Instead of brushing the ambiguities aside or looking for neat solutions that Machiavelli himself never suggests, scholars, teachers, and students should be looking closely at both types of statement and asking how to relate them to each other.

As a first step, we can acknowledge that Machiavelli's writings put forward—and oscillate between—two very different kinds of political realism:

Realism 1: *go-it-alone unilateral amorality* holds that since human beings are naturally untrustworthy, it is sometimes necessary to set aside moral scruples to secure oneself or one's state.

Realism 2: *collaborative realism* agrees that it is prudent not to trust most people without good reason but holds that it is both possible and highly desirable to seek to establish nonnatural relations of trust. Indeed, collaboration founded on respect for others' interests is a surer route to power and safety than unilateral amorality.

These two realisms are rooted in different accounts of Machiavelli's understanding of human nature. Collaborative realism encompasses the unreliable features emphasized by unilateral amorality but includes other, less pessimistic dimensions. If we scrutinize key passages that appear to express Machiavelli's views on human nature, it's not hard to see how readers might find examples of either account in his writings—often through narrower or wider interpretations of the same passages. Look again at the full passage from *The Prince*, chapter 17:

For one can say this generally of men: that they are ungrateful, fickle, pretenders, and dissemblers, evaders of danger, eager for gain. While you do them good they are yours, offering you their blood, property, lives, and children . . . when the need for them is far away; but when it is close to you, they revolt. And that prince who has founded himself entirely on their words, stripped of other preparation, is ruined.

The middle lines tell us that “men generally” are not *all* bad. They can also be extremely generous, even self-sacrificing, “while you do them

good." Throughout the chapter, the generality of "men" is loosely identified with the "people," in contrast to princes. If the *popolo* revolt when princes do them no good, is that so unreasonable? Perhaps if princes were to found themselves on orders and mutual obligations that benefit their people, the latter would be disinclined to abandon them.

The whole chapter, in fact, keeps changing tone, as if Machiavelli—great dramatist that he is—is playing with different voices: now harsh and bitterly misanthropic, then suddenly switching to temperate, humane tones. The tirade against men generally is surrounded by a host of caveats that moderate Machiavelli's, or his violent speaker's, sentiments.¹⁵ In the preceding paragraph we read that a prince "should be slow to believe and to move, nor should he make himself feared, and he should proceed in a temperate mode with prudence and humanity." A few lines later, having declared that princes should not make themselves feared, Machiavelli says that it is safer to be feared than loved; then he qualifies this in the next paragraph, declaring that "The prince should nonetheless make himself feared in such a mode that if he does not acquire love, he escapes hatred." He will "always" do this

if he abstains from the property of his citizens and his subjects, and from their women;¹⁶ and if he also needs to proceed against someone's life [*sanguè*, literally blood], he must do it when there is suitable justification and manifest cause [*iustificazione conveniente e causa manifesta*]. But above all, he must abstain from the property of others, because men forget the death of a father more quickly than the loss of a patrimony.

Despite pessimistic first appearances, when one reads further it turns out that various kinds of human "badness" can be managed in ways that transform relations between prince and *popolo* from initial suspicion into a steady alliance. And the most effective way is to punish specific subjects' or citizens' misconduct only when there is "suitable justification" and through transparent "modes of proceeding," not by instilling general fear through excessively cruel or arbitrary punishments.

A similar transformation occurs in these passages, both from *Discourses* 1.3.

(A) It is necessary [*necessario*] to whoever disposes a republic and orders laws in it to presuppose that all men are bad [*rei*] and that they

always have to use the malignity of their spirit whenever they have a free opportunity for it.

If we focus on this statement and skim what follows, we might well conclude that Machiavelli has a pessimistic account of human nature that points toward the necessity for unilateral, and sometimes amoral, means of self-preservation. But a few lines later he says:

(B) Men never work any good unless through necessity [*necessità*], but where choice abounds and one can make use of license, at once everything is full of confusion and disorder. Therefore it is said that hunger and poverty make men industrious, and the laws make them good [*le leggi gli fanno buoni*].

Here we learn two things that modify the initial pessimistic impression. Firstly, the harsh necessity of presumed human badness need not drive people to act badly in turn. Unilateral amoralists assume that agents have no significant range of options about how to respond to pressures they call *necessità*. Here and elsewhere, however, Machiavelli treats necessity as a stimulus to “good” human works, not an imperative that forces people to shed all scruples about goodness or badness.¹⁷ Necessity can make men fight to the death for their survival, but it also induces them—if they are prudent and virtuous—to choose their survival techniques with great care, as happened with the “free” builders of ancient cities who were “constrained by disease, hunger, or war” to leave their ancestral countries and establish new civil relations in hostile new lands.¹⁸

Secondly, what Machiavelli calls human good in passage (B) arises not from “raw” human nature but from laws imposed by human beings themselves. Human beings are naturally not-good in this sense, but they can be made good by laws, and the capacity to make laws must be part of human nature, as much as *malignità*.

It makes sense to see Machiavelli as a proponent of unilateral amorality if we focus on the badness and malignity in (A), not taking the further steps he takes in (B). Here he treats natural badness not as an absolute obstacle to improving human conduct but as a stimulus to establishing laws and orders to correct it. Collaborative realism takes passage (A) seriously as a constraint on any *ordinatore* or lawmaker. Manmade laws and orders can’t *transform* our nature, make it angelic, or eliminate human tendencies to duplicity, greed, and cowardice. But they can *restrain* actions

driven by these disordering parts of our nature, or channel them in ways that improve chances of individual and collective self-preservation instead of corroding them.

At a minimum, man-made laws provide a negative check on bad behavior. But in 1.4 we further learn that good laws can and should seek to educate and generate habits of virtue: "For good examples arise from good education, good education from good laws, and good laws from those tumults that many inconsiderately damn."¹⁹ When people "damn" tumults, conflicting humors, and natural desires that cause disorders when left "unshackled by laws"—such as desires to acquire, or to live free—they do so because they wrongly assume that these things *necessarily* threaten political order; they need, therefore, to be ruthlessly opposed. This assumption underestimates human beings' capacities to regulate natural humors and desires by means of well-designed laws and orders.

Human badness, then, is a poor excuse for giving one's own innate badness free rein, since there are far better ways to deal with it. Natural human badness poses a mortal threat only to those who fail to exercise their ordering capacities, whether out of laziness, ignorance of what good ordering involves, or impatience to conquer too much too quickly. A proper estimation of these capacities depends on recognizing two further, basic human realities that unilateral realists, with their narrower perspective, tend to underrate. One is that not all potentially disordering drives and desires are equally hostile to well-ordered political life. Insatiable desires to dominate are less decent (*onesto*) than inextinguishable desires not to be dominated; the desire to monopolize political power is injurious and unjust (*ingiurioso e ingiusto*), while the willingness to share it with others is "more reasonable" (*ragionevole*).²⁰ Collaborative realists should try to satisfy the "decent" or "reasonable" desires if they want their orders to last in good health, but rein in—not try to stamp out, since this can't be done—the less reasonable ones.

The other reality ignored by many unilateralists is that other people's decent and reasonable desires set formidable limits on any political agent's actions. Collaborative realists understand that their self-preservation *depends on* respecting other people's reasonable desires not to be dominated or treated with contempt. Machiavelli argues men "who do not know how to put limits [*termini*] to their hopes" err, since "by founding themselves on these without otherwise measuring themselves, they are ruined,"²¹ and even the strongest agents need to measure themselves against other people's reasonable desires "not to be dominated" and to live free and secure. These desires are extremely powerful. Contempt for them provokes

terrible resistance, threatening the safety and political integrity of whoever tries to take away freedom; they are among the “ordinary and natural inconveniences” that prudent statesmen must learn to “know and manage” well.²²

IV. NECESSITY AND AMORALITY

If we grant that both kinds of realism are present in Machiavelli’s writings, extending to his views of human nature, how are they related? Sometimes, as with the passages just discussed, the amoral or pessimistic-sounding statements might seem to serve as the starting point for more nuanced inquiries into the problems of political ordering and their solutions. It is harder to reconcile other sharply contrasting statements. How should we square *The Prince’s* many arguments underscoring the benefits of good faith with others that trumpet the advantages of disregarding it?

The simplest and most usual answer scholars offer is that each argument holds true for different circumstances. In this view, Machiavelli’s position is that more collaborative realist methods are to be preferred under more “ideal” or “normal” conditions, and should be practiced whenever circumstances allow. Unilateral, amoral realism kicks in in extremis, in nonideal conditions or under pressing “necessity.”

But this sounds like a cleaner solution than it is. It begs a further question touched on in the last section: namely, what kind of necessity does Machiavelli treat as excusing, indeed requiring, unilateralist amorality instead of various strategies of collaboration? It is easy enough to come up with general answers, based on his many dramatic statements about individuals or polities being compelled to set aside scruples about “being good.” Typical Machiavellian necessities include extreme threats to physical or political survival, the breakdown of civil order or external peace, the pressures of war, and special circumstances that arise when founding a new state or empire, or purging and reforming old ones. When Machiavelli declares that someone acts under necessity, some readers assume that he wants to underline the hard realities of power and conflict that severely restrict human choices, thereby ruling out “ideally” moral actions. Machiavelli’s *necessità*, in short, marks out the objective limits of any reasonable morality; to insist on fulfilling all one’s obligations, acting honestly, or trying to do justice under necessity is naïve, imprudent, unrealistic, even irresponsible.

Yet Machiavelli uses the concept of *necessità* in much subtler ways than this account appreciates. True, he often uses it to pick out objective

pressures that leave people little choice but to respond in go-it-alone, ruthless ways. But as noted earlier, even overpowering pressures such as “disease, hunger, or war”—or potentially devastating floods in *The Prince*—leave some small room for resourceful “ordering” and should stimulate virtuous individuals and cities to think hard about how they can build “dykes and dams” to preserve them in quiet times as well as in emergencies.²³ In Machiavelli’s writings, moreover, it is not always clear whether statements about the necessity to save one’s fatherland or to take some drastic-sounding action express Machiavelli’s own views. Take this deceptively straightforward statement in the *Discourses*:

Where one deliberates entirely on the safety of his *patria*, there ought not to enter any consideration of either just or unjust, merciful or cruel, praiseworthy or ignominious; indeed every other concern put aside, one ought to follow entirely the policy that saves its life and maintains its liberty.²⁴

Read out of context, this sounds like a classic example of the “necessity excuses” argument so often seen as the essence of “Machiavellian realism.” But a closer reading suggests good reasons not to ascribe it to Machiavelli himself. The statement, he says, is “imitated” by the French to avoid “ignominy for their king.” French monarchists use it, in effect, as an excuse for whatever the king does and to protect his “majesty”—regardless of whether his policies promote the safety of his countrymen. It is highly doubtful that Machiavelli endorses the statement in that extreme, monarch-supporting form. A subtly paraphrased version of the maxim appears earlier in the chapter where Machiavelli has the Roman legate Lucius Lentullus say, more simply, “that the fatherland is well defended in whatever mode one defends it, whether with ignominy or with glory.” In this version and the chapter’s title, the shocking assertion that just or unjust may be put aside under necessity is left out. And what Lentullus advises in this example, taken from Livy, is not to throw aside moral scruples under necessity. Rather, he urges defeated Romans to save their country by accepting “ignominious” terms of surrender, rather than destroy it by fighting to the death.

Here and elsewhere, Machiavelli sets out how different people use the *rhetoric* of necessity to justify various policies, some of them more reasonable than others.²⁵ He was well aware, of course, that invoking urgent necessity is a time-honored and effective way to short-circuit careful deliberation about how to respond to threats. Far from endorsing every

rhetorical use of *necessità* as an excuse or pretext for amoral action, he invites readers to evaluate the wisdom of various courses of action taken under its banner.

In fact, it's not easy to find any straightforward example that bears out Machiavelli's bold claims about the necessity to ignore justice or "enter into evil." When we look again at numerous other passages that are supposed to vindicate the necessity to deceive, commit violent murders, or seize what belongs to others, they turn out to be very ambiguous indeed.

V. NECESSITY IN FOUNDING: "WHEN THE DEED ACCUSES, THE EFFECT EXCUSES"

In *Discourses* 1.9, for example, Machiavelli seems to excuse Rome's legendary founder Romulus for killing his brother Remus because, as the chapter title declares, "It is necessary to be alone if one wishes to order a republic anew or to reform it altogether outside its old orders." Machiavelli does not say precisely what constitutes the necessity confronting founders and radical reformers. It presumably has a number of possible sources: the anarchic conduct of the multitude, deadly conflicts between ordinary people and the *grandi*, foreign enemies or rivalries among neighbors, or resistance from the founder's colleagues to his designs. Whatever the nature of the threat to ordering, "it never or rarely happens that any republic or a kingdom is ordered well from the beginning or reformed altogether anew . . . unless it is organized by one individual [*da uno*]."

This seems to imply that the *Discourses'* usual reasons for preferring the well-ordered government of many over the rule of one don't apply in conditions of new founding or "extraordinary" reforming—*estraordinario* being synonymous with the phrase "altogether outside its old orders," as distinct from reforms that take place through the *ordinario*, established institutions and without overriding existing laws. No "wise understanding," Machiavelli declares, will "ever reprove anyone for any extraordinary action that he uses to order a kingdom or constitute a republic." Indeed, "When the deed accuses him, the effect excuses him [*accusandolo il fatto, lo effetto lo scusi*]; and when the effect is good, as was that of Romulus, it will always excuse the deed."

A little later, however, Machiavelli complicates this tough-talking appraisal. The complications aren't presented as formal counterarguments: they emerge gradually, scattered over several chapters, often in subtle undertones that are easy to overlook among more eye-catching, Machiavellian-sounding statements. Thus in 1.10 we read that "almost all" men

are prone to be “deceived by a false good and a false glory,” and “let themselves go, either voluntarily or ignorantly, into the ranks of those who deserve more blame than praise.” And although “to their perpetual honor, they are able to make a republic or a kingdom, they turn to tyranny.” Cautious readers might wonder: If “almost all” men, including those who order states, let themselves be deceived as to what is truly good and glorious, then why should any one man be trusted to order alone? If we think we can tell which men are the rare exceptions, leaders who will surely order afresh without turning to tyranny and incurring blame, Machiavelli soon makes us think again. In chapter 1.16 he uses the example of Julius Caesar to ram home his recurring theme that people should beware of being taken in by appearances of “good” and “glory.” Caesar claimed, and in his times was widely held, to be under a necessity to act alone in order to make extraordinary reforms in a corrupt republic. Yet he “could so blind the multitude,” Machiavelli observes, “that it did not recognize the yoke it was putting on its own neck,” thus bringing about the ultimate “ruin” of Roman *virtù*.

Machiavelli does hasten to contrast Caesar’s bad example with Romulus’s good one, saying that one ought to “desire to possess a corrupt city not to spoil it entirely as did Caesar, but to reorder it as did Romulus.” But he proceeds to blur this distinction as well. Despite his robust “excuses” for Romulus’s deeds in 1.9, Machiavelli gradually reveals that the Roman’s political “orders” were a very mixed bag. As king and sole ruler Romulus founded many good institutions, including a Senate designed to advise and limit the king’s powers. Nonetheless, within a few generations his monarchical state “quickly” fell prey to the disorders that afflict all monarchies.²⁶ Throughout most of its life, the kingdom founded by Romulus teetered on the verge of self-destruction, so that “it was necessary either that the kings be extinguished in Rome or that Rome in a very short time become weak and of no value.”²⁷

Machiavelli’s nuanced discussion of Romulus’s legacy discreetly poses the question: Might Rome have been better off, after all, if it had never been founded as a monarchy and Romulus hadn’t done away with Remus and his other partners at the helm? Against an affirmative answer, some readers might argue that necessity dictated that Rome first had to be a monarchy, then be reformed later. But if this is Machiavelli’s clear-cut view, what should we make of his comments about Rome’s other legendary founder Aeneas, and Dido the founder of Carthage? In *Discourses* 2.8 we read that, far from finding it necessary to found alone, both were constrained by necessity to acknowledge their own insufficiency. So they had

to work “by way of friends and confederates [*per via d’amici e di confederati*]” to build their new cities, winning “the consent [*per consentimento*] of neighbours where they settled.” This alternative account of Rome’s founding sets a moderate, diplomatic understanding of a founder’s *virtù* and prudence alongside the more self-assertive, conquest-hungry kind of *virtù* symbolized by Romulus. Machiavelli gives readers a choice: we can “take” either Aeneas or Romulus as Rome’s founder, and hence as our ideal model of founder-under-necessity. Whether or not one prefers Romulus’s modes, Machiavelli makes it clear that they were not the *only* way to found Rome—and perhaps not the most virtuous.

Machiavelli plants further doubts about King Romulus’s “modes” when he tells us that the cure for Rome’s troubled kingly legacy was not another Romulus, an extraordinary man who could purge the prematurely corrupted state by seizing sole powers. What saved Rome and put the city on a safer path were new power-sharing orders, established by Lucius Junius Brutus. Brutus, we read in 1.20, expelled the kings and reordered Rome as a republic with two, limited-term consuls at the helm. The new republic’s founding is, Machiavelli says, “attributed” to Brutus as an individual. But the orders he made were more lasting than Romulus’s precisely because, from the outset, they built in extremely harsh constraints on anyone’s ambitions to rule alone, including the refounder’s—and those of his sons, who Brutus agreed to have killed (that is, legally executed) when they conspired to overthrow the fledging republic and restore monarchy.²⁸ This dispassionate act epitomizes a different kind of Machiavellian tough-mindedness and realism than the law-and-order-defying kind often ascribed to Machiavelli: one that punishes treason through transparent legal mechanisms, not arbitrary violence, and makes no exceptions for leaders’ family, friends, or partisans.

When Machiavelli turns from founders of new states to the reformers of corrupt ones—another distinction that gets blurred in his discussion—the argument oscillates even more confusingly between bold claims about the need for one-man orderers and skeptical caveats. In 1.17, we read that “where the matter is corrupt, well-ordered laws do not help unless they have been put in motion by one individual who with an extreme force ensures their observance so that the matter becomes good.” The first problem, then, is how to find such an individual. But “I do not know,” Machiavelli concedes rather discouragingly, “whether this has ever occurred or whether it is possible,” since “there cannot be one man of such long life as to have enough time to inure to good a city that has been inured to bad for a long time.” Sheer human mortality, it seems, must collide with and

deflate the initial, go-it-alone ideal. "Unless," we read again, the solitary reformer "makes [the city] be reborn with many dangers and much blood," using "the greatest extraordinary means . . . which few know how or wish to use."

Does this mean that one-man reordering feats *can* be pulled off by that rare paragon who doesn't flee from extraordinary means, blood, and violence? Perhaps—but once again, Machiavelli raises serious doubts about this solution. Even if a man of such audacity and forceful spirit can be found, he worries about how a man with this type of personality will use his power. For "it very rarely happens that someone good wishes to become prince by bad ways, even though his end be good." And if someone acquires princely power through "bad ways," it is almost impossible "that it will ever occur to his mind to use well the authority that he has acquired badly." Later, in 1.34, he discusses more generally the problem of "extraordinary" methods of reform, whether undertaken by one man or by several. "In a republic," even a corrupt one in need of reforming,

one would not wish anything ever to happen that has to be governed with extraordinary modes. For although [it] may do good then, nonetheless the example does ill. For if one sets up a habit of breaking the orders for the sake of good, then later, under that coloring, they are broken for ill.

These caveats make readers mistrust their first impressions of the text—as well as their initial enthusiasm, if they had it, for extraordinary reformers who promise singlehandedly to purge corruption. If we judge by all the reasons and evidence Machiavelli sets out, not just by his most confident-sounding assertions, we have to weigh the arguments favouring such reformers against numerous cons. And what's left, on balance, is an exceedingly remote possibility of finding any mortal being capable of doing the job under discussion: using "extreme force" to make a corrupt polity "good." On close scrutiny, in fact, looks as if the initial job description—"(A) one individual who (B) with an extreme force ensures their observance (C) so that the matter becomes good"—is a bundle of practical contradictions. Human nature being what it is, it is simply unrealistic to expect the desired outcome (C) to issue from a combination of (A) and (B). Some solitary individuals might work consistently for the wider good, but not the sort of individual who is willing to use extreme force all on his own; extreme force might sometimes produce good political matter, but

not when it is used by the untrustworthy kind of man who trusts himself to act alone. However hopeful Machiavelli seemed back in 1.9, by 1.18 it seems probable that the search for such a being is a thoroughly unrealistic ideal.

Discourses 1.58 issues similar warnings against the hubris of one-man rulers and reformers. "There have been very many princes," Machiavelli deadpans, "and the good and wise among them have been few." Because he acts alone without restraint, any "prince unshackled from the laws" will be unstable and imprudent, "for a prince who can do whatever he wishes is crazy." Nevertheless, Machiavelli notes, when people are troubled by present political disorders they readily "persuade themselves" that a one-man redeemer's "wicked life can make freedom emerge." In disordered times, the rhetoric calling for one-man princely saviors is terribly seductive. The Romans were seduced by it, to their ruin. So were those Florentines who traded in their republican orders for a Medici-led principality. A major theme of all Machiavelli's writings is that there is never any shortage of ambitious—and dangerously unrealistic—men keen to prove that they, unlike the ordinary run of mortals, have that super-rare combination of vigor, prudence, and ruthlessness needed to purge corruption alone. According to some of his most perceptive early readers, this is the cautionary lesson Machiavelli seeks to convey through all his writings. He wanted, wrote Spinoza, to warn a free people against "entrusting its welfare entirely to one man."²⁹

VI. NECESSITY AND JUSTICE IN WAR

If there are any circumstances in which we might expect Machiavelli to endorse unilateral amorality, the harsh necessities of war would seem a good candidate. One of the most dramatic episodes in the *Discourses* addresses the question of what role justice ought to play in war. Under tremendous pressure during their long wars with Gaul, the Romans sent three ambassadors to the enemy. These men then violated established conventions—the *ius gentium* or law of nations—that forbade ambassadors to take up arms against their hosts, including enemy hosts. The Gauls asked the Romans to punish their men, but these legitimate demands were refused and derided. So the Gauls swept down on Rome in such a rage that the city was almost wiped off the map. "This ruin," Machiavelli states, "arose for the Romans only through the inobservance of justice."³⁰ He does not suggest that the intense feelings aroused by war or the ambassadors' well-

meant desires to save their country excuse the Romans' unjust conduct. In Livy's original account, some of the Roman senators who defended their ambassadors' actions had patriotic motives: they wanted to defend their fatherland by any means, even the violation of sacred trust embodied in the *ius gentium*, and possibly shorten an already drawn-out war. Machiavelli gives no credit to such motives. He simply accepts the Romans' own belated, severe judgment on themselves: that their actions were intrinsically wrong and deserved the punishments inflicted by the gods and the Gauls. If some said necessity in war made them do it, this was no excuse, since the result was a far worse necessity—a self-inflicted one.

The only thing that could restore Rome to safety, Machiavelli says, was to draw "back to the limits" defined by the law of nations. He praises the general Furius Camillus for urging his countrymen to punish the ambassadors as they should have done earlier, thereby restoring the customary ethical orders they had violated at such high cost to themselves. Camillus's virtuous "orders" included acts of public repentance for Rome's egregious arrogance—thereby purging his countrymen of the hubris that provoked their enemies to inflict such merciless retribution. By these means Romans restored—and in the longer term increased—their city's strength on foundations that respected *ordinario* limits on any city's power.

Machiavelli uses the episode to show that even under pressure of war, injustice makes you less safe, because it's both natural and reasonable for human beings to seek to punish it. The conventions of mutual self-restraint embodied in the ancient *ius gentium* were established to promote a modicum of trust in conditions where deception and violence would otherwise have free rein, especially conditions of war. To violate such conventions unilaterally was both an order-destroying act of arrogance and an insult to the honor of others who observed them. Far from regarding war as an altogether disordered and lawless condition, Machiavelli shares the ancient view that it can and ought to be regulated by human conventions, which are reasonably regarded as sacred even on a largely secular view of sanctity.³¹ Injustice destroys the fragile yet all-the-more-necessary orders prescribed by the law of nations in the heat of war.

If Machiavelli upholds traditional laws of war in the Roman ambassadors' case, his views on the use of fraud in warfare are also only deceptively amoral. He begins another chapter in the *Discourses* with a teasing paradox: "Although to use fraud in every action is detestable," he declares, "nonetheless in managing war it is a praiseworthy and glorious thing."³² Detestable in *every* action, yet not in war, which is undoubtedly an ac-

tion? By this late stage in the book, readers will have encountered many similar oddities and should not expect straightforward reasoning. It transpires that his examples of glorious wartime fraud are confined to tactical ruses on the battlefield, such as disguising soldiers in shepherd's clothing or simulating flight. Such deceptions are an accepted part of military tactics; they do not involve any violation of trust, treaties, or the unwritten law of nations. Machiavelli is clear about this distinction: "I do not understand that fraud to be glorious which makes you break faith given and pacts made; for although this may at some time acquire state and kingdom for you, it will never acquire glory for you." He rejects, moreover, the view that deception used against enemies is more acceptable than that used against friends. When he condones fraud, "I speak of the fraud that is used with the enemy who does not trust in you [*non si fida di te*] and that properly consists in managing war": a rather narrow range of fraudulent actions, since outside specific battlefield conditions where cunning ruses are permitted, even enemies should trust you to keep your agreements, as the example of the faithless Roman ambassadors shows.

As for using fraud or breaking pacts with foreigners who are not at war with you, Machiavelli distinguishes between breaking unforced accords and breaking those made by force. No state, whether principality or republic, can be expected to stick to forced agreements when its survival is threatened. Princes, however, are more likely to violate unforced treaties than republics, since princes are more inclined to put their own utility ahead of good faith. Machiavelli gives an example from Thucydides of his general observation that "the least utility has made a prince break faith, and a great utility has not made a republic" do so. When the cunning Athenian leader Themistocles proposed to seize another city's fleet "though it remained under their faith," thus enabling the Athenians to become "wholly arbiters" of Greece, the Athenian people rejected his "very useful but very dishonest" proposal, refusing to practice such a low deception even for the sake of policy "that would be of great utility to their fatherland." Does Machiavelli imply that the people were hopelessly naïve to care so much about their own honesty—their integrity—that they missed a golden opportunity to aggrandize their city? On the contrary, he remarks that in these matters "the people makes lesser errors than the prince, and because of this can be trusted more than the prince." If one of the firmest sources of a city's power and safety is the unwavering trust of others, then honesty is ultimately more useful than the narrower, misleadingly useful kind of utility pursued by princes and by Themistocles.³³

VII. CONCLUSION

When dealing with questions of necessity, good faith, and justice, Machiavelli's texts often give the impression of speaking in two voices. One is louder, strident, ambitious, go-it-alone, and at times shockingly amoral. Its language is seductively unconventional, its examples grandiose, "rare," and "extraordinary." The second voice is less conspicuous and, for readers on the lookout for subversive Machiavellianisms, far less interesting. Yet its advice forms the bedrock of the policies that Machiavelli sees as essential for building sustainable power and security. Over and over, we see that unilateral amorality brings quick, easy, and immense acquisitions. But it is much less efficacious for maintaining stable orders, within or among polities.³⁴ If we examine the quality of the arguments and examples that support each position, we find that Machiavelli provides much stronger ones for collaborative realism—which has strong ethical dimensions—and extremely problematic ones for assertive unilateralism. The great genius of his writing is that throughout *The Prince* and the *Discourses* he dangles both options before us. Constantly shifting between one and the other, he compels readers to decide for themselves which is the more realistic route to lasting safety.



NOTES

1. *Prince* 17, 15.

2. *Discourses* 2.19.

3. *Prince* 18.

4. *Discourses* 1.58.

5. *Prince* 10.

6. In proposals for reforming Florence's military written in 1505–6, Machiavelli regrets that his city lacks the two essential pillars of any political order, justice and arms, and insists that "the only way to recover the one and the other is to order arms through public deliberation, and maintain them with good orders." (*Cagione della Ordinanza*, 26–27.)

7. *Prince* 10.

8. *Ibid.* 24.

9. *Discourses* 3.33; italics added.

10. *Prince* 21.

11. *Legation* to Baglioni, 11 April 1505.

12. *Prince* 17, 19. Machiavelli often distinguishes between the fear inflicted by

brute force or terror and the reasoned fear that arises from transparent, well-ordered arms, good discipline, and transparently applied punishments; see Erica Benner, *Machiavelli's Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 394–406.

13. *Discourses* 2.24, 2.32, 2.23 (citing Livy), *Florentine Histories* 8.30.

14. I address it at length in *Machiavelli's Ethics* and *Machiavelli's Prince: A New Reading* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2013).

15. This is one of Machiavelli's signature techniques of ironic writing; see "Machiavelli's Ironic Techniques" in Benner, *Machiavelli's Prince*, xlv–lv.

16. Machiavelli paraphrases Aristotle here; compare *Discourses* 3.26. Also compare Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1382b7–9: "most men are rather bad than good and the slaves of gain and cowardly in times of danger . . . And those who are able to ill-treat others are to be feared by those who can be so treated; for as a rule men do wrong whenever they can."

17. For example, *Discourses* 3.12.

18. *Discourses* 1.1; see Benner, *Machiavelli's Ethics*, chap. 4.

19. Thanks to Sam Bowles for alerting me to this.

20. On the desires to dominate and not be dominated, see *Discourses* 1.5, *Florentine Histories* 3.1.

21. *Discourses* 2.27.

22. See *Prince* 3–5 on reactions to Roman expansion; *Discourses* 3.37.

23. *Discourses* 1.1, *Prince* 25.

24. *Discourses* 3.41.

25. For examples see *Florentine Histories* 5.11 and Benner, *Machiavelli's Ethics*, 135–37, 145–47, 166, 330–31.

26. *Discourses* 1.2.

27. *Ibid.* 1.18.

28. *Ibid.* 1.16.

29. Spinoza, *Tractatus Politicus* (1677) 6.4–5, 7.1. 10.1.

30. *Discourses* 2.28, 3.1.

31. Echoing Livy, Machiavelli links Gauls' retribution to punishment from "heaven"—moral justice (see *Machiavelli's Ethics*, chap. 5).

32. *Discourses* 3.40.

33. *Ibid.* 1.59.

34. On more and less useful "modes" for acquiring and maintaining states, see *Prince* 6–7.

Loyalty in Adversity

STEPHEN HOLMES

Because the future is fundamentally unpredictable, the struggle to attain and preserve political power is always a voyage into the unknown. Unpredictability is a challenge confronting all rulers, from the usurper prince to the elected republican leader. In Machiavelli's words, all rulers—whether they observe or disregard conventional moral rules—aspire and cling to power “in good or in adverse fortune” (D III.41, 301).¹ Unforeseen circumstances regularly make a mockery even of the best laid plans. Prudence is obviously preferable to folly. But dramatic reversals of fortune can and do occur with little regard for the wishes of even the most gifted and wily wielders of power.

I. THREE CONCEPTS OF FORTUNE

How political rulers and political communities respond to contingencies and especially to erratic cycles of good and bad luck is a theme running throughout Machiavelli's works. Before rehearsing the ways in which *virtù* confronts fortune with variable success, however, we need to recall fortune's three different faces or dimensions. Machiavelli depicts fortune variously as a woman who must be impetuously beaten, as a periodically overflowing river that must be safely contained by levies built in advance, and as an arbiter who capriciously elevates and casts down men of *virtù*, thereby unilaterally bestowing success or failure on human endeavors while somehow occasionally permitting men of *virtù* to exert residual control over their own destinies.

Reconciling such mismatched metaphors is no easy task, as the rich secondary literature on the role of *fortuna* in *The Prince* amply demonstrates. All we can hazard at the outset is that the first two suggestions of

how *virtù* should confront fortune—judiciously constructing reliable institutions versus rashly resorting to force majeure—echo the clashing imperatives that every ruler who hopes to survive must follow: to learn how to be good and to learn how not to be good according to the necessities of the situation at hand.

The third image of fortune as an otherwise all-controlling despot who intermittently and inexplicably lapses into benign neglect is introduced less as an empirical generalization than as a hypothesis that, if accepted, rescues human agents from fatalism and despair (P 25, 98). Credit for worldly success can be *shared* by fortune and *virtù*, ideally, if fortune supplies the opportunities that individuals of outstanding *virtù* will intuitively recognize and exploit. Interestingly, this is not Machiavelli's last word on the subject, since he also suggests that the canniest virtuosi can sometimes play God, engineering the desirable difficulties that allow their latent *virtù* to shine (P 20, 85).

Empiricism, in any case, provides a poor guide to political action because human conduct is profoundly shaped by anxiety about a reality that cannot be seen, namely the future. The unpredictability of the future can be a liability for rulers, of course, but it can also be an asset. The ability to persuade others to believe claims about the future that are currently unverifiable and irrefutable is an important source of power. This is why bamboozling men's minds (*aggirare e' cervelli delli uomini* [P 18, 69]) plays such a central role in politics. Machiavelli emphasizes the decisive political import of empirically unfalsifiable but politically effective statements about the future when he discusses the way Roman military commanders instilled self-confidence in their troops by convincing them, through presumably rigged auguries, that the gods guaranteed victory (D 1.14, 42).

Machiavelli's confident generalization that empirically baseless prophecies can be self-fulfilling implies that, for those who know how to extract maxims of prudence from recorded history and personal observation, the future is not *entirely* unpredictable. If human psychology displays observable regularities (such as the tendency of soldiers to fight with redoubled ardor once assured of divine favor), then rulers who understand these law-like patterns of behavioral inclination and response can exert some measure of control over events. In other words, if you understand human nature, you can design a workable strategy for mastering the future at least to a modest degree. The recommended approach, distilled from Machiavelli's hard-earned familiarity with the actions of great men, takes the volatility and capriciousness of fortune as a given. So how do the seekers and wielders of power who recognize that fortune is chronically unstable

prepare for unforeseeable bouts of adversity in a way that maximizes their chances for survival and success?

II. EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

Every attempt to boil down Machiavelli's richly imaginative reflections on political power to a catchphrase will miserably if not ludicrously fail. Yet it can be a useful exercise to see how far one can push a single formula. In this spirit, I will ask what we can learn if we identify Machiavelli's leading concern with emergency preparedness. Although familiar to commentators, this theme has seldom been ascribed the preeminence in Machiavelli's thought that it deserves. Yet his preoccupation with emergency preparedness is clear from many passages, such as his remark in *The Prince* that "all wise princes . . . not only have to have regard for present troubles but also for future ones, and they have to avoid these with all their industry" (P 3, 12). The centrality of this theme is also illustrated in the *Discourses* where he discusses rulers who find themselves unable to defend themselves *nelle avversità* because they have not exploited periods of peace and prosperity to make adequate preparations (D 3.31, 281). No respecter of persons, the stop-and-go cartwheel of fortune will occasionally topple even the best-prepared rulers. But the personally blameworthy rulers are the ones who lose their grip on power because they foolishly failed to look ahead, "never having thought that quiet times could change" (P 24, 97), and therefore never took even the most elementary precautions.

Emergency preparedness is risk mitigation, the way virtuosi rulers insure themselves, to the extent possible, against the vagaries of fortune. This approach to unpredictability and uncertainty is most vividly conveyed in Machiavelli's picture of fortune not as a woman to be impetuously and violently assaulted but as a river whose own impetuosity and violence must be safely channeled by the human *virtù* that carefully constructs and locates dikes in the right places well in advance. No one can resist a torrential river that breaks her banks, uproots trees, destroys houses, tears up the earth, and forces everyone in her path to abandon their possessions and flee. Yet when the water recedes, men can learn from the damage, prepare an after-incident report, and rebuild in a more flood-resistant way. In other words, defense against fortune's onrushing rapids requires not audacity but preparing for the storm when the sea is calm (P 25, 98).

Men are not helpless before fortune's surging torrent because she "demonstrates her power where virtue has not been put in order to resist

her and therefore turns her impetus where she knows that dams and dikes have not been made to contain her" (P 25, 98–99). To resist fortune, this formulation implies, *virtù* must be "ordered." The personal *virtù* of the prescient ruler is exhibited in his workmanlike creation of "virtuous institutions" ["virtuose costituzioni"] (D 2.24, 185) that facilitate the adaptability to changing circumstances and the long-distance vision associated with regime survival in a hostile environment. But the remarkable thing about the phrase cited is the way Machiavelli's metaphor morphs mid-sentence, swerving from dikes that mitigate the destructive consequences of a flood to dikes that miraculously deter the river of fortune from overflowing in the first place. Adversity can be *deterred* by *virtù*, of course, only when it comes in the shape of adversaries who consciously consider the opportunity costs of an attack and, impressed by the ramparts raised against them, decide to direct their belligerence at a softer target. If Italy, prior to 1494, "had been diked by suitable virtue, like Germany, Spain, and France, either this flood would not have brought the great variations that it has, or it would not have come here" (P 25, 98–99).

III. STOCKPILING RESERVES

An example of successful risk mitigation is provided by the "cities of Germany" that "always keep in their public stores enough to drink and to eat and to burn for a year" (P 10, 43) on the off chance that they will be unexpectedly placed under siege.² Stockpiling materiel in case of emergency is one way to prepare for adversity. But Machiavelli devotes more attention to stockpiling something even more precious, namely popular loyalty. Here we come to the pivotal point where the descriptive and normative sides of Machiavelli's thinking overlap and coincide: *Rulers can survive bouts of ill fortune if their citizens or subjects are imbued with the kind of nonstrategic devotion, or ostinata fede (P 26),³ that will prevent their melting away in a crisis. Rulers can repel the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune by mobilizing and maintaining the noncalculating allegiance of citizens or subjects long enough during a regime-threatening crisis so that fortune has a chance to shift in their favor again.*

There is no guarantee that his own good luck (or, what amounts to the same thing, the bad luck of his enemies) will reappear in time to allow an embattled ruler to escape unscathed from a bout of adversity, of course. But luck shifts unpredictably, and holding one's armed supporters together as long as possible increases the chances of surviving what may ultimately turn out to be only a temporary setback.

Formulated differently: *Fatalism in adversity is chronically short-sighted because fortune can always take a turn for the better*. This is why Machiavelli so strongly advocates riding out, not trying futilely to halt, the gales and gusts of fortune. Men “should indeed never give up” because they do not know what fortune will bring next: “it proceeds by oblique and unknown ways” and therefore “they have always to hope and, since they hope, not to give up in whatever fortune and in whatever travail they may find themselves” (D 2.29, 199). Giving up prematurely is a mistake commonly made by those who, in adversity, fail to realize that their streak of bad luck too may, without warning, change for the better. But only a ruler who has prepared for adversity by storing up in advance the nonstrategic loyalty of supporters will have the logistical and therefore psychological wherewithal to avoid defeatism and, as a result, live to fight another day.

But how can a prince gain the *ostinata fede* of his followers? The smart move for any ruler aiming to stockpile the adversity-resistant loyalty of supporters is *self-restraint*.⁴ Here is the key passage in which Machiavelli summarizes how anticipation of reversals of fortune will lead the far-seeing ruler to abstain from abusing his subjects given the certainty that he will need popular allegiance and cooperation at some unknown point in the future:

whoever holds a state, whether republic or prince, should consider beforehand what times can come up against him, and which men he can have need of in adverse times; and then live with them in the mode that he judges to be necessary to live, should any case whatever come up. The one who governs himself otherwise—whether prince or republic, and especially a prince—and then believes in the fact that, when danger comes up, he can regain men with benefits, deceives himself; for not only does he not secure himself with them but he hastens his own ruin (D 1.32, 70–71)

Preparing for emergencies in the midst of a comforting normality naturally requires an ability to resist the temptation to lower one’s guard when lulled into complacency by peace and prosperity. But it also demands long-gestation investment in the obstinate, noncalculating, never-say-die loyalty of supporters, a loyalty that will not dissolve when *tempi avversi* strike. This is a large part of what Machiavelli means by his advice to any and every political leader to “never remain idle in peaceful times” but to apply himself assiduously “so that when fortune changes, it will find him ready to resist them” (P 14, 60). Instilling unflinching fealty, not merely

discipline and skill, into armed fighters must be a principal peacetime objective of any ruler who wishes to navigate his way successfully through perilous times. Only the unwavering loyalty of soldiers, in fact, makes them into "the sinew of war" (D 2.1, 248).

A ruler who fights "with his arms and not with alien arms" (P 13, 56) fights with the help of "good soldiers," meaning those who remain tenaciously loyal in adversity. The possessive "his" ["sua"] in the expression "his arms" ["le arme sua"] refers to the willingness of followers to fight with and for their ruler through thick and thin. Supporters who refuse to jump ship when the ruler's luck, perhaps temporarily, turns sour are "his arms." These can compose a citizen army in a republic or an army of loyal subjects in a kingdom, but they cannot be mercenaries who fight only because they are "soldati" (rented on a short-term basis for a handful of *soldi*) and who are therefore highly unlikely to remain loyal when the chips are down. Nothing is more likely to destroy a ruler than such a *milizia infidèle* (P 7). Thus, in the famous phrase "uno principe nuovo in uno principato nuovo sempre vi ha ordinato l'arme" (P 20), the verb *ordinare* (to "organize" or "constitute") does not refer only to chains of command, orders of battle, rules of engagement, and so forth. It also and most essentially refers to instilling and maintaining the loyalty of the troops or "faithful arms" ["l'armi fideli"] (D 1.10, 147). Similarly, the word "good" in the adage "the foundation of all states is a good military" [la buona milizia"] (D 3.31, 283) includes the soldiers' dependability, in the sense of *semper fidelis* even when their ruler's enterprise looks to be coming unwound.

IV. THE SOURCES OF LOYALTY IN ADVERSITY

The only way for a prince to find *remedy in adversity* is to have the people as a friend (P 9). But how does he win their friendship? How exactly can a ruler preemptively defend against the permanent proclivity of fair-weather supporters to abandon their leader opportunistically or in panic when he looks to be heading for a smashup? How can he "gain friends to himself" (P 7, 32), followers and supporters who will be reluctant to desert? How can he bind them to his cause by "a chain of obligation" (P 17, 66) that they will not break as soon as they perceive an advantage in so doing? How can he rally the people behind his banner or *tirarsi dietro e' populi* (P 4)? These are perennial questions because most men are "ungrateful, fickle" and "evaders of danger" (P 17, 66). By nature, they stick with their ruler only so long as it serves their interests. In times of peace and prosperity, when the ruler treats his subjects or citizens well but does not especially need their

support and cooperation, they promise him “their blood, property, lives, and children” (P 17, 66). If a ruler believes such flimsy assurances, he is no different from those ordinary chumps who “most often deceive themselves” about the love that others bear them (D 3.6, 222–223). Whether ingratiating or heartfelt, such promissory notes cannot be cashed. Many of those who, in prosperous times, swear that they will always support their ruler will perfidiously or pusillanimously turn against him in adversity. Indeed, inferring from professions of loyalty offered in easy times how followers will behave in hard times is a classic example of false empiricism. The central challenge for surviving adversity, in any case, is that the ruler “will always have, in uncertain times, a shortage of those one can trust” (P 9, 42).

The people, unlike the *grandi*, do not desire to command and oppress. The remarkable lack of *libido dominandi* displayed by the majority of the population does not reflect moral restraint, however. Only the few are in a position to command and oppress for a simple reason. Collective action problems make it impossible for the people as a whole to rule: “in all republics, ordered in whatever mode, never do even forty or fifty citizens reach the ranks of command” (D 1.16, 46). But if the many cannot realistically hope to rule, what can they realistically hope to do? Because doing it requires no more coordination than a bank run, abandoning a leader on the verge of defeat is a feasible popular move. Citizens in republics and subjects in principalities alike are prone to desert their ruler when they think his lucky star is about to crash and burn.

The likelihood of defection in adversity is a danger about which rulers learn only second-hand, from books, not from first-hand experience. This is because rulers whose followers defect in adversity do not survive to perform better next time (P 9, 42). But what does Machiavelli tell us about how loyalty in adversity can be excited or instilled?

Other things being equal, he implies, followers will ordinarily ditch their leader when dutiful allegiance no longer serves their rational calculating self-interest. To create loyalty in adversity, therefore, “a wise prince must think of a way by which his citizens, always and in every quality of time, have need of the state and of himself; and then they will always be faithful to him” (P 9, 42). He must somehow induce followers to entwine their fortune with his own. But how can a ruler make his subjects need him in bad times as well as good?

Frustratingly enough, Machiavelli provides no succinct summary of the ways in which leaders might inspire followers with the kind and degree of loyalty that can survive adversity. In one well-known passage, he

claims that such *ostinata fede* depends on context and so no rules can be given: "The prince can gain the people to himself in many modes, for which one cannot give certain rules because the modes vary according to circumstances, and so they will be left out" (P 9, 40-41). So how can we piece together and make sense of Machiavelli's scattered, telegraphic, miscellaneous, and perhaps intentionally nebulous accounts of how rulers create loyalty in adversity?

V. THE FACES OF LOYALTY

We can deepen our understanding of popular loyalty as the key to emergency preparedness by reconsidering one of the few passages in which Machiavelli employs the word *lealtà* as opposed to *fidelità* or *fede*. Astute rulers without a shred of moral integrity, he writes, have consistently prevailed over naively moral rulers who have been true to their word, that is, "who have founded themselves on loyalty" ["che si sono fondati in sulla lealtà"] (P 18, 69). A ruler who keeps his promises as a matter of honor has little chance of surviving in an international environment where peer competitors feel free to act in bad faith. This dizzying contrast between the folly of rulers who honor their pledges to political rivals and the folly of rulers who renege on their pledges to the ruled cries out for commentary.

Given the devious and duplicitous behavior of rival rulers and factional leaders, the norm *pacta sunt servanda* is often a "trap" by which school-book morality charms and then destroys wielders of power. The impulse of rulers to court popularity by visibly conforming to socially inculcated ideals such as generosity and leniency, as Quentin Skinner explains in chapter 5 of this volume, can be self-defeating. The road to hell is paved with conventional moral teachings because rulers who act accordingly often fail to take adverse consequences into account. Improvident generosity, for instance, leads through state insolvency to resentment at heavy taxation. Excessive leniency by the ruler permits factional violence to spin out of control and thereby excites public contempt for the ruler's squeamish indecisiveness (P 3, 10-11). For rulers who are not foxy enough to think two steps ahead, the social ideals of generosity, leniency, and so forth are as addictive as delicious sweets. They go to your head at first, and their ruinous effects become apparent only subsequently, when it is too late to undo the damage (P 13, 57).

Loyalty, to return to our theme, can be just another sugar-coated poison pill. In particular, unscrupulous rivals can take advantage of a ruler's naïve desire to keep his word. They can tactically exploit his nonstrate-

gic disposition to behave honorably to remove him from power and even take away his life (P 18, 69). Ingratiating flattery and gift horses are typical methods by which maliciously astute rivals can bamboozle the brains of a ruler they are seeking to outwit or depose. But the most interesting form of strategic deceit, for our purposes, is the feigning of loyalty. No ruler would bother to feign loyalty to another ruler unless a shared code of honor created the strong presumption that plighted faith will usually be respected, even if it requires a smothering of rational calculating self-interest. In a world wholly bereft of nonstrategic loyalty, seekers and wielders of power could never manipulate the loyalty of others for either benevolent or nefarious ends.

VI. THE BEST FORTRESS

It is fortunate that armed followers can display nonstrategic loyalty because this is the stockpiled reserve most likely to permit a ruler to survive adversity. The ruled will be unflinchingly loyal to their ruler, however, only if the ruler manages to convince them that, whatever happens, he will remain loyal to them. This is one of those observed regularities of human behavior that the ruler, despite the inscrutability of the future, can know in advance. In dealing with peer rivals, the ruler is sometimes forced to betray sworn loyalties, that is, he is sometimes forced not to be good. In dealing with the people, by contrast, a savvy ruler, unless he is a warlord commanding a personally loyal standing army, is always forced to be good to the people.

Delving deeper into the question of how rulers can foster popular loyalty in adversity requires us to reconsider Machiavelli's thoughts on fear, hatred, and love. Bush-league Machiavellians recite the slogan "it is better to be feared than loved" as if it were a wedding vow. But Machiavelli was more interested in the *ruler's fear* of being assassinated or betrayed by vindictive and ambitious subjects, especially among the upper classes, than in the fear felt by the governed in the presence of their governors. Rulers will be good, in the sense of benevolent to the people, only when they are forced to be so. They keep *el popolo amico*, when they do, only because their fear of violent death so dictates. To guard against coups, assassination plots, and military invasions, they must avoid doing anything that would encourage the people to abandon them when under attack by rival factions within their city or by rival rulers from other cities. The ruler's fear of being abandoned in adversity will create a chain of obligation that *binds the ruler to the people* so long as his power is threatened by politi-

cal rivals. This is the real liberalism of fear. How binding himself to the people helps the ruler bind the people to himself, however, remains to be explained.

Rulers have greater reason to fear popular defection than popular rebellion. Not the threat of revolution but the threat to withhold the cooperation a leader knows he needs in order to deter domestic coups and foreign attacks is the most effective leverage by which the people can extract privileges and immunities from the ruler: "The worst that a prince can expect from a hostile people is to be abandoned by it" (P 9, 39). Only power can check power, and the power of the people rests mostly on their ability to credibly threaten to withdraw the cooperation that the ruler expects to need in case of adversity. The threat is credible because a stampede or avalanche of defections can be loosed, as mentioned, with minimal coordination among the defectors. Moreover, the people's fear of the ruler's revenge will not prevent the people from remaining passive and disobliging when adversity strikes.

The ruler's fear of being deposed and killed by an ambitious or disappointed faction is underwritten by his fear of being abandoned by the people. The importance of not being hated by the people is never more obvious than when a foreign enemy is hammering at the gates and/or domestic conspirators are slinking around street corners and palace hallways. Assassination plots are deterred not only by the majesty of office and the regular machinery of law enforcement but also by support from ordinary citizens and subjects. When the prince also has *la benivolenzia popolare* on his side, then "it is impossible that anyone should be so rash as to conspire" (P 19, 73).

Catering to the people is therefore a long-gestation investment aimed at reducing over time the ruler's natural fear of assassination and betrayal, not to mention wartime defection. Ratcheting up the people's fear of their ruler will not necessarily diminish the ruler's paralyzing fear of potential assassins and malevolent turncoats. If the ruler has built his "fortress" in the people's respect and loyalty, by contrast, not the ruler but the conspirators and traitors will be the ones paralyzed by their fear of being tricked by feigned professions of undying loyalty from fellow conspirators ready to betray their confidence for personal advantage. Even if their plot were to succeed, moreover, assassins will be afraid of being torn limb from limb by an irate public. They will have no refuge (P 19, 73).⁵ If they think they will not satisfy but rather offend the people, few would-be assassins, even if they luck upon a handful of allies they think they can trust, will have the courage to carry out the deed.

Actions that instill fear also risk triggering hatred. Hatred incites a craving for vengeance more quickly than fear can inhibit it. The ruler's justified fear of a popular backlash is why his need to avoid hatred should persuade him to minimize his resort to rule-by-fear (P 16, 65). It is true that Hannibal's ethnically mixed forces remained obedient and united while fighting in a foreign land in part because they feared his "inhuman cruelty" (P 17, 67). But Hannibal was ruling not a city but an army. In cities, cruelty must be used sparingly and gotten over quickly so that citizens can be convinced that it will not return. This is a decisive consideration because "he who has the collectivity as enemy never secures himself; and the more cruelty he uses, the weaker his principality becomes" (D 1.16, 45).

A final piece of evidence that "the best fortress there is, is not to be hated by the people" (P 20, 87) is that even the ruler of a fortified town who stockpiles firewood and other necessities for the winter on the off chance that his townsmen will be unexpectedly placed under siege will retain power only if, in addition, he "is not hated by the people" (P 10, 43). This central Machiavellian imperative is implied by his most general definition of government, namely: government is nothing other than a way of treating subjects so that they have either no capacity or *no compelling reason* to hurt you ["uno governo non è altro che tenere in modo i sudditi che non ti possano o debbano offendere"] (D. 2.23, my emphasis).

All towns in late-medieval Italy were walled. This includes the self-governing republics in which the first line of defense for *il vivere libero* was collectively and laboriously constructed stone by stone. City walls may have encouraged the spread of "civilian" or nonmartial habits in the population, but their obvious utility for repelling surprise attacks, something even the best-trained soldiers, who occasionally need to sleep, could not do, made them universal. Princes who built stand-alone forts, by contrast, were making a grave mistake. Such small forts, designed to shelter not the people but the princely court, are counterproductive because a safe harbor creates an incentive for the ruler, and especially his sons born to, and spoiled by, privilege, to treat the people with obnoxious insolence, relieving them of any fear of an immediate backlash. The ruler who builds fortresses to defend himself from his potentially rebellious subjects should ask why he needs to be defended from his subjects in the first place and especially why they might be disposed to rebel.

The reason must be that his subjects hate him or, rather, hate the way he abuses them. But abusive treatment of subjects by rulers is a dependent variable that itself must be explained. The cause Machiavelli emphasizes is the ruler's unfounded belief that he can control his subjects

by repressive force. This widespread illusion is a sure sign of the ruler's lack of prudence, since compulsion can, at best, produce passive obedience but not loyalty in adversity. But why would a ruler come to believe that force suffices to govern the people? Machiavelli has reverse engineered the fortress-building project and discovered that the alleged motive for building fortresses, the ruler's need to protect himself from popular hatred and rebellion, is actually the effect and not the cause of fortress building: "the bad treatment that is the cause of their hatred arises in good part from the prince's or the republic's having fortresses" (D 2.24, 185). In peacetime, fortresses give the ruler "more spirit to do evil," making you "more audacious and more violent toward your subjects" (D 2.24, 185). The subtlety of Machiavelli's analysis, here as elsewhere, stems from his insight into the causally complex relation between means and ends. Fortresses are not the rational means to the rational end of security for the ruler. Instead, means reshape ends or capacities create intentions. The availability of a sanctuary from popular backlash fosters in the ruling family the illusion that abusing the people will have no negative downstream consequences. This is shortsighted. The popular animosity toward the ruler that naturally results from abusive treatment will prove disastrous in wartime when hostile subjects may either open the gates of the city to the enemy or, at the very least, refuse to fight with ardor for a ruler who has abused them so cruelly.

VII. THE SELF-RESTRAINING STATE

A ruler who behaves arbitrarily and observes no self-restraint in his dealings with the people is not necessarily thinking straight [*"un principe che può fare ciò ch'ei vuole, è pazzo"*] (D 1.58, 118). A limited state can be more powerful than an unlimited state, moreover, because the former can mobilize greater and more reliable public support than the latter. To avoid the kind of popular hatred that will encourage defection in adversity, the ruler will restrain himself and his magistrates from stealing the property and violating the women of his subjects or citizens. In a world ruled by unpredictability, the modest sphere in which the ruler guarantees legal certainty in acquisitions and transactions is a benefit doled out to citizens and subjects slowly, over time, so that it tastes better and is appreciated more (P 8, 38). From his own perspective, the ruler's contribution to legal certainty and economic prosperity pays off not only because it prevents hatred and wins friends but also because it swells the tax base on which effective defense against foreign rivals depends.

Only rulers who have long-distance vision will be motivated to exercise the prudent self-restraint that helps commit the people to their cause. Fortune's capricious ups and downs cannot be regularized or evened out, therefore, but they can be ridden rodeo-style if rulers overcome their natural myopia.⁶ A ruler who wishes to nip problems in the bud, before they get out of hand, must live among his subjects, rather than retreating into palatial luxury while assigning day-to-day governance to magistrates. Only first-hand exposure to the public mind will alert the ruler to the dangerous backlash that government policy often provokes. An absentee ruler who governs through magistrates will also expose himself, "especially in adverse times," to having these magistrates "take away his state with great ease" (P 9, 42).

The self-restraint of the ruler is experienced by his subjects as the rule of law. Machiavelli's aside in *The Prince* that "I shall leave out the reasoning on laws" (P 12, 48) is therefore misleading. Having argued both that "to fight . . . with laws . . . is proper to man" and that "it is necessary for a prince to know well how to use . . . the man" (P 18, 69), Machiavelli naturally concludes that it is also necessary, some of the time, for a ruler to know how to rule through laws known in advance and reliably enforced.

Preserving one's state requires respecting the property of your citizens and subjects: a ruler "above all . . . must abstain from the property of others" (P 17, 67) in order to avoid being hated. This is perhaps the most important illustration of legitimation through self-restraint, presented by Machiavelli as the opposite of ruling through fear. Citizens and subjects must be *relieved* of any fear of confiscation. Wives, sisters, and daughters should also remain untouched, less perhaps as property than as neuralgic points of male honor. Acquisitiveness is perfectly natural, but if it involves seizure of what others believe to belong to them it will be bitterly resented. A prohibition against arbitrary takings is more important politically than a prohibition on arbitrary killings because motives for capital punishment are rarer and disappear more quickly than reasons for confiscating private property. Unlike capital punishment, property confiscation is a slippery slope because "he who begins to live by rapine always finds cause to seize others' property" (P 17, 67). If a ruler begins on this road he will become addicted to confiscatory measures and will end up turning the majority of his citizens or subjects against him.

It is worse to be feared than loved if fear includes the people's fear that the ruler will arbitrarily confiscate their property or rape their wives and daughters. A ruler will weaken his city and therefore inadvertently cripple himself if he rules by this kind of fear. Moreover, citizens will exert them-

selves economically only if they have a reasonable chance of capturing some benefits from such exertion: "each willingly . . . seeks to acquire those goods he believes he can enjoy once acquired" (D 2.2, 132). They will not create taxable wealth and improve their property without the kind of legal certainty in acquisitions and transactions that can be supplied only by the rule of law. To say that a prudent ruler must encourage economic activity by making his own behavior predictable is, once again, to deny that he should rule through fear. Riches multiply only when property rights become secure against confiscation by the authorities.

A ruler cannot win the *ostinata fede* of his followers simply by refraining from harming them: "For no one ever confesses that he has an obligation to one who does not offend him" (D 1.16, 45). To the extent that they preside over pure meritocracies devoid of favoritism, uncorrupt rulers in uncorrupt republics have no reliable, and that means partisan, friends. To remedy this deficit of loyal supporters, the prudent ruler will assign the administration of justice to independent tribunals and reserves to himself the supply of *grazia* that, as a surprising expression of undeserved favoritism, tends to excite gratitude and allegiance (P 19).

On the other hand, the rule of law itself can also produce a measure of genuine loyalty if, as already indicated, it results in positive benefits that the people can savor over time. A prudent ruler must be especially careful to satisfy the interest of citizens or subjects in legal certainty in their business affairs or "private concerns" ["*maneggi privati*"] (P 19, 72). He must bring to a swift and unshakable conclusion disputes about who owns what and who owes what to whom in order for the economy to function smoothly. *Stare decisis* must prevail and the ruler must protect himself against disinformation that economic losers are apt to feed maliciously into the dispute resolution system. That is to say, the ruler "should insist that his judgments [*la sua sentenza*] in the private concerns of his subjects be irrevocable. And he should maintain such an opinion of himself that no one thinks either of deceiving him or of getting around him" (P 19, 72). More particularly, the ruler "should inspire his citizens to follow their pursuits quietly, in trade and in agriculture and in every other pursuit of men, so that one person does not fear to adorn his possessions for fear that they be taken away from him, and another to open up a trade for fear of taxes" (P 21, 91). Rulers can foster economic prosperity, once again, only if their citizens or subjects do not fear arbitrary confiscation and excessive taxation. The private wealth accumulated in a state under the far-seeing protection of its ruler, moreover, is an essential component of emergency preparedness. By catering to the *utilità de' sudditi* (P 8, 38), as already

mentioned, the ruler can also swell the tax base on which he will draw in times of war and factional strife.

VIII. LOYALTY AND SACRIFICE

Another component of Machiavelli's multifaceted theory of loyalty in adversity surfaces in his paradoxical remark that "the nature of men is to be obligated as much by benefits they give as by benefits they receive" (P 10, 44). The subconscious need to reduce cognitive dissonance may be involved here. People tend to invent *ex post* justifications for sacrifices made: if it was so costly, it must have been worthwhile. But Machiavelli himself places greater stress on a different dynamic. The context in which this issue arises is that siege, mentioned above, in which the people, having retreated behind city walls on the approach of the marauding enemy army, look on helplessly as their farms and fields are burned. Those besieged citizens "unite with their prince" (P 10, 44), that is, are loyal in adversity, because they know that he owes them an enormous debt that must, in all honor, be repaid. Their fortunes are now intertwined. Expecting to be repaid, according to the principle of reciprocity between ruler and ruled, they have an enormous stake in his victory, which encourages them to fight with unrelenting ferocity of his/their own behalf.

But what makes these citizens so confident that their ruler will honor his obligation toward those soldiers who defend him in adversity? How will he convince them that he will continue to treat them decently after they put their lives at risk to help him repel an existential threat? The people are not stupid. They realize that their ruler will not keep his promises to them unless he needs their cooperation over time. The ruler will "always and in every quality of time" (P 9, 42) be loyal to the ruled only because the international and domestic environment will almost certainly continue to be populated by rivals who would like to take away his state and his life. If the people believed that their ruler could survive and flourish without them, or if they thought that he thought he could, they would cease to trust him and would therefore be strongly disposed to abandon him in adversity.

The people will willingly tie their fortune to the fortunes of their ruler, then, only when convinced of the ruler's existential dependence on their willing support. To emphasize the role of foreign danger, especially, in creating pacts of mutual loyalty between rulers and ruled, Machiavelli explains why new princes, desperate to secure popular allegiance, invariably arm the people. In this way "from subjects they are made into your parti-

sans" (P 20, 83). To make the people into the ruler's loyal supporters it is necessary to give them the means to defend themselves against abuse by the ruler's officials, to involve them in the joint defense of the city from dangerous foreign conquerors, and to allow them to fight "as free persons" (D 1.43, 91) for their own share of booty and glory. Fighting for their ruler, armed subjects will feel "affection toward him for whom they engage in combat" so that they "become his partisans" (D 1.43, 91).

IX. LOYALTY AND CRUELTY

It may not always be possible to retain the good will of the people while treating the supercilious nobility with the degree of respect they think they deserve. The mark of a totally corrupt city is that the insolent few feel free to humiliate the many in public and the envious many seethe with unbearable feelings of resentment against the few. When class contempt and animosity descend to such depths, it is impossible to satisfy the wishes of the great without harming the people and thereby indirectly provoking popular hatred of the ruler. In such corrupt circumstances, treating the nobility decently would simply ruin the ruler. His only option is therefore to allow the commoners to vent their pent-up rancor against the nobles (P 19, 77).

In Rome, before it became corrupt, popular antipathy toward the patricians was canalized institutionally into public trials where ordinary citizens, feeling injured, could openly lodge accusations against members of the elite who had purportedly injured them. This system provided a safety valve, preventing revolutionary violence and stabilizing the class system (D 1.7, 24). Opening a forum for public accusations meant channeling inside the system, where it would do less harm, the plebs' potentially destabilizing desire to right wrongs perpetrated by patricians. This system reduced the poisonous influence of anonymous denunciations and the demand for back-street ambushes. It cauterized class resentment and the desire for vengeance before they could spiral out of control.

Machiavelli's most shocking examples of cruelty well used are introduced in contexts where such institutional safety valves are missing. It is best to appease both patricians and plebs, but when this proves impossible, "a prince is compelled of necessity to know well how to use the beast" (P 18, 69). In a corrupt city, where upper-class factions have captured the instruments of power, the ruler cannot balance class interests and must therefore take his stand with the people (P 19, 76).⁷ After using cruelty to cut down the rich and prominent, the prudent ruler will return quickly

to the human path of legal self-restraint in dealing with the people because the momentary enthusiasm for the ruler brought by his willingness to use the beast in slaughtering their obnoxious social superiors will soon fade. Retaining their support will require the ruler to use the man. Extralegal violence against the insolent and greedy nobility momentarily increases the popularity of the ruler of a corrupt city because, under conditions of class oppression, the people at large always seek “to be avenged against those who are the cause that it is servile” (D I.16, 46).

X. PARADOXES OF ADAPTATION

It is easier to document the centrality of “loyalty in adversity” to Machiavelli’s theory of political prudence than to pin down his settled view about adapting to fortune’s ups and downs. Sometimes he says that adapting flexibly to changing circumstances is essential. Sometimes he says that it is impossible. And sometimes he says it must be avoided at all costs.

I will not attempt here to sort out this cluster of seemingly contradictory thoughts but will instead restrict myself to the final claim, namely that men of *virtù*, unlike weaker members of the species, never change demeanor when their luck changes: “great men are always the same in every fortune; and if it varies—now by exalting them, now by crushing them—they do not vary but always keep their spirit firm and joined with their mode of life so that one easily knows for each that fortune does not have power over them” (D 3.31, 281).

Leaders should avoid unsteadiness in the face of cycles of good and bad luck because it inevitably excites public contempt: “Weak men . . . grow vain and intoxicated in good fortune by attributing all the good they have to the virtue they have never known. Hence it arises that they become unendurable and hateful to all those whom they have around them” (D 3.31, 281). To avoid being hated, therefore, rulers must, among other things, openly acknowledge the role played by good luck in their worldly successes and the role played by bad luck in the failures of others.

The man of *virtù*’s unflappability under fire, derived from his better knowledge of the world, will also inspire his troops. By developing a reputation for “entering into and escaping from dangers” and displaying “the greatness of his spirit in enduring and overcoming adversities” (P 8, 35), he will be able to induce his supporters to follow him into battle even against unfavorable odds. By making sure that “greatness, spiritedness, gravity, and strength” are always visible in his actions (P 19, 72), a ruler can excite the kind of we-will-follow-you-anywhere loyalty and partisan devotion

that would be impossible to achieve exclusively through the rule of law or the establishment and protection of a free market in goods and services, however necessary and important these admittedly are.

XI. THE UPSIDE TO ADVERSITY

Bouts of adversity, it should not be forgotten, provide occasions for men of *virtù* to exercise and exhibit their inherent prowess. Political action can only be as spectacular and praiseworthy as the challenges to which it responds. This is why adversity, for the virtuoso, is not at all equivalent to bad luck. Indeed, the worst fortune for a man of *virtù* is to live in a time when no adversity that is sufficiently grave and threatening occurs. Uninterrupted prosperity deprives him of all occasion to display his capacity to overcome adversity.

The dormant and frustratingly underutilized nature of *virtù* in times of peace and prosperity means that the virtuoso individual can make a splash only during times of crisis: "it was necessary for anyone wanting to see the virtue of Moses that the people of Israel be enslaved in Egypt" and so forth (P 26, 102). For the virtuosi, paradoxically, their community's good luck can be their personal bad luck and vice versa. One reason why the bad luck of a community can be the good luck of its rulers is that popular adversity encourages the people to seek shelter under the protective wing of public authority. Without class oppressors or foreign enemies from which a ruler can heroically "save" the people, there would be perhaps insufficient psychological motivation for popular loyalty in adversity. Fear of a common enemy, foreign or domestic, can help create a chain of obligation binding citizens or subjects to their ruler and vice versa.

The virtuous leader is a political alchemist. He converts popular emotions into popular support for his authority. He can, for instance, channel pent-up rancor at class subordination into fervent support for his rule. In particular, the frustrations of servitude and subordination incline citizens and subjects to throw in their lot with a leader who promises and manages to liberate them from their degraded state. A savage illustration of this psychological mechanism is Agathocles's slaughter of Syracuse's patricians. He was able to mobilize the support of the city's plebs by giving vent to their resentment and envy of the rich. He benefited the lower class by allowing it "to be avenged against those who are the cause that it is servile" (D 1.16, 46). A more politically palatable example, because the savagery involved is downplayed by tenderly Christian readings of the Hebrew Bible, is Moses (P 6, 23). It may seem circular or tautological, then,

but the popular loyalty that a ruler needs to survive adversity can best be created by adversity itself, including the intolerable adversities of oppression and enslavement.

XII. LOYALTY AND ENMITY

How did Roman citizens, even in the wake of devastating defeats at the hands of Hannibal's forces, manage to sustain their undaunted resolve, essential to their eventual triumph over Carthage? Rome survived adverse fortune because its citizens were willing to risk their lives against overwhelming odds. But why?

Among the factors that instilled Roman citizen-soldiers with fierce devotion to their fatherland, even unto death, were Roman religion, popular spectacles, the charisma of field commanders, and the sharing of booty and glory. To prepare in advance for future troubles, the Romans were "liberal to the people" (D 1.32, 70). The benefits or public provisions that the Roman authorities conferred on the people were savored with greater pleasure and appreciation because doled out slowly and distributed regularly, by predictable installments, over time (P 8, 38). But the ultimate reason why Rome was able to build up a *milizia fidele*, consisting of citizen soldiers whose fidelity to Rome could be counted on in troubled times, was the salience of *adversity*, embodied in the ferocious onslaught of a very powerful enemy state, Carthage.

That a foreign war can increase domestic support for a country's leader is no secret. The perverse incentives this creates are well known. Machiavelli naturally asks what remedies can be applied to counteract the pathological tendency of men aspiring or clinging to power to foment crises in order to repress the envy of rivals and inferiors, to charm potential loyalists, and to open up opportunities to strut their stuff. The best option is to organize the city for ceaseless war, as during the early Roman republic. War solves the problem because a city always at war "always has need of reputed citizens" (D 3.16, 255). Unlike peacetime, wartime favors meritocracy, a fact that men who feel meritorious but insufficiently appreciated understand all too well.

Although it builds support for the ruler and satisfies the reputational longings of the virtuosi, war also has several unintended and unwelcome consequences. Imperial expansion, while increasing the wealth and glory that can be shared among the citizenry, destroys republican liberty because, among other reasons, it presupposes the creation of a standing army. A standing army, because of "the particular goodwill that [the ruler]

acquires with the soldiers" (D 3.22, 267), destroys the original logic that induced the prudent ruler to prevent himself and his staff from preying upon the population in order to avoid being hated and to secure popular loyalty in adversity. If he can secure the loyalty of the army in adversity, a warlord prince will be willing to brave the hatred of the people that will predictably result if he allows soldiers to abuse civilians the way they are prone to do. In other words, *virtù* itself destroys the original bargain between the ruler and the people by creating a large group of political supporters, namely the legions, whose allegiance some caesar can secure while throwing the people under the elephants' hooves.

XIII. CONCLUSION

The random alternation of good and bad luck is a prison from which political *virtù* offers a possible, if only provisional, escape. If a ruler's troops remain loyal to him even in adversity, they are "his arms," and he has a chance to hold out until fortune once again shifts unpredictably and his good luck returns. This is how loyalty in adversity, instilled in the ruler's subjects or citizens, frees the man of *virtù* to some extent from the cycles of fortune he cannot otherwise control.

Rather than basking hedonistically in the pleasures of prosperity, when fortune happens to smile, the virtuoso ruler will invest single-mindedly in institutions, policies, and civic disciplines that will induce his subjects or citizens to close ranks in a crisis. He does this because *virtù* includes foresight, especially the empirically confirmed expectation that reversals of fortune will occasionally occur. Knowing that adversity will eventually strike, the virtuoso ruler is "forced to be good" by the fear that, if his subjects or citizens come to hate and despise him, they will readily abandon him in adversity. He can do this because observed regularities in human behavior make the future, which is generally unknowable, at least partially predictable. He can know in advance, for example, that the people, in a crisis, will be less loyal to a prince who has wantonly abused them than to a prince who has entwined his fate with theirs. To encourage loyalty in adversity, a prudent ruler will make the people taste well-being slowly and reliably over time. He will arm the people both as a costly signal of his trust in them and to show them that he cannot survive without their support. The wartime sacrifices they will then make on his behalf (and their own) will redouble their commitment to his cause.

Paradoxically, this resort to war, although helpfully dampening class conflict, also leads inevitably to Caesarism, that is, to the creation of a

standing army fiercely loyal to their field commander. This last turn of fortune's wheel fatefully releases the ruler from dependence on popular support. Thus, *virtù's* perennial struggle to free itself from fortune's grip ends quite miserably. This is the principal lesson Machiavelli distills from the period between 193 AD and 238 AD when most Roman emperors were murdered by their soldiers, with no loyal citizens willing or able to come to their rescue in their hour of need.

NOTES

For comments on an earlier version of this chapter, I would like to thank John McCormick, Erica Benner, Gloria Origgi, Jon Elster, Marcello Simonetta, and the participants in a political theory seminar at the CNRS in Paris in December 2014.

1. All in-text references are to Niccolò Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield and Nathan Tarcov (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996) and Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 2nd ed., trans. Harvey C. Mansfield (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

2. Elsewhere, Machiavelli describes another, more institutional method for maintaining political stability despite the ups and downs of fortune. Republics, he famously remarks, can keep pace with the wheel of fortune by sometimes placing bold and sometimes placing cautious rulers in power, depending on what the current situation demands (D 3.9, 240).

3. For a definition of the "ostinata fede" appearing in chapter 26 as "a rapturous love of total submission and loyalty," see John M. Najemy, *Between Friends: Discourses of Power and Desire in the Machiavelli-Vettori Letters of 1513–1515* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 213.

4. I take this to be the basic insight of Erica Benner, *Machiavelli's Prince: A New Reading* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

5. Here Machiavelli offers a republican version of Tom Schelling's doomsday machine, whereby one country can allegedly deter another from launching a first-strike nuclear attack by publicly arranging in advance for an automatic and devastating nuclear counterattack to be launched *after* the attacked country's leadership is killed. *The Strategy of Conflict* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 37.

6. Najemy's suggestion that, for the author of *The Prince*, unexpected twists and turns of fate (*variazioni*) can be "eliminated" (204) is unpersuasive (*Between Friends*, 204).

7. See on this theme John McCormick, *Machiavellian Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

Machiavelli and the Modern Tyrant

PAUL A. RAHE

The great advance of the twentieth century has been our discovery that it is possible to combine all the advantages of theocracy with all the conveniences of atheism. Brian Tierney¹

Back in the third quarter of the last century of the last millennium, when I first became fascinated by matters political, there was in the Dominican Republic a tyrant named Rafael Leonidas Trujillo Molina. Of this man, who ruled that country with an iron hand for more than thirty years, I heard it said that, when he returned to his palatial home each evening, he could expect to find upstairs a different dinner and a different woman awaiting him in every bedroom.

It is doubtful whether the story which I have just related is, strictly speaking, true—though it is clear enough that it really does capture the spirit of the Dominican dictatorship. Trujillo was a force of nature. He brought order to a hitherto anarchic land. He constructed roads and reasserted the nation's sovereignty with regard to borders, immigration, and public finance; he turned the national police into a well-trained army; and he fostered in the island republic a vibrant and, by the standards in Latin America at the time, prosperous economy. His was what political scientists call a developmental dictatorship.

Trujillo was also, however, a megalomaniac and a monster. He fostered a cult of personality. He named schools and parks after members of his family; he renamed the capital Ciudad Trujillo after himself. He surrounded himself with well-educated and highly cultured toadies—lawyers and men of letters who were ready, willing, and even eager to sing his praises and do his bidding. He was perfectly prepared to have the thugs also in his employ assassinate his critics abroad and murder his opponents

at home. He named incompetent and venal relatives to high posts, he allowed his sons to run amok, and he amassed immense wealth and eventually controlled something like forty percent of the Dominican economy. For the purpose of seduction and humiliation, he paid visits to the wives of his ministers in the afternoons while their husbands were at work, and he promoted those who dispatched their nubile, virginal, teenage daughters to his country estate to be deflowered by the man they all called "the Chief." It was not for nothing that Dominicans called Trujillo "the goat."² To do the man and the world that revolved around him justice, to clarify the nature of the tyrannical regime he established, to capture the man's charm, keen intelligence, and depravity would take a novel of the first rank, and, with his disturbing masterpiece *The Feast of the Goat*, Mario Vargas Llosa produced just such a work of art.³

The lurid tales told concerning Rafael Trujillo and the analysis provided by Vargas Llosa deserve mention here because they jibe nicely with the account of tyranny articulated by Herodotus in his *Histories* and Plato in the *Republic*,⁴ and these tales and this analysis arguably also capture the flavor of actual ancient tyranny. Polycrates of Samos would surely have understood the point, and the same can be said regarding Cypselus and Periander of Corinth; Thrasybulus of Miletus; Pisistratus, Hippias, and Hipparchus of Athens; and Hiero of Syracuse.⁵ The ancient tyrants and those in more modern times who resembled them may have for the most part been populists, they generally did exploit class tensions, and they certainly displayed ambition. Often enough, they left behind as a memorial magnificent public works. To come to power in the first place they had to take advantage of grievances sorely felt, and they had to be spirited and single-minded. But they were not idealists with a utopian bent equipped with fully articulated programs, and, to judge by the reports passed down concerning their conduct, they were anything but averse to enjoying the adulation, the pomp, and the opportunities for self-glorification, self-aggrandizement, and self-indulgence attendant on one-man rule.⁶ The tyrant depicted in Aristotle's *Politics* rules in the interest of no one apart from himself.⁷

Vladimir Lenin and Josef Stalin, Benito Mussolini and Adolf Hitler, Mao Tse-Tung and Ho Chi Minh, Fidel Castro and Pol Pot—these men were tyrants of a new and different breed. They were—or, at least, they posed as—visionaries and men of ideas. They published books. They pursued elaborate programs. Holding power and enjoying the fruits thereof were no doubt for them a great source of satisfaction, but this did not suffice. They exploited modern technology and refined the age-old techniques

of tyranny. But, most important of all, they forged a marriage between old-fashioned despotism and the idealism and the public-spiritedness that animated the classical republicanism of ancient Greece and Rome. Like the lawgivers of antiquity—at least as these were imagined by Plato, Xenophon, Aristotle, Polybius, Cicero, Livy, Plutarch, and the like—these distinctively modern tyrants had as their aim the shaping of character and the radical transformation of social relations.⁸ They were, in a word, supremely ambitious in a fashion unprecedented, and they were certainly unwilling to leave well enough alone.

Whence came the impulse distinguishing the modern tyrant from the ancient prototype? How should we understand that impulse? Here, I suggest, we should take as our guide the political philosopher who revolutionized our understanding of the possibilities inherent in one-man rule. What Xenophon with his subtle, understated dialogue *Hiero* did for ancient tyranny,⁹ I believe Machiavelli did for modern tyranny in *The Prince*.¹⁰ To make my case, however, I will have to suggest an unorthodox reading of this familiar book.

I. MACHIAVELLI AND THE ECCLESIASTICAL PRINCIPALITY

There is no shortage of scholarly literature on the work that Machiavelli entitled *De principatibus* almost precisely half a millennium ago.¹¹ But there is one chapter in that slim volume that has been neglected.¹² It is, in a sense, a hidden chapter. It is not included in the program laid out in the book's opening chapter.¹³ It appears as if out of nowhere and going nowhere. It seems, in fact, to be a passing afterthought, and it is usually ignored. Political science professors do not assign it. Scholars rarely acknowledge its existence, and, when they do, they generally take it as an occasion in which to dismiss the subject.¹⁴

In his little book on Machiavelli, for example, Quentin Skinner made no mention of the chapter entitled "Of Ecclesiastical Principalities."¹⁵ Even more to the point, in the justly celebrated chapter he devoted to Machiavelli in *Politics and Vision*, Sheldon Wolin read the Florentine as contending "that ecclesiastical governments were irrelevant to the proper concerns" of his new political science and as thinking that they were "not politic enough to warrant the attention of political thought."¹⁶ I think the precise opposite—that making sense of the ecclesiastical principality is central to Machiavelli's new political science, that the chapter slipped into *The Prince* as a surprise is crucial to its author's larger purpose.

Consider what the Florentine has to say in the pertinent chapter about ecclesiastical principalities:

All difficulties in their respect arise before they come into one's possession, because they are acquired either by means of virtue or by means of fortune and are maintained without either, for they are sustained by orders that have grown old with religion, which have been so powerful and of such a quality that they keep their princes in state no matter how they proceed and live. These alone have states and do not defend them; they have subjects and do not govern them; and their states, though undefended, are not wrested from them. And their subjects, though ungoverned, do not care; and they neither think of turning against their princes nor can they. Thus, only these principalities are secure and successful (*felici*).

It is true that Machiavelli goes on to say that these principalities "subsist by superior causes, to which the human mind does not reach" and that he will "leave off speaking of them; for since they are exalted and maintained by God, it would be the office of a presumptuous and reckless man to discourse on them." But there is in this pious disclaimer more than a trace of sarcasm, and, after saying, "*Nondimanco*," he goes on to display with considerable ostentation the presumption and recklessness he purports to eschew, and he does so by boldly discussing what he just said he would omit.¹⁷

When confronted with the claims of tradition and faith, Machiavelli may write that "one should not reason" about a given subject, but in the aftermath he always does so, for his ultimate posture is one of resolute defiance. "I do not," he asserts, "judge it a defect to defend any opinion with reasons nor shall I ever judge it so"—and in this spirit he renounces all appeal to "either authority or force."¹⁸ In this case, I believe, he had an especially compelling reason for pursuing his inquiry. For him, the ecclesiastical polity is the central mystery of modern politics. Above all else, he intimates, it is what would come to be called *priestcraft* that modern princes, operating in principalities and republics alike, must, if they are to be effective, get their minds around.

There is another chapter in which, obliquely, Machiavelli touches on the same question. I have in mind the central chapter of the first part of *The Prince*—chapter 6, where he addresses a subject quite near and dear to his heart: "New Principalities That Are Acquired by Means of One's Own Arms and Virtue." It is in this chapter of *The Prince* that he speaks of new

princes as founders who have introduced “new orders and modes.”¹⁹ It is also in this chapter that he playfully and mischievously equates Moses, on the one hand, and Cyrus, Romulus, and Theseus, on the other, treating them as exemplars and singling them out as the new princes and founders who most deserve imitation. It is, moreover, in this chapter that he speaks of these men in religious language as “armed prophets”; that he echoes the book of Revelations on the problem posed by “lukewarmness”; and that, in a manner that will attract the admiration of Adolf Hitler, he treats that condition’s chief source—“the incredulity of men, who do not truly believe in new things”—as the central problem faced by new princes who introduce “new orders and modes.” As Machiavelli puts it, “matters must be ordered in such a manner that, when they no longer believe, one can make them believe by means of force.”²⁰ For Machiavelli, “the art of government” was what it would be later for George Bernard Shaw: “the organisation of idolatry.”²¹

In treating religion under the rubric of political science, in speaking of political founders as “prophets,” and in making “faith” the central feature of politics, Machiavelli ostentatiously follows the lead of the Arab *falasifā*—Alfarabi and his followers Avicenna and Averroes, among others—who were the first, as far as we can tell, to ponder fully the significance for politics of the emergence of universal, revealed, monotheistic religions equipped with elaborated doctrines and intent on proselytizing all of mankind.²² He is silent, to be sure, about Muhammad, and he makes no mention of Jesus Christ. But he could be confident that his contemporaries would think about what he left unsaid. After all, from a Renaissance Italian perspective, Muhammad was the armed prophet par excellence, and one could not speak of Savonarola as an “unarmed prophet,”²³ as Machiavelli did in this context, without causing those who lived within what was then called the *respublica Christiana* to pause and reflect.²⁴ For there was one unmentioned (and, perhaps, in this context unmentionable) prophet, well known to all of Machiavelli’s prospective readers, who appears to have been unarmed but who managed, nonetheless, to establish the only principality in Europe that could be called “secure and successful”; and without, in any obvious way, resorting to force, this prophet appears to have contrived somehow to overcome “the incredulity of men” and to “make them believe.”

Of course, Machiavelli was not himself a believer: he did not embrace the doctrine preached by the *respublica Christiana*. In the preface to the first book of his *Discourses*, he alludes to “the weakness into which the present religion has conducted the world” and to “the evil done many

Christian provinces and cities" by the "ambitious idleness (*ambizioso ozio*)" of the clergy. There, however, he places his greatest emphasis on the absence of "a true knowledge of histories," contending that his contemporaries do not get "from reading them that sense nor from savoring them that taste that they have in themselves." This happens, we are told, because Machiavelli's contemporaries take pleasure in "hearing of the variety of incidents they contained without otherwise thinking of imitating them, judging imitation not only difficult but impossible—as if heaven, the sun, the elements, men had varied in motion, in order, and in power from what they were in antiquity." Machiavelli's chosen task in the *Discourses* is "to draw men from this error." What this means, however, only becomes evident later when he traces "the weakness of present-day men" to "their weak education and their slight information concerning things" and then hints that what causes them to "judge ancient judgments in part inhuman, in part impossible" are "certain . . . opinions" peculiar to the postpagan age. The most important of these "modern opinions" may not have to do with a variation in the motion, order, and power of heaven, the sun, and the elements, but they do pertain to just such a transformation—one putatively worked by divine grace in the motion, order, and power of men. For his part, Machiavelli insists that "men . . . have and have had always the same passions" and that, if "their works are more virtuous in this province at present than in that, and in that more than in this," it is "in accord with the form of education from which those people have derived their mode of living."²⁵

Later in the same volume, Machiavelli will be less coy. As "a form of education," he bluntly explains, the Christian religion "makes us esteem less the honor of the world." In this regard, he goes on, it is inferior to that of the ancient Romans, which esteemed this honor "very much" and "lodged in it the greatest good." Thereby, the latter religion rendered its adherents "in their actions more ferocious" than their modern counterparts.

This can be assessed from a consideration of many of their institutions, starting with the magnificence of their sacrifices in contrast with the humility of ours, where there is a certain pomp more delicate than magnificent but no ferocious or spirited action. Here there was no lack of pomp or magnificence of ceremony, but there was added the action of the sacrifice, full of blood and ferocity, with a multitude of animals suffering butchery. This sight, being terrible, rendered men similar to itself. Besides, the ancient religion did not beatify men if they were not

full of worldly glory, as were captains of armies and princes of republics. Our religion has conferred more glory on men who are humble and contemplative than on those who are active. It has then lodged the greatest good in humility, abjectness, and contempt for human things; the other lodged it in greatness of spirit, strength of body, and all other things suited to making men very strong. And if our religion requests that you have in yourself strength, it wishes you to be apt more to suffer than to do something strong. This mode of living, then, seems to have rendered the world weak and to have given it in prey to wicked men, who can manage it securely, seeing that the collectivity (*università*) of men, in order to go to paradise, think more of enduring their thrashings than of avenging them.

In concluding this diatribe against what an English republican admirer would later dub "Priest-craft," Machiavelli raises the possibility that Christianity only "appears" to have rendered "the world . . . effeminate and heaven disarmed," and he invites future theologians to recast it as a more worldly doctrine—suggesting, in a fashion that foreshadowed not only the Social Gospel but also German Christianity and liberation theology—that the troubles that he identifies arise less from Christianity itself than "from the cowardice of those who have interpreted our religion according to leisure and idleness (*ozio*) and not according to *virtù*."²⁶

In the opening chapter of the third book of his *Discourses on Livy*, Machiavelli brings the *respublica Christiana* as such openly into the picture. There he suggest that religious "sects" are very much like "republics" and "kingdoms" in that, to achieve renewal, they need to be led "back toward their beginnings," and there he describes the manner in which Saint Francis and Saint Dominic achieved this:

For with poverty and with the example of the life of Christ they brought back into the minds of men what had already been eliminated there. Their new orders were so powerful that they are the cause that the dishonesty of the prelates and of the heads of the religion do not ruin it. Living still in poverty and having so much credit with peoples in confessions and sermons, they give them to understand that it is evil to say evil of evil, and that it is good to live under obedience to them and, if they make an error, to leave them for God to punish. So they do the worst they can because they do not fear the punishment that they do not see and do not believe. This renewal, therefore, has maintained and does maintain this religion.²⁷

There is more to this passage than the savage anticlericalism that one immediately perceives—for it savors as well of a grudging admiration, and it explains how a seemingly unarmed prophet could, nonetheless, succeed in overcoming “the incredulity of men.”²⁸

II. THE THIRD HUMOR

There are other threads to be pursued in *The Prince*. As I already mentioned, the title that Machiavelli originally gave to this work is *De principatibus*. This title is in Latin, and it has as its focus a word that was coined at Rome to describe that polity's rule by an individual who presented himself to the public not as a king or *rex* but as the *princeps* or “first man” of a *res publica* by him restored and renewed. The *principatus* established by Augustus Caesar was the ancient forerunner of modern despotism. It was, to begin with, a tyranny disguised as a republic. Its *princeps* was awarded *tribunicia potestas* and postured as a tribune of the plebs,²⁹ and, as Machiavelli makes clear, it differed in one other crucial respect from the tyrannies that preceded it.

In *The Prince*, as in his *Discourses on Livy*, Machiavelli asserts that there are “two diverse humors” that one must take into account: the great ones and the people.³⁰ In the nineteenth chapter of *The Prince*, however, he introduces a third humor: “the soldiers.” Most of those, he tells us, “especially those who came to the principate as new men, once they recognized the difficulty posed by these two diverse humors, turned to satisfying the soldiers, caring little whether they injured the people.” This was the option taken by Julius Caesar, and the precedent was followed by Augustus as well. The greatest and most successful of their successors, however, would appear to have been Septimius Severus, who possessed, Machiavelli tells us,

such virtue that, by maintaining the soldiers as his friends, although the people were overburdened by him, he was always able to rule successfully (*felicamente*). For these virtues of his made him so admirable in the view of the soldiers and the people that the latter remained somehow astonished and stupefied, while the former were reverent and satisfied.³¹

The language Machiavelli uses in this passage is reminiscent of what he has said earlier in *The Prince* about the impact on the people of the Romagna of Cesare Borgia's sacrifice of Remirro d'Orco, which left them “satisfied and stupefied,”³² and it points forward to the discussion in his

Discourses on Livy of those Roman *imperatores* who sparked a renewal and a return to first principles by an act of *devotio*—which is to say, by ostentatiously sacrificing their own lives.³³ All of this is clearly pertinent to our understanding of the Christian ecclesiastical principality, which has as its central ritual a reenactment of a human sacrifice intended to leave its adherents not only “astonished and stupefied” but “reverent and satisfied” as well.³⁴

To be sure, Machiavelli goes on to say that—in his time in Europe, where hereditary monarchy is the norm—the soldiers pose less of a problem and that rulers should focus on satisfying the people. This would be reassuring were it not for the fact that he also then singles out the Ottoman “Turk” and Egypt’s “Sultan” as exceptions to what is the norm in Europe in their dependence on the soldiers. For, at this point, in telling fashion, he compares the Janissary and Mameluk regimes predominant under Sunni Islam with

the Christian pontificate, which cannot be called either a hereditary principality or a new principality. For it is not the sons of the old prince who are the heirs and become lords; it is the one who is elected to that rank by those who have authority over it. And this being an ancient order, one cannot call it a new principality, since in it there are none of the difficulties found in new principalities. For even if the prince is new, the orders of that state are old, and they are ordered to receive him as if he were their hereditary lord.³⁵

The clergy would appear to be to the Christian pontificate what the Janissaries and Mameluks are to the principalities established on something like the Roman model in Constantinople and Cairo. But there is, of course, this difference. Regarding polities dominated by a third humor genuinely akin to the Christian clergy, one could say something that could not be said regarding the Ottoman and Mameluk Sultans:

These alone have states and do not defend them; they have subjects and do not govern them; and their states, though undefended, are not wrested from them. And their subjects, though ungoverned, do not care; and they neither think of turning against their princes nor can they. Thus, only these principalities are secure and successful.

As we learned in the 1980s, Joseph Stalin to the contrary notwithstanding, the pope was, in one crucial regard, well armed. He did, in fact, have

divisions at his beck and call. Moreover, as Machiavelli would have recognized, the legions deployed by the pope formed an invisible occupying army throughout Poland and elsewhere, and they had mastered the supreme political art—that by which one controlled men’s minds.

What, then, in modern—which is to say, in Christian and post-Christian—times could a would-be new prince learn from Machiavelli’s ruminations on ecclesiastical principalities? This matter, like many other matters, Old Nick leaves to be pondered and sorted out by those destined to come after. He does, nonetheless, provide a hint. For, at the very beginning of the *proemium* to the first part of his *Discourses on Livy*, Machiavelli claims not only to have entered onto “a path untrodden by anyone” but also to have “discovered new modes and orders”—which is to say, he presents himself as a new prince and prophet of sorts, worthy of comparison with Moses, Cyrus, Theseus, and Romulus—and, at the end of that same *proemium*, he informs us that he is engaged in an “enterprise (*impresa*)” that he cannot himself fully bring to completion. This task he leaves to “another” who will take up “this burden” and “conduct it along a short road to the destined place.”³⁶ If Machiavelli is somehow, in his capacity as a new prince and prophet, “armed,” if he genuinely thinks that he will be able to overcome “the incredulity of men,” it must be because, like Jesus Christ, he has as his legacy a book, and, of course, it would then also be because he is persuaded that the disciples he recruits via this book, like the third “humor” commanded from the grave by Christ, will find themselves, as a consequence of this legacy, possessed of an effective substitute for the “force” needed “to make men believe.”³⁷

By means of his literary legacy, Machiavelli was, in fact, able to recruit a host of talented successors able, willing, and even eager to follow him down a “path” hitherto “untrodden by anyone” in the hopes of completing his “enterprise.” Christopher Marlowe testified to the attractiveness of the Florentine’s enterprise for these recruits when he proudly put on the English stage the *Machevill* who had advocated reasoning about everything and had him say, “I count Religion but a childish Toy, / And hold there is no sinne but Ignorance.”³⁸ Sir Francis Bacon provided similar testimony when he observed, “[We] are much beholden to *Macciavell* & others that write what men doe, and not what they ought to do,” and it is telling that the English statesman did so in his programmatic treatise *The Advancement of Learning*.³⁹

III. A SECULAR CLERISY

As I have argued in detail elsewhere,⁴⁰ the bold project Bacon announced in that book aimed at instituting man's *imperium* over things—which was to be conducted by way of vexing and tormenting and squeezing and molding nature for the purpose of making her not only reveal her secrets but acquiesce in her conquest—was a logical extension of the enterprise that Machiavelli had in mind in *The Prince* when he suggested that fortune is a woman who can be held down and brought under control if thrashed and struck hard.⁴¹ This is why Bacon ostentatiously insisted on applying to science as well as to politics Machiavelli's teaching concerning republics and religious sects—that their renewal requires a return to first beginnings.⁴² Renewal was, in fact, the aim of his new science. "Natural philosophy," he wrote, "proposes to itself, as its noblest work of all, nothing less than the restitution and renovation (*instauratio*) of things corruptible, and (what is indeed the same thing in a lower degree) the conservation of bodies in the state in which they are, and the retardation of dissolution and putrefaction."⁴³

With this end in mind, Bacon presented himself to the world as "a trumpeter (*buccinator*)" but denied that his "trumpet . . . summons and excites men in order that they might mutually cut each other to ribbons with contradictions or strive with one another in gladiatorial contest (*praelientur et digladiantur*)." It summons them, he asserted, "rather in order that, having made peace among themselves, they might turn with united forces against the Nature of Things (*Natura Rerum*), storm and seize her strongholds and fortified retreats, and extend the confines of human empire (*finis humani imperii*)."⁴⁴

With this end in mind, Bacon also proposed a reform of Christian theology in keeping with Machiavelli's critique of idleness and the praise he lavished on what he called *virtù*, and, in support of his effort, he quoted Machiavelli himself as an authority on the defects of the Christian religion as it was then taught. His was a reform by means of which "the *Theologicall Vertue Charitie*" was reinterpreted and made a bulwark of the new virtue "*Humanitie*," by means of which the scientist dedicated to "the affecting of the Weale of Men" replaced the priest as the preeminent man of God, and by means of which men were induced to imagine a scientific utopia, which he insistently calls humane, and envisage it as "a picture of our salvation in heaven."⁴⁵ Under Bacon's new dispensation, God's punishment of man at the Fall was turned into a challenge and an opportunity. "Creation was not by the curse made altogether and for ever

a rebel," he contended, "but in virtue of that charter 'In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread,' it is now by various labors . . . at length and in some measure subdued . . . to the uses of human life." In bringing his *Novum organum* to a conclusion with this unprecedented interpretation of Genesis 1:28, the English statesman and philosopher laid the foundation for a radical, this-worldly reorientation of the Christian faith founded on Machiavellian *virtù*.⁴⁶

Moreover, like the Florentine's enterprise, the project initiated by Bacon and soon thereafter taken up and refined by René Descartes required a marginalization of the clergy; the recruitment, training, and deployment of a vast intellectual army; and a radical reorientation of civil society toward the achievement of prosperity in this world as opposed to salvation in the next. It is by no means fortuitous that in the last part of his *Discourse on Method* Descartes identified longevity in good health on earth as the chief end of the scientific revolution—for it was only by propagating the dream of eternal life in comfort here on earth that one could fully disarm the ecclesiastical principality and replace the churchmen with a secular clerisy.⁴⁷

IV. FROM PRIESTCRAFT TO IDEOLOGY

Of course, Machiavelli was also influential in the more narrowly political sphere. The theory of reason of state, as put into practice by the princes who ruled the various European polities after his death, was a species of moralized Machiavellianism,⁴⁸ and the Florentine's influence on the new species of republicanism that emerged in England, spread to America, and exploded in France was, to say the least, profound.⁴⁹ But I, nonetheless, think that it would be fair to repeat what John Pocock said to me some years back: that the first fully Machiavellian prince was Napoleon Bonaparte—for that towering figure was the first to unite the ruthless statecraft, which had made Machiavelli notorious, in a thoroughgoing way with the larger Machiavellian enterprise explored here—as it was amended by Sir Francis Bacon and René Descartes and taken up by their admirers among the *philosophes* and their heirs.⁵⁰

Napoleon did not, as John Adams once supposed,⁵¹ actually coin the term *ideology*. But he was among the first to appropriate it, deploy it, and treat it with condescension as a word specifying the manner in which vulgarized philosophy (Lockeanism, for example) could be made to substitute for religion as the foundation for civil society.⁵² Moreover, as the Napoleonic Code testifies, Napoleon himself was (his expressions of contempt

notwithstanding) the very model of a modern enlightened monarch. As such, by his deeds, if not also by his words, he put himself at the head of what Peter Gay would later rightly identify as “the party of humanity.”⁵³ Indeed, in crucial regards, despite his public opposition to the *idéologues*, he was an *idéologue* of sorts himself.

The first to recognize that there was a kinship between the partisans of humanity devoted to the Baconian project and the practitioners of priestcraft was Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Like Machiavelli, the author of the *Discourse on the Origins and Foundations of Inequality* was no friend to Christianity. When he began drafting this work, he composed for inclusion within it and polished a brief but trenchant passage analyzing the “*proud curiosity*” that causes man to suppose that he can “penetrate mysteries which are beyond his intelligence” and that engenders “follies and crimes” by erecting “idols” and inspiring “fanatics.” To this propensity, Rousseau traced not just “astrology, the renown of the divinatory art, Magic, and the other pretended supernatural reveries that constitute the shame of reason, the recourse of malcontent imbeciles, and the triumph of con men” but “a novel sort of inequality,” established neither by nature nor by convention, which rests solely on “chimerical opinions” and which enabled “a species of singular men,” a congeries of “idolatrous and ambitious Priests,” to raise themselves on high, “representing themselves as interpreters of things incomprehensible and as Ministers of the divinity” authorized “to subject the Human Race to their decisions.”

Adroitly substituting Gods of their own fashioning for the true God who did not suit their turn, and substituting their absurd and interested maxims for those of right reason, they redirected the Peoples insensibly away from the duties of humanity and the rules of morality that they did not dispose of at their whim—all for the purpose of subjecting them to practices indifferent or criminal and to arbitrary punishments and fines of which they were the sole dispensers and judges. Mortal enemies of the Laws and their ministers, always ready to authorize unjust usurpations on the part of the supreme magistrate for the purpose of usurping more easily themselves *his* legitimate authority, by always speaking of spiritual rights, they arranged affairs so that the goods, life, and liberty of the Citizen were secure only in so far as he placed himself at their discretion. Their power was all the more formidable because, establishing themselves without shame as sole judges in their own cause and suffering no common measure of the differences that they set up between themselves and other men, they overturned

and annihilated all human rights without anyone ever being able to prove to them that they had exceeded their own.

If, in the end, Rousseau excised this passage from his discourse, it was not because he had in any substantive fashion changed his mind. It was rather because, he realized, his attempt to couch it in such a manner as to slip it past the censor was bound to fail.⁵⁴ It was one thing to attack scholasticism and to pour scorn on the Catholic League of the late sixteenth century; it was another to launch what everyone would recognize as a direct assault on the Holy Mother Church. Even in the heyday when Rousseau's great patron and admirer, the liberal statesman Chrétien-Guillaume Lamignon de Malesherbes, served as *Directeur de la librairie* and made sure that the censors he employed gave *permission tacite* for the anonymous publication in France under a false imprint of many a scandalous tract,⁵⁵ a measure of authorial discretion was required. Malesherbes was a man of audacity and cunning, capable of astonishing feats. When forced by the Jesuits to issue an order providing not only for the suppression of the first two volumes of the *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts, et des métiers* but also for a confiscation of all the articles written for subsequent volumes as yet unpublished, he was not only prepared to tip off Denis Diderot and Jean Le Rond d'Alembert in advance; he offered and actually provided sanctuary for the outlawed manuscripts in his own house. But not even Malesherbes could protect an author who openly attacked the Christian religion and insisted that authorial integrity required that he forego anonymity.⁵⁶

Rousseau would later take up the theme of priestcraft in his *Social Contract*, where he would in good Machiavellian fashion treat the "communion of churches" as a political conspiracy of breathtaking brilliance.

Communion and excommunication are the social pact of the clergy—with which it will be always the master of peoples and of Kings. All the priests who are in communion with one another (*qui communique ensemble*) are fellow citizens—be they at opposite ends of the world. This invention is a masterpiece in politics. There was nothing similar among the pagan Priests: so they never formed the Clergy into a body.⁵⁷

For his audacity in this work and in the *Profession of Faith of the Savoyard Vicar* that he buried in his pedagogical novel *Emile, or On Education*, Rousseau would soon thereafter pay a very high price,⁵⁸ and it was at this point that he laid an indictment against the *philosophes*.

In an apologetic work written after the storm broke, which he entitled *Dialogues: Rousseau, Judge of Jean-Jacques*,⁵⁹ Rousseau systematically applied his analysis of “priestcraft” to his former associates, spelling out in detail the implications of a claim, which he had intimated in his *Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts* when he asserted that “the sort who acts the part of the Freethinker (*l’Esprit fort*) & Philosopher today would have been for the very same reason nothing more than a fanatic” in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries “at the time of the [Catholic] League,”⁶⁰ and suggesting that Voltaire, Diderot, d’Alembert, and the like were, in fact, party to a conspiracy even more insidious than the one first mounted in the distant past by “idolatrous and ambitious Priests.”⁶¹

The suspicions that Rousseau entertained in the 1770s may have been exaggerated, especially as they pertained to the conspiracy that, he believed, the *philosophes* had concocted against him, and, in expressing these suspicions, he had frequent recourse, as always, to hyperbole. But his fears, though blown out of proportion, were by no means utterly without foundation—for Rousseau’s former associates among the *philosophes* really were party to a philosophical conspiracy, and they really did aim at dominating opinion and at giving direction to the larger society thereby. They were, moreover, in no way sorry to see this philosophical turncoat harried from refuge to refuge, and, in modest ways, they actively contributed to the difficulties he faced.⁶² To this one can add that, when judged in light of the history of Europe and of the larger world after 1789, his analysis of the role that intellectuals, loosely organized as a party, had come to play in the fabrication of public opinion seems remarkably prescient. Jean-Jacques Rousseau was among the very first to recognize that, within modern society, what we now call political ideology performs a function comparable to that served in earlier times by religious doctrine and that—as ideologues—scientists, men of letters, and artists now occupy a status once reserved for none but high priests.

Rousseau traced this remarkable revolution in human affairs back to the period in which his erstwhile friends Diderot and d’Alembert launched the *Encyclopédie*. Prior to the 1750s, he observed, “opinions wandered in an incoherent fashion and without regulation at the whim of men’s passions, and these passions, constantly banging into one another, caused the public to roam from one place to another in a direction inconstant.” Thereafter, however, a profound change took place. A “spirit methodical and consistent” was applied for the purpose of guiding “public opinions,” and “prejudices themselves” came to possess a “logic of progression and rules all their own.”

Rousseau had no doubt that he had been present at the creation of something entirely new. This trend, he argued, was "among the peculiarities that distinguish the century in which we live from all others." It had its inception when "the philosophical sect" of which he had once been a member "united itself into a body under chiefs." It was underway the moment "these chiefs by the art of intrigue to which they applied themselves" made of themselves "the arbiters of public opinion," capable of determining "the reputation, even the destiny, of particular individuals and through them that of the State." And it reached its culmination when they made alliances with "powerful men" for the purpose of becoming "the arbiters of society" as well. These chiefs made their newfound allies "feel," he wrote, "that, working in concert, they would be able to extend their roots under the feet of men in such a fashion that no one would any longer find solid footing, and no one would be able to march forward except on terrain that had been countermined."

Crucial to all of this was the fact that "the chiefs of" what Rousseau pointedly describes as "the philosophical league" possess a "doctrine" all their own, and have mastered "the art of making their doctrine circulate . . . in the seminaries and colleges so that the newborn generation is devoted to them from birth." He acknowledges their animosity to the Jesuits, but he insists that this animosity is rooted solely in "professional jealousy," and he contends that the *philosophes* are, in fact, "great imitators of the mode of proceeding followed by the Jesuits." They "govern minds with the same imperial control, with the same dexterity that these others employ in governing consciences," and they are "shrewder" than these priests "in that they know better how to conceal themselves while acting."

The Jesuits rendered themselves all-powerful by exercising divine authority over consciences and by making themselves, in God's name, the arbiters of good and evil. The *philosophes*, not being able to usurp the same authority, applied themselves to its destruction; and then, in the course of appearing to explain nature to their docile sectaries and of making of themselves its supreme interpreters, they established, in its name, an authority no less absolute than that of their enemies—although it appears to be consistent with freedom and to rule over wills solely by way of reason.

The struggle between the two parties Rousseau compared with that between Carthage and Rome. "These two bodies," he wrote, "both imperious, both intolerant, were, in consequence, incompatible—since the fun-

damental system of both was to rule despotically. Each wishing to rule alone, they could not share the empire and rule together." Gradually, then, and inexorably, "the new" league, "following the erring ways of the other but with greater adroitness, supplanted it by way of debauching its supporters and through them brought about its destruction." Now, Rousseau adds, we can now see this new league "marching along" the tracks laid out for it "with as much audacity" as its predecessor "and with more success—since the other always encountered resistance and this one no longer encounters any." In this fashion, moreover, the *philosophes* managed to "substitute little by little a philosophical intolerance" for the religious intolerance once propagated by the Jesuits, and "without anyone perceiving it, they became even more dangerous than their predecessors."

The danger posed by this new "philosophical league" he thought rooted in the fact that "the proud despotism of modern philosophy has carried the egotism" associated with the spirit of profound insecurity and fierce vainglory, which Rousseau calls *amour propre*, "to its ultimate extreme." It eventuates in a "taste for domination" that gives life to "all of the angry passions related to amour propre," and from among "the apprentice *philosophes*," it produces "a generation of Despots" who, having "become slaves in order to be tyrants," exhibit "the liveliest intolerance." This intolerance may be "more hidden" than that once promoted by ambitious and idolatrous priests, but, Rousseau insists, it is "no less cruel." If the new conspiracy does not "appear to exercise the same rigor" as the old, it is only because "it no longer encounters rebels." If, however, there were a renaissance of religious belief, if "some genuine defenders of Theism, of tolerance and morality," were to present themselves on the public stage, "one would soon see raised up against them the most terrible persecutions," for quite "soon a philosophical inquisition, more cunning and no less sanguinary than the other, would burn without mercy anyone who dared to believe in God."⁶³

V. THE TREASON OF THE CLERKS

I quote Rousseau at length for a reason. Even if one thinks his critique of "the party of humanity" excessive, as many do, nonetheless, as an analysis of what was to come in the twentieth century, it is penetrating and discerning in the extreme. There would be other tyrants who would follow in Napoleon's wake. Like him, they would govern in the name of an idea, and, just as the Christian church in Machiavelli's day was devoted to the propagation of the faith via what in Latin they called *propaganda*, so

would Napoleon and his successors make use of this tool—and the latter would dramatically improve on his efforts by founding hierarchically organized, ideological political parties that functioned, in the manner of the Christian clergy, as a disciplined army intent, above all else, on occupying men's minds. To promote the requisite discipline, the communists even adopted the sacrament of penance, putting their recruits at regular intervals through sessions of self-criticism.⁶⁴

There would be this one difference between these new principalities and the old ecclesiastical principality, to be sure. The Napoleonic tyranny and the new, totalitarian tyrannies constructed in the twentieth century would have states, and they would defend them. They would possess subjects, and they would govern them. In sum, like the ancient republics and the Ottoman Sultanate, they would combine in one head the functions divided within Christendom between Caesar and Christ. They would deploy force and propaganda to powerful effect at the same time.

I would very much like to think that the great age of modern tyranny has passed. A quarter of a century ago, when the Berlin Wall fell, my spirits were lifted, and I entertained that very possibility. But I am now not so sanguine. As I have argued in detail elsewhere, there are reasons—articulated by Alexis de Tocqueville long ago—for supposing that modern liberal democracy is itself subject to an inexorable soft despotic drift,⁶⁵ and modern tyranny's distinctive techniques of governance are still available. Indeed, they have been refined by repeated experiment, and, because they are convenient and ready to hand, they are quite apt to be reemployed. We have not witnessed the end of ideology.⁶⁶ Nor has history come to an end.⁶⁷ The announcement of their demise is wishful thinking. We still live in an age of ideological partisanship. We live in a time in which political leaders continue to pose as messiahs and in which we are frequently promised something like heaven and threatened with something like hell on earth—and, in consequence, partisan proclivities still tend to have a quasi-religious edge. Moreover, we live in a period in which propaganda is deployed to powerful effect. Thanks, in part, to breakthroughs in the study of human psychology, to the emergence of electronic media, and to microtargeting, the manipulation of public opinion is now more a science than an art.

And this is not all. For—thanks to dramatic advances in computing power, thanks to the internet and the development of drones—we live in an age in which privacy has, for all intents and purposes, disappeared. Governments now have sophisticated tools of surveillance that allow them to track our every move and to record our every spoken word and written

thought. And even in liberal democracies, governments appear to be intent on doing just that. Before long, the twentieth-century tyrannies that we thought of as totalitarian will be outclassed by quasi-ecclesiastical principalities with a far greater capacity to exercise total control.⁶⁸ Whether the Florentine, whose undoubted achievements we ponder in this volume, would be pleased with what, under his inspiration, his disciples have wrought—this, alas, I do not know.

NOTES

1. See Brian Tierney, *Religion, Law, and the Growth of Constitutional Thought, 1150–1650* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 8. I would like to record my gratitude to Matthew Gaetano, who read this piece and commented on it extensively. In what follows, all translations are my own.

2. See Robert D. Crassweller, *Trujillo: The Life and Times of a Caribbean Dictator* (New York: MacMillan, 1966), and Bernard Diederich, *Trujillo: The Death of the Goat* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1978). Note also Eric Paul Roorda, *The Dictator Next Door: The Good Neighbor Policy and the Trujillo Regime in the Dominican Republic, 1930–1945* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998).

3. See Mario Vargas Llosa, *The Feast of the Goat: A Novel*, trans. Edith Grossman (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2002).

4. See Herodotus 3.80.2–6; Plato, *Republic* 9.571a–579e. In this connection, note Archilochus F19 (West) and Thucydides 6.53.3–59.4; then, see Herodotus 1.6–13, 20–22, 59–64, 3.39–60, 120–25, 62–65, 91–95, 6.35, 103.2–3, 109.3, 123.2, 7.27–29, 38–399.107–13 along with Plato, *Gorgias* 481b–492e.

5. It is now the fashion for scholars to dismiss as slander the fifth-century evidence for abusive conduct on the part of the tyrants of the archaic period: cf., for example, Sian Lewis, *Greek Tyranny* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009), and Lynette Mitchell, *The Heroic Rulers of Archaic and Classical Greece* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013). But it is striking how well the tales passed down and later recorded accord with what we know to be true about the conduct of usurpers left unchecked in other places and times. As David Lewis, *Sparta and Persia* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1977), 21, aptly observed some years ago, “I am myself disposed to take seriously stories of the irrational caprice and wanton cruelty of monarchs. Nothing is reported of Periander, tyrant of Corinth, which does not find ready parallels in well-attested information about Ali Pasha of Iannina at the beginning of the nineteenth century.”

6. See Antony Andrewes, *The Greek Tyrants* (London: Hutchinson Library, 1969).

7. See Aristotle, *Politics* 1279a8–1279b18. See also 1295a1–24, 1310a39–1315b39.

8. On the peculiar character of the species of republicanism that animated ancient Greece and Rome, see Paul A. Rahe, *Republics Ancient and Modern: Classical Republicanism and the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press,

1992), I.prologue—epilogue, and Claude Nicolet, *The World of the Citizen in Republican Rome* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980).

9. Consider Xenophon, *Hiero* in light of Leo Strauss, *On Tyranny: Including the Strauss-Kojève Correspondence*, ed. Victor Gourevitch and Michael S. Roth (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

10. If, in this particular, the Florentine had a forerunner, it was this same Xenophon in his *Cyropaedia*. See Christopher Nadon, *Xenophon's Prince: Republic and Empire in the Cyropaedia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001). Note also James Tatum, *Xenophon's Imperial Fiction: On the Education of Cyrus* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).

11. See Letter from Niccolò Machiavelli to Francesco Vettori on 10 December 1513, in Machiavelli, *Tutte le opere*, ed. Mario Martelli (Florence: G. C. Sansoni, 1971), 1158–60.

12. See Niccolò Machiavelli, *Il principe* 11, in *Tutte le opere*, 273–74. This work I cite by the chapter divisions provided by the author as well as by page from Mario Martelli's edition of the collected works.

13. See Machiavelli, *Il principe* 1, in *Tutte le opere*, 258.

14. For notable exceptions to the rule, see Leo Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1958), 32 (with n. 34); Mario Sansone, "Osservazioni intorno al capitolo XI del Principe di Machiavelli," in *Studi storici in onore di Gabriele Pepe* (Bari: Dedalo Libri, 1969), 515–30; Giorgio Barberi Squarotti, "La parodia del principato: Lo stato ecclesiastico," in Barberi Squarotti, *Machiavelli, o la scelta della letteratura* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1987), 173–91; Emanuele Cutinelli-Rèndina, *Chiesa e religione in Machiavelli* (Pisa: Istituti editoriali e poligrafici internazionali, 1998), 93–151 (esp. 96–117); and Leo Paul de Alvarez, *The Machiavellian Enterprise: A Commentary on The Prince* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1999), 10–11, 48–52.

15. See Quentin Skinner, *Machiavelli* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981). Although the new edition of this work has been revised and updated, it, too, is silent concerning the ecclesiastical principality; see Quentin Skinner, *Machiavelli* (New York: Sterling, 2010).

16. See Sheldon Wolin, "Machiavelli: Politics and the Economy of Violence," in *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought*, 2nd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 173–213 (at 198–99).

17. See Machiavelli, *Il principe* 11, in *Tutte le opere*, 273–74.

18. Consider Machiavelli, *Il principe* 6 and 11, in *Tutte le opere*, 264–65, 274, in light of *Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Tito Livio* 1.18.1, 1.58.1, in *Tutte le opere*, 102, 140. The latter work—hereinafter, *Discorsi*—I cite by the book and chapter divisions provided by the author and by the paragraph enumerations added by the editors in Niccolò Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield and Nathan Tarcov (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), as well as by page from Mario Martelli's edition of the collected works.

19. See Machiavelli, *Il principe* 6, in *Tutte le opere*, 265.

20. Note Revelation 3:14–19, and see Machiavelli, *Il principe* 6, in *Tutte le opere*, 264–65. Cf. Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 2002), 12.

21. See George Bernard Shaw, "Maxims for Revolutionists," in *Man and Superman: A Comedy and a Philosophy* (Westminster: Archibald Constable, 1903), 227.

22. See Paul A. Rahe, *Against Throne and Altar: Machiavelli and Political Theory under the English Republic* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 56–100.

23. See Machiavelli, *Il principe* 6, in *Tutte le opere*, 265.

24. Machiavelli himself uses the phrase: see *Discorsi* 1.12, in *Tutte le opere*, 95.

25. Cf. Machiavelli, *Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Tito Livio* 1 proemio with 2 proemio 2–3, 3.27.2, 43, in *Tutte le opere*, 76, 144–46, 233–34, 250; and see Marie-Dominique Couzinet, "Sources antiques de l'irréligion moderne chez Machiavel: Crise religieuse et imitation des Anciens," in *Sources antiques de l'irréligion moderne: Le relais italien, XVIe-XVIIe siècles*, ed. Jean-Pierre Cavaillé and Didier Foucault (Toulouse: Presses Universitaires du Mirail, 2001), 47–67.

26. See Machiavelli, *Discorsi* 2.2, in *Tutte le opere*, 149–50; note James Harrington, *Pian Piano or, Intercourse between H. Ferne, Dr. in Divinity and J. Harrington, Esq. Upon Occasion of the Doctors Censure of the Common-wealth of Oceana* (London: Nath. Brook, 1656), 8, 60; and see Mark Goldie, "The Civil Religion of James Harrington," in *The Languages of Political Theory in Early-Modern Europe*, ed. Anthony Pagden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 197–222. With regard to the history and character of the crusade against priestcraft, see Rahe, *Against Throne and Altar*, *passim*.

27. See Machiavelli, *Discorsi* 3.1, in *Tutte le opere*, 195–97.

28. Similar material can be found in Machiavelli's *Art of War* and in his *Florentine Histories*: see Rahe, *Against Throne and Altar*, 91–95.

29. Consider *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*, ed. Cynthia Damon (Bryn Mawr, PA: Thomas Library, Bryn Mawr College, 1995), *passim*, in light of Tacitus, *Annals* 1.2–15 and Suetonius, *Divus Augustus* 18–101, and then see Ronald Syme, *The Roman Revolution* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1939).

30. Cf. Machiavelli, *Il principe* 9, in *Tutte le opere*, 271–72, with Machiavelli, *Discorsi* 1.4, in *Tutte le opere*, 82–83, and cf. Anthony Parel, *The Machiavellian Cosmos* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 89, 101–52, with Gérard Sfez, "Machiavelli: La Raison des humeurs," *Rue Descartes* 12–13 (May 1995): 11–37.

31. See Machiavelli, *Il principe* 19, in *Tutte le opere*, 286–88.

32. See Machiavelli, *Il principe* 7, in *Tutte le opere*, 267.

33. Note Livy 8.7, 9–10, 10.26–29 with *PW* 5:1, 277–80 (s.v. *devotio*); then consider Machiavelli, *Discorsi* 2.16, 3.22, 34, 45 in light of 3.1, in *Tutte le opere*, 166, 195–97, 228–30, 241–42, 252, and see Harvey C. Mansfield, Jr., *Machiavelli's New Modes and Orders: A Study of the Discourses on Livy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979), 232–38, 299–305, 379–84, 408–11, 433.

34. Cf. Rene Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), and *Sacrifice*, trans. Matthew Pattillo and David Dawson (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2011).

35. See Machiavelli, *Il principe* 19, in *Tutte le opere*, 288–89.

36. See Machiavelli, *Discorsi* 1 proemio, in *Tutte le opere*, 75–76.

37. See Pierre Manent, *An Intellectual History of Liberalism*, trans. Rebecca Balinski (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 17–18.

38. See Christopher Marlow, *The Jew of Malta* prologue 5–15, in *The Complete Works of Christopher Marlow*, ed. Fredson Bowers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), I:263, which should be read in light of David Riggs, *The World of Christopher Marlowe* (New York: Henry Holt, 2004).

39. See Sir Francis Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning*, ed. Michael Kiernan, 2.21.9, in *The Oxford Francis Bacon*, ed. Graham Rees and Lisa Jardine (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1996–), 4:144. See also Sir Francis Bacon, *De dignitate et augmentis scientiarum* 7.2, in *The Works of Francis Bacon*, ed. James Spedding, Robert Leslie Ellis, and Douglas Denon Heath (London: Longman, 1857–1874), 1:729 (translated at 5:17). For the convenience of readers, in citing *The Advancement of Learning*, I have employed the divisions, absent from the Oxford critical edition, that editors after Bacon's time introduced.

40. See Rahe, *Republics Ancient and Modern*, 2.i-iv.

41. Note Sir Francis Bacon, *Novum organum*, ed. Graham Rees and Maria Wakley, 1.129, in *The Oxford Francis Bacon*, 11:192–97; then, cf. Bacon, *Instauratio magna* *Distributio operis* and *Novum organum* 1.998, in *The Oxford Francis Bacon*, 11:38–39, 156–57; *De dignitate et augmentis scientiarum* 2.2, in *The Works of Francis Bacon*, 1:500 (translated at 4:297–98); and “Proteus, sive materia, *De sapientia veterum* 13, in *WoFB*, 6:651–52 (translated at 725–26), with Machiavelli, *Il principe* 25, in *Tutte le opere*, 295–96. For a brave, if futile, attempt to escape the implications of Bacon's fully self-conscious, deliberate, and persistent choice of metaphors, see Peter Pesic, “Proteus: Francis Bacon and the ‘Torture’ of Nature,” *Isis* 90, no. 1 (March 1999): 81–94.

42. Cf. Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning* 2.5.3, in *The Oxford Francis Bacon*, 4:77–78, and *De dignitate et augmentis scientiarum* 3.1, in *The Works of Francis Bacon*, 1:541 (mistranslated at 4:338), with Machiavelli, *Discorsi* 3.1, in *Tutte le opere*, 195–97.

43. See Bacon, “Orpheus, sive philosophia,” *De sapientia veterum* 11, in *The Works of Francis Bacon*, 6:646–48 (translated at 720–22), which should be read in light of Timothy H. Paterson, “Bacon's Myth of Orpheus: Power as a Goal of Science in *Of the Wisdom of the Ancients*,” *Interpretation* 16, no. 3 (May 1989): 427–44.

44. See Bacon, *De dignitate et augmentis scientiarum* 4.1, in *The Works of Francis Bacon*, 1:579–80 (translated at 4:372–73).

45. Cf. Bacon, “Of Goodnesse And Goodnesse of Nature,” *The Essayes or Counsels, Civill and Morall*, ed. Michael Kiernan, 13, in *The Oxford Francis Bacon*, 15:38–41—which should be read in light of Bacon, “Of Atheisme” and “Of Superstition,” *The Essayes or Counsels, Civill and Morall* 16–17, in *The Oxford Francis Bacon*, 15:51–56, and in light of Bacon, “Perseus, sive bellum,” *De sapientia veterum* 7, in *The Works of Francis Bacon*, 6:641–43 (translated at 714–17)—with Machiavelli, *Discorsi* 2.2, 3.1, in *Tutte le opere*, 49–50, 195–97, and see Bacon, *The New Atlantis*, in *The Works of Francis Bacon*, 3:129–66 (esp. 130, 132, 134, 136, 139, 144, 147). Consider as well Bacon, *De dignitate et augmentis scientiarum* 7.1–2, in *The Works of Francis Bacon*, 1:713–31 (translated at 5:3–19), and *The Advancement of Learning* 1.1.1–3, 2.20.1–21.11, 22.15, in *The Oxford Francis Bacon*, 4:5–9, 133–45, 153–55, in light of Clifford Orwin, “Machiavelli's Unchristian Charity,” *American Political Science Review* 72 (1978): 1217–28; then, see Timothy H. Patterson, “On the Role of Christianity in the Political Philosophy of

Francis Bacon," *Polity* 19 (1987): 419–42, and Rahe, *Republics Ancient and Modern*, 2.1.5 (with n. 123), 2.3.3 (with n. 38).

46. Note Bacon, *Novum organum* 2.52, in *The Oxford Francis Bacon*, 11:446–47, and see Jeremy Cohen, "*Be Fertile and Increase, Fill the Earth and Master It*": *The Ancient and Medieval Career of a Biblical Text* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989).

47. See René Descartes, *Discours de la méthode* 6, in *Oeuvres et lettres*, ed. André Bridoux (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1953), 167–79 (esp. 168–69). In this connection, see Robert K. Faulkner, *Francis Bacon and the Project of Progress* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1993), and Laurence Lampert, *Nietzsche and Modern Times: A Study of Bacon, Descartes, and Nietzsche* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 1–271.

48. Note Friedrich Meinecke, *Die Idee der Staatsräson* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 1957), and see Harvey C. Mansfield, Jr., *Taming the Prince: The Ambivalence of Modern Executive Power* (New York: The Free Press, 1989), 153–58. See also Peter S. Donaldson, *Machiavelli and Mystery of State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), and Richard Tuck, *Philosophy and Government 1572–1651* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

49. See Rahe, *Republics Ancient and Modern*, 2.prologue–3.epilogue, and *Against Throne and Altar*, 101–355, as well as *Machiavelli's Liberal Republican Legacy*, ed. Paul A. Rahe (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

50. That the *philosophes* saw themselves as the heirs of Bacon and of those, such as Descartes, who followed his lead is abundantly clear: see Jean le Rond d'Alembert, "Discours préliminaire des editeurs," and Denis Diderot, "Encyclopédie," in *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts, et des métiers*, ed. Denis Diderot and Jean Le Rond d'Alembert (Paris: Briasson et al., 1751–1757, 1762–1772; Neufchatel: Samuel Faulche & Compagnie, 1765; Amsterdam: Marc-Michel Rey, 1776–1780), 1:i–liii (esp. xxiv–xv), 5:635–48a.

51. See Letter from John Adams to Thomas Jefferson on 13 July 1813, in *The Adams-Jefferson Letters: The Complete Correspondence between Thomas Jefferson and Abigail and John Adams*, ed. Lester J. Cappon (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 354–56.

52. See Hans Barth, *Truth and Ideology*, trans. Frederic Lilje (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 1–16.

53. See Peter Gay, *The Party of Humanity: Essays in the Enlightenment* (New York: Norton, 1954), passim (esp. 114–32, 262–90).

54. Rousseau's attempt to disguise his point was so maladroit, as he must have recognized in the end, that it could never have passed muster: see the critical edition of Bibliothèque publique et universitaire de Genève MS. fr. 228, fol. 39r–40v, and Bibliothèque de la ville de Neuchâtel MS R. N. a. 9 fol. 1, which is printed in Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Diskurs über die Ungleichheit/Discours sur l'inégalité: Kritische Ausgabe des integralen Textes, mit sämtlichen Fragmenten und ergänzenden Materialien nach den Originalausgaben und den Handschriften neu ediert, übersetzt, und kommentiert*, 5th ed., ed. Heinrich Meier (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2001), 386–403, and consider Robert Shackleton, "Censure and Censorship: Impediments to Free Publica-

tion in the Age of Enlightenment," *The Library Chronicle of the University of Texas at Austin* n. s. 6 (December 1973): 25–41, which is reprinted in his *Essays on Montesquieu and on the French Enlightenment*, ed. David Gilson and Martin Smith (Oxford, UK: The Voltaire Foundation, 1988), 405–20; and William Hanley, "The Policing of Thought: Censorship in Eighteenth-Century France," *Studies in Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* 183 (1980): 265–95.

55. In this connection, see François Furet, "La Librairie du royaume de France au 18^e siècle," in *Livre et société dans la France du XVIII^e siècle*, ed. Geneviève Bollème et al. (Paris: Mouton & Co., 1965–70), 13–32, which is reprinted in translation as "Book Licensing and Book Production in the Kingdom of France in the Eighteenth Century," in *In the Workshop of History*, trans. Jonathan Mandelbaum (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 99–124.

56. Note Christopher Kelly, *Rousseau as Author: Consecrating One's Life to the Truth* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), and see Pierre Grosclaude, *Malesherbes: Témoin et interprète de son temps* (Paris: Librairie Fischbacher, 1961), 63–186, and Maurice Cranston, *The Noble Savage: Jean-Jacques Rousseau, 1754–1762* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 6–7, 133–39, 151, 203–4, 215–16, 220, 226, 232–53, 266–69, 278–362.

57. See Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Du Contrat social; ou, Principes du droit politique* (1762), ed. Robert Derathé, 4.8, in *Œuvres complètes de Rousseau*, ed. Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1959–95), 3:460–69.

58. See Maurice Cranston, *The Noble Savage*, 323–62, and *The Solitary Self: Jean-Jacques Rousseau in Exile and Adversity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

59. For a brief introduction to this neglected work, see Christopher Kelly and Roger D. Masters, "Rousseau on Reading 'Jean-Jacques': *The Dialogues*," *Interpretation: A Journal of Political Philosophy* 17, no. 2 (Winter 1989–90): 239–53.

60. See Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discours sur les sciences et les arts* (1750), ed. George R. Havens (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1946), 94. For the origins and import of the phrase *l'esprit fort*, see Rahe, *Against Throne and Altar*, 155–68, 297–312.

61. For a more detailed discussion than seems appropriate here, see Arthur M. Melzer, "The Origin of the Counter-Enlightenment: Rousseau and the New Religion of Sincerity," *American Political Science Review* 90, no. 2 (June 1996): 344–60 (esp. 344–51). See also Paul A. Rahe, "The Enlightenment Indicted: Rousseau's Response to Montesquieu," *Journal of the Historical Society* 8, no. 2 (June 2008): 273–302, and *Soft Despotism, Democracy's Drift: Montesquieu, Rousseau, Tocqueville, and the Modern Prospect* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 75–95.

62. For a brief, but telling discussion of the foundations for Rousseau's claim, see Judith N. Shklar, *Men and Citizens: A Study of Rousseau's Social Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 95–99. Note also Melzer, "The Origin of the Counter-Enlightenment," 347n7, and Graeme Garrard, *Rousseau's Counter-Enlightenment: A Republican Critique of the Philosophes* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 11–27, 83–87.

63. See Rousseau, *Dialogues: Rousseau, Juge de Jean Jacques* (ca. 1772), ed. Robert Osmont, 2–3, in *Œuvres complètes de Rousseau*, 1889–91, 964–68. In this connection,

see Marc Fumaroli, "Between the Rigorist Hammer and the Deist Anvil: The Fate of the Jesuits in Eighteenth-Century France," in *The Jesuits: Cultures, Sciences, and the Arts, 1540–1773*, ed. John W. O'Malley et al. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999–2006), 2:682–90.

64. See, for example, Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 280–354.

65. See Rahe, *Soft Despotism, Democracy's Drift*, passim.

66. Cf. Daniel Bell, *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties*, with "The Resumption of History in the New Century", 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).

67. Cf. Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992).

68. These claims, which were purely speculative when I first delivered this paper, seem now to be an accomplished fact: see "China's Creepy New Form of Oppression," *The Weekly Standard* 21, no. 6 (19 October 2015): 2.

PART III

*Class Struggle, Financial Power, and
Extraordinary Authority in the Republic*

Machiavelli and the Gracchi: Republican Liberty and Class Conflict

BENEDETTO FONTANA

I

In the *Discourses* Machiavelli identifies two major kinds of conflict.¹ The first is positive and conducive to a republic's viability and resilience. It describes the reciprocal and intimate relationship between republican liberty and competition and conflict.² The liberty and power of the Roman republic are a direct consequence of the conflict between the nobility and the people, the few and the many.³ The second is negative and noxious and embodies the strife and factionalism that undermined and destabilized the republic. The difference between them is the difference between a politics defined by the *vivere libero e civile* and a politics dominated by the strife of private and fragmented factions. To Machiavelli the distinction between the two kinds of politics, and the two kinds of conflict, emerges with the Gracchi and their attempts to resolve the immiseration of the Italian countryside. The first type of conflict is transformed into the second as the land question and agrarian reform increasingly and progressively generate factional and sectarian conflict among the ruling elite.⁴

Machiavelli in the *Discourses* emphasizes that the decline of republican institutions in ancient Rome may be traced to the Gracchi and their attempts to push through their agrarian reforms against the opposition of the nobility. He criticizes them for resuscitating the land question and placing it at the center of Roman politics. Gracchian policies, he asserts, initiated a long period of class strife that culminated in the civil wars and that resulted in the rise of military dynasts such as Marius, Sulla, and Caesar, all of which sealed the death of the republic.

This chapter investigates Machiavelli's interpretation of the land laws in Rome, and his understanding of the role the Gracchi played in

the factionalism and struggles that led to the disintegration of republican politics.⁵ It will discuss Machiavelli's requisites for republican liberty and republican politics—namely, sociopolitical equality, subordination of the armed forces to the political will of the community, and open, public competition within a clearly defined and delimited public space—and will relate them to the social and political initiatives of the Gracchi.⁶

In *The Art of War* Machiavelli identifies the politicization of the army and its privatization by powerful factions of the elite as the fundamental cause for the eventual rise of the principate, an outcome directly related to the destruction of the independent peasantry and its transformation into an impoverished urban proletariat dependent upon powerful patrons. The emphasis on sociopolitical equality would indicate that Machiavelli sees a connection between immiseration and the transformation of the army into private militias. Yet he appears uncertain or ambivalent about the Gracchi reforms and views them as the catalyst for republican decline. This chapter addresses the link between equality and republican liberty and attempts to relate the Gracchi reforms to Machiavelli's politics.

II

In comparison to such central terms as conflict between the senate and the plebs, love and fear, the great and the people, and the tribunate and its role in republican politics, Machiavelli's writings make very little reference to the Gracchi. There is one reference in *The Prince*, in chapter 9, where Machiavelli discusses leaders and rulers who were unable to rely on the people and their followers because unable to manage and to control them properly. The Gracchi receive four references in the *Discourses*.⁷ And one is found in *The Art of War*.⁸ A reader is led to inquire and to wonder why Machiavelli devotes only one chapter in the *Discourses*, and a relatively short one no less, to a discussion of the land laws and to the Gracchi. And this to a period and to events that, according to him, initiated and led eventually and inexorably to the tyranny of Caesar. Why so little space to events that initiated the civil wars and the downfall of the republic?

The relevant citation is *Discourses* 1.37: "What Discords the Agrarian Law causes in Rome; and for a republic to make a law that looks far backward and is opposed to an ancient custom of the city is productive of discord." In this chapter Machiavelli reiterates his belief that ambition causes strife (strife is due either to necessity or to ambition). The estab-

lishment of the tribunes was due to necessity (the people's desire for it "was forced by necessity"), but once having attained it, "it began fighting through ambition and through its hope to share honors and wealth with the nobles, as things much esteemed by men."⁹ And "from this arose the disorder that brought forth the contention over the Agrarian Law which at last resulted in the destruction of the republic."¹⁰ Because, as Machiavelli believes, well-ordered republics ought to keep the state rich and the citizens poor, there was a "defect" in this law. For various reasons the rich were able to evade the agrarian law, such that they acquired lands and property in violation of its provisions, an evasion and violation that over time acquired the semblance of custom and through inertia acquired the status of "facts on the ground" though in formal contradiction to the law. "Thus the injustice done by the rich, although great, was not easy to ascertain."¹¹

In any case, the nobles and the rich managed by various means and stratagems to hold on to the land originally intended to be divided among the Roman people as a whole. When the Gracchi resuscitated the land question "it wholly ruined Roman liberty, because by that time the power of its adversaries was redoubled; as a result, it stirred up so much hatred between the multitude and the Senate that it led to arms and bloodshed, contrary to every lawful habit and custom. Since the public magistrates could not remedy it, the factions, placing no more hope in them, had recourse to private remedies, and each of the parties decided to get a leader to defend it. The multitude acted early in this turmoil and disorder by turning its support to Marius. . . . Having no remedy against this plague, the nobility backed Sulla. . . ." The disorders culminated in the dictatorship of Caesar, "the first tyrant in Rome; as a result, that city was never again free." Thus Machiavelli traces the civil wars between Marius and Sulla, and later between Caesar and Pompey, which led to the destruction of the republic and the eventual foundation of the principate, to the strife and discord that characterized republican politics since the Gracchi reforms.

Machiavelli recognizes that the "result of this Agrarian Law seems out of harmony with my belief" that the conflict between the Senate and the people was conducive to liberty, and yet he refuses to "abandon his opinion" precisely because during a period of three hundred years the conflicts over the land laws acted as a brake and a check on the ambition and appetites of the rich. For this ambition of the few constitutes the gravest danger to a free city unless it is "crushed." Thus the people "with this law

and with its other cravings . . . continually checked the ambition of the nobles."

Why, then, did the conflict between the great and the people over the land question lead to "illegalities" and to ultimate tyranny? Machiavelli gives us two reasons: first, "men esteem property" more "than they esteem positions of honor," and so the great were willing to open magistracies to the people, but "great was their obstinacy" when it came to giving up their wealth and property. Machiavelli repeats this belief in chapter 17 of *The Prince*, where he notes that a prince must avoid being hated by his people, and the seizure of the people's property and the violation of their women and children will surely inspire hatred, because "men forget more quickly the death of a father than the loss of a father's property." An interesting parallel is also seen in Machiavelli's advice to Giovanni de' Medici after the dynasty's return to Florence in 1512 regarding the recovery of property lost by his family in 1494: "Men feel more sorrow for a farm taken away from them than for a brother or a father put to death, because sometimes death is forgotten, but property never."¹²

Machiavelli's attitude toward the Gracchi is somewhat unusual. It assumes that letting things go on as they have in the past (that is, letting the law regarding the *ager publicus* [public lands] continue to be violated because the practice has now become customary) will be more constructive, or at least less destructive, to republican stability. At the same time, by following custom and allowing things to stay as they are one knows that the disparity in wealth will continue to increase, which, in turn, would destroy the balance between the few and the many. On the other hand, by seizing the bull by the horns, by trying to reform both the state and its social bases, there might be a chance to save the republic and its institutions.

Chapter 37 of the first book of the *Discourses*, the only extended commentary on the Gracchi, resumes and summarizes Machiavelli's major themes, and it does so by presenting a number of interlaced and layered themes. Thus, we have: the conflict between the few and the many, between the rich and poor; the former is political conflict, which is then transformed into the second, socioeconomic conflict. Within this overall structure, wealth and property are given overriding significance in the sense that the socioeconomic conflict between the rich and poor is the determining factor within the conflict dynamic. At the same time, Machiavelli points to the role played by the tempo or the pace of conflict (the timing of types of conflict), that is, the question of timing and opportunity regarding the struggle for and introduction of particular laws or policies.

III

Antiquity has dealt severely with the Gracchi. Its writers attribute the civil strife, violence, and all-out war that characterized the last decades of the republic to the Gracchi's efforts to initiate reforms within the economic and political institution of Rome. Cicero, Sallust, Pliny, Appian, and Plutarch seem to agree on the general outlines of the Gracchian reforms and their motivation. Cicero praises the Gracchi for their patriotism and love of country when addressing the people but excoriates them when addressing the Senate.¹³ Partisan strife and civil discord are attributed to the tribunates of the Gracchi. Cicero says that "The death of Tiberius Gracchus, and already before that the whole thrust of the tribunate, has divided a united people into two camps."¹⁴ The belief that a once "united" people was split into antagonistic parties as a result of the Gracchi's push to force an agrarian law is typical of the literature.¹⁵ There seem to be two rival traditions: one popular and supporting the Gracchi, the other aristocratic and hostile.

In any case, the agrarian question is not unique to the Roman republic. It is a perennial problem in the ancient world, especially in the Greek city-states. The land question, given the economic and material conditions, translated into the question of the redistribution of land. This issue politically was seen as a pretext for the transformation of the state into a tyranny.¹⁶ The call for a redistribution of land was assailed as a pretense of its supporters for their attempt to establish a tyranny. Many in the senatorial aristocracy saw land reform as a means to change the established order in Rome.¹⁷ Similar conflicts and similar divisions occurred in Florence.¹⁸ The conservative and aristocratic factions saw a direct relation between land reform and tyranny—that is, their imputation to the popular leaders and to the supporters and allies of reform of desiring to establish a tyranny, or a *regnum* in Rome.¹⁹

Plutarch's narrative of the lives of the two brothers, as well as Appian's history of the tribunes' reforms, are striking in their anticipation or prefiguration of several Machiavellian themes regarding the social determinants of republics, monarchies, and tyrannies. Thus, Plutarch says that Tiberius Gracchus, while traveling through Etruria on his way to Spain, first became aware of the overall social and economic condition of the countryside and could not but note its despoliation and depopulation. Plutarch writes: "But his brother Caius, in a certain pamphlet,²⁰ has written that as Tiberius was passing through Tuscany on his way to Numantia,

and observed the dearth of inhabitants in the country, and that those who tilled its soil or tended its flocks there were imported barbarian slaves, he then conceived the public policy which was the cause of countless ills to the two brothers."²¹ And: "The wild beasts of Italy have their dens to retire to, but the brave men who spill their blood in her cause have nothing left but air and light. Without homes, without settled habitations, they wander from place to place . . . The private soldiers fight and die to advance the luxury and wealth of the great . . . and they are called the masters of the world without having a sod to call their own."²² And, according to Appian, Tiberius asks: "Is it not just that what belongs to the people should be shared by the people? Is a man with no capacity for fighting more useful to his country than a soldier? Is a citizen inferior to a slave? Is an alien or one who owns some of his country's soil the best patriot? You have won by war most of your possessions, and hope to acquire the rest of the habitable globe. . . . [Y]ou should if need be spontaneously and of your own free will yield up these lands to those who will rear children for the service of the state. Do not sacrifice a great thing while striving for a small, especially as you are to receive no contemptible compensation for your expenditure on the land, in free ownership of 500 jugera secure forever, and in case you have sons, of 250 more for each of them."²³ Thus "[C]ertain powerful men became extremely rich and the race of slaves [working on their estates and lands] multiplied throughout the country, while the Italian people dwindled in numbers and strength, being oppressed by penury, taxes, and military service. . . . [T]hey passed their time in idleness, because the land was held by the rich, who employed slaves instead of freemen as cultivators."²⁴ Appian summarizes the "sedition of the younger Gracchus" in pointing out the consequences of the failure: "so the plebeians lost everything, and hence resulted in a still further decline in the numbers both of citizens and of soldiers, and in the revenue from the land and its distribution. . . . the people were reduced to unemployment."²⁵

Finally, Pliny the Elder attributes the decline of Rome and of the *societas italiana* it established to the emergence and growth of the latifundia, which, he says, were the "ruin of Italy,"²⁶ whose origin, Cicero says, was due to the violence, purchase, or enclosure of vacant lands by a few, who added field to field in their quest for greater acquisitions.²⁷

It is noteworthy that these passages parallel and underline comments Machiavelli makes regarding the social, economic, and cultural underpinnings of republican government, especially passages regarding the relation between equality and republic, and regarding the nature and role of "gentlemen." The weakening and progressive disintegration of the free

peasant-farmer as a social group and as a political factor, as well as the simultaneous growth in the number of slaves and the consequent importance of slave labor to the economy, describe a social and economic structure that Machiavelli sees as both antithetical and inimical to republican rule. Plutarch, Appian, and Pliny describe social and political conditions in Roman Italy that parallel conditions in parts of Italy at the time of the secretary's writings. Machiavelli's discussion of social structures of the various Italian states is a trenchant critique of peninsular politics, as well as a close analysis of the social bases of various kinds of politics.

Machiavelli outlines the social and economic framework that underlies political structures in *Discourses* 1.55. He praises the liberty and the civic virtue of the German cities of northern Europe. He compares them to the Romans of Camillus's time and attributes to both peoples qualities of "goodness," "honesty," and religious sincerity, habits of mind and demeanor that are much more admired "in these times" because infrequent. Two major reasons are given. One is the relative isolation of the free cities that makes them less tempted by corruption. It is significant that Machiavelli compares the goodness and civic virtues of the Germans to those of the Roman republic during the period of Camillus. The figure of Camillus embodies two important political themes: the republican and constitutional dictatorship as a means of maintaining and restoring the republic, and the admission or cooptation of plebeians to the consulship.²⁸ In both cases Camillus is seen as the second founder of Rome, as the reformer who reconstituted the state both internally (by granting the plebs the right to the consulate) and externally (by defeating Rome's enemies). This is the era where Rome underwent invasion and burning by the Gauls, a period where the republic had to be reconstituted and was thus "brought back toward its beginnings"²⁹ by the violence the Gauls forced on the republic as well as by the *imperium militiae* (military power) exercised by Camillus. Camillus rejuvenated the customs and laws of the Romans and reestablished a republic devastated by social conflict and by the Gallic pillage of Rome. The Gracchi intended to rejuvenate the laws and mores of the Romans and to reestablish a republic that was being destroyed by an internal enemy, extreme wealth and luxury that, like acids, were corroding the political institutions of the republic.

The second reason given for the political and moral strength of the Germans is the absence of "lords and gentlemen" and the prevalence of "complete equality" in their territory. These are put to "death as the beginners of corruption and the cause of all evil." Gentlemen are a class "who without working live in luxury on the returns from their landed possessions,

without paying any attention either to agriculture or any other occupation for making a living. . . . [and they] are dangerous in every republic and in every country, but still more dangerous are they who, besides the afore-said fortunes, command castles [*signori di castella*] and have subjects who obey them." The language here is noteworthy in its resemblance to Apian's description of the conditions in Italy that sparked the conflict over the Gracchian policies: "Thus certain powerful men became extremely rich and the race of slaves [working on their estates and lands] multiplied throughout the country, while the Italian people dwindled in numbers and strength, being oppressed by penury, taxes, and military service. If they had any respite from these evils they passed their time in idleness, because the land was held by the rich, who employed slaves instead of freemen as cultivators."³⁰

Machiavelli's "gentlemen" and "lords" live through the labor of their "inferiors," and "pass their time in idleness," and as such they are "hostile to every form of free government." In the Papal States, the Kingdom of Naples, Lombardy, and the Romagna, where gentlemen and lords prevail, it is impossible to introduce a free republic. What is needed is the force and the power of a "mano regia," or kingly power, to control and to check the overweening ambition, greed, and corruption of the idle nobility and aristocracy. On the other hand, if indeed one would attempt to introduce a republic in such places it is necessary to "wipe them all out" in order to establish conditions conducive to equality and liberty. In this chapter Machiavelli discusses equality and inequality as the differential socioeconomic characteristics that provide the framework for republican politics. He outlines what in contemporary language amounts to an embryonic political sociology of power and political regimes.

In effect, the progressive depopulation of the countryside, the accompanying impoverishment and elimination of independent peasants as a class, and the consequent increase in large estates dependent upon slave or some other kind of dependent labor posed a direct and ultimately fatal threat to the free republic. Machiavelli establishes a direct relationship between free labor and free political institutions in the same way that he establishes a direct relationship between dependent labor and domination.

Machiavelli criticizes the Gracchi for their impatience and for resuscitating public and legal rights to land that had long remained dormant. This impatience initiated the long period of destructive political conflict and civil wars. The Gracchi may answer that speed and audacity were necessary precisely because the social foundations were being increasingly undermined. The conflict of the people and the great that Machiavelli saw

as the basis and motive force of republican liberty had, by the time of the Gracchi, degenerated into intraelite squabbles within the ruling oligarchy, one now made up of both patricians and plebeians. Thus the cleavage that to Machiavelli provided the dynamic for republican politics no longer existed and had been transformed into power struggles among the nobility and the Senate themselves.³¹ The difference in the type of conflict is seen in the transformation of the tribunate from its revolutionary origins as the defender and shield of the plebs' liberty and civil rights to a mere vehicle for the conservation of the power and privileges of the Senate and of the great.

In the same way that Machiavelli criticizes relations of domination obtaining in the Papal States and other parts of Italy, the Gracchi establish a relation between the sociopolitical and economic desertification of the countryside and the growing immiseration of the urban plebs in Rome. As a result the bipolarity of opposition and conflict between the few and the many that underlies the institutions of the Roman republic undergoes a slow but cumulative and decisive change. The debility and weakening of the plebs upset the political balance and made possible the moral and sociocultural corruption of all levels of society. In this sense Tiberius and Gaius tried in their own way to attack the very roots of the corruption, decadence, and inequality that prevailed throughout Italy. They saw slave labor driving out and destroying free labor, which to them meant that the social, economic, and cultural bases of Italy, and therefore of the Roman army, could no longer sustain the political structures of the republic. Thus they proposed to distribute to the poor—both of Rome, the *municipia*, the Roman colonies and of the *socii*—land taken from the rich who had unjustly acquired it from the *ager publicus*. There is no doubt from which group the land was to be taken, the rich and the great, and there is no doubt to whom it was to be given, to the poor and the common people, the purpose of which was to refound and to rejuvenate a class of free peasant-farmers and simultaneously reverse the increasing numbers of slave-dominated agricultural enterprises.

Yet Machiavelli's words in chapter 37 of the *Discourses* appear to question the merit of the Gracchi reforms, and this is the crux of Machiavelli's apparent critique of the Gracchi: "to attempt to take away an irregularity that has grown serious in a republic, and for the sake of this to make a law that looks far into the past, is a badly considered decision; . . . it does nothing else than to hasten the evil toward which that irregularity is taking you. But if you delay, either the evil comes later, or before it comes to its completion, with time it disappears of itself." This is a remarkable judg-

ment on the Gracchi: Machiavelli advises them to be cautious, prudent, and dilatory. Inaction is better than action. This counsel directly contradicts Machiavelli's many other observations in which he privileges activity over passivity, praises audacity and decisiveness as crucial elements of *virtù*. To him it is better to act than not to act, even if action were to result in failure. Thus in *The Prince* in his discussion of *fortuna* he insists that fortune favors the young, who are more audacious, more passionate, and more fierce.³²

Machiavelli distinguishes between two kinds of conflict: one is the conflict and struggle for "positions of honor"—that is, for political offices and magistracies and for an expanded and more inclusive political participation, and thus effectively for inclusion into the Senate. The other is the conflict characterized by property rights, wealth, and most especially the conflict over the distribution of the spoils and booty taken by the army from the defeated enemy. The more the republic expanded and acquired territory and spoils the more the distribution of the spoils of victory became a question and a factor in republican conflicts. These two kinds of conflict have different aims and scope, but though separable nevertheless they became entangled and intertwined over the course of their development. The Struggle of the Orders, the yielding of political office and political power to the people, was ended "without great disturbance" and, according to Machiavelli, greatly expanded the sphere of liberty and greatly expanded the rule and dominions of the republic. Machiavelli looks favorably on this conflict and in many places in the *Discourses* discusses its development and its consequences on the institutions of the republic. In fact, these institutions are the product of these conflicts. Thus the development of political institutions is coextensive with the development of political conflicts.

In *Discourses* 1.4 Machiavelli makes the famous assertion that the "discord between the people and the Roman Senate made that republic free and powerful." To him dissensions, quarrels, and "noise" were not injurious but were rather productive of liberty and growth. "[F]rom the Tarquins to the Gracchi, more than three hundred years, the dissensions in Rome rarely caused exile and very rarely bloodshed." But Livy shows that the land question became a cause of dissension as the republic expanded and narrates an episode where a consul early on was killed because he proposed land reform.

The problem for Machiavelli emerges with the second type of conflict, that between the rich and the poor over property and the distribution of the ever-expanding *ager publicus*. Machiavelli shows considerable ambiva-

lence and uncertainty regarding class conflict. On the one hand, there is a constant refrain about the dangers of greed and an almost regretful description of the unavoidable propensity of the human appetite for wealth, property, and riches, an appetite difficult to keep in check and to counterbalance: indeed, what will counteract and check the power of property, if not property itself? The ambition of the nobles and of the rich must be checked, even “crushed,” for the sake of the city, yet the appetite for property makes this exceedingly difficult.

IV

What is Machiavelli actually saying when he criticizes the Gracchi for their impetuosity in resurrecting the agrarian controversy? Is the critique real, or merely apparent? Or both—that is to say, does the apparent critique lead to an interpretation of the reforms that is both more radical and more favorable to the Gracchi? They should have anticipated the reaction of their opponents, and so they should not have brought the issue to the level of violent conflict without first preparing their party and anticipating the violent response of their opponents, that is, without first making preparations for the arming of the common people. It should be noted that Machiavelli praises their intentions but criticizes their methods. What other methods would have been available? The Gracchi tried various procedural and institutional devices within the confines of constitutional practice, though they may have used some tactics that seemed unusual and novel (and thus revolutionary) to their opponents. One significant political strategy not used is arming the people. If so, what would it mean for a tribune of the plebs to acquire arms? One possible meaning is that to be armed is to command and to lead an army. Yet a tribune does not have *imperium*, and his power is valid and legitimate only within the *pomerium* (the sacred boundaries) of the city. For a tribune to acquire arms is to violate both his office and the principle that military authority is exercised outside the city boundary. A second possible meaning of being armed is organizing the urban plebs into an armed private force to be deployed against the senatorial faction. This latter method is precisely what was used against the Gracchi.

Sheldon Wolin long ago observed that Machiavelli’s politics issues from his “discovery of the mass.”³³ There are various ways to understand Wolin. One meaning is that the “people” are central to a postmedieval politics, in the sense that it provides both the ground and the background of modern politics. Another is that Machiavelli recognized the decisive

character of the “mass” once it is organized, focused, and concentrated. The attitude toward the popular masses, his conviction that they are central to modern politics and are the sine qua non of republican politics, is fundamental to the understanding of Machiavelli’s politics. “The opinion of the people”—its formation, organization, development, direction, and deployment—is decisive.³⁴ Wolin’s observation, though true, is not strictly correct, because the Roman nobility recognized the irrepressible force of the people once it is given a conscious direction. Roman politics, both in its republican and in its early imperial phases, is based on the popular masses. Without them there would have been no republican politics, nor would there have been an Augustan principate. (It should be pointed out that Augustus is the type of new prince whose power rests on the “friendship of the people.”)³⁵ Machiavelli rediscovered the power of the people through his “continual study” of the ancients.³⁶ And it is the recognition of the force of the masses in politics that led the Gracchi to pursue their reforms. They understood the intimate connection between land reform, manpower/population, military strength, and ultimately the political health of the republic. Without the popular masses republican politics could not continue, nor for that matter could imperial expansion, upon which the safety and liberty of the republic depended.³⁷

The Gracchi understood this connection and were concerned that it was about to be severed and that some remedy would be necessary. At the same time, Tiberius Gracchus was not the only one, or even the first, to raise the issue of land, manpower, and liberty. Laelius, close friend of Scipio Aemilianus and member of the Scipionic Circle celebrated by Cicero in *De re publica*, some years earlier than 133 BCE broached a proposal for land reform, only to abandon it because of strong opposition on the part of the senatorial conservatives. It is for this that Laelius was dubbed *sapiens*.³⁸ Metellus Macedonicus delivered a speech in 131 BCE in which he discussed population decline and urged an increase in the birth rate.³⁹ Apian says that “what Gracchus had in his mind in proposing the measure was not money, but men.”⁴⁰ What Gracchus had in mind was a program he thought would restore the balance between the rich and the poor, between the few and the many. It is this balance that to Machiavelli established and maintained both republican liberty and republican empire. This question of balance is fundamental: it underlies the political discussion and the political project as understood by Machiavelli. It is what Machiavelli recognized as his novel contribution to politics, his new modes and orders as well as his striking out in dangerous and as yet unexplored paths.⁴¹

The struggle over the Gracchi reforms revealed a fundamental *arca-*

num imperii embedded within the republican constitution, one which, though ever present and dormant, had not yet been recognized: the popular assemblies possessed an intrinsic power that remained to be tapped and wielded against the senate and the nobility. It is this that generated the violent and fanatical reaction of the nobility in their attempts to thwart the reforms. The reforms themselves were not merely or solely agrarian and economic. They must be seen as an ensemble of measures that when taken together constituted a fundamentally political program and pointed to the renovation of the Roman republic. Gaius Gracchus is reputed to have wanted to pass a tribunician law that would have mandated a novel restructuring of the Centuriate Assembly wherein the centuries of all five classes into which it was divided would have voted in an order determined by lot, rather than by property, as was customary.⁴² If this law had passed this assembly would have been radically transformed from an upper-class bastion to an assembly controlled by the popular masses. Gaius also attempted to overhaul the courts and make them more responsible; he tried to deter or to prevent the ruling class from using the courts for its own political ends and to eliminate opponents it feared or deemed dangerous.⁴³ For example, any magistrate who inflicted a capital sentence on a citizen without the specific authority of the people would himself be subject to a capital prosecution; in the same way, any senator or magistrate who tried to corrupt a capital court, or who attempted to set up a capital court without the people's authority, would be liable to capital prosecution. Thus, though the people gave power to the magistrates, and though the Senate had its own role to play, Gaius's legislation attempted to provide further controls on the abuse of its powers.

But what is more significant is the reinvigoration and renewal of the powers of the tribunes of the plebs as wielded by the Gracchi. Machiavelli and Cicero see the tribunate as the characteristic signature of Roman politics: the first sees it as the mark of republican liberty, the second as the expression of Roman political instability and ultimate decline.⁴⁴ The use of the tribunate and the *concilium plebis* (as well as the *comitia tributa*, which almost amounted to the same thing) to legislate reforms as a reaction to the hostility of the conservatives in the Senate sparked intense and violent opposition. This opposition attempted to check the Gracchi by using tribunes who supported the senatorial nobility to veto their actions in the assembly of the people. In response, Tiberius invoked the powers of the assembly to define, or to redefine, the powers of the tribune and to enforce the assembly's powers over the office of the tribune. His rationale was that a tribune of the people has the obligation to act in the interest of the plebs,

and failing such a duty, the plebs have a right to remove him from office. As Appian puts it, Tiberius asked the comitia “to determine whether a tribune who was acting contrary to the people’s interest could continue to hold office.”⁴⁵

Thus, during the struggle for the reform laws within the popular assembly of the *concilium plebis* Tiberius appealed to the people to remove from the tribunate M. Octavius, his obstructive colleague, who supported the conservative senatorial aristocracy, due to the latter’s persistent veto of Tiberius’s measures. First, Octavius’s repeated use of his veto to prevent Tiberius from enacting his laws in the assembly of the people was unprecedented. No tribune had persistently blocked a *plebiscitum* since 287. Polybius, a friend of Scipio Aemilianus, Laelius, and their circle, writing fifteen years before 133 BCE, asserts that “a tribune is always duty-bound to act in accordance with the people’s wishes, and above all to make what the people want his aim.”⁴⁶ Though the tribunate by this time was no longer the revolutionary office it had once been, having been transformed into an instrument of the elite to control both magistrates and the people, Polybius nevertheless shows that “making what the [people] want his object” was still a powerful political method.⁴⁷ Octavius’s opposition was fundamental: in over 150 years no tribune had so acted against a *plebiscitum*. And, as Cicero notes, it was this unrelenting opposition that destroyed Gracchus.⁴⁸

The action of Tiberius in deposing an elected tribune of the plebs poses interesting questions regarding the functions and prerogatives of a tribune, and whether the office possessed the discretionary power to act in ways contrary to the majority of the people when assembled and to act in ways deemed by them as supporting the senatorial and aristocratic factions.⁴⁹ The situation anticipates, *ante litteram*, as it were, Burke’s distinction between a delegate and a representative, and brings up the problem of the meaning and import of a mandate imposed by an elected magistrate’s constituencies.⁵⁰ The conflict attendant upon economic and agrarian reform led ineluctably to the conflict over the political prerogatives of the *concilium plebis* and, by extension, to the conflict over the proper powers and authority of the tribune of the plebs. It was this attempt to rejuvenate and to renew the political autonomy and moral integrity of the tribunate that led to violence and bloodshed. The conflict exposed and posed the basic question of what the essential and defining characteristic of the tribunate is—that is, that a tribune qua tribune embodies and represents the interests of the plebs.

The efforts of the Gracchi to push their program, and the corresponding efforts of the nobility to thwart and to circumvent them, forced the novel institutional tactic of going to the assembly of the people. Yet, at the same time, their failure showed that the assemblies were not quite mature and stable, and were often fickle and easily manipulated.⁵¹

V

In the Gracchian reforms we have the coming together of a variety of issues, programs, and forces. There is, of course, the economic issue, the distribution of land, which is linked to the repopulation of the countryside with an independent peasantry, which is linked to the reform of the legions, all of which, finally, are linked to political reform. Tiberius, and especially Gaius, initiated substantial reforms, a significant number of which were not limited to land. These reforms aimed at renovating the political and military institutions of the republic.

The failure of the reforms recalls Machiavelli's discussion of innovation and renovation in chapter 6 of the *The Prince*: "there is nothing more difficult to plan or uncertain of success or more dangerous to carry out than an attempt to introduce new institutions, because the introducer has as his enemies all those who profit from the old institutions, and has as lukewarm defenders all those who will profit from the new institutions." During the struggle with Gaius Gracchus the Senate eventually resorted to the ultimate degree and directed the consul Opimius to use whatever method was necessary to preserve the state.⁵² Precisely because the senatorial aristocracy had "the laws on their side," and precisely because under the law the consul possessed *imperium* (the legal power to command and to coerce), it was relatively simple to use force and violence against a popular faction led by a tribune lacking *imperium*.⁵³

Here Machiavelli neatly captures the problem faced by the Gracchi: their opponents had the force of accumulated custom, practice, and prestige for support, whereas they attempted to resuscitate a constitutional order that over time had come into disuse; they thus appeared, and were deliberately cast by the conservatives, as radical and contrary to constitutional order. To repeat Machiavelli's analysis: "to attempt to take away an irregularity that has grown serious in a republic, and for the sake of this to make a law that looks far into the past, is a badly considered decision."⁵⁴ The irregularity has become an ancient and accepted (at least on the part of the senatorial aristocracy) custom of the city. It is dangerous to inquire

into the ways and means by which this irregularity has become a usage, so that a new law that attempts to remedy the irregularity by “looking far backward” is now dangerous and “productive of discord.”

In the same chapter 6 Machiavelli discusses armed and unarmed prophets, where the former succeed and the latter fail. Machiavelli notes that persuasion, belief, and the arts of oratory are important to organize and direct a given social group or people. But persuasion and rhetoric, or the human part of the centaur as Machiavelli pointed out in chapter 18, are not sufficient. Force and the animal part of the centaur are required, so that when the people no longer believe, they can be made to believe by force.

The Gracchi established a pattern that runs throughout the last century of the republic—reformers using the popular assemblies against the Senate and the nobility, which invariably ended in failure until Marius and Sulla discovered the use of the legions in republican politics.⁵⁵ First Marius, and then Sulla in response to Marius, cut the Gordian knot, called on their legions, and brought the military into the civil conflict—one which had initially taken place within the political and civil space of the republic. Force and violence had been used in the past, and not only during the Gracchi period. But this was violence among civilians within the city. Marius introduced military force into the political and civil strife. Thus a crucial *arcanum imperii* was uncovered: the centrality of the army to internal struggles, to be used for and against the Senate and the commons. The question of the army recalls Machiavelli’s discussion of “la mano regia”—how is the necessity for a monarchy obviated?⁵⁶ Can an argument be made that the Gracchi wanted to stop, or reverse, a process that would lead to a tyranny either of one or of the few, precisely the opposite of what their opponents accused them of trying to institute?

Ascribing the decline of liberty and the rise of tyranny to the Gracchian reforms seems somewhat unusual for Machiavelli, who is ever ready to argue against “all writers” and who relishes his presumptuousness in putting forth unconventional interpretations of the past. Why would Machiavelli assume that the attempt to initiate reforms sparked the decline? Why assume that a policy of procrastination and risk avoidance would not have contributed to decline? This is another way of asking whether decline was inevitable or if a Gracchian reformation could have forestalled or prevented civil war and downfall.

What Machiavelli says in chapter 9 of *The Prince* is instructive. Here Machiavelli discusses the conflict between the many and the few, the people and the great, as the foundation of politics, and recommends that

a prince base his power on the support of the people. A new prince, in contrast to the hereditary prince, must organize and use the people in their conflict against the few and great, and he must devise means by which he attains and maintains the "friendship of the people." He argues against those who criticize the people and responds to the criticism "He who builds on the people builds on mud" by making a distinction between two kinds of princes. The first is one who is "deceived" by the people, as the Gracchi were in Rome. And the second is a prince "who can command," who possesses *virtù* (that is, a "stout-hearted man," who has "courage" and "management") and therefore "keeps up the spirit of the masses, he is never deceived by them, but receives assurance that he has made his foundations strong." In the *Discourses* Machiavelli also argues against those who criticize the people for their inconstancy, unpredictability, and irrationality. In comparing princes to people he finds the latter more honest, constant, and wise, and capable of judgement and resolution.⁵⁷ A "good man worthy of trust" is able to persuade the people to act prudently and to make the necessary decisions.⁵⁸ In what way did the Gracchi fail in the organization and direction of their followers? In what way did the Gracchi lack these qualities? Does Machiavelli believe they should never have attempted what they attempted? Or perhaps he is suggesting that reforms would have been successful if the Gracchi had been better prepared in the organization, direction, and deployment of the people. But what is a prince "who can command"? Command the people within the city? Or command an army in the field? Yet, as we said above, to bring a field army into the city, in the manner of a Sulla, is to vitiate the republican order.

This notion of commanding is related to what Machiavelli says in chapter 6 of *The Prince*, in which he contrasts a prince who uses both persuasion and force with a prince who lacks the latter. A prince needs the ability to compel, so that when people no longer believe, they can be made to believe by force. Machiavelli's discussion of the lion and the fox, and of the centaur, in chapter 18 addresses similar themes. Thus "command" here means establishing the social, economic, and political conditions within which the people will not choose not to obey. This is the problem Machiavelli sees with Gracchian politics: though they recognize the importance of the popular masses, and though they attempt to use the people against the conservatives in the Senate and in the nobility, they were not able to maintain this support, nor were they able to undermine the power and the resources of their senatorial opponents. The latter were better organized and better armed, and also more determined and willing to resort to extraconstitutional—and to extraordinary—methods. Is what befell

the Gracchi similar to what happened to Savonarola, in that they were not armed prophets? Yet Marius, Sulla, Pompey, and Caesar were indeed armed, and precisely because they were armed they succeeded in pushing through land laws and colony laws that favored their own legionaries. But if this is the case, then Machiavelli would seem to undermine his own analysis of the origins and sociopolitical bases of the Caesarian dictatorship and of the principate that emerged from it.

The Struggle of the Orders, the patricians and the plebeians, is concluded with the admission of the plebeian order into the political system. Thus individuals within the plebs, talented, ambitious, wealthy, can now participate in the electoral struggle for power and become leaders of the republic. The official and formal designation of the Roman state was "The Senate and the People of Rome," *Senatus Populusque Romanus*, which means that the Senate and, especially, the consulship are now open to plebeians.⁵⁹ But this does not mean that the distinction between leaders and people, leaders and followers, and elite and people is eliminated. The polarity is radically changed and given a new basis: from the conflict between the few and the many to a conflict among diverse leaders and dynasts. The change occurs on two levels, the political and the social. On the first, the office of tribune is now an instrument of the elites, and on the second, the conflict between the few and the many is transmogrified and translated into a factional and power struggle within the ruling class.

The problem of the Gracchi is the problem of the tribunate. The Gracchian reform program, its economic provisions as well as its political reforms, cannot be understood without placing it within the changed role of the tribunes and the realignment of their functions with respect to the Senate and the plebs.

The fact is that the Senate eventually absorbed, or coopted, the tribunate. And the cooptation was made possible because the tribunes lost their original constituency. The plebeian elite, whose claims and rights were promoted and defended by the tribunes, had been assimilated into the ruling class. They were now members of the ruling class and of the nobility of office and of the Senate. The cooptation of the plebeian leadership was signaled by the tribunes' admission to the Senate and their participation in its deliberations. As members of the Senate their role changed from defenders of the plebs to defenders of the establishment. In the same way that the Senate asked magistrates to propose bills and legislation before the assemblies of the people, so too it could use the tribunes to put legislation before the assembly of the plebs. It is the declawing of the tribunate that the Gracchi attempted to remedy, and it is their attempt to re-

store the popular character of its power that made their reforms anathema to the aristocratic opposition.

VI

To sum up: Machiavelli's attitude toward the Gracchi should now be a bit clearer. It is more sympathetic than it appears, especially when compared to that of the ancient writers. It assumes that letting things go on as they have in the past (that is, let the law regarding the *ager publicus* continue to be violated because the practice has now become a custom) is only apparently more constructive, or at least less destructive, to republican stability. By following custom and allowing things to remain as they are, the disparity in wealth will continue to increase, which, in turn, would destroy the balance between the few and the many. Yet by audaciously accepting risk, by initiating social and political reforms, new conditions may give rise to the opportunity to establish the republic on new foundations.

Machiavelli throughout his writings is fond of using "nevertheless" as a way of expressing his opposition to conventional opinion and to the writers of the past. And in the case of the Gracchi he appears to stay pretty close to the judgement of his sources, Cicero, Appian, and especially Plutarch. He follows Plutarch in praising the Gracchi, yet he also offers advice *post res* in suggesting political and strategic methods in dealing with the senatorial nobility. When he says that "these troubles were started by the Gracchi, whose intention should be praised above their prudence," the observation reveals a sharp awareness of the political context in which the Gracchi and their opponents confronted each other. He does not say that their prudence should not be praised but that the intention should be praised *above* their prudence. Thus a hierarchy is established: first the intention, then the prudence, so that therefore both the intention and the prudence are praised. The language is careful and indirect, and it reveals Machiavelli's sympathy and understanding for the Gracchi's attempt to "initiate a new order of things."

NOTES

1. Allan Gilbert, *Machiavelli: The Chief Works and Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1989). Classical references are from the Loeb Classical Library.
2. See Marco Geuna, "Machiavelli e il ruolo dei conflitti nella vita politica," in

Conflitti, ed. A. Arienzo and D. Caruso (Naples: Libreria Dante e Descartes, 2005), 19–57.

3. *Discourses*, 1.2, 3, 4, 5. See also *The Prince*, chapters 9, 17, 19.

4. Benedetto Fontana, "Sallust and the Politics of Machiavelli," *History of Political Thought* 24, no. 1 (2003): 86–108.

5. D. C. Earle, *Tiberius Gracchus: A Study in Politics* (Brussels, 1963); David Stockton, *The Gracchi* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979); John M. Riddle, ed., *Tiberius Gracchus: Destroyer or Reformer of the Republic?* (Lexington, MA: D. C. Heath and Company); P. A. Brunt, *Social Conflicts in the Roman Republic* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1971), and his "The Army and the Land in the Roman Revolution," *Journal of Roman Studies* (1962): 69–86; Andrew Lintott, *Violence in Republican Rome* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), as well as his *The Constitution of the Roman Republic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Harriet I. Flower, *Roman Republics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

6. Quentin Skinner, "Machiavelli on the Maintenance of Liberty," *Politics* 18 (1983): 3–15, and "The Republican Ideal of Political Liberty," in *Machiavelli and Republicanism*, ed. Gisela Bock, Quentin Skinner, and Maurizio Viroli (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 293–309; John P. McCormick, *Machiavellian Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); and Robert Black, *Machiavelli* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

7. *Discourses* 1.4, 1.6; and 1.37.

8. *Ibid.* 1.16.

9. See Cicero, *Pro Sestio* 103: "Tiberius Gracchus sought to carry an agrarian law. It appealed to the common people. It looked likely to safeguard the fortunes of the poor. The best people threw their weight against it, because they saw it was a source of discord, and believed that to remove the rich from their long-held possessions would be to rob the state of its defenders." It is noteworthy that Cicero's position is directly antithetical to the Gracchi's aim: "[not] to remove the rich and [settle the poor on these lands] would be to rob the state of its defenders."

10. See Livy 2.41.

11. Appian, *The Civil Wars* 3.18.

12. See Oreste Tommasini, *La vita e gli scritti di Niccolò Machiavelli* (Turin: Ermanno Loescher, 1883), 600–601.

13. See Cicero, *De lege agraria* 2.10–11, and *De officiis* 3.12

14. Cicero, *De re publica* 1.31; Sallust, *Bellum jugurthinum* 42.

15. See Cicero, *De re publica* 1.31.

16. Polybius 6; Florus, *Epitome of Roman History* 3.13–15.

17. Lily Ross Taylor, "Forerunners of the Gracchi," *Journal of Roman Studies*, 52 (1962): 19–27.

18. Gisela Bock, "Civil Discord in Machiavelli's *Istorie Fiorentine*," 181–201, in *Machiavelli and Republicanism*.

19. Plutarch, *Tiberius Gracchus*. Plutarch dismisses the charge that Tiberius was a demagogue aiming at supreme power. His opponents accused him of "introducing a redistribution of land for the confusion of the body politic [*tes politeias*] and . . . inciting a general revolution." Machiavelli is aware of this view, and certainly cautions vigilance.

See *Discourses* 3.28, "Attention Should Be Given To Citizen's Deeds, Because Often Under A Work of Mercy The Beginning of Tyranny Is Hidden."

20. See Cicero, *De divinatione* 2.29, 62.
21. Plutarch, *Tiberius Gracchus* 8.7.
22. *Ibid.* 9.5.
23. Appian 1.9–11.
24. *Ibid.* 1.7.
25. *Ibid.* 4.27.
26. Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia*.
27. Cicero, *De lege agraria* 3.14.
28. Livy 10, 6.4, and Plutarch, *Camillus*.
29. *Discourses* 3.1.
30. Appian 1.7.
31. See Sallust, *Histories* 1.12, ed. Patrick McGushin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), vol. 1.
32. *Prince*, chapter 25.
33. Sheldon S. Wolin, *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1960), 228–35.
34. See *Prince*, chapters 6, 9 and 18; and *Discourses* 1.4, 55, 58.
35. *Prince*, chapter 6.
36. *Prince*, dedication.
37. See *The Art of War*, beginning and concluding sections; and "A Provision for Infantry," in Gilbert.
38. Plutarch, *Tiberius Gracchus* 8.3.
39. E. Malcovati, *Oratorum Romanorum Fragmenta Liberae Rei Publicae* (Turin: Paravia, 1955), 107–8; Livy, *Periochae* 59; and Suetonius, *Divus Augustus* 89.
40. Appian 1.11.
41. *Discourses* 1.preface.
42. Sallust, *Ad Caesarem senem de re publica epistula* 8.1–3.
43. See Cicero, *Pro Cluentio* 145–57 and *Pro Sestio* 103; and Appian 1.8.
44. Cicero says that the tribunate was an office naturally suited to radical activity: it was born in sedition and destined to generate sedition (*De legibus* 3.19). What to Cicero is sedition to Machiavelli is the ordinary politics and normal conflict characteristic of a republic. Where Cicero sees seditious conflict as resulting in the tribunate, which, in turn, is productive of further sedition, Machiavelli makes a sharp distinction between pre- and post-Gracchi conflict. See also Florus, *Epitome* 3.13–15.
45. Appian 3.1.12.
46. Polybius 6.16.5.
47. *Ibid.*
48. Cicero, *Brutus* 95.
49. Appian 1.12.5.
50. Stockton, *The Gracchi*, 78.
51. See *Discourses* 1.58.
52. Livy, *Epitome* 59, and Plutarch, *Gaius Gracchus* 14.3.
53. Stockton, *The Gracchi*, 196–200.

54. *Discourses* 1.37.
55. *The Art of War*.
56. *Discourses* 1.55.
57. *Ibid.* 1.58
58. *Ibid.* 1.4.
59. Stockton, *The Gracchi*, v–xi.

Machiavelli, the Republic, and the Financial Crisis

JÉRÉMIE BARTHAS

Shepherds were to be more aware of their sheep than of wolves. Traiano Boccalini (1612)

From 1498 to 1512, Niccolò Machiavelli served a republic that constituted a particularly interesting experience for the understanding of an early stage of what, in the wake of World War I, Rudolf Goldscheid identified as the central problem of the academic discipline he attempted to promote: namely the connection between the development of democratic institutions and the forms of public debt. According to the Austrian father of fiscal sociology, certain systems of public debt allow groups of creditors to form a “caricature of the State, the State within the State”: “only a State forced to live from hand to mouth and deprived of sufficient funds to meet even the most urgent social needs on its own remains at the mercy of private capital.”¹ Now, in a mature democracy Goldscheid thought there should be no place for a “State within the State.” In this regard, Machiavelli’s remote epoch conceals something rather untimely, which needs to be carefully considered. At the time of the Great Council of Florence (1494–1512), the question of the interaction between financial system, political order, and social structures had indeed led certain actors to develop original political programs, in an effort to establish the republic’s autonomy from financial power. Machiavelli, in his quality of secretary and second chancellor of the republic, set out to achieve this goal, putting forward a highly controversial project of mass conscription.

The critique of a mercenary-based military system is a central issue in Machiavelli’s works, from his early writings, when he was in charge of the Second Chancery, up to his major ones, written once he had been

discharged from offices. In his latter works—the ones following the aristocratic coup of August 1512—the critique of political and economical elites is conducted with a vehemence that largely explains the singular position occupied by Machiavelli, after five centuries, within the history of political thought, as the author of a “plebeian philosophy.”² In *The Prince*, the *Discourses on the First Ten Books of Titus Livy* as well as the *Florentine Histories*, he clearly states the need to protect the majority against the wealthy minority and to restrain the “desire” of domination of the elites (*i grandi*).³ In his dialogue on the *Art of War*, the only major work that he sent to print in his lifetime, he allows himself to state as a general rule that “the unarmed rich man is the reward of the poor soldier.”⁴ The Machiavellian concept of “people in arms” actually leads to an undoing of the knot between a military system based on mercenary forces and a financial system based on public credit, which the financial aristocracy had made the main asset of their political and economic hegemony.

The above mentioned general rule points straightaway to the connection between the critique of the military system and the critique of the power elite. This connection needs therefore to be clarified further, by considering the power relations that underlie the management of public debt. But a certain distancing is required in order to develop this analysis. I will start by presenting the main chronological coordinates and interpretative paradigms that place Machiavelli into historical context. Subsequently, I will investigate the transformation of the political and institutional system at the heart of which his concept of “people in arms” has been developed, taking part in a redefinition of the relationships between financial debt and political sovereignty. What was at stake was nothing less than an attempt to suppress those political powers to which the aristocracy of government bond holders considered themselves entitled.

I

In the autumn of 1494, the French invasion of Italy allowed the Florentines to free themselves from the “tyranny” of the Medici family. On December 23, they instituted the Great Council of Florence, a form of direct democracy and the most “democratic” political system in the Western world since ancient Athens right up to the French Revolution, both in terms of the amount of citizens participating in the sovereign authority and of the extension of the powers that they collectively shared. In the following years, the most significant issues remained the definition of the rules

that determined the relationships between the various public authorities, as well as the modes of election of their members. As a consequence, for instance, a major reformation of the electoral system was introduced in May 1499. In this new system, in order to broaden the distribution of a great number of public offices, random draw played a greater role. No less significant, at that time, were the issues of tax reform—specifically, the institution of a new form of direct and progressive taxation—and of public debt management.⁵ With the institution of the Great Council, which also had the power to ratify laws relating to finances, the “financial oligarchy” lost the monopoly over public finances. Over the following years, the great creditors of the republic would fight to reestablish that hegemony. Altogether, the extraordinary experience of a “democratic” republic was relatively brief. In August 1512, a coup d’état backed by the Spanish military power led to the restoration of the Medici regime in Florence. This was overthrown again in 1527, a few weeks before Machiavelli’s death. But in 1530, with the military defeat of Florence by the imperial troops, the aristocratic counterrevolution triumphed. The Great Council was put down once again and for all, and the oldest republican institutions were quickly dismantled in favor of monarchical ones.

With the advent of the Medici’s hereditary monarchy (officially a duchy and then a grand duchy, from 1532 to 1737) and with the classifying of the atheist Machiavelli in the first ranks of the 1559 *Index* (the Catholic Church’s list of prohibited books), an ideological wall of silence descended on the experience of Florence without the Medici. Up until the eighteenth century, the publications that mentioned it, such as the *History of the City of Florence* by Jacopo Nardi, posthumously published in 1582, were more than rare. Even Francesco Guicciardini’s writings, which illustrated Florence’s internal political situation during those years did not leave the family archives until the second half of the nineteenth century. Guicciardini, himself a member of the Florentine aristocracy, defended a perspective that was hostile to the popular forces, and the opposite vision still struggles to come out today. Even Machiavelli, perhaps the political theorist most favorable to popular government, has received a greater attention for the new interpretation of republican Rome’s history that he had put forward in *The Discourses on Livy*. However, this work’s praise of the virtues of the “tumults between the nobles and the plebs”⁶ of Rome appeared to his contemporaries as a direct response to the criticism put forward by the opponents of the Great Council of Florence. Indeed, in his last project of constitutional reform, Machiavelli had invited Cardinal Giulio

de' Medici—de facto prince of Florence—to reestablish this pillar of the people's republic, giving it the “widest” authority, which it had had until the coup of 1512.

Nevertheless, Machiavelli's image remains largely defined by the fact that *The Prince* is dedicated to Lorenzo de' Medici, grandson of the Magnificent. Relying perhaps on the contradiction between the mediocre personality of the dedicatee and the ambition of the project that Machiavelli submitted to him—namely to liberate Italy from the barbarians, and the people of Florence and of Tuscany from the oppression of the *grandi*—Rousseau's hypothesis of an ironic or satiric intention within *The Prince* still finds today some sophisticated defenders, notwithstanding Hegel's historicist objection and the risk of losing sight of the serious and solemn character of the project.⁸ Yet the classic historicist interpretations of Machiavelli have presented him as the theorist of the “necessity” of the passage from republic to principality, sometimes portraying him as a man of a court society that, in Florence, was established several years after his death.⁹ This retrospective illusion forces him to conform, on one side, with the ideology promoted by the partisans of the Medici's absolutism after 1530¹⁰ and, on the other side, with those common representations of the genesis of the modern state that hinge on the process of monarchic centralization. Florence's adverse experience with the Great Council remains thus banalized and carried on for a negligible period, as a simple parenthesis within the long-lasting era of Medicean power. Yet it represents a unique case for the analysis of the relations between the management of public finances and the definition of new political programs in “democratic” context. The presence of Machiavelli, an inescapable reference for Western culture for five centuries, makes it even more special.

While Machiavelli finds a place within the great narrative of the genesis of the modern state only at the price of simplistic interpretations of *The Prince*, his political theory is informed by nothing more than the experience of the years 1494–1512. Although from a low social extraction, and one of the many excluded from active citizenship, in June 1498 the Republic of the Great Council elevated Machiavelli to the summit of its high administration. His appointment marks an additional effort to break with the ancien régime of the Medici.¹¹ As “chancellor and secretary of the Second Chancery,” Machiavelli was chief of the high administration division responsible for territorial affairs. As a consequence, he was also appointed secretary of the Ten of War, the office in charge of internal security and defense, as well as of police, justice, and the control of public agents in the territories. The perception of what the Florentine ex-secretary, in the

dedication to *The Prince*, called his long experience with modern things, has nevertheless been dominated, since the end of the nineteenth century, by the observation of his diplomatic service, starting from his legations to Italian and foreign princes. The internal history of the Republic of the Great Council—and specifically the activity of Machiavelli's territories, which is nowadays better documented¹²—still needs to be examined in depth in order to appreciate the significance of one of the most important concepts of the Florentine secretary, namely that of "people in arms." Several weeks before announcing the writing of *The Prince*, Machiavelli wrote to Francesco Vettori: "for you need to understand this: that the best armies are those of the armed populations."¹³ Machiavelli was in fact behind the making of the law—adopted by the Great Council on December 6, 1506, with a majority of 841 votes against 317—that formally instituted the recruitment of the peasant populations under Florence's jurisdiction, and soon became secretary of the office in charge of administering this new army of conscripts (the Nine of the Militia), while maintaining his roles as secretary of the Ten of War and head of the Second Chancery.¹⁴

Now, at the heart of the history of the age of the Great Council, we find two major conflicts, both generated by the same driving force and finding a common symptom in a "financial crisis."¹⁵ These were, namely, the class struggles within Florence and the resistance of certain Tuscan populations to the domination of Florence. Behind these struggles was a financial system based on the principle of public credit, which divided the entire society into creditors and debtors. The structures of the fifteenth-century Florentine territorial state can actually be summarized in a financial system where the discharge of expenses, specifically military ones, relied greatly on the peasants and the population of the subjected territories, as well as on the working class, the smallholders, and the artisans of the capital city, under the promise of a return in terms of protection, security, and justice. For the financial aristocracy, who had constructed this system and its laws, the contributions took mainly the form of titles that offered a financial counterpart on top of the return of loaned capital. Tax oppression exercised in the name of debt obligations and security and defense requirements—following the development of the recourse to private military companies—entailed the concentration of capital in the hands of the few and the impoverishment of the masses, while the health of the financial system depended on the fiscal growth burdening the population. From the first third of the fifteenth century, its counterproductive and exploitative character appeared clearly to the Florentines and to the Tuscans.¹⁶ In 1494, the arrival of the armies of Charles VIII on the Italian scene favored the

uprising of several subjected populations against the Florentine authority, endangering the independence of the republic. Faced with the disintegration of Florentine Tuscany, Machiavelli was led to come up with some solutions based on his functions and experience in territorial affairs, as well as on his understanding of the context of chronic instability inaugurated by the Italian Wars.

At the core of an old debate that has received renewed attention in recent years, we find the hypothesis that Machiavelli's system of conscription—initially limited to the peasant masses directly under Florentine jurisdiction—was part of a new political program aiming at resolving the contradiction within the Florentine territorial state, namely the relationship between center and periphery.¹⁷ I contributed to this debate by demonstrating that Machiavelli's explicit critique of mercenaries contains an implicit critique of the Florentine financial system, even though within his work the financial system does not find a systematic presentation. However, Machiavelli's negation of the maxim "money is the sinews of war" in the *Discourses* (book 2, chapter 10) appears as the most pronounced trace of this implicit content. His concept of "people in arms" finds itself, in fact, in a triptych where the political regime is the central piece flanked by the lateral panels of the financial and the military systems.

II

On December 6, 1506, a sovereign assembly of 1,158 members convened to vote for the institution of the conscription army called militia and of the office of the Nine that would be in charge of its administration. At the time, Florentine Tuscany was one of the largest and most populous states in Italy. It was ruled by a form of direct democracy, in which participation in the sovereign assembly was open to adult male Florentine "active" citizens. Citizenship was conceived as privilege, excluding both the populations of the territories under Florentine jurisdiction and three-fourths of the heads of the nearly 13,500 households in the dominant city around the year 1500.

Anachronistically taking universality as an interpretative criterion, one can insist on the limitations of "democratization" during those years. The phenomena of continuity with the Medici's former regime—such as the importance of family traditions and competition within the ruling group—is also regularly pointed out in order to trivialize a revolutionary political experiment.¹⁸ In contrast, John M. Najemy has recently summarized:

under the Medici regime, select committees handpicked officeholders from [a] large pool of eligible citizens, whereas under the 1494 reform 3,000 citizens simultaneously constituted a governing body endowed with real power over finances, taxes, and elections. And once the council's division into thirds was abolished (legislated in August 1495 and effective the following January), every eligible citizen had the right to attend every meeting and vote on every piece of legislation and in every election. Never before had even a remotely similar number of citizens shared in real powers of government. [. . .] And between 1495 and 1499 the council became larger, more open, and less amenable to elite interests and manipulation.¹⁹

To this element of radical discontinuity, it needs to be added that for a Florentine such as Machiavelli, the institution of the Great Council represented the foundation and starting point of the people's freedom. It was certainly not, for him and for others as well, an end point. Reading the *Discourses*, one gets the sense that, according to Machiavelli, the history of the Great Council is inscribed within a dynamic of increasing political participation able to redefine the forms of social cohesion in Tuscany.

Exclusion from the Great Council did not stop the inhabitants of the subject territories from expressing their views in front of the Florentine authorities and making their voice heard. The population of the surrounding countryside, the plains and mountains of the *contado*, which extended throughout nearly half of the whole Florentine territory and whose administration depended directly on the capital city, traditionally presented petitions in front of the Florentine authorities, repeatedly sending "ambassadors" to plead their causes. The object of these pleas was often of a fiscal nature. From 1495, a significant part of the Great Council's activities consisted in deliberating on these petitions. The concession of exemptions and privileges appeared as a response to particularized requirements, inducing, as before,²⁰ the problematic development of a mosaic of communities with differentiated interests. But a larger number of people could henceforth become aware of the conditions of the subject communities and of the consequences of such politics.

Furthermore, the populations of the districts (*distretto*) with the most relevant urban centers had not all resigned themselves to the Florentine protectorate. West of Florence, Pisa—the maritime gateway of the Tuscan capital since 1406—rose in rebellion at the beginning of the Italian Wars, resisting for fifteen years. Other populations of the territories, such as

Pistoia in 1501 or, east of Florence, Arezzo and Val di Chiana in 1502, also saw upheavals or other forms of instability that stressed the structural frailties of the Florentine territorial state and the precarious ties between Florence and certain subject territories. One of the major problems of the Republic of the Great Council, then, was the reunification of the Florentine empire over Tuscany. Machiavelli, who found himself leading the administration of the territory and the relations with the subjected territories, was, more than anyone else, aware of the situation. Accordingly, his first political writings examine what was happening at Pisa, Pistoia, and the Val di Chiana.²¹ Noteworthy is his prioritization of moderate measures of repression aimed not at obtaining a mere submission of the rebels but opening the way to the creation of new relationships based upon reciprocity, trust, and mutual protection between the dominant city and the subject populations.²² By 1506, when he submitted his plans for the institution of conscription and the enrollment of at least 10,000 peasant soldiers,²³ Machiavelli had gained an in-depth knowledge of the situation in the Florentine territories, of the characteristics and the limits of the tax pressure exercised by Florence, as well as of the ineffectiveness of the dominant city to maintain its commitments in terms of justice and protection. He had by now established direct relationships with the local populations, which was a decisive element while organizing the militia, subsequently confirmed by his popularity amongst the conscripts. The troops that he formed took control of Pisa in 1509. After this success, Machiavelli insisted on the effectiveness of the conscripts, arguing that their merits and success should receive greater recognition from the republic and hence possibly the concession of more rights.²⁴ Also, the fact that the conscripts behaved in exemplary fashion, abstaining from ransacking the defeated city—which was the common practice at the time—laid the grounds for a new stability. Witnesses have reported that at that time, people from Pisa—expecting a repression as harsh as the one the Medici's mercenaries had imposed on Volterra in June 1472—were extremely surprised that this was not the case. They claimed that “the greatest and the most cruel enemies of the Florentines” had decided to become “the greatest allies [. . .] under their jurisdiction.”²⁵

All together, this was a personal success for Machiavelli, one that his contemporaries would acknowledge.²⁶ But as his subsequent work on Roman history would demonstrate, the militia's success was, in his mind, only a phase of a larger process: the author of the *Discourses* would argue that the capacity to grant forms of citizenship to subjected populations is a fundamental element for a society constituted in view of the autonomous

and collective defense of its goods.²⁷ Already in 1506, in *The Reason for the Militia*—which affirmed the necessity of the law that instituted the conscription—Machiavelli suggested that once the peasant masses of the countryside around Florence (*contado*) were militarily organized and their reputation established, and once the relations with the populations of the territories (*distretto*) were pacified and equilibrated, it would be desirable to give the latter a military organization. But what about the Florentine population itself? In this important text, which is especially remarkable for the argumentative strategies that it deploys to reassure those that had been convinced by the project's opponents, Machiavelli never actually reveals the reasons behind the choice of not arming the capital itself, which separates his project from the humanist tradition eulogizing the citizen-soldier and the value of the equestrian order.²⁸ Tacitly referring to this tradition, Machiavelli plays with the imaginary identification of the Florentine elite with this order of ancient Rome, to encourage, from a military point of view, the prioritization of a mass of infantrymen rather than the organization of the cavalry. Yet he remained silent on the possibility of enrolling the Florentine masses in the infantry. His silence might be connected to the issue of social division in Florence and the exclusion from the Great Council of almost three-fourths of the male heads of household.

The exclusion from the direct democracy of the Great Council did not prevent males aged fifteen to seventy from forming plebeian societies, politically active and listened to at the highest levels. They would assemble at the level of the smallest political and administrative unity of the city, the *gonfalone*, bearing the distinctive standard of their company. Florence had sixteen of them, four per borough. Each of these companies was then represented at the summit of the institutions by a member of the College of the Sixteen Standard-Bearers of the companies of the people of Florence. Operating as chief administrators at the level of their local communities, the standard-bearers of the companies relayed individual petitions and collective moods. Their role was historically conceived as fulfilling a tribunician function.²⁹ They had a determinant part in the organization and direction of the armed uprisings against the Medici in November 1494.³⁰ This college also had a prominent role during the legislative process at the time of the Great Council: managing the fiscal matters within the *gonfalons*, for instance, they successfully blocked certain measures introduced by the finance committee (the officials of the Monte) that seemed, despite the need for liquidity, to favor the private interest of those who could invest in the floating debt.³¹ In 1506, as the internal divisions intensified and the Florentine aristocracy became strongly worried that certain sections

of the militia could be used against them as a repressive instrument, the Florentine secretary did not reach the point of invoking the mass conscription of the urban masses, which could have relied on the military function of the standard-bearers of the companies. Was Machiavelli's prudence on this point a late effect of the trauma of the Ciompi revolts? In the summer of 1378, the workers of wool manufacture, some of whom had gained military experience on behalf of Florence, had challenged the social and financial order in extremely radical manner. The Ciompi had demanded and provisionally obtained the creation of their own corporation, with representatives within governmental councils, and the creation of a militia organizing them militarily; they had also refused, as Machiavelli recalls in the *Florentine Histories*, to allow the taxes weighing on them to serve for payment of interest on debt.³²

III

Focusing on the law of December 6, 1506, in what follows I will pinpoint the fundamental coordinates of the constitutional arrangement within which the Great Council gave legislative sanction to Machiavelli's proposal to define the legal framework of the peasant army he had officially begun to recruit, organize, train, and discipline more than a year earlier. Machiavelli had publicly announced the project in 1503, in a speech that aimed to demonstrate the need to quickly adopt the finance bill in order to move on to more fundamental reforms.³³ In 1505, the project had been debated on several occasions in special consultative assemblies convened to hear the view of some requested citizens. Machiavelli himself had drafted the minutes of those debates.³⁴ The law proposal—which he had submitted in his quality of secretary of the Ten of War—had initially been examined by the eight government members, or priors, under the presidency of Piero Soderini, head of the republic, elected in the autumn of 1502 with the title of standard-bearer of justice for life. Judging this law proposal acceptable, the government demanded the opinions of the two advisory colleges, the Twelve Good Men and the Sixteen Standard-Bearers of the companies. After a favorable deliberation, together decided to shorten the procedure by way of exception, limiting the possibilities of opposing it. The law proposal was put to a vote by the assembly that reunited the priors, members of the two advisory colleges, and the Council of the Eighty, which functioned as antechamber of the Great Council from a legislative point of view. It obtained sixty-two votes, with twenty-eight votes against (only two votes over the required two-thirds majority). The law's confor-

mity was then evaluated by an audit office composed of four law keepers and four representatives of the colleges. Finally, the text that Machiavelli had initially put forward was submitted to the Great Council, which sanctioned it (with sixty-nine votes to spare).³⁵

As well as acting as the bearer of legislative power, the Great Council also functioned as an electoral body. The government, as well as a great number of officials, functionaries, administrators, and magistrates, were elected within and through this institution. These voting procedures would combine preselection, random draw, or election of eligible candidates, taking into account at the same time the administrative (by borough) and economic (by corporations) organization of the city. The Eighty, the two colleges, and the priors followed as a direct emanation of the Great Council. In a city of about 55,000 inhabitants, where face-to-face interaction was common, the first condition for selection was recognition and reputation, with a marked hereditary and familial aspect. A hereditary link was juridically defined as direct relation, as a son, grandson, or great-grandson, to someone who had been considered eligible as a member of the priorate or one of the two colleges, the highest offices of the city. Furthermore, the frequent turnover of offices—every two, four, or six months—together with the interdiction on occupying the same position again, at least for a while, allowed a great number of individuals to be eligible and to be therefore, in principle, integrated with the Great Council if they were not part of it already.

However, there was a second, census-based condition that limited this potential openness. Even if details remain insufficiently known by historians, the general principle was the following: from “perhaps 1406, the eligible citizen also had to own shares in the Florentine public debt, that is, he had to be a creditor of the government. The government frequently collected sums of money from its citizens, but it regarded payments above a certain amount as loans (even if forced), entitling the citizen to shares in one of the several funded debts. Poorer citizens who paid less than the threshold amount gave their money *ad perdendum*, ‘to be lost.’”³⁶ In the aftermath of the Ciompi revolution, the oligarchic regime (1382–1434) defined a series of social criteria of eligibility for the offices of the republic, which the republic of the Great Council somewhat carried in heritage: most noteworthy, each member of the Great Council was an actual creditor of the republic. The Great Council thus appeared as a sort of shareholder company, even if it could not hide important social differences and class divisions within that company. The republic was not a debtor in the same way toward all creditors, who did not attain all the same material

and symbolic benefits. From the point of view of indirect taxation, for example, the interests of the majority of the included were not necessarily far from those of a great part of those excluded from the Great Council. To gain a thorough understanding of the power relations and the social tensions within the Great Council, it is necessary to look at the principles of the financial institution that the republic of 1494–1512 had inherited.

In Florence, the institution in charge of public finances was called the Monte, because of the “mountain” of government bonds that it represented. In the fourteenth century, Florence had “consolidated” its debt by promising the payment of a form of annuity on a capital that it was not able to return. After that, the public credit—traded on the securities market, transferable, negotiable, and working as a means of payment—offered important opportunities for financial speculation to a restricted group of investors because the poorest citizens’ need for liquidity led them to give away their titles at a low price. The entire system of public finance in Florence based itself on credit and on a deficit policy, which had the service of the floating debt, a short-term action with high interest rates, as its top priority. The financial system was “entirely oriented towards extraordinary finance, hence open to the speculation of financial groups, which took its institutional control, evading the effective control of other social groups.”³⁷ Because of this institutional tie between private speculation and public credit, state organizations became the clients of the financial activity of a number of great merchants and bankers, the so-called financial aristocracy.

The principle of financial anticipations produced a structural floating debt alongside the consolidated debt. The men in charge of managing the public credit, the Monte officials, would lend great amounts of money at the beginning of their period in office. They also found themselves in the position of being at the same time both the first investors in the floating debt and the privileged intermediaries for other investors. Their portfolio of powers included the elaboration of those fiscal measures necessary to recover the capital that they themselves had advanced, the supervision of the distribution, collection and management of loans, as well as that of taxes and imposts, in the city as well as in the territories. Under Lorenzo the Magnificent their powers were reinforced to the point that “the Officials of the Monte were coming to be regarded as the most powerful magistracy in the city.”³⁸

In the end, there were two main categories of creditors: on one side, a minority of rich citizens that invested in the floating debt, receiving the compensation of high interest for short-term loaned capital that would be

employed in new loans; and on the other side, the great majority of “active” citizens that had to contribute to the consolidated debt. To the latter, the capital was not returned in cash, and the titles offered a meager and uncertain profit. Yet the timely acquisition of these titles was a condition to maintain their citizenship status and, at the time of the Great Council, to access the collective decision-making process. This is an example of how “the State remained in contradiction with its own social foundations, because its financial system kept it chained to an obsolete past.”³⁹

In virtue of this financial system, the Monte officials were elected from the minority of rich citizens and notables who found in the debt that burdened the political body an opportunity for financial investment. In particular, the need for liquidity of the committee in charge of military affairs depended on this mechanism, by which privileged and well-connected individuals put forward great sums according to the needs that were incumbent. In fact, the members of the committee in charge of financial affairs and those of the committee in charge of military affairs belonged to the same social group, and some also passed in rotation from one committee to the other. The articulation between mercenary armies and the indebtedness of the state was the institutional form that offered economic opportunities to financial capital. These solutions relied on the existence of an essentially heteronomous state, that is to say, one dependent on this financial capital in order to satisfy even the most fundamental and urgent needs. Behind this there was no structural necessity but only the clearly recognizable political choices and programs of the power elite. Machiavelli points this out with great clarity in the *Discourses*: the power elite had disarmed the people in order to plunder them more easily. He even uses the military term “to ransack”—*saccheggare i popoli*—, designating as class war the politics by which the power elite would treat the dominated populations as a defeated enemy.⁴⁰

The institution of the Great Council made things more difficult for the military-financial complex, because the social group that controlled it had to submit to the authority of other social groups whose expression had previously been rather limited or even repressed. But even if the legislative power of the Great Council was extended to the budget and other financial bills, the financial system itself remained oriented toward extraordinary finances in the same way that the military system, which inherently depended on the financial one, was based on the extraordinary use of mercenary troops under the authority of a magistracy itself also extraordinary in principle. The republic remained thus dependent upon the financial anticipations of the financial aristocracy, even if the latter

no longer had a hegemonic position. An example that goes back to the moment when Machiavelli began his career at the chancery clearly illustrates this point. In August and September 1498, when a fundraising campaign to pay the mercenaries engaged in the conflict against Pisa became necessary, the Monte officials negotiated better guarantees in order to remunerate the creditors of the floating debt and appealed to public authorities to maintain creditors' confidence. The Monte officials also asked that they be liberated from the final deliberation of the Great Council and granted the discretionary authority of raising the money in the most convenient way—that is, offering a high interest and establishing all the necessary taxes to guarantee its amortization. During one of the consultations where this issue was debated, Giuliano Mazinghi expressed the contrary views of a group of citizens: rather than increasing certain indirect taxes that affected everybody—in order to assure the service of the debt contracted with a narrow group of rich individuals, based on high interest and the restitution of capital—an extraordinary levy could be charged equally on everybody, which would be lower than the services required by a new loan. This way, everybody could benefit from the advantage that would otherwise pertain exclusively to the financial aristocracy.⁴¹ The answer that opposed this point of view was confirmed by a law in December 1498. It contained in its preamble the maxim that Machiavelli later refuted: “money is the sinews of war.” This maxim—of ancient origin and of various applications—had become in Florence at once expression, proof, and panegyric of that financial system that the new political order rendered obsolete, notwithstanding the resistant opposition. It maintained the illusion that the ancient financial order was natural and necessary, and that the creditors' confidence had to be maintained by all means as a measure of public safety. Given the military-financial organization still in place, it was indeed of paramount importance to encourage the reconstruction of capital that could be useful again. The extraordinary demands of liquidity justified this system of credit.

But the contradiction between the new political order and the old military-financial complex was already blatantly clear. Piero Parenti, contemporary to Machiavelli, summarized the issue in the following way: credit is the main lever that the notables use to attain a hegemonic role; since credit is determined by them, they demand unacceptable guarantees and interest rates, so that the republic finds itself without liquidity to administer current affairs, in particular military urgencies.⁴² The finance aristocracy would intentionally put the republic on the verge of bankruptcy

so that a political order more convenient to them could emerge as a result of the crisis. On the other side, for the popular forces the issue was already how to make the republic autonomous from financial power. This was precisely the question that Machiavelli faced while he was head of the Second Chancery. Calling for the vote on the 1503 annual budget, he did not conduct his investigations from the point of view of expenses and costs—even though he does not ignore them, as any reader of his chancery writings (*Scritti di governo*) would easily note—but from the perspective of defense and social organization. Changing the state of things in order to face an external threat and counterpoise the dissolution of the territory required that the Florentines take control of the defense of their freedom and welcome the idea of conscription.

A legislative event that occurred just as Machiavelli arrived at the head of the Second Chancery provides a new insight on this issue. It allows us to inscribe clearly his experience and the elaboration of the conscription project within the context of the development of the crisis between the new political order and the old military-financial complex. At the same time that Machiavelli was also appointed as secretary of the Ten—the committee in charge of the security of the state, the integrity of the territory, and therefore of controlling the insurgency in Pisa—the members of the Ten were suspected of defrauding the state. A law ratified on July 19, 1498 by the Great Council ordered an inquiry commission aimed at analyzing the account books linked to the military activities after 1494 and stamping out the fraud. The law's preamble connected the problem of the ineffectiveness of the mercenary troops fighting against Pisa with the fact that the sums allocated for their payment had been diverted in every possible way “with shame and damage” to the republic.⁴³

The conflict between the Ten and the Great Council lasted for more than three years. The question of the competence of this committee in the deployment of public money for foreign and military affairs had become more and more an object of attention and discontentment, as certain interest groups were seen as trying to prolong the war against Pisa, and the Ten as the bridge to their ambitions. As a matter of fact, the aristocracy resolved never to negotiate with the popular forces on matters of central importance—namely defense and finance—and developed the project of instituting a senatorial body in charge of these matters, composed of members of their social class. In this context, Machiavelli might reasonably have appeared as someone the popular forces could rely on: he had been chosen to occupy a central position between an administration that

was meant to serve the republic's universal interest and a committee that apparently worked toward its destabilization, backing the political agenda of a specific social group.

In September 1499, the judiciary powers of the inquiry commission created the previous year were extended and the investigation reached the entirety of the financial records regarding military affairs after 1494: from focusing on the activities of a particular committee, the investigation shifted toward the scrutiny of a larger network. A year later a debate regarding the limitations of the powers of the Ten concluded with the ratification of a law determining that the decisions regarding military and diplomatic engagement, with the resulting costs, would now be directly handled by the authority of the government and the Council of the Eighty. The aristocracy therefore found itself weakened in what had been one of its main levers of influence. With this effort of codification, the control of the deployment of public money became larger and more impersonal.

In order to obtain this result, the Great Council had systematically refused to vote for the renewal of the Ten, leaving the committee empty for fifteen months, and thus stripping the republic of a fundamental organ, especially in the context of war. A few years later, Machiavelli would write that "the cause of the sickness was the fever and not the doctor,"⁴⁴ the sickness meaning the war itself, not merely the committee in charge of military affairs. The causes of Florence's weakness in fact did not involve only the suspect behavior of certain individual members of the Ten. They had much deeper roots: Florence's power elite had chosen to disarm the people in order to plunder them, with the view of an immediate profit and without worrying if this constituted Florence's structural weakness.

Nonetheless, the report of the inquiring committee on the frauds connected to the military expenditures did reveal a vast system of corruption of laws and institutions. It described muddled account books and certain mechanisms of falsification that directly involved Monte officials and the investors in the floating debt, for example, paying unwarranted interests on titles that had already been sold but remained in circulation with the simple artifice of changing the name of the holder. An estimated 28,000 florins had been defrauded according to the report, roughly a tenth of the republic's ordinary budget. It successfully asked for the establishment of a special commission in charge of systematically examining the account books of the floating debt and identifying all of the citizens involved with it. This new commission, which started its activity on February 1502, put nearly two hundred of the most powerful citizens under investigation and

four months later had cut the interest rate of the floating debt titles from 14 percent to 8 percent.⁴⁵

Thereafter, new procedures were put in place aimed at increasing the transparency of the public accounts (reduction of the number of books, simplification and accessibility of the accounts), as well as simplifying and unifying taxation. The Monte officials lost their control over the management of loans. Amortization principles, which had been up to that point reserved to the consolidated debt, were applied to the floating debt, allowing the partial repayment of new loans through titles and not cash. The budget of 1505, approved by 918 votes to 125, maintained the lowering of the interest owed to creditors of the floating debt from 14 to 8 percent. This somewhat confirmed the abolition of the privileges of the financial aristocracy by the provision of June 10, 1502, as it brought back the value of interest of its titles toward the highest common public debt annuity rate.

However, an observer at the time reports that the 1505 law of finances frustrated over three-fourths of the members of the aristocracy, without liberating the republic from the system of extraordinary finances.⁴⁶ New loans were carried out to mobilize troops of mercenaries engaged against Pisa. Once again, these troops went missing in the decisive moment. Henceforth, the conscription advocated by Machiavelli, a project discussed for several months and object of a limited experimentation, took a route toward its effective institution. It remains difficult to calculate its effect on military expenditures, but it is certain that by introducing an ordinary and socialized mode of defense, the conscription weakened the military-financial complex that had normalized the exception on the basis of which the aristocracy had established an essential part of its strength. From the point of view of the finance aristocrats, it was also foreseeable, and worrying, that arming the subjects from the *contado* could lead to redefining the social equilibrium that prevailed in Tuscany. It would have made it more difficult to plunder their peoples through debt obligations.

It is clear that the Florentine aristocracy had immediately understood the Machiavellian project of arming the people as a major threat. In 1505–1506, the aristocracy had spread the rumor that the militia would become the instrument by which Piero Soderini would make himself “tyrant” of Florence. Trying to popularize its fears, it focused on the will manifested in the circles close to the standard-bearer of justice, and by Machiavelli himself, to put at the head of a section of the militia the Spaniard Don Michelotto, “a terrifying and fearful person,” who had worked as an executor of Cesare Borgia’s dirty work in Senigaglia and elsewhere: if Soderini

“were in some difficulty, he might use such a man to get rid of his enemies.”⁴⁷ To be sure, anti-government propaganda is an important element lying behind this accusation. Nevertheless, the hypothesis that certain elements of the Machiavellian militia under the command of someone like Don Micheletto could have been used to answer directly to the hostility that the aristocracy always manifested toward the republic is not to be excluded.⁴⁸ *The Prince* even suggests the contrary: for instance, in Romagna, Cesare Borgia’s brutal elimination of the godfathers—those who had exploited rather than governed their subjects, as Machiavelli says in chapter 7—was instrumental to the unification and pacification of this territory and benefited the people. From a broader point of view, the history of revolutions shows that the redefinition of the relationships between political regime and financial order, advantageous to the development of an authentically republican project—one that liberates the people from the oppression of the aristocracy—might require means of surveillance, accusation, and coercion “against that minority opposed to the general good as well as against the abuse and negligence of the authorities.”⁴⁹ Having a political police is not a trait specific to authoritarian regimes: even modern, liberal democracies make use (and abuse) of them.⁵⁰ Still, the propaganda that the aristocracy developed against Soderini’s government and Machiavelli’s popular conscription project presents some constitutive elements of an image of the future author of *The Prince* as a friend of tyrants. The resilience of this image after five centuries signals the difficulty of defending society against men who operated cold-bloodedly and ruthlessly toward the destruction of the people.

IV

It has often been said that Machiavelli represents the introduction of “modernity” in the history of political ideas. Machiavelli’s modernity has been conceived as the public declaration—with a significant potential for democratic education—of the knowledge of the arcane features of power that had been, up to that point, a privilege of the elites. In times of totalitarianism, this has been a reason to accuse Machiavelli of having cleared the way to a form of mass Machiavellism, banalizing the evil and the unacceptable.⁵¹ Seventeenth-century Libertine minds have pointed out that when it came to Machiavellism, the Old and New Testaments offered resources that had nothing to envy in Machiavelli’s darkest pages.⁵² Yet, from the point of view of a financial and political history of moder-

nity, what was left of this Republic of the Great Council that Machiavelli served and defended with passion and energy?

It is premature to answer this question now. There is a proposal for a comparison between the Medici regime, born in 1434, and the one that preceded it, challenging the current definition of "the modern state," which derived more or less directly from Max Weber.⁵³ It turns out that the political action of the period 1383–1434 was more "modern" in certain aspects than that of the Medici regime, even in its grand duchy version, in the sense that there was a much more advanced will to centralization and rationalization in this period. In the early fifteenth century, all the information regarding public revenues and funds was for the first time centralized in clear registers, kept by a specific office that followed precise rules fixed by law. And it was still during this period that Florence "undertook an exhaustive survey of its subjects and their properties"⁵⁴ that would allow for the definition of principles for an equitable and nondiscretionary imposition. The Florentine *catasto* of 1427 gave a measure of the economic inequalities and the great social contradictions in Tuscany. It put in danger the interests of the wealthiest by revealing how these inequalities were the effect of a determined social construction: the study of the *catasto* demonstrates that the Florentine fiscal system had encouraged a highly asymmetrical distribution of wealth.

These efforts at the comprehension of society and rationalization of the fiscal system, without equivalent in Europe at the time, were quickly abandoned by the Medici regime, which developed, on the contrary, a form of patrimonial domination. Various elements from the previous analysis seem to suggest the will of the post-1494 revolutionaries to reactivate these efforts. The oligarchic regime of the years 1382–1433 had developed principles of budget rationalization in order to make the credit system more effective, with a relative short-term success. In the *Florentine Histories*, which contains a great deal of references to the political and social implications of fiscal and financial issues, Machiavelli retraces the myth of Florence's greatness back to the years of the war against the Duke of Milan, started in 1423. This myth was based on the Florentines' proven capability to sustain military expenses, thanks to their financial system and relying on mercenary troops, while the population had already been disarmed. But it was clear to the contemporaries of this war, and was echoed by Machiavelli, that the group of socially advantaged citizens obtained power and considerable wealth from the administration of the city's finances and the commerce of war.⁵⁵ After 1494, the new configuration of

international power relations showed how the illusions provoked by the system of credit had brought Florence toward the progressive loss of its liberty.

NOTES

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1. Rudolf Goldscheid, "A Sociological Approach to Problems of Public Finance" (1925), trans. in *Classics in the Theory of Public Finance*, ed. Richard A. Musgrave and Alan T. Peacock (London: Macmillan, 1958), 202–13: 211.

2. Jérémie Barthas, "Machiavelli in Political Thought from the Age of Revolutions to the Present," in *The Cambridge Companion to Machiavelli*, ed. John M. Najemy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 256–273: 267.

3. Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, chap. 9; in *The Chief Works and Others*, trans. Allan Gilbert, 3 vols. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1965; reprint ed., 1989), 1:39 (hereinafter Gilbert, trans.)

4. Machiavelli, *Art of War*, book 7; in Gilbert, trans., 2:720.

5. Cf. two pioneers contributions by Nicolai Rubinstein and Louis F. Marks in the 1954 issue of *Archivio storico italiano*, and a classical synthesis: Felix Gilbert, *Machiavelli and Guicciardini: Politics and History in Sixteenth-Century Florence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965).

6. Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy* 1.4; in Gilbert, trans., 1:202.

7. Machiavelli, *Minuta di Provvisione per la riforma dello Stato di Firenze l'anno 1522* (*Draft of a Law for the Reform of the Florentine Constitution in the Year 1522*); in *Opere*, ed. Corrado Vivanti, 3 vols. (Turin: Einaudi, 1997–2005), 1:747 (hereinafter Vivanti, ed.). A slightly earlier project of constitutional reform is the *Discursus florentinarum rerum* (*A Discourse on Florentine Affairs*), in Gilbert, trans., 1:101–15. Cf. Jérémie Barthas, "Il pensiero costituzionale di Machiavelli e la funzione tribunitia nella Firenze del Rinascimento," in *Il laboratorio del Rinascimento: Studi di storia e cultura per Riccardo Fubini*, ed. Lorenzo Tanzini (Florence: Le Lettere, 2016), 237–54.

8. Cf. Barthas, "Machiavelli in Political Thought," 264. Hegel's view was recently echoed by Gabriele Pedullà in his commentary notes to Niccolò Machiavelli, *Il Principe*, ed. Carmine Donzelli and Gabrielle Pedullà (Rome: Donzelli, 2013), 127–29, esp. notes 6–7.

9. Cf. Mario Martelli and Francesco Bausi in their editions of, respectively, *Il*

principe (Rome: Salerno, 2006) and the *Discorsi* (Rome: Salerno, 2001) for the Edizione Nazionale delle Opere di Niccolò Machiavelli.

10. Cf. Rudolf von Albertini, *Firenze dalla repubblica al principato: Storia e coscienza politica*, intro. Federico Chabod, trans. Cesare Cristofolini (Turin: Einaudi, 1970; 1st Swiss German ed. 1955).

11. Cf. Jérémie Barthas, "Machiavelli from the Ten to the Nine: A Hypothesis Based on the Financial History of Early Modern Florence," in *From Florence to the Mediterranean and Beyond: Essays in Honour of Anthony Molho*, ed. Diogo Curto et al., 2 vols (Florence: Olschki, 2009), 1:147–66.

12. Cf. Niccolò Machiavelli, *Legazioni: Commissarie: Scritti di governo, 1498–1512*, ed. Jean-Jacques Marchand et al., 7 vols (Rome: Salerno, 2002–2012).

13. Machiavelli, letter to Francesco Vettori, August 26, 1513; in James B. Atkinson and David Sices, trans., *Machiavelli and His Friends: Their Personal Correspondence* (De Kalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1996), 258. On the importance of the letters with Vettori for the making of *The Prince*, cf. John M. Najemy, *Between Friends: Discourses of Power and Desire in the Machiavelli-Vettori Letters of 1513–1515* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

14. Cf. Machiavelli, *Provisione della ordinanza (Provision for Infantry)*, in Vivanti, ed., 1:31–43.

15. Cf. Louis F. Marks, "La crisi finanziaria a Firenze dal 1494 al 1502," *Archivio storico italiano* 112 (1954): 40–72.

16. Cf. Anthony Molho, *Florentine Public Finances in the Early Renaissance, 1400–1433* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 44.

17. Cf. Jérémie Barthas, "Machiavelli, Public Debt, and the Origins of Political Economy," in *The Radical Machiavelli: Politics, Philosophy, and Language*, ed. Filippo Del Lucchese, Fabio Frosini, and Vittorio Morfino (Boston and Leiden: Brill, 2015), 273–305, here 282.

18. Cf. Nicolai Rubinstein, "Oligarchy and Democracy in Fifteenth-Century Florence," followed by Roslyn L. Pesman's "Comments," in *Florence and Venice: Comparisons and Relations*, ed. Sergio Bertelli, Nicolai Rubinstein, and Craig H. Smyth, 2 vols. (Florence: La Nuova Italia Editrice, 1979), 1:99–112 and 113–15.

19. John M. Najemy, *A History of Florence, 1200–1575* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 389.

20. Cf. Samuel K. Cohn, *Creating the Florentine State: Peasants and Rebellion, 1348–1434* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

21. Cf. Machiavelli, *Discorso sopra Pisa (Discourse on Pisa)*; *De rebus pistoriensibus (On Pistoian Matters)*; *Del modo di trattare i popoli della Valdichiana ribellati (On the Method of Dealing with the Rebels of the Val di Chiana)*; in *Essential Writings of Machiavelli*, intro. Albert R. Ascoli, trans. Peter Constantine (New York: The Modern Library, 2007): 349–350; 352–354; 358–364.

22. Cf. Jean-Jacques Marchand, *Niccolò Machiavelli, i primi scritti politici (1499–1512): Nascita di un pensiero e di uno stile* (Padua: Antenore, 1975).

23. Cf. Machiavelli, *La cagione dell'ordinanza (The Reason for the Militia)*; in Vivanti, ed., 1:26–31.

24. Cf. Corrado Vivanti's commentary notes in Vivanti, ed., 2:1847; and Andrea

Guidi, *Un segretario militante: Politica, diplomazia e armi nel cancelliere Machiavelli* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2009).

25. Bartolomeo Masi, *Ricordanze dal 1478 al 1526*, ed. Gius. Odoardo Corazzini (Florence: Sansoni, 1906), 72–73. On Lorenzo's Volterra massacre, cf. Najemy, *A History of Florence*, 348–52.

26. Cf. Filippo Casavecchia, letter to Niccolò Machiavelli, June 17, 1509; in Atkinson and Sices, *Machiavelli and His Friends*, 181–82.

27. Cf. Gabriele Pedullà, "'Concedere la civiltà ai forestieri': Machiavelli e il repubblicanesimo imperialista," in *Machiavelli in tumulto: Conquista, cittadinanza e conflitto nei "Discorsi sopra la prima Deca di Tito Livio"* (Rome: Bulzoni, 2011), 341–418.

28. Cf. Sergio Bertelli's book review of Cecil C. Bayley, *War and Society in Renaissance Florence: The "De Militia" of Leonardo Bruni* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961), in *Rivista Storica Italiana* 76 (1964): 834–36.

29. Cf. Leonardo Bruni, *History of the Florentine People*, ed. and trans. James Hankins, 3 vols (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001–2007), vol. 1, 423. Cf. Barthas, "Il pensiero costituzionale di Machiavelli," 244–54.

30. Cf. Masi, *Ricordanze*, 23.

31. Cf. Marks, "La crisi finanziaria a Firenze," 69.

32. Cf. Machiavelli, *Florentine Histories* 3.15, in Gilbert, trans., 3:1164.

33. Cf. Machiavelli, *Parole da dirle sopra la provisione del danaio* (*Words to be Spoken on the Finance Bill*), in Gilbert, trans., 3:1439–44.

34. Cf. John M. Najemy, "'Occupare la tirannide': Machiavelli, the Militia, and Guicciardini's Accusation of Tyranny," in *Della Tirannia: Machiavelli con Bartolo*, ed. Jérémie Barthas (Florence: Olschki, 2007), 75–108, here 82.

35. Cf. Marchand, *Machiavelli, i primi scritti politici*, 144n1.

36. David Herlihy, "The Rulers of Florence, 1282–1530," in *City-States in Classical Antiquity and Medieval Italy*, ed. Anthony Molho, Kurt Raaflaub, and Julia Emlen (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991), 197–222, here 198.

37. Paolo Cammarosano, "L'analisi del Molho sulla finanza pubblica fiorentina," *Studi Medievali*, 16 (1975): 887–906, here 903. For a recent overview, with more references, see Lawrin Armstrong, *Usury and Public Debt in Renaissance Florence: Lorenzo Ridolfi on the Monte Comune* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Study, 2003).

38. Louis F. Marks, "The Financial Oligarchy in Florence under Lorenzo," in *Italian Renaissance Studies*, ed. E. F. Jacob (London: Faber and Faber, 1960), 123–147, here 146.

39. Goldscheid, "A Sociological Approach," 211.

40. Machiavelli, *Discourses* 2.30, in Vivanti, ed., 1:408; "to plunder the people" in Gilbert, trans., 1:410.

41. Cf. *Consulte e pratiche della Repubblica fiorentina, 1498–1505*, ed. Denis Fachard (Geneva: Droz, 1993), 104.

42. Piero Parenti, *Storia fiorentina, Vol. 2: 1497–1502*, ed. Andrea Matucci (Florence: Olschki, 2005), 408.

43. This law is partially edited in Barthas, "Machiavelli from the Ten to the Nine," 165–66.

44. Machiavelli, *Discourses* 1.39, in Gilbert, trans., 1:278.

45. Some documents are presented and edited in Giovanni Ciappelli and Anthony Molho, "Lorenzo de' Medici and the *Monte*: A Note on Sources," *Rinascimento* 37 (1997), 243–82; others in Barthas, *L'argent n'est pas le nerf de la guerre*, 441–66.
46. Bartolomeo Cerretani, *Ricordi*, ed. Giuliana Berti (Florence: Olschki, 1993), 108.
47. Francesco Guicciardini, *The History of Florence*, trans. Mario Domandi (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), 257. Cf. Najemy, "'Occupare la tirannide,'" and Robert Black, "Machiavelli and the Militia: New Thoughts," *Italian Studies* 69 (2014): 41–50.
48. Cf. Carlo Dionisotti, "Machiavelli, Cesare Borgia e Don Micheletto" (1967 and 1970), in *Machiavellerie: Storia e fortuna di Machiavelli* (Turin: Einaudi, 1980), 3–59.
49. Cf. Louis-Antoine Saint-Just, *Report on the General Police (1794)*, ed. Jérémie Barthas, trans. Christopher Fotheringham, in *Theoria: A Journal of Social and Political Theory* 141 (December 2014): 76–113, here 91.
50. Cf. Jean-Paul Brodeur, *The Policing Web* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 223.
51. Cf. Barthas, "Machiavelli in Political Thought," 262, 268.
52. Cf. Louis Machon, *Apologie pour Machiavelle (1668)*, ed. Jean-Pierre Cavaillé (Paris: Champion, 2016), 121–26.
53. Cf. Anthony Molho, "The State and Public Finance: A Hypothesis Based on the History of Late Medieval Florence," in *The Origins of the State in Italy, 1300–1600*, ed. Julius Kirshner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 97–135.
54. David Herlihy and Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, *Tuscans and their Families: A Study of the Florentine Catasto of 1427* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985; abridged trans. of *Les Toscans et leurs familles*, 1978), xxiii.
55. Machiavelli, *Florentine Histories*, preface and 4.14, in Gilbert, trans., 3:1032 and 1201.

Extraordinary Accidents in the Life of Republics: Machiavelli and Dictatorial Authority

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Eric Weil once observed that it is possible to distinguish between two types of “presences” through which Machiavelli inhabits our culture, two types of presences that sometimes replace one another and at other times overlap.¹ The first is a phase, or a moment, in which commentators discuss with painstaking philology the genesis and meaning of his work. The second is embodied by other moments, in which Machiavelli returns directly onto the political scene and we look to his work for possible answers to the problems of our present, to the point that he becomes almost a contemporary of anyone wishing to understand the true nature of politics. In short, there are moments when Machiavelli remains in his past and moments in which he appears as our contemporary. While in the former phase we focus more on the conceptual discontinuities that separate us from Machiavelli, in the latter we emphasize the ideas that we still have in common with him, revisiting those aspects of his political theory that still remain relevant and disquieting for us.

Weil’s remarks come back to mind when one begins to study the wide-ranging literature dealing with democracies and emergency powers that has accumulated in the last decade. After 9/11 many scholars—political scientists, political philosophers, experts in constitutional law—have followed in the footsteps of Bruce Ackerman, attempting to add analytical depth to the issue of emergency powers in contemporary constitutional democracies. In doing so they have reassessed the various institutions and magistracies that the Western tradition has turned to at various times in order to deal with emergencies, starting with the Roman magistracy of dictatorship. An obligatory stage in this excavation has been that of studying those thinkers who have theorized how properly functioning republics might need to make provision for the magistracy of dictatorship, starting

with Machiavelli and Rousseau.² Machiavelli in particular is considered by most scholars to be the crucial author, bringing us to the point that two of the most distinguished constitutional scholars in America recently saw fit to publish a long essay entitled "Constitutional Dictatorship: Its Dangers and Its Design,"³ in which they asserted that the Florentine is "perhaps the most important theorist of 'constitutional dictatorship' in the West."⁴

Indeed, Machiavelli can be thought of as the first modern political theorist to have paid considerable attention to the magistracy of dictatorship. "Dictatorial authority," as he put it, is fundamental to the survival and prosperity of republics, and he paused to consider this form of power on several occasions in the *Discourses on Livy*. In one particularly crucial chapter of the work we read: "a republic will never be perfect unless it has provided for everything with its laws and has established a remedy for every accident and given the mode to govern it. So, concluding, I say that those republics that in urgent dangers do not take refuge either in the dictator or in similar authorities will always come to ruin in grave accidents."⁵ Dictatorship⁶ therefore is the magistracy to which republics turn in moments of emergency; it is the "ordinary way" that they use to face up to "extraordinary accidents."

Machiavelli's starting point, as it is obvious, is a careful examination of the Roman magistracy.⁷ He not only devotes three important chapters (33 to 35) of the first book of the *Discourses* to the magistracy of dictatorship, but he also returns to discuss certain historical figures of Roman dictators, and therefore the meaning of dictatorial authority, in many other passages and chapters of his work. He also briefly mentions the other Roman constitutional emergency institution, the *Senatus consultum ultimum*,⁸ which was mainly employed in the second and first centuries BC. But his gaze, as always, is cast both on the ancient and the modern world: although he concentrates on the Roman magistracy, he also pays attention to those magistracies in the modern world that were in some way similar to it, such as the Council of the Ten in the Republic of Venice. His problem was of a normative kind: how republics should deal with emergency situations, which he called "urgent dangers." In this chapter, I will attempt to reconstruct the essential points of Machiavelli's discussion on dictatorship; in other words, I will try to explain why and when he considered it necessary for a "perfect republic" to turn to dictatorship. I intend to show that, according to Machiavelli, well-ordered republics do not have to turn to "extraordinary modes" during emergencies but to a magistracy specifically envisaged by the constitutional order. In fact, the "perfect republic,"

the ideal or model republic, requires not only magistracies like the consulate, the senate, the tribunes of the plebs, and the censors, magistracies that are always in place in “ordinary times” or in the everyday political life of the republic, but also magistracies like dictatorship, which are activated only in the event of certain types of emergency, or in “extraordinary times.”

I. THE JUSTIFICATION OF DICTATORSHIP

Machiavelli first presents dictatorship as an “order,” a magistracy of the Roman constitutional system.⁹ But he immediately points out that “such an order” should be present in every properly constituted republic that wishes to be capable of handling emergencies. In one of the key chapters of the *Discourses*, he writes: “And truly, among the other Roman orders, this is one that deserves to be considered and numbered among those that were the cause of the greatness of so great an empire, for without such an order cities escape from extraordinary accidents with difficulty.”¹⁰

Why would the Roman republic and, more generally, the republics that aspire to be “perfect” have need for such an order? Republics are mixed forms of government. In mixed governments, the different parts of the city are represented by different institutions and magistracies. Thus there is a plurality of magistracies that cooperate and regulate reciprocally in the government of the city. One today might say, with contemporary jargon, that republics are in fact polyarchies. But it is this institutional plurality—or polyarchy—that creates problems in times of emergency. Using a vivid expression, Machiavelli writes that the institutional machinery typical of republics has “il moto tardo,” works in “slow motion”: to reach a decision in a collective and coordinated way they risk being unable to face up to “dangers,” to address emergencies. He specifies: “Because the customary orders in republics have a slow motion (since no council and no magistrate can work anything by itself, but in many things one has need of another, and because it takes time to add these wills together), their remedies are very dangerous when they have to remedy a thing that time does not wait for.”¹¹ It is this peculiar institutional characteristic of republics that gives rise to the need for “dictatorial authority”: since their governments are dependent on the consultation and the coordinated endeavors of various magistracies, republics tend to act and react slowly. A further observation may be useful at this point. The above quotation reveals once again Machiavelli’s understanding of the crucial importance of time in politics. The time factor is decisive: there are ordinary times and extraordinary

times, times in which the institutions of the republic are not in jeopardy and times in which their very survival is “in danger,” in which they are radically called into question.

Finally, it may be interesting to pause to consider the language used by Machiavelli in these contexts. Dictatorship is usually presented as a “*rimedio*,” a “remedy,” for the various emergencies faced by the republic. In many chapters in which he discusses dictatorship and dictators, Machiavelli turns to this medical term.¹² At other times he instead uses the term “*refugio*,” “refuge,” and insists on the “necessity” that leads the republics to adopt such a choice: Romans “had the refuge of the dictator, who executed immediately—in which remedy they never took refuge unless for necessity.”¹³

II. EXTRAORDINARY ACCIDENTS THAT REQUIRE THE CREATION OF A DICTATOR

One might ask what the “extraordinary accidents” actually are and what form they assume. In these chapters Machiavelli limits himself to referring to “urgent dangers” in the plural,¹⁴ or to “urgent danger” in the singular,¹⁵ without describing them in detail. From other passages and chapters we learn that dangers requiring recourse to a dictatorial authority are caused in most cases by foreign wars or by external military threats, and only in a few cases by a degenerating situation in the city leading to conflict. It is moreover possible that these external and domestic dangers might sometimes be linked and overlap. So, in the *Discourses* Machiavelli analyzes both the actions of dictators, such as Marcus Furius Camillus and Lucius Papirius Cursor, who willingly measured themselves against external threats,¹⁶ and the choices of those who, like Aemilius Mamercus and Aulus Cornelius Cossus, mainly faced up to problems and conflicts within the republic.¹⁷

First of all, it is important to pay attention to the way in which the genesis of the magistracy is interpreted and explained. It is worth remembering that Machiavelli points out that the magistracy of dictatorship arose in response to external military threats, when “a good forty peoples conspired against Rome.”¹⁸ The reference is to the events related to the so-called First Latin War of 501 BC. Dictatorship is therefore presented as one of the oldest magistracies of the Roman republic, one that accompanied the history of the republic almost from its origin (which by convention dates back to 509 BC). It is therefore an “order” that even predates the creation of the plebeian tribunate, which is usually traced to 494 BC. An

indication that dictatorship was established in response to external military threats is the fact that the dictator was originally named *magister populi*, master of the citizen army: he, in fact, held the role of commander of the infantry. Furthermore, the dictator was usually required to appoint a subordinate officer, the *magister equitum*, who took the role of commander of the cavalry. It should be added that Machiavelli continues, even in other chapters of the *Discourses*, to pay attention to the ways in which many dictators carried out their military roles. Not only does he underline the fact that dictators, like consuls, were given “free commissions” from the Senate, which entitled them to complete freedom over how to conduct a war,¹⁹ but he also stops to consider the disagreements over military decisions²⁰ that in some cases divided the dictator from his subordinate officer, the *magister equitum*.²¹

Machiavelli naturally devotes considerable space to a consideration of perhaps the most well known Roman dictator, Lucius Quinctius Cincinnatus, who took up the magistracy of dictator on two occasions. The first, in 458 BC, was aimed at battling foreign enemies, the Aequi,²² while the second, in 439 BC, was intended to tackle internal problems, specifically to halt the rising personal power of the grain dealer Spurius Maelius.²³ I would like to briefly consider this exemplary story,²⁴ discussed by Machiavelli in chapter 28 of book 3 of the *Discourses*, under the title “That one should be mindful of the works of citizens because many times underneath a merciful work a beginning of tyranny is concealed.” Spurius Maelius was a wealthy grain trader who, in a period of great economic difficulty for Rome, distributed grain to the people in order to build himself a following and create a base of supporters, or “partisans,” to facilitate his political ascent. Machiavelli shows how the Senate rightly appointed a dictator, Lucius Quinctius Cincinnatus, to obstruct this attempt to acquire a reputation through what he calls “the private ways,” which he contrasted to the licit “public ways.” Dictatorship is therefore presented as a magistracy that seeks to preserve the “well-ordered republic” and to prevent its civic life from being subverted by attempts by individuals to “get reputation” through “private ways,”²⁵ in a trajectory that can lead to the formation of a personal tyranny. As a result, in this passage dictatorship appears as the conceptual opposite of tyranny, but we will return to this opposition further on. At this point, I only wish to shed light on one of the internal problems²⁶ of the republic that can make it necessary to resort to dictatorship.

I would add that the internal problem brought about by the attempt by individuals to seize reputation through “private ways” so worried Rome,

and so attracted Machiavelli's attention, that he felt it appropriate to pause to consider another episode of this kind, which also led to the appointment of a dictator. This occurred in 314 BC, more than one hundred years after the episode involving Cincinnatus. Marcus Menenius and Marcus Fulvius, two plebeian citizens, were chosen for the roles of dictator and *magister equitum* and were given two tasks: firstly, that of tackling the external threat of an anti-Roman plot hatched by the elders of the city of Capua, and secondly, in relation to internal matters, "authority was also given to them by the people to be able to look into whoever in Rome, through ambition and extraordinary modes, might be contriving to come to the consulate and to the other honors of the city."²⁷ While in the case of Cincinnatus the attempt to gain a reputation through "private ways" is denounced, in the case of Marcus Menenius the similar attempt to gain "honors" through "extraordinary modes" is condemned. Both in the Roman constitutional practice, and in Machiavelli's meditation upon it, the dictator was seen as the appropriate "remedy" to turn to in these circumstances.

To sum up, if republican Rome had recourse to the dictator for a wide variety of reasons, Machiavelli shows himself to be interested only in the two most important forms of dictatorship: the dictatorship *rei gerundae causa* (the dictatorship that faces the threat of an external war) and the dictatorship *seditionis sedandae* (the dictatorship that has to cope with serious internal conflicts).²⁸ He is not interested, for example, in the role and meaning of the *dictator clavi figendi causa*, whose role was to perform an important religious function in the Roman social life, namely to fix a nail in the walls of the temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus,²⁹ or in the role and meaning of the *dictator comitorum habendorum causa*, the dictator whose task was to call elections.

I must specify that in this chapter I am not concerned with the level of *historical* understanding of Roman magistracy reached by Machiavelli or with the problem of classical and modern sources he referred to, but with his *theoretical* reformulation of the more general problem posed by the existence of this crucial magistracy. With regard to the problem of classical sources, I would merely observe that Machiavelli seems to follow the presentation of the magistracy of dictatorship put forward by Cicero in the *De legibus*³⁰ and by Livy in the pages of his *History*. In the last decade, some scholars, like Marie Gaille and Gabriele Pedullà,³¹ have argued that Dionysius of Halicarnassus, and his *Roman Antiquities*,³² should be considered an important source of his thought. This could be true for some concepts and historical interpretations developed in the *Discourses*. But when we focus on the problem of dictatorship, we have to recognize that

Machiavelli does not reformulate the interpretation of the origins of the magistracy developed in the fifth book of the *Roman Antiquities*,³³ nor does he rephrase Dionysius's radical thesis, according to which dictatorship is just an "elective tyranny."³⁴

III. THE NATURE AND LIMITS OF DICTATORIAL AUTHORITY

In order to make plain the nature of the dictatorial authority that all republics require in times of emergency, Machiavelli focuses on the characteristics of the Roman magistracy of dictatorship: its term of office and its powers. He underlines, first of all, the time limit placed on the magistracy. While we know that dictators could remain in office for a maximum of six months,³⁵ Machiavelli speaks only of a "short time."³⁶ However, in the footsteps of Livy, he recalls that in Rome standing down from dictatorship as soon as possible after a crisis had been resolved was considered an act worthy of the highest praise.³⁷

Machiavelli then proceeds to highlight the breadth and limits of dictatorial authority. It was, in fact, a very wide authority, but constitutionally delimited. When a dictator was designated, power was given "to one man who could decide without any consultation and execute his decisions without any appeal."³⁸ To decide "without any consultation": the constitutional powers of the other magistracies were suspended. The dictator could identify and determine the "remedies" needed to deal with the "urgent danger"—the policies to be adopted to overcome the emergency—without having to consult the other magistrates and other constitutional organs. To take measures "without any appeal": several fundamental constitutional guarantees of Roman citizens were suspended, in particular the most important one, that of the *provocatio ad populum*. This was the right of every citizen to appeal the sentences passed by the magistracies—above all death sentences—and to submit to the judgment of the citizens' assemblies.³⁹

Having stated the affirmative aspect of the powers that the dictator possessed—namely his prerogative to decide without having to consult other magistracies and to pass sentences without having to submit to the *provocatio ad populum*—Machiavelli immediately spells out the negative aspect, the limits of those powers. The dictator "could not do anything that might diminish the state, as taking away authority from the Senate or from the people, undoing the old orders of the city and making new ones, would have been."⁴⁰ Machiavelli is very precise: the dictator could

not "undo old orders and make new ones"; the dictator could not alter the constitutional structure of the state. The dictatorship was a magistracy designed to maintain the "constitution" of the state, to preserve it in times of emergency. The dictator did not have legislative power, the power to "make new laws."⁴¹ Machiavelli stresses this point: "If he had been able to deprive one of them of the consulate, one of the Senate, he could not annul the senatorial order and make new laws. So the Senate, the consuls, the tribunes, remaining in their authority, came to be like a guard on him to make him not depart from the right way."⁴² The dictator, then, had a wide-ranging authority but one that was constitutionally regulated: other magistracies acted as a "guard" on his activities. Machiavelli therefore argues, with apparent paradox but without contradiction, that the Roman dictator had "limited authority." He also concludes that this magistracy never caused damage to the city of Rome but rather was one of the reasons for its greatness: "So, when the brief time of his dictatorship, the limited authorities he had, and the noncorrupt Roman people are added up, it was impossible for him to escape his limits and to hurt the city; and one sees by experience that he always helped."⁴³

The constitutional nature of Roman dictatorship also emerges in the meticulous procedure followed to arrive at the appointment of a magistrate. Machiavelli fully grasps the importance of the matter and draws attention to it, observing: "In this new order the mode of electing is to be noted, as it was wisely provided by the Romans."⁴⁴ He returns to this problem not only in the crucial thirty-fourth chapter of the first book but also in other chapters, with observations that are unambiguous and to the point.⁴⁵ It should be borne in mind, first, that a dictatorship, in contrast to other magistracies, was not established by popular assemblies but according to a strict process. It was the Senate that decided that a dictator should be appointed in a particular circumstance or, to use contemporary language, it was the Senate that declared a state of emergency. The consuls were then entrusted with the task of choosing who should assume the magistracy, and they, having made their choice, then appointed the dictator, usually in a ceremony that took place at dawn.⁴⁶ If the consul, or consuls, were unwilling to appoint a dictator, the Senate could turn to the tribunes of the plebs, or to other appropriate delegates, to persuade the consuls of the need for action.⁴⁷ The procedure, therefore, was punctiliously codified and allowed for the intervention of other major constitutional magistracies. The method of appointment, which separated the roles of initiator (the Senate), nominator (a consul), and nominee (the candidate for the office of dictator), was intended to be a safeguard against

possible abuse of power on the one hand and, on the other, to facilitate the selection of highly competent individuals who had no dangerous personal ambitions.⁴⁸ The procedure for the nomination of a dictator was extremely important for Machiavelli: by involving the other main magistracies, it revealed how the magistracy of dictatorship was installed in a balanced and organic way into the constitutional framework of the Roman republic. By showing how many precautions were taken to avoid possible abuses of power, it shed an indirect light on how the purpose of dictatorship was to preserve freedom in a well-ordered republic. Machiavelli therefore had no hesitation in concluding: "one sees that while the dictator was appointed according to public orders, and not by his own authority, he always did good for the city."⁴⁹

IV. DICTATORSHIP VS. TYRANNY

Machiavelli thinks of dictatorship as a perfectly legal magistracy, envisaged and developed by the republican system. For this reason he makes a rigorous distinction between dictatorship and tyranny.⁵⁰ Or rather: he contrasts dictatorships with tyrannies, as they occurred in Roman history. There were at least two examples of tyranny being imposed on Rome: the experience of the Decemvirate in the early stages of the republic and the rule of Sulla and Caesar in its terminal phase. Machiavelli thought it particularly useful to compare the power of the dictator to that held by the Decemviri, by the Ten, in order to point to the constitutional distinctiveness of dictatorship. The Decemvirate had been created to draft and enact new laws (the so-called Twelve Tables).⁵¹ Once the Ten had been appointed, the other magistracies were disbanded, and, moreover, there was no possibility of appeal against their laws. Machiavelli points out that the magistracy of the Decemvirate had no set time limit and, what was more, it had full legislative power. It was a "free authority [. . .] given for a long time." In contrast to dictatorship, its powers were not controlled by other magistracies who might have acted as a "guard"; "in the creation of the Ten it happened all the contrary; for they annulled the consuls and the tribunes; they gave them authority to make laws and do any other thing, like the Roman people." The Decemvirate constitute a negative counter-example with respect to dictatorship and it is therefore not surprising that the Ten "in time [. . .] became tyrants."⁵²

The other political-institutional experience that was carefully distinguished and separated from classical Roman dictatorship was that of Caesar. For Machiavelli, Caesar is the symbol of tyranny.⁵³ In the *Dis-*

courses, the Florentine unhesitatingly repeats the polemic against Caesar developed by the humanists of the fifteenth century.⁵⁴ Machiavelli is fully aware that after the Battle of Pharsalus Caesar was appointed first dictator for ten years (46 BC) and then (from February 44 BC) dictator for an indefinite period, *dictator perpetuus*. But he is convinced that it is absolutely necessary to keep in mind a clear-cut distinction of names and things. The term "dictator" was in fact misused by Caesar to legitimize his absolute power, but "if the dictatorial name had been lacking in Rome, they would have taken another; for it is forces that easily acquire names not names forces."⁵⁵ Caesar's tyranny had roots in the "prolongation of commands,"⁵⁶ in the long-term appointments given to military commanders. There is no doubt that "it was neither the name nor the rank of dictator that made Rome servile, but it was the authority taken by citizens because of the length of their command."⁵⁷ The conclusion of this argument is that classical Roman dictatorship, the magistracy to which the Romans resorted consistently from 501 BC to the Punic Wars,⁵⁸ has nothing to do with the tyranny of Sulla⁵⁹ and Caesar, who merely used the classical term to legitimize their power.⁶⁰ But beyond the names, the reality of the powers at play was profoundly different. Thus those writers who perceived some continuity between these two institutional forms were completely mistaken, and the first amongst them can probably be identified as Dionysius of Halicarnassus.⁶¹

V. AN ORDINARY MAGISTRACY IN EXTRAORDINARY TIMES

The meaning of "dictatorial authority" fully emerges when we examine certain key terms used by Machiavelli to conceptualize the problem. When we analyze his language, his understanding of the crucial importance of time in politics comes once more to the fore, a knowledge that separates him from many of the philosophers and political theorists who preceded or followed him. We have already seen that republics—like all political formations—are at times forced to contend with "extraordinary accidents," situations of "urgent danger." Now, Machiavelli insists on the fact that these emergency situations should not be confronted "through extraordinary ways" but "through ordinary ways."⁶² The conceptual pairing of ordinary-extraordinary is not only a valid description of time in politics but also has significance for institutional responses, for the "means" or "modes" used to face up to emergency situations.⁶³ The republic is the embodiment of the rule of law and therefore must never resort to "extraor-

dinary ways" or "extraordinary modes." Machiavelli insists categorically on this point, on the rejection of extraordinary modes and on the need for the republic to provide itself with an ordinary magistracy to tackle emergencies: "For magistrates that are made and authorities that are given through extraordinary ways, not those that come through ordinary ways, hurt republics; so one sees that in Rome the result was that in so much course of time no dictator ever did anything but good to the republic."⁶⁴ Republics that do not turn to this type of ordinary magistracy are doomed to suffer "infinite evils."⁶⁵ In fact, those republics when confronted with emergencies face a tragic dilemma: they either are unable to face up to emergencies by relying on traditional constitutional magistracies, on "customary orders," or by facing up to them they call into question the entire constitutional order and open themselves up to a consequent loss of freedom, "for when a like mode [dictatorial authority] is lacking in a republic, it is necessary either that it be ruined by observing the orders or that it break them so as not to be ruined. And in a republic should never happen anything that has to be governed with extraordinary modes."⁶⁶ Constitutional orders should never be violated. They have their own extreme importance, which should never be called into question: "For although the extraordinary mode may do good then, nonetheless the example does ill; for if one sets up a habit of breaking the orders for the sake of good, then later, under that coloring, they are broken for ill."⁶⁷ The conclusion of this reasoning, already pointed out in the opening of this chapter, is that a "perfect republic" should prepare for everything in its orders and laws; it should make ready ordinary solutions, constitutional remedies, to emergency situations.

When an order like dictatorship does exist, the citizens and the other magistracies that form the republic can freely choose to entrust themselves to it in times of emergency. Machiavelli emphasizes the voluntary and free dimension of this choice, the "free vote" that is in fact mentioned in the title of the thirty-fourth chapter. After having stated with clarity that "the dictatorial authority did good, and not harm, to the Roman republic," he then underlines "that the authorities citizens take for themselves, not those given them by free votes, are pernicious to civil life."⁶⁸ The recourse to dictatorship is the result of a free choice and dictatorship is the order established specifically to defend freedom and ensure its survival when it is jeopardized. Dictatorial authority, therefore, takes the form of a magistracy whose purpose is to preserve, to keep intact, the constitutional order put in danger by the emergency situation. Its purpose is

not to alter or to innovate it. As has been well said, the dictator is “the guardian of the republican status quo.”⁶⁹

At this point it is necessary to offer a clarification, in order to fully grasp Machiavelli’s theses. Dictatorship is the normal response, the “ordinary mode” used by republics to face up to emergencies. But one could well ask: Which republic? The answer is the uncorrupted republic, the republic in its political physiology, the republic whose institutional arrangements make freedom possible. A different response is, however, needed when the “the matter” is corrupt.⁷⁰ In situations in which the process of corruption is so advanced to have affected people and orders, Machiavelli considers the option to have recourse to “extraordinary modes.”

VI. DICTATORIAL AUTHORITY AND THE MODERNS

Machiavelli’s considerations on Roman dictatorship clearly do not have an archaeological purpose. The problem he sets himself is to identify the means by which republics should tackle emergency situations. There is a need for an institution similar to Roman dictatorship, one that the constitution provides for and regulates stringently: it is clear that “republics should have a like mode among their orders,”⁷¹ he declares with conviction.

Machiavelli identifies in the Republic of Venice a magistracy that is somewhat similar to the classical Roman one: the Council of Ten. It is well known that, unlike many other Florentines, he was not an advocate of the Venetian institutional model; he disdained its “governo stretto,” its government that excluded a large part of the people.⁷² Thus the praise that he heaps on the Venetian republic (in his chapter on dictatorial authority) for having considered the need for, and then having established, a magistracy competent to deal with emergencies, is extremely significant: “The Venetian republic, which is excellent among modern republics, has reserved authority to a few citizens who in urgent needs can decide, all in accord, without further consultation.”⁷³ What counts is that in dangerous situations, in times of “urgent needs,” one has an authority capable of making decisions “without further consultation,” without having to seek and wait for the views of other constitutional organs. While republics are institutional regimes based on a plurality of magistracies and orders—that is to say, polyarchic regimes—it is nevertheless necessary that they make provision for the suspension of this polyarchic dimension in times of crisis so that an appointed magistracy can act decisively, without consulting

others. In Rome the dictator, and in Venice the Council of Ten, act “without consultation.” The Council of Ten resembled the Roman dictatorship in another way, in that it could condemn citizens, even to capital punishment, without possibility of appeal. Asking, in another crucial chapter, in whose hands the “authority to shed blood”—the authority to adjudicate on capital crimes—should be placed, Machiavelli underlines that, in contrast to Florence and other cities, “The city of Venice [. . .] had ten citizens who could punish any citizen without appeal.”⁷⁴ In times of dire emergency, not only was the power of ordinary magistracies suspended but so too were certain fundamental citizens’ rights, primarily that of appealing against the death penalty.

Machiavelli’s arguments on the need for republics to turn to an “order” to deal with emergency situations were taken up by several important seventeenth- and eighteenth-century thinkers. It suffices to mention here the names of Algernon Sidney, who considered the matter in several passages of his *Discourses on Government*,⁷⁵ and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who dedicated the entire sixth chapter of book 4 of *The Social Contract*⁷⁶ to it. But even the more specific considerations on the fact that this “order” could also take the shape of a council rather than a monocratic magistracy, as in the case of Venice’s Council of Ten, were influential and were in one way or another taken up by important theorists in the two subsequent centuries.

For example, James Harrington, who deemed Machiavelli to be “the only politician of later ages,”⁷⁷ argued in *The Commonwealth of Oceana* that the “*Dictator Oceanae*” ought to be a “junta” composed of nine aristocrats, which “upon emergencies” could take up power together with the council of war and remain in office for no more than three months.⁷⁸ In his *Tractatus Politicus*, Baruch Spinoza, the admirer of the “*acutissimus Florentinus*,” argued against the possibility of appointing a single man as a dictator “for one or two months.” According to him, such an appointment could represent a “great risk” for the liberty of the republic (“*magno reipublicae periculo*”)⁷⁹. He argued instead that dictatorial power, or the “*gladius dictatorius*,” should be entrusted to a “council of syndics” (“*Syndicorum Concilium*”), “so that the dictatorial sword might be permanently vested, not in any natural person, but in a civil person, whose members are too numerous to be capable of dividing the state among themselves [. . .], or of agreeing on any crime.”⁸⁰ David Hume, in the essay *Idea of a Perfect Commonwealth*, outlined the constitutional structures of an ideal republic, confronting himself with Harrington’s proposal, which he considered “the only valuable model of a commonwealth that has as yet been offered

to the public."⁸¹ Among other magistracies, he called for a "dictatorial power," which, "on extraordinary emergencies" would take charge "for six months." Such a power had to be formed by several members of different institutions: "the protector, the two secretaries, the council of state, with any five more than the senate appoints."⁸²

Machiavelli's lesson had demonstrably been learnt. What was important for him was the creation of an order, of a magistracy that had the requisite constitutional powers to tackle emergencies, not necessarily the fact that such a magistracy was entrusted to one man, to "uno solo," as had occurred in Rome.⁸³ It is true. While discussing dictatorship, Machiavelli on several occasions qualifies it by turning to expressions like "this kingly power"⁸⁴ or this "kingly arm."⁸⁵ But such phrases should not mislead us: by using them, Machiavelli refers to the breadth of power in the hands of the dictator but does not imply that the ordinary magistracy charged to face emergency situations had necessarily to be a monocratic power. The conclusion of the argument he lays out in chapter 34 of book I, in which he has examined both the Roman and Venetian experience, leaves no room for doubt: "so, concluding, I say that those republics that in urgent dangers do not take refuge either in the dictator or in similar authorities will always come to ruin in grave accidents."⁸⁶ "Or in similar authorities": Machiavelli's qualification should not be forgotten.

VII. CONCLUDING REMARKS

It is enough, in conclusion, to introduce three observations. The first arises from the shared acknowledgment that the conceptual structure and argumentative narrative of Machiavelli's work add up to an extraordinary stratification of theoretical insights. Resorting to contemporary language, we might say that his writings present an almost inextricable tangle of analytical and normative elements, of historical reconstruction and political philosophy. Machiavelli is both the creator of *The Prince* and the author of the *Discourses*. On the one hand he focuses on politics and its actors, on the great and the people and the conflicts between them, and on the other he simultaneously considers legal institutions, orders, and laws. He proposes a normative arrangement for the ideal republic but at the same time investigates the corruption of the existing republics and the potential for their fall into crisis, a crisis that often can be solved only by the principality. He develops momentous diagnoses such as that of the crisis of the Roman republic, which can be linked to the "prolongation of commands," and that of the birth of the modern world and Christian-

ity's role in it, with all its nonpolitical consequences. Yet at the same time he tackles more limited and specific questions, such as the possibility of Italian reunification. Paying great attention to the problem of the "matching with the times," he sometimes reflects on "ordinary times," while at others, and perhaps more often, he considers "extraordinary times" and their challenges. It is our duty as interpreters to distinguish between the different levels of discourse in Machiavelli's work and to explain how they relate to one another.

It is therefore important to be clear about which theoretical level his considerations on dictatorship occupy. To this end, it may once more be useful to focus attention on the language and conceptual structure of the arguments set out in those crucial chapters. Let us first of all reconsider the language used by the Florentine. "A republic will never be perfect unless it has provided for everything with its laws"⁸⁷: a *perfect republic*, this is what is at stake. "So republics should have a like mode among their orders; and the Venetian republic, which is excellent among modern republics, has reserved authority to a few citizens"⁸⁸: an *excellent republic*, again this is what is in question. But let us note once more the verb: "republics *should have* [le repubbliche *debbano*]." This is evaluative or prescriptive language, we would say with our contemporary jargon.

Next let us turn to Machiavelli's conceptual categories, or to the structure of his conceptualizations. Dictatorship is set in contrast to tyranny, the tyranny of the Decemvirate or the tyranny sought by Spurius Maelius and stopped in its tracks by Cincinnatus. Tyranny: in the Western tradition this is a concept laden with judgment, filled with axiological assumptions. In short, in these pages Machiavelli considers Rome and Venice and presents the basic characteristics of his "perfect" or ideal republic, and in doing so he presents arguments that we would today call normative. The constitutional order designed by Machiavelli requires that alongside the orders and magistracies designed for "ordinary times," from the consuls to the tribunes of the plebs, from the censors to the system of "accusations," there should also be an "order" meant for "extraordinary times," a magistracy provided with broad powers but also characterized by precise temporal and constitutional limits.

Having recognized the institutional articulation of Machiavelli's model for the perfect republic, which prescribes magistracies for both ordinary and extraordinary times, it becomes possible to introduce a second observation, which arises from a historiographical consideration. In the past two decades, many scholars have given careful consideration to the theory of conflict proposed by Machiavelli and his praise for the

“disunion” that “made that republic free and powerful.”⁸⁹ Those scholars who have studied and developed the interpretative viewpoints of Luis Althusser and Claude Lefort have been particularly keen to do so. They have laid emphasis on how, in his arguments, Machiavelli places tumults and orders, politics and law in relation with one another, and have claimed his thought contains a circular or recursive relationship between the two elements.⁹⁰ Without “disunions,” without “tumults” Rome would not have created laws and orders capable of guaranteeing freedom. Such scholars have thereby highlighted the original division and permanent conflict between the two groups present in every body politic: the great and the people. They have rightly insisted, in this context, that Machiavelli sided with the latter. In doing so, they have also conferred a kind of genetic primacy on politics. This line of thinking is important, but it seems to me to represent only one part of the story. The reflection on dictatorial authority presented in the *Discourses* allows us to understand and to highlight another aspect of Machiavelli’s thought, one that has perhaps received less attention in recent decades. This is the extent to which orders and laws, once created, take on an extraordinary importance for Machiavelli.⁹¹ The Florentine secretary repeats time and again: in a republic, the multitude has to be “regulated by the laws, as was the Roman [multitude]”⁹²; or, more memorably: the “people” have to be “fettered by them.”⁹³ In a republic it is these laws that guarantee personal freedom. However, it is the politics pursued by ambitious individuals, such as Caesar and the “greats,” that brings the constitutional structure into crisis. The relationship between law and politics can therefore be seen from another perspective, one in which the law (orders and laws) is an element of freedom, and politics, in particular the politics pursued by the “great,” is an element that leads to corruption.

I thus come to my final comment. It has been said that Machiavelli’s thought is profoundly stratified and that it develops on different levels. When reasoning on the subject of dictatorship, the Florentine secretary not only considers which might be the best magistracies to allow the republic to preserve itself through time, but he is also driven to reconsider the issue of what kind of “extraordinary accidents” republics may encounter along the way. Thus, the subject of dictatorship encourages us to rethink the question of how Machiavelli’s thought thematizes the problem of the various types of crises that republics find themselves confronting in the course of time. Perhaps one might distinguish between three different types of crisis that they are forced to face, each of which is tackled differently depending on the level of “corruption” within the republic.

A first type of crisis, or emergency, is the one we have considered up to now in dealing with the magistracy of dictatorship. This can emerge from external military threats as well as from internal “dangers,” whether these be conflicts between the parts or “humors” of the city or the rise of single individuals to positions of personal power, as in the case of Spurius Maelius. Dictatorship is the normal response, the “ordinary mode” that uncorrupted republics use to face this kind of emergency. It is the uncorrupted republic, the republic in its political physiology, that resorts to the magistracy of dictatorship. Machiavelli makes this clear as early as chapter 34 of book 1 of the *Discourses* and reiterates the same point in many later passages.⁹⁴ For him, if the “matter” of the republic is still uncorrupted, then the intervention of the dictator, the recourse to the “ordinary mode,” can resolve the emergency comprehensively.

Another type of crisis is the one that emerges when the “matter” is corrupt, when public orders and values have been scarred by corruption. This is the scenario that Machiavelli chiefly analyzes in the first chapter of book 3 of the *Discourses*, namely the situation in which it becomes necessary to “draw back” the republic “toward its beginning.”⁹⁵ This type of crisis can in fact be triggered by external emergencies, by “external beating,”⁹⁶ but it usually emerges as an internal crisis, as a crisis of the virtue and more generally of the customs of the citizens. Machiavelli recognizes that in such situations the intervention of individual dictators or, in other words, the recourse to “ordinary modes” was valuable. But he begins to argue that in order to “renew” republics more thoroughly there is often a need to turn to the “simple virtue of one man” and frequently to “executions” that induce “terror” and “fear” in the population. He thus begins to show how in those situations the use of “extraordinary” measures might become necessary. This appreciation for “extraordinary” measures aimed at drawing back the republic “toward its beginning” emerges more clearly in later chapters, for example in chapter 22 of book 3, in which he considers the “strong things”⁹⁷ employed by a military commander like Titus Manlius Torquatus.

Machiavelli does not restrict himself to considering the republic’s physiology, or to analyzing its pathologies, the correlative processes developing within it. He is fully aware of the fact that there are different “degrees of corruption”⁹⁸ and that there exist definite turning points in political life. He thus investigates, on several occasions both in book 1 and book 3, what he calls “a change of state” (“una mutazione di Stato”),⁹⁹ which usually occurs “either from republic to tyranny or from tyranny to republic.” Machiavelli makes clear that it is precisely when such “a

change of state" has taken place that it becomes necessary to make use of "extraordinary" measures. He unambiguously states: "whoever takes up a tyranny and does not kill Brutus, and whoever makes a free state and does not kill the sons of Brutus, maintains himself for a little time."¹⁰⁰ It is exactly this conviction of the need to turn to "extraordinary" modes in certain crucial moments following a "change of state" that leads Machiavelli to severely criticize Piero Soderini, who proved himself incapable of understanding the nature of the appetites of the sons of Brutus and unable "to take up extraordinary authority."¹⁰¹

But I do not have space here to elaborate on the last two forms of crisis. This is not the place to question the nature of the extraordinary means that are needed to tackle such emergency situations or to ponder on the different political actors involved in them, whether they be new princes, Greek tyrants or other reformist figures¹⁰², since doing so would require an entirely new essay. In this concluding passage, I merely wanted to sketch out in broad strokes the conceptual framework that Machiavelli uses to consider the different types of crises that a republic may encounter in the course of time and the different means, ordinary and extraordinary, that may be required to cope with them. In this conceptual context, dictatorial authority represents the "ordinary mode" to which the uncorrupted republics—those republics that wish to continue to enable people to enjoy a "free way of life"—must regularly turn.

NOTES

1. Eric Weil, "Machiavel aujourd'hui," in *Essais et conférences: Politique* (Paris: Vrin 1991), 2:190.

2. For example, see John Ferejohn and Pasquale Pasquino, "The Law of Exception: A Typology of Emergency Powers," *International Journal of Constitutional Law* 2 (2004): 210–39, on Machiavelli especially 211–13 and 233–34; Nomi Claire Lazar, "Making Emergencies Safe for Democracy: The Roman Dictatorship and the Rule of Law in the Study of Crisis Government," *Constellations* 13 (2006): 506–21, especially 509–14; Oren Gross and Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, *Law in Times of Crisis. Emergency Powers in Theory and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), on Machiavelli, especially 17–26, 35–36, 144–45; John Ferejohn and Pasquale Pasquino, "Emergency Powers," in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Theory*, ed. John S. Dryzek, Bonnie Honig, and Anne Phillips (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 333–48, especially 335–37; Bernard Manin, "The Emergency Paradigm and the New Terrorism," in *Les usages de la séparation des pouvoirs*, ed. Sandrine Baume and Bianca Fontana (Paris: Houdiard,

2008], 136–71; Nomi Claire Lazar, *States of Emergency in Liberal Democracies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), on Machiavelli especially 25–36 and 113–35.

3. Sanford Levinson and Jack M. Balkin, “Constitutional Dictatorship: Its Dangers and Its Design,” *Minnesota Law Review* 94 (2010): 1789–866.

4. *Ibid.*, 1799. The idea of “constitutional dictatorship” was put forward and developed by Carl Joachim Friedrich and Clinton L. Rossiter: cf. Carl Joachim Friedrich, *Constitutional Government and Politics: Nature and Development*, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1937), chapter 14, “Constitutional Dictatorship and Emergency Powers,” 208–23; Clinton L. Rossiter, *Constitutional Dictatorship: Crisis Government in the Modern Democracies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1948). Rossiter pays great attention to Machiavelli’s remarks on dictatorship in the *Discourses*: see *Constitutional Dictatorship*, ii, viii, 15, 23, 28, 301. Friedrich plainly presents Machiavelli as an author who supports “a constitutional dictatorship” in Carl Joachim Friedrich, *Constitutional Reason of State: The Survival of the Constitutional Order* (Providence: Brown University Press, 1957), 27–30. These pages by Friedrich are still one of the best commentaries on Machiavelli’s remarks on dictatorship. Both Friedrich and Rossiter were familiar with and critically discussed the interpretation of the different forms of dictatorship put forward by Carl Schmitt in 1921.

5. Niccolò Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield and Nathan Tarcov (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), henceforth abbreviated as “*Discourses*” and cited with book, chapter, and page numbers: 1.34, 75. I always checked the English translation on the original Italian text established by Giorgio Inglese: Niccolò Machiavelli, *Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Tito Livio*, introduction by Gennaro Sasso, preface and notes by Giorgio Inglese (Milan: Biblioteca Universale Rizzoli, 1996).

6. For the history of the concept of dictatorship, among recent studies, see Ernst Nolte, “Diktatur,” in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* (Stuttgart: Klett, 1972), 1:900–24; Giovanni Sartori, “Dittatura,” in *Elementi di teoria politica* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1987), 51–85; Herfried Münkler and Marcus Llanque, “Diktatur,” in *Der Neue Pauly: Enzyklopädie der Antike, Rezeptions- und Wissenschaftsgeschichte* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1999), vol. 13, cols. 852–63; Wilfried Nippel, “Dictatorship,” in *The Classical Tradition*, ed. Anthony Grafton, Glenn W. Most, and Salvatore Settis (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 267–68; Wilfried Nippel, “Saving the Constitution: The European Discourse on Dictatorship,” in *In the Footsteps of Herodotus: Towards European Political Thought*, ed. Janet Coleman and Paschalis M. Kitromilides (Florence: Olschki, 2012), 29–49; Andrew Arato, “Conceptual History of Dictatorship (and Its Rivals),” in *Critical Theory and Democracy*, ed. Enrique Peruzzotti and Martin Plot (London: Routledge, 2013), 208–80.

7. On the Roman magistracy of dictatorship, among recent studies, see Marianne Elizabeth Hartfield, *The Roman Dictatorship: Its Character and Its Evolution* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1982); Claude Nicolet, “La dictature a Rome,” in *Dictatures et légitimité*, ed. M. Duverger (Paris: PUF, 1982), 69–84, English translation “Dictatorship in Rome,” in *Dictatorship in History and Theory: Bonapartism, Caesarism, and Totalitarianism*, ed. Peter Baehr and Melvin Richter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 263–78; Claude Nicolet, “Dictateurs romains, *strategoi autokratores* grecs et généraux carthaginois,” in *Dictatures*, ed. François Hinard (Paris: De Boccard, 1988), 27–47; Andrew W. Lintott, *The Constitution of the Roman Republic*

(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 109–13; Wilfried Nippel, “Emergency Powers in the Roman Republic,” in *La théorie politico-constitutionnelle du gouvernement d’exception*, ed. Pasquale Pasquino and Bernard Manin (Paris: Les Cahiers du CREA, 2000), 5–23; M. de Wilde, “The Dictator’s Trust: Regulating and Constraining Emergency Powers in the Roman Republic,” *History of Political Thought* 33 (2012): 555–77; Gregory K. Golden, “The Roman Dictator,” in *Crisis Management During the Roman Republic: The Role of Political Institutions in Emergencies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 11–41.

8. Cf. *Discourses* 1.34, 75: Machiavelli quotes the Latin formula “Videat Consul, ne Respublica quid detrimenti capiat,” found in Livy, *History of Rome* 3.4 and 6.19. Machiavelli is aware of the fact that this procedure was created and used “in the final years” of the republic, but he does not explicitly stop to consider the reasons for the abandonment of dictatorship and for the recourse to *Senatus consultum ultimum*. On *Senatus consultum ultimum*, see Lintott, *The Constitution of the Roman Republic*, 89–93; J. von Ungern-Sterberg, “Senatus consultum ultimum,” in *Der Neue Pauly: Enzyklopädie der Antike* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2001), vol. 11, col. 409; Gregory K. Golden, “The Senatus Consultum Ultimum,” in *Crisis Management*, 104–49.

9. On Machiavelli and dictatorship, among recent studies, see Gennaro M. Barbuto, “Machiavelli e la dittatura nella Roma antica,” in *Antinomie della politica: Saggio su Machiavelli* (Naples: Liguori, 2007), 95–104; Gabriele Pedullà, “Una ‘tirannide elettiva’ Ovvero: ciò che gli umanisti e Machiavelli possono insegnarci sulla dittatura e sullo ‘stato di eccezione,’” in *Il governo dell’emergenza: Poteri straordinari e di guerra in Europa tra XVI e XX secolo*, ed. Franco Benigno e Luca Scuccimarra (Rome: Viella, 2007), 35–73; Pasquale Pasquino, “Machiavel: Dictature et *salus reipublicae*,” in *Raison(s) d’Etat(s) en Europe: Traditions, usages, recompositions*, ed. Brigitte Krulic (Bern: Peter Lang, 2010), 11–34; Gabriele Pedullà, *Machiavelli in tumulto: Conquista, cittadinanza e conflitto nei ‘Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Tito Livio’* (Rome: Bulzoni, 2011), 565–602; Pasquale Pasquino, “Between Machiavelli and Carl Schmitt: Remarks on Rousseau’s Dictatorship,” *Storia del pensiero politico* 2 (2013): 145–54; Marco Geuna, “Machiavelli and the Problem of Dictatorship,” *Ratio Juris: An International Journal of Jurisprudence and Philosophy of Law* 28 (2015): 226–41. The ensuing argument constitutes a fully revised and greatly extended version of this article.

10. *Discourses* 1.34, 74.

11. *Ibid.* On the “slow motion” of republics, see also *Discourses* 1.59, 120, and *Discourses* 3.6, 232. On this issue, see the interesting remarks put forward by Pasquino, “Machiavel: Dictature et *salus reipublicae*,” 14–16.

12. See, e.g., *Discourses* 1.34, 75; *Discourses* 3.25, 271: “a dictator, the ultimate remedy in things that afflicted them.” On the notion of “remedy” and the medical terminology used by Machiavelli, among recent studies, see Jean-Louis Fournel and Jean-Claude Zancarini, “Sur la langue du Prince: Des mots pour comprendre et agir,” in N. Machiavelli, *Le Prince*, trans. Jean-Louis Fournel et Jean-Claude Zancarini (Paris: PUF, 2000), 545–610, esp. “Le prince-médecin,” 579–82; Giulio Ferroni, *Machiavelli, o dell’incertezza: La politica come arte del rimedio*, (Rome: Donzelli, 2003), 113–31; Luigi Zanzi, “Aspetti della “filosofia” di Machiavelli nella ricerca di un metodo tra medicina e storia,” in *Il metodo del Machiavelli* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2013), 745–898.

13. *Discourses* 1.49, 101. See also *Discourses* 1.34, 75: "I say that those republics that in urgent dangers do not take refuge either in the dictator or in similar authorities will always come to ruin in grave accidents"; in the original Italian text: "hanno rifugio."

14. *Ibid.* 1.33, 71 and 1.34, 75.

15. *Ibid.* 1.34, 74.

16. The case of Marcus Furius Camillus, the dictator who defeated the Gauls in 390 BC, is a paradigm of the recourse to dictatorship in the event of war with foreign powers. On Camillus, see, for example, *Discourses* 1.8, 26; *Discourses* 2.29, 197–98; *Discourses* 3.1, 210. On Lucius Papirius Cursor, dictator for four times, first in 325 and 324 BC, then in 310 and 309 BC, see for example *Discourses* 1.31, 69–70 and *Discourses* 3.36, 293.

17. Aemilius Mamercus, dictator in 437, 434, and 426 BC, and Aulus Cornelius Cossus, dictator in 385 BC, are examples of dictators who worked mainly for the solution of domestic problems. On Aemilius Mamercus, see *Discourses* 1.49, 100 (Mamercus, during his second dictatorship, reduced the time in which censors were allowed to remain in office from five years to eighteen months; the story had been told by Livy, *History of Rome* 4.24), and also *Discourses* 3.14, 252–53 (Mamercus engaged in the war against the Fidenates); on Aulus Cornelius Cossus, *Discourses* 1.8, 26–27. Machiavelli found the story of the confrontation between Aulus Cornelius Cossus and Marcus Manlius Capitolinus in Livy, *History of Rome* 6.14–16.

18. *Discourses* I. 33, 71.

19. *Discourses* II. 33, 206.

20. For example, the conflict that opposed, after 325 BC, Lucius Papirius Cursor to Quintus Fabius Maximus Rullianus, his *magister equitum*, is carefully considered by Machiavelli: see *Discourses* 1.31, 70; *Discourses* 3.1, 210; *Discourses* 3.36, 293; *Discourses* 3.47, 307.

21. I therefore cannot agree with Wilfried Nippel when he writes "Machiavelli is interested in the dictatorship as an institution to cope with serious conflicts within the citizenry; he passes over the dictatorship as a way of unifying military command during a war as would be done in almost all later discussions" (Nippel, "Saving the Constitution," 35); for a similar statement, see Nippel, "Dictatorship," 267B.

22. On Lucius Quinctius Cincinnatus, consul in 460 BC, see *Discourses* 3.24, 270; on Cincinnatus, dictator in 458 against the Aequi, see *Discourses* 3.25, 271–72.

23. On the threat posed to the life of the republic by the rising power of Spurius Maelius, see *Discourses* 3.28, 276–77.

24. Cincinnatus's handling of Spurius Maelius—in other words the dictator's intervention against the citizen who tries to gain a reputation through "private means" and seeks to establish a tyranny—is considered so important that it is counted amongst the most significant examples, in the history of the Roman republic, of that practice of "return toward beginning," highly recommended by Machiavelli: cf. *Discourses* 3.1, 210.

25. See *Discourses* 3.28, 277: "The private ways are doing benefit to this and to that other private individual—by lending him money, marrying his daughters for him, defending him from the magistrates, and doing for him similar private favors that make men partisans to oneself and give spirit to whoever is so favored to corrupt the public and to breach the laws. A well-ordered republic ought, therefore, to open the ways, as

we said, to whoever seeks support through public ways and close them to whoever seeks it through private ways, as one sees Rome did."

26. Another example of an internal problem, or "danger," whose solution requires the recourse to dictatorship is the possibility of conflict between the two consuls, a problem that can lead to the paralysis of the political life of the republic. Machiavelli analyses the clash, in 431 BC, between Titus Quinctius Cincinnatus and Gnaeus Iulius Mento, which was overcome through the appointment as dictator of Aulus Postumius Tubertus, who had previously held the role of *magister equitum* under Aemilius Mamercus. In *Discourses* 1.50, he remarks that the two consuls, "since they were disunited, had stopped all the actions of that republic. The Senate, seeing this, urged them to create the dictator to do that which they were unable to do because of their discords. But the consuls, in discord in every other thing, were in accord only in not wishing to create the dictator. So, not having any other remedy, the Senate had recourse to the aid of the tribunes, who with the authority of the Senate forced the consuls to obey" (*Discourses* 1.50, 102).

27. *Discourses* 1.5, 19. Machiavelli writes "Marcus Menenius" and "Marcus Fulvius." But actually their real names were Gaius Maenius and Marcus Fostius Flaccinator.

28. Machiavelli follows the path taken by Cicero. In fact, Cicero mentioned only these two reasons for turning to a dictator, i.e., he considered only these two forms of dictatorship. See *De legibus*, trans. Clinton Walker Keyes (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 3.3.9.

29. The ritual was performed in reaction to bad religious omens or, usually, at the ides of September. On this form of dictatorship, see the classic pages written by Arnaldo Momigliano, "Il Dictator Clavi Figendi Causa," in *Quarto contributo alla storia degli studi classici e del mondo antico* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1969), 273–83. Momigliano's essay was first published in 1931.

30. See Cicero, *De legibus* 3. 9; see also *De re publica*, trans. Clinton Walker Keyes (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 1.63 and 2.56.

31. See Gabriele Pedullà, "La ricomparsa di Dionigi. Niccolò Machiavelli tra Roma e Grecia," *Storica* 10, no. 28 (2004): 7–90; Marie Gaille-Nikodimov, *Conflit civil et liberté: La politique machiavélique entre histoire et médecine* (Paris: Champion, 2004), 29–30 and 78–79; Pedullà, "La ricomparsa di Dionigi: Machiavelli e la fondazione del classicismo politico europeo," in *Machiavelli in tumulto*, 419–518.

32. Dionysius's text was available, from 1480, in a Latin translation, prepared by Lampugnino Birago: see *Dionysii Halicarnasei originum sive antiquitatum Romanorum liber primus [-decimus]*, trans. L. Biragus (Tarvisii: per Bernardinum Celerium Delvere, 1480).

33. Cf. Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities*, trans. Earnest Cary (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950), 5.70–72, 3:211–21. Dionysius underplayed the influence of external factors in the creation of the Roman magistracy that were central in Livy's account. His narrative stressed almost exclusively the central role of domestic politics: he described the institution of dictatorship as "an aristocratic political instrument aiming at quelling domestic turmoil and preserving the interests and authority of the patricians" (Andreas Kalyvas, "The Tyranny of Dictatorship: When the Greek Tyrant Met the Roman Dictator," *Political Theory* 35 [2007]: 412–42, here 420).

34. Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities* 5.73.2, 3:223.

35. The time limit of six months was already mentioned in Cicero, *De legibus* 3.9 and in Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities* 5.70.2. Also a fifteenth-century writer, like Andrea Domenico Focchi, mentioned it in his *De Romanorum magistratibus*, published for the first time in Venice in 1475, under the pseudonym of Lucius Fene-stella. I checked the edition published in Florence, by Bartolommeo de' libri, in 1492. In chapter 24, "De dictatore," we read that this magistracy "quoniam quamamplissimus esset, non nisi sex menses retinere licuit."

36. *Discourses* I. 34, 74.

37. See *Ibid.* I.30, 68: "that when one came to the dictatorship he carried away from it the greater glory the sooner he laid it down." Machiavelli found in Livy, *History of Rome* 3.29, 4.47, 6.29 the examples of Lucius Quinctius Cincinnatus, Quintus Servilius Priscus, and Titus Quinctius Cincinnatus, who renounced their dictatorship after sixteen, eight, and twenty days, respectively.

38. *Discourses* I. 33, 71. See also *Discourses* I. 34, 74: "his authority extended to being able to decide by himself regarding remedies for that urgent danger, and to do everything without consultation, and to punish everyone without appeal."

39. On the *provocatio ad populum* and its suspension in times of emergency, see also *Discourses* I.49, 101.

40. *Ibid.* I.34, 74.

41. Carl Schmitt understood this point very clearly when he wrote: "But all these powers have to be distinguished from the legislative activity of government. The dictator cannot change the laws; neither can he suspend the constitution or the organization of office; and he cannot 'make new laws' ('fare nuove leggi'). In a dictatorship, according to Machiavelli, the official administration subsists as a kind of control ('guardia'). Therefore dictatorship was a constitutional instrument for the Republic." Carl Schmitt, *Die Diktatur: Von die Anfängen des modernen Souveränitätsgedankens bis zum proletarischen Klassenkampf* (Munich: Dunker & Humblot, 1921), 7; English translation *Dictatorship: From the Origin of the Modern Concept of Sovereignty to the Proletarian Class Struggle*, trans. Michael Hoelzl and Graham Ward (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014), 4.

42. *Discourses* I.35, 76.

43. *Ibid.* I.34, 74.

44. *Ibid.* I.34, 75.

45. *Ibid.* I.50, 102 and 3. 47, 307.

46. Machiavelli adds that entrusting the nomination of the dictator to the consuls was a psychologically persuasive move. The consuls would have let go of their authority more readily if they were in a position to choose to whom to confer supreme authority over the city: "For wounds and every other ill that a man does to himself spontaneously and by choice hurt much less than those that are done to you by someone else" (*Discourses* I.34, 75). Arato casts some doubts on the persuasiveness of this thesis: "according to Machiavelli this form of nomination was to spare the pride and dignity of the consuls, but that does not seem likely" (Arato, "Conceptual History of Dictatorship," 244).

47. Cf. *Discourses* I.50, 102, for the intervention of the tribunes of the plebs; *Discourses* 3. 47, 307, for the intervention of the "two ambassadors."

48. Cf. Nippel, "Dictatorship," 267B.

49. *Discourses* 1.34, 74; in the Italian original text: "secondo gli ordini pubblici."

50. On Machiavelli's interpretation of tyranny, among recent studies, see John M. Najemy, "'Occupare la tirannide': Machiavelli, the militia and Guicciardini's accusation of tyranny," in *Della tirannia: Machiavelli con Bartolo*, ed. Jérémie Barthas (Florence: Olschki, 2007), 75–108; Giovanni Giorgini, "The Place of the Tyrant in Machiavelli's Political Thought and the Literary Genre of the Prince," *History of Political Thought* 29 (2008): 230–56; Stefano Saracino, *Tyrannis und Tyrannenmord bei Machiavelli: Zur Genese einer antitraditionellen Auffassung politischer Gewalt, politischer Ordnung und Herrschaftsmoral* (Munich: Fink, 2012). See now the precious entry by Jean-Louis Fournel and Jean-Claude Zancarini, "Tirannide," in *Machiavelli: Enciclopedia Machiavelliana*, ed. Gennaro Sasso (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana fondata da Giovanni Treccani, 2014), 2:612–17.

51. In year 302 of Rome's foundation, or 451 BC. On the events involving the decemvirate, cf. Livy, *History of Rome* 3.32–54. For Livy, "the passage from the consulate to the Decemvirate represents a constitutional change comparable to the expulsion of the kings" (Giorgio Inglese in Machiavelli, *Discorsi*, 248).

52. *Discourses* 1.35, 76, for the last three quotations. On the decemvirate, see also *Discourses* 1.40, 85–89. For a contemporary interpretation of the episode of the decemvirate, see John P. McCormick, *Machiavellian Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 84–86.

53. See *Discourses* 1.37, 80: Caesar "was the first tyrant in Rome, such that never again was that city free." See also *Discourses* 1.10, 31–32. Machiavelli follows the path opened by Plutarch; see Plutarch, *Caesar* 57.1. On Machiavelli, reader of Plutarch, see Domenico Taranto, "Machiavelli e Plutarco," *Il pensiero politico* 42 (2009): 167–97; Paolo Desideri, "Plutarco e Machiavelli," in *Saggi su Plutarco e la sua fortuna*, ed. Angelo Casanova (Florence: Firenze University Press, 2012), 283–97.

54. On Leonardo Bruni's interpretation of Caesar, see the classic pages by Hans Baron, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance: Classical Humanism and Republican Liberty in an Age of Classicism and Tyranny* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), 47–75. On the controversies between humanist thinkers on Caesar, see Davide Canfora, *La controversia di Poggio Bracciolini e Guarino Veronese su Cesare e Scipione* (Florence: Olschki, 2001) and *Prima di Machiavelli: Politica e cultura in età umanistica* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2005), 5–55; Thierry Sol, *Fallait-il tuer César? L'argumentation politique de Dante à Machiavel* (Paris: Dalloz, 2005).

55. *Discourses* 1.34, 74.

56. *Ibid.* 3. 24, 269.

57. *Ibid.* 1.34, 74.

58. Claude Nicolet and Wilfried Nippel consider the year 202 BC as the *terminus ad quem*; they emphasize that, from 501 BC to 202 BC, according to the sources, seventy-six dictators were appointed. Cf. Nicolet, "Dictatorship in Rome," 265; Nippel, "Saving the Constitution," 30.

59. In 82 BC Sulla was named dictator with supreme power to reorganize the state (*dictator legibus scribundis et reipublicae constituendae*) by means of a law, later known as the *Lex Valeria*, introduced to the *comitia* by the *interrex* Lucius Valerius

Flaccus. Machiavelli discusses the role of Sulla in many chapters of his work: for example, see *Discourses* 1.37, 80; *Discourses* 3. 8, 238; *Discourses* 3. 24, 270.

60. Machiavelli uses the verb “adonestare” (Machiavelli, *Discorsi*, 134), meaning “to put an honest face”: see *Discourses* 1. 34, 73: “if had not been for this, Caesar would not have been able to put an honest face on his tyranny under any public title.” Andrea Domenico Fiocchi had already made a similar point in his *De Romanorum magistratibus*: “Huius etiam praetextu magistratus L. Sylla, ac deinde Iulius Caesar Rempublicam opprēssere, tyrannidis invisum atque infame nomen evitare cupientes” (chapter 24, “De dictator”).

61. The identity of the writer that Machiavelli criticizes at the beginning of chapter 34 of the first book is not certain. Giorgio Inglese hypothesizes that Machiavelli is referring to Dionysius of Halicarnassus and his *Roman Antiquities* (Inglese, in Machiavelli, *Discorsi*, 247). Francesco Bausi mentions Dionysius of Halicarnassus, but he also suggests the name of Andrea Fiocchi: cf. Niccolò Machiavelli, *Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Tito Livio*, ed. Francesco Bausi (Rome: Salerno Editrice, 2001), 1:167, note 2. Gabriele Pedullà denies that Dionysius is the object of Machiavelli’s criticism. Instead he argues that his targets were the detractors of dictatorship obliquely mentioned by Dionysius (Pedullà, *Machiavelli in tumulto*, 581–87). I am not convinced by Pedullà’s arguments and prefer to adhere to the theses put forward by Inglese, Bausi, and Nippel. Also Nippel, in fact, argues that Machiavelli “rejects the opinion of an ancient author, probably Dionysius of Halicarnassus, that the dictatorship, as demonstrated by the cases of Sulla and Caesar, would inevitably lead to tyranny” (Nippel, “Saving the Constitution,” 36). If we consider what Fiocchi wrote about Sulla and Caesar in the passage quoted in the previous note to this chapter, it emerges that he cannot be considered one of the writers who argues in favor of a continuity between the two institutional forms of power.

62. *Discourses* 1. 34, 74; see F. Saint-Bonnet, *L'état d'exception* (Paris: PUF, 2001), especially 183–89, “Machiavel ou la normalité de l’exceptionnel.”

63. On the antithesis between ordinary and extraordinary modes, see Erica Benner, *Machiavelli's Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009) 367–85.

64. *Discourses* 1.34, 74.

65. *Ibid.* 1.33, 73.

66. *Ibid.* 1.34, 75. I modify the translation. I follow the suggestion of Francesco Bausi, the editor of the recent national edition of the *Discourses*, according to which the verb “vorrebbe” in the passage has to be read as “dovrebbe”: cf. Bausi, in Machiavelli, *Discorsi*, 1:170, note 33. In 1965, Allan H. Gilbert translated the passage in the following way: “Yet it is not good that in a republic anything should ever happen that has to be dealt with extralegally” (Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Chief Works and Others*, trans. Allan G. Gilbert [Durham: Duke University Press], 1:268).

67. *Discourses* 1.34, 75.

68. *Ibid.* 1.34, 73; “suffragi liberi” in the original Italian text.

69. Pasquino, “Between Machiavelli and Carl Schmitt,” 148. Pasquino used this expression to refer specifically to the Roman magistracy, and not to Machiavelli’s theory of dictatorial authority.

70. cf. *Discourses* 1.17, 48.

71. *Ibid.* 1.34, 74.

72. For a recent synthetic account of Machiavelli's approach to the Venetian republic, see Romain Descendre, entry "Venezia," in *Machiavelli: Enciclopedia Machiavelliana*, 2:654–58.

73. *Discourses* 1. 34, 74–75. On Machiavelli and the Venetian Council of Ten, some fine remarks in Gennaro M. Barbuto, *Machiavelli* (Rome: Salerno Editrice, 2013), 174–75.

74. *Discourses* 1.49, 101.

75. See, for example, Algernon Sidney, *Discourses Concerning Government*, ed. Thomas West (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1990), 152: "I do therefore grant that a power like to the dictatorian, limited in time, circumscribed by law, and kept perpetually under the supreme authority of the people, may, by virtuous and well-disciplin'd nations, upon some occasions, be prudently granted to a virtuous man."

76. Cf. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract and Other Later Political Writings*, ed. V. Gourevitch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 138–40.

77. James Harrington, *The Commonwealth of Oceana*, in *The Commonwealth of Oceana and A System of Politics*, ed. John G. A. Pocock (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 10.

78. *Ibid.*, 129–30.

79. Baruch Spinoza, *Tractatus Politicus* 10.1, in *The Political Works*, trans. A. G. Wernham (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958), 430.

80. *Ibid.* 10.2, 431.

81. David Hume, "Idea of a Perfect Commonwealth," in *Political Essays*, ed. Knut Haakonssen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 222.

82. *Ibid.*, 227.

83. Therefore I cannot follow the interpretation put forward by Harvey C. Mansfield, "Machiavelli and Modern Executive," in *Machiavelli's Virtue* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 295–314, especially in the last paragraph entitled "Uno solo," 146–49.

84. *Discourses* 1.34, 75; "questa regia potestà" in the original Italian text.

85. *Ibid.* 3.28, 277; "braccio regio" in the original Italian text.

86. *Ibid.* 1.34, 75.

87. *Ibid.*

88. *Ibid.* 1.34, 74.

89. For example, see Gaille-Nikodimov, *Conflit civil et liberté*; Filippo Del Lucchese, *Tumulti e indignatio: Conflitto, diritto e moltitudine in Machiavelli e Spinoza* (Milan: Ghibli, 2004), English translation *Conflict, Power and Multitude in Machiavelli and Spinoza: Tumult and Indignation* (London: Continuum, 2009); Serge Audier, *Machiavel, conflit et liberté* (Paris: Vrin, 2005); Marie Gaille, *Machiavel et la tradition philosophique* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2007); McCormick, *Machiavellian Democracy*; Miguel Vatter, *Machiavelli's Theory of Political Freedom, with a New Afterword* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014).

90. Cf. Thomas Berns, *Violence de la loi à la Renaissance: L'originnaire du politique chez Machiavel et Montaigne* (Paris: Kimé, 2000), 116–18 for the notion of "circularity"; Del Lucchese, *Conflict, Power and Multitude in Machiavelli and Spinoza*, 90, for

the notion of “recursivity”: “This perpetual recursivity between laws and conflict is the most convincing key to interpreting all aspects of Machiavelli’s reflections on the law.” Del Lucchese prefers to adopt the concept of “recursivity” in this context, for the following reason: “The reciprocal influence between politics and law, and, ultimately, between law and conflict, is not a peaceful, linear process: it ‘jerks’ along continuously, unexpectedly stopping in its tracks at times, or suddenly leaping forward” (177n7).

91. Quentin Skinner has emphasized many times the importance of orders and laws in Machiavelli’s political thought for the experience of liberty. For example, see Quentin Skinner, “The Republican Ideal of Political Liberty,” in *Machiavelli and Republicanism*, ed. Gisela Bock, Quentin Skinner, and Maurizio Viroli (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 293–309; Quentin Skinner, *Liberty before Liberalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Quentin Skinner, “Machiavelli on Virtù and the Maintenance of Liberty,” in *Visions of Politics*, vol. 2, *Renaissance Virtues* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 160–85. But I also want to recall the important remarks made by Claude Lefort on the role of the law in the republic; see Claude Lefort, “Machiavel et la vérité effective,” in *Écrire à l’épreuve du politique* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1992), 141–79.

92. *Discourses* 1.58, 117; see also *Discourses* 1.45, 93.

93. *Ibid.* 1.58, 118; “un popolo incatenato da quelle” in the original Italian text. For a recent interesting account of the role of “orders” and “laws” in Machiavelli’s thought, see Gianfranco Borrelli, “Praticare i conflitti: Il primato del ‘vivere politico’ e il posto della legge in Machiavelli,” in *Niccolò Machiavelli e la tradizione giuridica europea*, ed. Giulia Maria Labriola and Francesco Romeo (Naples: Editoriale Scientifica, 2016), 97–119.

94. See, e.g., *Discourses* 3.25, 271–72.

95. If in *Discourses*, book 1, chapters 16–18, Machiavelli discusses at length the question of the corruption affecting the republic and regards the principality as a possible solution to it, in *Discourses*, book 3, chapter 1, he considers the possibility of the renewal or reordering of the corrupted republic, of its drawing back “towards its beginning.” Cf. *Discourses* 3.1, 209.

96. *Discourses* 3.1, 210.

97. See *ibid.* 3. 22, 266: “Thus one ought to believe that Manlius was constrained to proceed so rigidly by his extraordinary commands, to which his nature inclined him. They are useful in a republic because they return its orders toward their beginning and into its ancient virtue. As we said above, if a republic were so happy that it often had one who with his example might renew the laws, and not only restrain it from running to ruin but pull it back, it would be perpetual.”

98. *Discourses* 1.18, 49; “i gradi della corruzione” in the original Italian text.

99. *Ibid.* 3.3, 214.

100. *Ibid.* for this and the previous quotation.

101. *Ibid.* 3.3, 215; “pigliare istraordinaria autorità” in the original Italian text.

102. On this issue, among recent contributions, see John P. McCormick, “Of Tribunes and Tyrants: Machiavelli’s Legal and Extra-Legal Modes for Controlling Elites,” *Ratio Juris: An International Journal of Jurisprudence and Philosophy of Law* 28 (2015): 252–66.

PART IV

Machiavellian Politics beyond Machiavelli

The Reception of Machiavelli in Contemporary Republicanism: Some Ambiguities and Paradoxes

JEAN-FABIEN SPITZ

The attempts carried out these last thirty years to revitalize republican political thought and to make it a tool for reflection on the situation of contemporary democracies has resulted in a disagreement on the place of Machiavelli in this current of ideas as it developed between the Renaissance and the seventeenth-century revolutions. This disagreement also pertains to the nature of republicanism and the role it can play in the current debate. This chapter's aim is to understand how, today, different approaches to the difficulties facing contemporary democracies, as well as the contradictions met by the manner in which they propose to conceive individual freedom, determine the different appreciations of modern republicanism as an alternative tradition to a liberalism that is seen as responsible for these difficulties and contradictions. In turn, these different appreciations of modern republicanism determine different readings of Machiavelli's political work, inasmuch as it is supposedly at the origin of this alternative political school of thought. It is thus less a question of determining whether such or another conception of freedom attributed to Machiavelli in the course of this debate is really his own, but rather a question of grasping the dissonances between the different voices he is made to speak with and probing their conceptual consistency as well as their respective presuppositions.¹

Some—first and foremost Quentin Skinner—consider modern republicanism to be a reflection on the free city (public affairs placed under the rule of law and not of men) as an indispensable vector of the freedom of its members understood as independence. The republic would thus be a city providing each citizen with a legal and juridical status that protects him from any form of dependence to an arbitrary will, be it that of his cocitizens or that of the state itself. In this perspective, Machiavelli's political

work would be a reflection on the civil and civic institutions indispensable to preserve the freedom of the state as well as the rule of law, and thereby to establish and safeguard the freedom of individuals.

This reading attempts to present Machiavelli as the origin of an ethical line of thought centered on the production of freedom through institutions, and thus on the idea that there exists a great difference between a sum of private interests and a city that integrates and regulates these interests within the framework of a normative and legitimate political order. It also tries to insert the Florentine's work in a tradition that has its roots in what Quentin Skinner calls the "neo-Roman" conception of freedom, with the result that Machiavelli is seen as having proposed a conception of the citizen's freedom that is radically different from that which has prevailed in liberal thought throughout the last two centuries. Instead of being centered on prepolitical rights and of conceiving laws as a constraint on liberties, this alternative conception underlines the essential role played by civic life, as well as that of the rule of law, in the making of a freedom that would not so much be the property of the individual but rather a collective work, a consequence of a well-regulated legal order.

While Skinner's interpretation of Machiavelli's thought has been very influential in the recent period, it seems to be open to criticism on two different levels. First, on an internal level, one can suggest that the conception Skinner attributes to Machiavelli is inconsistent and marked with anachronism. Even if we remain within the limits of the thesis according to which the Machiavellian theory is a theory of freedom as *the product of institutions*, philosophical difficulties appear (section 1). Second, on an external level, critics have underlined that, for Machiavelli, freedom is not the *effect* but the *cause* of institutions, and that institutionalization should be seen more as a threat than as a safeguard of real freedom (section 2).

I. HOW DO REPUBLICAN INSTITUTIONS MAKE CITIZENS FREE? SOME DIFFICULTIES IN THE SKINNERIAN INTERPRETATION

Let's start from the fact that, in Skinner's reading of Machiavelli, there is always an ambiguity in the use of the term "people" and about the idea that laws must be made "by the people." Machiavelli constantly uses the term "people" to distinguish the mass from the elite that strives for power and to indicate that this mass is—on the contrary—animated by a desire not to be subject to domination. Skinner, for his part, is constantly shifting

the meaning of this word to make it designate not the people inasmuch as they are distinct from the elite but as the whole of the components of the city as they are represented by an institutional body. The consequence of this shifting is the complete disappearance of the central idea of Machiavelli's politics, that is to say that the life of the city is rhythmized and dominated by the struggle between two irreconcilable humors. This Machiavellian theme is replaced by the radically different idea that there exists—in the process of representation—a homogeneous people that, as a body, aims at the freedom of its members.² The consequence is that the two opposed humors are placed on the same footing. If, on the one hand, the people as mass constrains the elite's humor to satisfy itself only under a form compatible with the masses' aspirations for nondomination, this same people as a mass, on the other hand, is itself subject to the whole body in which its desire not to be dominated must compose with the opposite humor, and it can never decide on anything without the consent of the elites. Consequently, if it's true that the aspiration to dominate can only be satisfied within the forms compatible with the aspiration to freedom of the masses, this same aspiration for freedom can itself only be satisfied under a form compatible with the aspiration for domination of the elites, that is to say through a legal protection in a system of institutions whose operation is inevitably placed under the guardianship of these elites. Yet Machiavelli explicitly warns us that freedom is only safeguarded if it is placed in the hands of the people. And it is clear that he means the people as mass, and not the people as a whole body.

The idea that the law can make us free is also questionable. Indeed there is in Skinner's interpretation a serious equivocation on the cause-and-effect relationship between law and virtue. The mixed and balanced republican constitution cannot be the cause of the fact that the citizens act, and it is not in this sense that it makes them "virtuous." The real meaning of Skinner's point is that the republican constitution constrains citizens to act in a rational way and to behave so that their actions are really conducive to the freedom they are aiming at. Yet it is difficult to consider as virtuous a citizen whose motivation is either to dominate (the *grandi*) or to reject all kind of power (the *popolo*), because such a citizen is merely constrained by an institutional device not to indulge in the behavior he is inclined to. The American framers of the constitution, for instance, very well understood that such institutional devices do not make citizens virtuous and that, on the contrary, they are made necessary by *the absence of virtue*. They can replace the effects of an absent virtue, but they cannot determine citizens to be virtuous.

What's more, Skinner seems to have committed the sin of anachronism against which he himself warns. He superimposes the diagnosis he makes of the pathologies of modern democracies (citizens are passive and relinquish their freedom by leaving the power in the hands of a minority) to what Machiavelli had to say on the Florence of his time (freedom is at bay because each of the two factions is corrupt in that each one seeks to make its particular interest prevail without accepting to transform it and to make it compatible with that of the rival faction).³ The corruption mentioned by Machiavelli is not passivity—a pathology belonging to negative freedom—but unilaterality, the incapacity to understand that there can be neither freedom nor good government where a part of the city is oppressed by the other. The “institutionalist” Machiavelli, the only one considered in this internal critique, does not reflect on the pathologies of negative freedom—the disinterest for politics, the concentration on civil and material interests to the expense of common action for the safeguard of freedom and legitimacy—but on those affecting the human passions: their incapacity to follow a controlled course.

A third difficulty affects the Skinnerian thesis, according to which civic engagement is a condition of freedom. In effect, it's an argument that bears on the very substance of the law. It says that when the constitutional mechanism constrains any legislative measure promoted by one of the two humors to obtain the agreement of the other one, it is logically impossible that the measures that pass through this filter bear the mark of a particular interest and that those asked to obey them will be placed under the dependence of a rule that illustrates and confirms the will of the rival faction. Yet this reasoning, which seems essential to the consistency of Skinner's thesis, is not always at the center of his analysis. At times, on the contrary, he seems to emphasize another argument, which states that the citizens of a self-governed state are freer because, differently from the subjects of a prince who may alter the law at will, they are not exposed to this type of sudden modification, since the law cannot be changed without their consent. The formal dimension here replaces the substantial, for that which characterizes the citizens of a free state, here, is no longer the assurance that the law is not the instrument of a particular interest but the assurance that the law cannot be subjected to sudden changes. In order to fold one argument upon another, one would have to claim that any law with the assurance that it will not be changed without our consent could be defined as the bearer of a universal value, as being nonarbitrary, and as not contrary to our objective interests. But such an affirmation is problematic. If one considers the authentically Machiavellian theme of an opposi-

tion of principle between two antagonistic interests—that of the *grandi* and that of the *popolo*—it is true that a law that may not be changed without the consent of each of the two is necessarily exclusive of any particular interest. But Skinner commits the sin of anachronism by shifting from the Machiavellian thesis of the opposition between the *two humors* to the contemporary idea of the presence of a *plurality of interest groups* within a society. Now, if one puts aside the analysis of the two humors and seeks to understand in which way a law could be favorable to all *groups* who risk being subject to dominations, or even to all individuals, it becomes absurd to pretend that a law made by all (one that cannot be changed without our consent) cannot oppress one of the groups in question, for the majority easily dictates its law to a minority. Thus the Machiavellian analysis does not apply in a complex society marked by the pluralism of interests, a situation to which Skinner nevertheless keeps on referring under the pretext of analyzing the effects of the opposition between the two humors such as it is conceived by Machiavelli. The latter's analysis does not state that the participation of all guarantees *each one* against oppression. Machiavelli does not trust, as Skinner sometimes implies, the intrinsic wisdom of the majority's voice, nor is he putting forth a "primitive" version of the general will according to which the body could not want to wrong its own members (Skinner 1993, 414). He only shows that, in Rome, the irreconcilable opposition of two humors and the necessity to collaborate that is brought about by the constitution results in legislation having to prove beneficial to both the interests in order to subsist.

And finally there is a major inconsistency in Skinner's thesis. Indeed, he affirms that freedom consists in pursuing one's fixed goals, that is to say, one's private interests, without having to fear the arbitrary interferences of a will other than one's own. The price to be paid for this freedom is to submit to a constitution that imposes a bridle on our tendency to act as we wish, that forces us to restrain or not to satisfy those of our desires that can only be satisfied at the expense of others. The law thus forces the *grandi* to satisfy their appetite for power only in ways compatible with the freedom of the *popolo* by preventing them, when they act as magistrates, from treating their fellow citizens otherwise than in conformity with the law. Conversely, the *popolo* must refrain from their desire not to obey, and satisfy it under the form of having only to obey the impersonal power of laws to which they have themselves consented. Here, it is clear that the free city's institutions constrain citizens to change the form of their aspirations, and not only to make use of other means to obtain a finality that has remained identical. Henceforth, under these institutions, citizens

no longer do what they aspired to do initially. They have not only implemented alternative means to achieve finalities that remained the same, but the law constrains them (or appears to constrain them) to want something else than what they initially wanted.

Yet, Skinner seems, for his part, to postulate that there would exist here a constancy in the finalities and only a variation of the means. It's difficult to play it both ways, though, for if the motivations are constant, citizens have in no way become virtuous through the law. And if, on the contrary, the motivations have changed, we are no longer in the presence of a theory of negative freedom. To maintain his thesis, Skinner would have to claim that the law only constrains citizens to adopt an external conduct in conformity with what would be deemed a virtuously motivated conduct. Yet this "constrained" form of conduct can hardly be defined as a "willingness to cultivate virtue," since it is adopted neither in consideration of its advantages (which the citizens do not perceive, due to a lack of rationality) nor in reason of its intrinsic quality (its morality, its conformity to the general good, the fact that it takes into account the satisfaction of the opposite humor) (Skinner 1986, 230).⁴ As far as this goes, Skinner's thesis contains a double restriction that is hardly Machiavellian: it reduces virtue to rationality (to a sound computation of the means to develop our aspirations), and then it reduces this redefined virtue to its external shape, given that citizens do not tend to act rationally and that the law only constrains them to act *as if* they were rational.

By insistently repeating that the law only constrains us to change the means to attain an invariable aim, and by claiming that the law is the cause of freedom without actually constituting it, Skinner takes his distance from Machiavelli in order to preserve his "revisionist" project. According to Machiavelli, the law does not enable citizens to do what they wish to do just by removing part of their desires. It does not make them "free" in the sense that they can do what they want to do. It determines them—but Machiavelli does not believe that it can do so alone and without a preceding motivation of virtue—to adopt a radically unprecedented form of conduct: the submission to an impersonal law in the case of the *popolo*, and the exercise of a nonarbitrary form of power in the case of the *grandi*. The law is not, in its relationship to freedom, a cause to its effect, and, in this sense, one may well conclude that, after all, the Machiavellian theory of freedom could be seen as a conception of positive freedom. If to be free means acting in a certain manner, we are confronted with a concept of exercise, not because citizens are active in the making of the law but because, be it in commanding or in obeying, they are brought to

conform their conduct to a model that was not the one that they followed initially. In the case of the *popolo*, as in the case of the *grandi*, the variation of the means implies a variation of the ends whereas, when he insists on the idea that the Machiavellian conception is a negative one, Skinner implies that Machiavelli shares the liberal conception of freedom (it is not a form of action, it is not a concept of exercise) and that he distances himself from it only through his approach of means (only active participation in the civic life can keep the citizens free).

As demonstrated by Shaw, Skinner's revisionist project thus constantly oscillates between two contrasting ideas. On the one hand it suggests that the law makes us adopt a *morally superior conduct*, one in conformity with the good life or the moral life, one that takes into account the requirements of common freedom (but in this case we are no longer within the theory of negative freedom). On the other hand, it suggests that the law only constrains us to pursue our goals through different means (but in that case it is impossible to say that the law *makes us virtuous*, or that it makes us good, and we are in a form of "liberal" republicanism akin to that of Madison) (Shaw 2003, 52).

The Skinnerian project also hesitates on the definition of corruption. Is the corrupt man only the one who is lacking in rationality, who cannot see what must be cut back from his own aspirations in order to maximise their satisfaction? Or is he the one who does not wish the absence of power of man over man, who is not possessed by "the love of freedom" in the sense of a collective form of existence ethically justified and marked precisely by this absence of power of man over man? In the first case, the law does not make men virtuous but only more rational. In the second case, it makes them virtuous by forcing them to *desire* such an absence of power. Machiavelli, as suggested by Hannah Arendt, opts for the second idea. For him, the corrupt man is the one who either does not wish to renounce domination (in the case of the *grandi*) or does not renounce acting without submitting to any power (in the case of the *popolo*). The corrupt man is the one who does not want freedom, who does not want to build a legitimate political form that preserves it, and who is not ready to be watchful of its preservation (Vatter 2000, 87). The virtue that the law constrains him to follow is then not an alternative way to satisfy his initial aspirations, but a transformation of them. Thus we have now returned to the idea that the Machiavellian conception of freedom is not a conception of negative freedom.

Simultaneously, it is clear that, if we reason this way, we can no longer accept the idea that the law is the *cause* of virtue, for the latter must in

a sense preexist the legal institutions in order to give birth to the institutions that, in turn, will be able to consolidate it. This means that Skinner's error about virtue—a mere lack of rationality—is interdependent with his error on the fact that the law could be the cause of freedom, that freedom could be imported from the exterior to the citizens through an institutional mechanism.

Shaw comes to the conclusion that as Skinner's revisionist project takes shape—a project that consists of demonstrating the compatibility of a negative conception of freedom with the two paradoxical republican themes (the law forces us to accomplish our duty, the law is a tool of freedom)—the idea that the law makes men more moral, or makes them virtuous, recedes little by little to the background so that Machiavelli becomes a mere source from which to draw a teaching about what kind of institutional devices would be able to channel egoistic acts and make them contribute despite themselves to the public good. But, in this case, Machiavelli ceases to illustrate a trend of thought centered on *republican virtues* that incite the refusal of any power of man over man.

Kari Palonen notices in the same way that, in *Liberty before Liberalism*, the source of the idea of freedom as nondomination refers not only to the Roman historians but essentially to the *Digest*, that is to say, to a juridical conception. The “useful past” found by Skinner in the seventeenth-century English works inspired by this juridical concept that contrasts freedom with slavery proves itself much more useful to him in defending his own conception of negative freedom than the “republican” Machiavelli. This allows us to understand why Skinner has left Machiavelli out of the picture in the later versions of his work (Palonen 1998). Machiavelli indeed is not really compatible with his juridical approach of freedom as a guarantee of rights within a constituted constitutional order (Visentin 2007). It is thus quite natural that, in *Liberty before Liberalism*, Skinner all but dismisses Machiavelli. But this also goes to show that the interpretation that he was attempting to impose on the thought of the Florentine secretary really didn't suit a thinker who claimed that virtue is the principle and not the effect of free institutions.⁵

II. A RADICAL CRITIQUE OF MACHIAVELLI'S CONTEMPORARY REPUBLICAN INTERPRETATION

The most radical critique levelled against republican contemporary readings of Machiavelli's work is nevertheless an external one. Its aim is not

so much to underline problems of consistency but to point out that, for Machiavelli, the art of liberty has nothing to do with the reciprocal neutralization of the two “umori” that are present inside the city and that would be deemed as equally irrational. On the contrary, this art is mainly concerned with the means of making sure that the popular desire for freedom will be predominant over the drive for arbitrary power that animates the “grandi.” This means a Copernican revolution since, instead of claiming that Machiavelli did conceive freedom as the product of an institutional structure, or as the effect of enclosing the people into a stable legal form, the point of this alternative approach is to say that, on the contrary, freedom dies of such an enclosure and that one should rather conceive liberty as the *cause* that gives birth to the legal institutional system, but also as what should always be able to monitor this system, to control it, to reduce it to its first principles. Thus, this external criticism stresses the clear-cut asymmetry between the two “umori,” and it wants to show that, for Machiavelli, liberty cannot be reduced to a stabilized institutional form.

Most recently, several political theorists have thus cast serious doubts on Machiavelli’s place in the republican genealogical tree and its “institutional” bent violently adverse to any independent manifestation of the popular will. John P. McCormick has shown, for instance, that classical republican thought has several aspects that fit very uneasily with Machiavelli’s political ideals. It supposes that an elite of wise or talented men should be in charge of formulating what is good for the people, that such men should play a major part in the exercise of power, that the lower classes are too unruly, too passionate, and too irrational to be trusted with any independent political function, and that “the people” should be seen as a homogeneous whole in which natural elites of talent and knowledge will necessarily emerge, through elections, in the role of natural aristocratic representatives (McCormick 2011). According to McCormick, Machiavelli would have had none of these ideas, since he was favoring a democracy more than a republic in this classical sense. He thought that the main danger for liberty did not come from the unruly passions of the majority, or of the poor, but from the dominating appetite of the wealthy elites. Machiavelli thus thought, according to McCormick, that material inequalities and the aristocratic pulsions to dominate were the major problem for free states and that political means should be found to allow the people to contain the consequences of those inequalities and pulsions. This is why he praised the Roman tribunes of the plebs and suggested that

the *popolo* (that is, the poorest sections of the city) should be invested with some independent powers in order to check the dominating enterprises of the wealthy.

McCormick's criticism thus suggests that the classical republican tradition is intrinsically elitist insofar as the concept of freedom it has put forth—freedom as a legal status securing the individual against subjection to an alien will—requires a kind of virtue that is not available without a social cleavage between a virtuous elite and a deferential mass (see also Olsen 2005). Consequently, such a tradition of thought cannot be used in order to reinvigorate contemporary democracies, nor to imagine the means by which the people would be able to prevent the confiscation of power by representative elites. The diagnosis formulated by classical republicans on the pathologies of modern democracies is centered on the incapacity of representative institutions to capture and to promote the common good. McCormick thinks, on the contrary, that those pathologies have to do less with some incapacity to efficiently melt down the various aspirations that are present inside the city in order to extract the common good from this precipitate, than with the resilience of a deeply rooted relationship of power that leads to the permanent preeminence, inside the so-called stabilized institutional and legal structure of modern democracies, of the will and interests of the governing elite over the democratic aspirations of the greatest number. Whereas the neo-Roman republicans claim that democracies need a searching reflection on the possibility to build genuinely representative institutions able to identify and to promote political measures that are authentically in the interest of the people as a whole, McCormick suggests that such a common interest does not exist and that contemporary democracies can only follow one of two paths: either the government by the people for the people, or the government by the elites for the special interests of the elites. No reconciliation between those two opposing aspirations is possible so that contemporary political thought should exclusively bear on how to make sure that the political power of the people—the very heart of modern freedom—is secured against its erosion in the hands of the elite of the wealthy and the well born.

As we can see, such a deeply seated disagreement on the pathologies of modern democracy cannot fail to affect the way Machiavelli's work is read. Neo-Roman republicans see in the *Discourses* the fountainhead of a line of thought bearing on the way to extract a common public reason through finely tuned institutional devices. But McCormick—following a long tradition of interpretation—rather sees Machiavelli as a major expo-

ment of the idea that politics is first and foremost a recurring struggle between the *popolo* and those who try to confiscate political power for their own profit. Consequently, McCormick claims that what democracies need above all is to invent and to practice exceptional and moderately institutionalized devices in order to put the power of the people somehow out of reach of the dominating elites. For him, the true republic should not be defined as a compromise or as a reciprocal neutralization of particular interests for the sake of a self-proclaimed common good. Such a “balanced” regime always turns out to be in the elite’s interests, so that what real freedom requires is an actual uprooting of the power of man over man. Following many other commentators, he wants to show that Machiavelli’s thought is loaded with elements of radicalism that induce him to look for political ways to secure, if not the political preeminence of the people over the elites, at least some kind of security and defense against the erosion of the popular will at the hands of those who claim to represent it. According to McCormick, those radical elements constitute the main fault line between Machiavelli and the classical republican tradition, and he claims that such elements could be very useful today in order to imagine possible ways to cure the pathologies of modern democracy. But, unfortunately, they are constantly backstaged or overshadowed by the claim that the author of the *Discourses* belongs to a “republican tradition” in which the idea of a common good—not popular democracy—plays the pivotal role.

Similarly, Eric Nelson has suggested that the Roman version of the classical republican tradition, while remaining strongly attached to the idea that private property is the basis of independence and freedom, constantly concludes that such a freedom is to be the privilege of the few, and that the many—who are devoid of independence because they have no independent property—should only show deference toward the elites who, alone, are able to see what is good for the whole (Nelson 2004). Here again, according to Nelson, Machiavelli would have had none of this aristocratic and deferential republic. This is why he praised the agrarian laws as a way to redistribute wealth and to promote actual independence for all, even if he knew that, when the Gracchi brothers attempted such a reform in Rome, it was too late because the “patricians” had accumulated excessive wealth and, through it, excessive power that made such a redistribution impossible (Nelson 2004; Machiavelli, *Discourses*, 1.37). In order to interpret Machiavelli’s thought, one should rather draw from Greek ancient republicanism some ideas that are again more radical than those attributed to him by neo-Roman modern republicans. Greek republicanism did, in particular, put a marked emphasis on the claim that social equality and

redistribution of wealth are the necessary conditions of freedom and the resilience of republican institutions. It also claimed that the existence of an aristocratic elite leading a separate life entirely distinct from that of the greatest number is wholly incompatible with a true republic, with a city that would be a *res publica* securing equal liberty for its citizens. It claimed that such an aristocratic elite would actually be invested with so much wealth, so much influence, so much rhetorical skill, that it would be impossible to maintain them under the rule of the law and to prevent actual power from flowing into their hands (see also Southwood 2002).

As both McCormick and Nelson have suggested, contemporary republicans like Pettit and Skinner have thus reconstructed the republican tradition along lines that lead them to adopt the antipopulist and elitist aspects of the classical version. They fear majority rule much more than elitist domination, and they favor various institutional devices (like Pettit's "depolitization") that are meant to prevent political conflicts (something Machiavelli was not afraid of) but that, in fact, tend to enhance the power of experts over the power of the people. Pettit, as it were, is also quite reluctant to say that no republic oriented toward the common good can exist in the midst of excessive material inequalities of wealth and that a republic worth the name could require severe limitations on the constraining power of private property. Skinner, for his part, is almost completely silent on this social aspect of Machiavelli's thought since he is almost exclusively concerned by political—not social—domination and power.

This current reevaluation obviously tries to distance Machiavelli's political thought from the republican revival by stressing that its democratic and egalitarian components are in sharp contrast with the deferential and hierarchical aspects of the classical version of republicanism. It should be a good opportunity to ask whether the institutional aspects of the republic as put forth by Pettit but also by Quentin Skinner are actually those that are required for making real nondomination an actual component of civil and civic life today. Should republican institutions aiming at securing nondomination for all be oriented toward representation in a mixed constitution, depolitization devices, contestation forums, and a market economy with few qualms about inequalities and the constraining power of private property? Or should they gravitate toward the two following ideas? The first is that the "common good" is the good of the *popolo* as the greatest number, those who want not to be oppressed. It is a matter for their collective decisions to identify it, independently of any process of incorporation and representation if necessary. Such an identification

should not be trusted to decisions located within the confines of the law, to some expert reasoning on the “objective interests of the people” by self-proclaimed elites. The second idea is that no freedom is available where property can be accumulated and concentrated in a way that confers huge constraining powers to the owners of massive property and wealth, so that a true republic requires at least an “embedded” market.

Though highly contested and contestable, these two “Machiavellian” ideas can be given some philosophical and argumentative credentials. Moreover, they should be at the center of an updated republicanism for the modern times that would show less reverence for the elitist and institutional version of classical republicanism and for its undue adoration of private property and the so-called common good in which, in a bizarre manner, the appetite for power is supposed to be as legitimate as the popular desire for freedom. No doubt, Skinner’s reading is less distant from those radical ideas than Pettit’s, but his interpretation remains deeply marked by several hesitations that lead him to water them down and to maintain the thesis that freedom depends not so much on the people remaining the master of their own fate as on the fact that everyone in the city abides by a law supposed to materialize and express the common good. But inevitably, as Skinner seems reluctant to notice, the elites of wealth and influence will gain a preponderant role in interpreting the laws and managing the institutions so that they serve their own interest. Machiavelli, for his part, was much more alert to such corruption, and he knew that, in any stable institutional system, the *grandi*’s drive for domination would get the upper hand over the *popolo*’s aspiration to freedom.

The external critique thus underlines the important measure in which Skinner’s interpretation remains within the confines of the liberal paradigm at the very moment when it tries to expose and to criticize its restrictive character. Skinner takes little account of the superiority Machiavelli grants to the popular love of liberty over the aristocratic drive for power. He does not give pride of place to the Machiavellian idea that the people are the best guardians of their own liberty (Del Lucchese 2004). Instead, he seems to put the two “*umori*” on the same footing so that, in his view, freedom is not linked to the people’s ability to act in an autonomous way but to the insertion—which is also a domestication—of the popular will into a legal structure that imprisons and stifles it while giving it a very partial satisfaction that, paradoxically for a theory of freedom, has to be compatible with the appetite of the “*grandi*” for domination and power. Such a view implies that, under any but the limited and tamed form it assumes when constrained in a legal structure, the popular will can only

tend to an anarchical, illimited, and intrinsically corrupted way of acting, which needs to be offset by the humor of the *grandi*. It is clear, then, that freedom appears as a consequence of the reciprocal neutralization of two equally dangerous humors and not of the political preeminence of the people over the elites. On the contrary, according to the external critique of Skinner's approach, Machiavelli's thesis is precisely that common freedom can only be founded on such a preeminence, on this ability of the people to have things their way and not to let their aspiration for freedom be frozen, eroded, or confiscated by an elite through the political process taking place inside the institutional and legal structure.

Machiavelli seemed to be conscious that the specific qualities of the elites as well as their social situation and their wealth enable them to play the major part in institutionalized processes and to twist or delude the popular will in order to build inexpugnable positions of power inside the legal structure. Thus, even if it does seem to be true that the elites can be trusted—under an adequate disposition of the legal structure—to make a positive contribution to freedom of their own, it remains that only the *popolo*, conceived as the greater number, or the nonaristocratic section, of the population, has the true will to impose institutions favorable to freedom. Those institutions can remain free only if that same people has the power to control them, to found them anew when necessary, and to reduce them to their primary principles so as to master the processes of corruption that inevitably affect them. But, quite strangely, Skinner leaves entirely aside this problem of the internal corruption of the legal structure in which he puts so much confidence. He neglects entirely the Machiavellian claim that the extralegal activity of the people is an essential part of the art of freedom, and he concentrates only on the supposedly stable form that an adequate institutional structure is supposed to be able to confer to civic liberty. The dynamic aspects of the problem of freedom—mainly the corruption that affects free institutions because of the central role they are constrained to give to elites—seem to escape his attention. And so does also the reflection Machiavelli devotes to the ways and means by which the *popolo* could act outside the institutions in order to prevent or contain the erosion of their own place inside those same institutions.

Quentin Skinner could thus be charged for his inability to distance himself from a *rights-centered* conception of politics that conceives freedom as the individual enjoyment of well-defined legal guarantees, and for his inability to acknowledge that politics is first and foremost a matter of conflict and power. In such a conflict-based approach, there can be no freedom without a stern and primitive determination in the *popolo* to control—and

reject when necessary—the power of man over man. Skinner thus misses one essential aspect of Machiavelli's thought by letting recede backstage the idea that freedom is less a matter of individual rights than of collective will. More than in a set of legal guarantees, Machiavelli is interested in the way popular movements are able to give birth to a mixed constitution and, above all, in the way germs and processes of corruption arising inside such institutions can be prevented or cured by movements of refoundation and returning to first principles. What could enable the *popolo*, when the legal structure is functioning on its proper footing—but also when the founding moment is receding back in time—, to preserve their own constituent and supreme collective power from its erosion and manipulation into the hands of the representative elites? How can the liberty-aspiring masses keep the upper hand over institutions to which they must trust their fate, but at the same time remain deeply suspicious, because their very enemies are well entrenched inside the citadel that is meant to defend them? What are the political means able to keep the legal structure on its proper orbit, to make sure that the mixed constitution remains at the service of freedom? What can prevent it from turning into a means of oppression, as it inevitably tends to do, because, by its own nature, it allows the elites to be the sole interpreters of what is required by the rights it is supposed to secure?

For sure, Skinner endeavors, in a manner that seems contradictory to his radical critics, to emphasize both the political thesis that the *popolo* is the best guardian of their own liberty and the legal thesis that freedom is the negative enjoyment of guaranteed rights by independent individuals. In a way, this is the very meaning of Skinner's project, which aims at demonstrating the possibility of marrying a negative theory of freedom with the idea that citizens must exercise virtues and civic duties in participating in and defending republican institutions. But those two aspects are more incompatible than Skinner wants to admit because, if freedom is conceived exclusively as the product of institutional artifacts, its defense and preservation require, in Miguel Vatter's words, that the uniqueness of the political event and of the manifestation of the popular will, which always appear as destabilizing factors, be excluded from politico-institutional life. Nevertheless, it is precisely when the very process by which the popular will is both stymied and channeled in the name of its dangerousness for legal rights and stabilized governance that corruption creeps in and the erosion that substitutes the interests of the elites for those of the freedom-loving *popolo* takes place (Vatter 2000, 13, 79). Skinner does not seem to take this view of corruption seriously, and he reduces it to a type of irrational behavior. But actually, corruption is less a defect

of the mind than an inescapable bent of all institutional forms, which, by their own nature, tend to transform political will into rights, movement into stability, the drive to reject power of man over man into a desire of secure possession of material goods, and nondomination into negative liberty (Vatter 2000, 87). On the one hand, Skinner tries to rehabilitate the collective dimension of politics, the collective act of giving shape to and remodeling the legal structure through popular mobilization, which is the very heart of the Machiavellian theory of freedom. But, on the other hand, at the very moment when he tries to insert such a mobilization into his own approach, he weakens its meaning by presenting it as an irrational humor, and he cuts off its centrality by claiming that the central question of politics is not so much what happens in the act of instituting a legal structure but what is generated inside this structure. This is also why Skinner does not succeed in giving true importance to the Machiavellian claim that civil discords and disorders have played a major role in the birth and preservation of Roman republican freedom. In fact, this claim is nothing but the other face of the idea that any stable legal order tends to be corrupt because its very stability is the sign that the elites have arrogated its management for themselves and oriented it toward the satisfaction of their own drive for power.

The external criticism thus underlines how much Skinner is wide off the mark as far as Machiavelli's conception of freedom is concerned. In the version presented by the radical critics, freedom is a practice without rules that is at the origin of all rules, a practice without form that is at the origin of all institutional forms but that cannot be reduced to any of them without being perverted. It is a practice of collective opposition to any kind of established power. In this view, the *res publica* would refer not to a legal order encapsulating stable rights for all and supposed to be able to satisfy jointly the different interests present in the community but to a reiterable event by which, according to Vatter's words, forms of legal power are instituted, constantly monitored, and changed in a revolutionary manner.

Beyond this critique, there is a second important claim in the radical approach. The main feature of Machiavelli's political thought is that there is no natural concept of what the common good should be, no common interest, and that politics has necessarily the form of a recurring conflict between those who want to dominate and those who want to be free from any domination. But, if this is true, the idea that the people could be made into a homogeneous whole through well-ordered institutions is a dangerous myth, since it is always when it becomes commonsense that the

popolo and the *grandi* have the same interests (the stability of the legal order, the absence of precariousness in the enjoyment of rights) that the door is wide open for domination to creep in. This is the reason why the mixed constitution, which is supposed to give satisfaction both to the desire for freedom and to the desire for power, cannot be stable as an instrument of common independence. It is always affected by a dynamic that tends toward either usurpation by the elites or popular revolution. In consequence, the fate of freedom depends less on the way the legal structure is balanced than on the direction toward which its movement is heading. Its natural bent is toward usurpation by the elites who are mightily advantaged when the question is who is better able to manage a legal structure from the inside. If this is the case, the main point in order to keep freedom alive is to find extra- or marginally institutional means in order to prevent such a corruption. But, following Pocock's example, Skinner remains convinced that freedom lies in the resilience of a stable legal order, not in a principle of revolutionary instability. He seems to miss the fact that, if virtue exists, it is inherently in the *popolo*, and it certainly cannot be instilled into it by legal means. In that light, the very idea that institutions could force the citizens to be free, to exercise their vigilance and civic activity, appears as an illusion both risky and hollow. The institutionalization of freedom in a stable legal structure has a tendency to stifle virtue rather than to energize it, and it is the evident mark of its absence or exhaustion more than of its vigor.

Skinner tends moreover to conceive corruption as a mere lack of rationality, as if the constitutive parts of the city were targeting a common aim (freedom) but that, left alone, they tended to an illimitation in contradiction with the satisfaction of their own desires. He constantly substitutes, as the internal criticism was already noticing, an imaginary people conceived as a unified whole rendered homogeneous by a suitable constitution for the actual *popolo* as the greater number of those who want to escape domination. According to Machiavelli, those popular masses are animated by a drive that is invested with universal value and that, as a consequence, should not be seen as a particular interest "among others" or in need of restraint in order to be intrinsically legitimate. The Machiavellian city, according to the external critique, does not put face-to-face two parties that would aim at the same thing but that would merely be both mistaken about the adequate way to reach it. It is a conflict between two desires that are so contradictory that freedom can only be the result of the *popolo's* drive for the absence of power taking decisive precedence over the *grandi's* drive for domination. Thus corruption has less to do with irra-

tionality or an ignorance about means, and more with the way supposedly free institutions are wont to let hardly detectable forms of arbitrary power entrench themselves through legal formalities.

III. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Skinner thus seems to have given inadequate weight to the link, in Machiavelli's thought, between freedom and the preeminence of the popular will. Like Pettit, he distances himself from a "populism" that he perceives more as a danger than as a universal value (Pettit 2013). But one can suspect that there is another reason for this distancing. Neither Skinner nor Pettit has thoroughly taken into account the possibility that social equality should be considered a necessary condition for freedom. But, as Rousseau has seen, the preponderant role of the popular will leads to real freedom for all only if the citizens are invested with degrees of wealth and influence that are sufficiently similar for the thesis that nobody can will anything for others without willing it at the same time for himself to be true. It is only when such an egalitarian situation prevails that it can be said that the people cannot want its own wrong as a body and that it cannot collectively want to oppress one of its parts either. This is the reason why Machiavelli constantly said that freedom becomes impossible in a city where a class of *grandi* manages to live on an aristocratic footing. In a society where interests would be so different, and even opposed, the preeminence of the popular will would actually have a great probability of turning into a tyranny of the poor over the rich. If one reasons within the confines of a pluralist model where there is no acceptable motive why one of the interest should prevail over the others, such a tyranny is so unacceptable that one is led to reject the very idea that the greater number should always be able to have things their way. But if, as Machiavelli does, one reasons in terms of a conflict between the desire for freedom and the desire for power, one can see no objection to the idea that the masses should "tyrannize" the elites and prevent them from satisfying their thirst for domination. One has then to conclude that such a "tyranny" in the name of freedom can maintain itself only if the elites are deprived of their main weapon—wealth and influence—and if they are allowed to keep only their superiority of intellectual qualities and political vision, which they are then constrained to put at the service of the freedom of the people if they want to access positions of eminence and authority. A republic does indeed need men of talent because only such men are able to anticipate the

impending risks and display the necessary “spirit of decision” required for the preservation of a free state. But it is also necessary that those exceptional men can use only their personal qualities and talents in order to rise over their cocitizens since, if such was not the case, the magistracies they would be trusted with would immediately become instruments of arbitrary power. That’s what Machiavelli intended to say when he claimed that a state cannot remain free if it ignores the art of maintaining all its citizens in a state of poverty.⁶ Conversely, if both Skinner and Pettit seem highly skeptical about the idea that freedom stems from the decisive superiority of the *popolo* over the elites, it is because they think that nondomination can exist even in the presence of wide material inequalities. The way they are fascinated by political forms of domination prevents them from seeing the very acute kinds of social domination that have so often been and still are able to subvert the best-contrived institutional liberties.

McCormick also claims that the way contemporary republicans misrepresent Machiavelli’s thought leads to similar results. On the one hand, it underestimates both the way Machiavelli incriminates as adverse to freedom the social preeminence of the aristocratic class, and the way he looks for possible ways to stifle it. On the other hand, it overestimates the so-called classical republican tradition by seeing it as a doctrine of nondomination aiming at the uprooting of the power of man over man, whereas actually it is a doctrine of the preeminence of the self-proclaimed elites of wealth and wisdom through legal representative institutions that allow them to make their drive for power prevail under the guise of the common good.

These two consequences are severe for the way Machiavelli is understood since he is misrepresented as a political writer that accepts social hierarchy and has no doubts about its compatibility with real freedom. But they are severe also for those who wish to cure the pathologies of contemporary democracies, since such an approach misleads them into looking for institutional ways to harmonize the interest of the people with those of the elites. It appears then that a true republic requires a stern determination to fight both the elite’s drive for power and their drive to accumulate wealth. But if such is the case, the so-called contemporary republicanism—by being blind to how easily wealth is translated into power—accepts and comforts the hypocritical nature of the democracies of today: the rule of the elites through wealth and influence under the guise of the one-man, one-vote rule and the dogma of equal rights (Visentin 2009, 637).

 NOTES

1. As Wilamowitz has said: "We know that ghosts cannot speak until they have drunk blood; and the spirits which we evoke demand the blood of our hearts. We give it to them gladly; but if they then abide our question, something of us has entered into them, something alien that must be cast out in the name of truth." Wilamowitz, *Greek Historical Writings* (1908), quoted in Hugh Lloyd Jones, *Blood for the Ghosts: Classical Influences in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (London: Gerald Duckworth and Co. Ltd., 1982). As I shall attempt to demonstrate, it appears that contemporary republicans have succeeded in transfusing their own blood to Machiavelli's ghost, but that they haven't succeeded in the second part of the operation, which consisted in its extraction in order to avoid for Machiavelli to speak in *their* voice about problems *they* are preoccupied with.

2. See Skinner 2002b, 197: "The grandi and popolo alike aim to be free in the sense of being unobstructed in the pursuit of the particular goals they choose to set themselves"; this view has been fiercely criticized by Visentin 2007, 186.

3. Machiavelli, *Istorie fiorentine* 5.1

4. Skinner refers several times to Machiavelli's scepticism as far as the possibility of transforming man's natural egoism into "a willing and virtuoso/virtuous concern for the common good" (for instance, Skinner 2002b, 173).

5. Palonen 1998, 247 quotes a passage in which Skinner explicitly acknowledges that Machiavelli doesn't speak of rights, "whereas the neo roman conception of freedom is exclusively framed in terms of guaranteed rights" (*Liberty before Liberalism*, 18); see also Visentin 2007, 182: "Rimane pero difficile sfuggire alla presa del giusnaturalismo, nella misura in cui la liberta neo romana si determina comunque attraverso il godimento privo costrizioni di un certo numero di diritti civili."

6. Machiavelli, *Discorsi* 1.37, 1.55, 3.16, 3. 25

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On the Myth of a Conservative Turn in Machiavelli's *Florentine Histories*

JOHN P. MCCORMICK

The notion that the later political writings of Niccolò Machiavelli, especially the *Florentine Histories*, express the former Florentine secretary's conservatism has today become something like settled opinion.¹ Even many scholars who tend to locate Machiavelli's political preferences, as reflected in *The Prince* and the *Discourses*,² toward the democratic rather than aristocratic side of the republican political spectrum, conclude that the more mature author of the *Histories* transformed his views in several fundamental ways; most prominently, that Machiavelli became substantively more critical of common people and more laudatory of elites than he was in his earlier writings.³

In what follows, I hope to demonstrate that the specific details of Machiavelli's historical account of the respective actions of the Florentine people and nobles within the *Histories* decisively undermine any general, evaluative statements on Machiavelli's part that overtly criticize the people, and that signal a newfound sympathy for the nobles. I suggest, therefore, that proponents of the "conservative-turn" thesis err when they rely overwhelmingly on the latter to the utter neglect of the former in their analyses of the *Histories*. They consistently ignore the blatant discontinuity between, on the one hand, Machiavelli's demonstration of *how* common people and nobles behave throughout the book and, on the other, *what* he says about the behavior of these respective groups in the work. I will argue that the former contravene the latter, and that the literary-rhetorical method deployed by Machiavelli in the *Histories*—a mode of writing through which, even more so than in *The Prince* and the *Discourses*, deeds trump words—substantially reinforces, rather than in any way undermines, Machiavelli's previously expressed democratic republicanism in his later, seemingly more conservative, political writings.

Sometimes Machiavelli directly contradicts himself in the *Histories*, as when he insists that the Florentine people refused to share political offices with the nobles (FH 3.1), only a few paragraphs after he describes in explicit detail precisely how the people had tried, very much in good faith, to do just that (FH 2.39). At other times, Machiavelli engages in—to use an unlovely phrase—descripto-normative incongruity: he often denounces popular behavior as inappropriate, excessive, or indecent when, in fact, indications in the *Histories*, and statements from previous works, suggest that Machiavelli not only tolerates but actually countenances such conduct. For instance, Machiavelli criticizes the Florentine plebs for creating a commotion in the streets during an important council meeting at the height of the Ciompi Revolt (FH 3.15). But by Machiavellian standards that explicitly favor tumults as civically salutary events (or minimize them as harmless occurrences) (FH 3.1; D 1.4), this unruly behavior ought to be judged as either perfectly appropriate or morally neutral—especially since the plebs, in this instance, inflict no bodily harm on their political adversaries among the city’s magistrates.

The evidence affirming Machiavelli’s consistent view of social classes across the span of his political writings, I will demonstrate, is deeply embedded within the *Histories*’s narrative, which, in what follows, I will be compelled to recapitulate at length. Moreover, I suggest, it only becomes apparent—without explicit signaling on Machiavelli’s part—when one compares Machiavelli’s accounts of the people and the great in the *Histories* with those set forth in *The Prince* and the *Discourses*. After explicating the peculiar form of rhetorical exposition that Machiavelli deploys throughout the *Histories*, I suggest that conservative-turn scholars fail to take seriously the immediate context of the book’s composition—a context in which the addressees of the book, the Medici prelates who ruled Florence through their “friends” (*amici*) among the Florentine aristocracy, had come to view the city’s common citizens as stalwart enemies, and the people had come to view Florence’s rulers as illegitimate tyrants.

I. A MORE PESSIMISTIC VIEW OF THE PEOPLE? A MORE LAUDATORY VIEW OF THE NOBLES?

The following, frequently quoted passage from the *Florentine Histories* plays a central role in virtually every scholarly effort endeavoring to demonstrate that Machiavelli became more critical of the common people in the *Histories* and other works of the 1520s than he was in *The Prince* and the *Discourses*:

While the Roman people desired to *share* supreme honors with the nobles, the Florentine people fought to govern Florence *all alone without the nobles' participation*. As the desire of the Roman people was *more reasonable*, the nobles came to view popular offenses as more bearable, and they conceded to them more readily, without taking up arms. Therefore, after disputes, [the Romans] came together to make laws that satisfied the people and permitted the nobles to *maintain their dignities*. On the contrary, because the desires of the Florentine people were so *harmful and unjust*, the nobility defended itself with greater force, which resulted in more bloodshed and exile for citizens. Moreover, the laws that were subsequently enacted [in Florence] *never corresponded with the common good*, but rather reflected *the advantage of whosoever prevailed* in any particular conflict. . . . Thus, the [Florentine] *nobles' military virtue and generosity* were entirely eliminated . . . such that Florence became more humble and servile. (FH 3.1, emphases added)⁴

I will now focus on three episodes from the *Histories* where Machiavelli's account of popular behavior drastically (and I would say deliberately) repudiates the evaluative judgment that the Florentine himself levels in the above quoted passage: popular conciliation with the nobles after the overthrow of the Duke of Athens's tyranny (FH 2.39–42); the people's relenting from destroying the nobles after the departure of popular champion Giano della Bella (FH 2.14); and the supposedly evil and indecent behavior exhibited by the Florentine plebs during the Ciompi Revolt (FH 3.12–15).

It is necessary and illuminating, I contend, to read such episodes from the *Histories* with the aim of assessing the extent to which Machiavelli's evaluative judgments prove compatible with the political circumstances he describes: that is, to put it somewhat crudely, it is worth asking whether Machiavelli's adjectives match his verbs when he discusses the political actions of the Florentine nobles and people. My intuition is that most of Machiavelli's evaluative judgments of the nobles and the people expressed in the *Histories* are consistently belied by his actual descriptions of each group's behavior. I suggest that, at almost every point when Machiavelli explicitly criticizes the people in the book, he places material within the details of the events and actions he describes that seriously mitigates those criticisms, especially when judged by the standards set by the former Florentine secretary in *The Prince* and the *Discourses*.

Allow me now to explore at length the details of these three cases that bear directly on claims made by the now abundant number of schol-

ars who insist that Machiavelli became much more critical of the lower classes of republics in his later, more Florence-focused, as opposed to his earlier, more overtly ancient-influenced, writings.

II. THE NOBLES CAUSE THEIR OWN DEFEAT AND DISENFRANCHISEMENT (1343)

The first episode that explicitly contradicts Machiavelli's claim regarding popular intransigence over sharing offices with the nobles occurs exactly five paragraphs before Machiavelli makes the oft-cited declaration at the outset of book 3, quoted above. In the aftermath of the expulsion of Florence's protector cum tyrant, Walter Brienne, the so-called Duke of Athens, Machiavelli explicitly shows at the conclusion of book 2, despite his claims at the start of the very next book, that the Florentine people reformed the republic's constitution precisely with the intention to "share" offices with the nobles. These constitutional revisions, as Machiavelli indicates, were intended to benefit "the common good" and not any particular political actor or group.

Furthermore, Machiavelli makes plain the fact that the truce between the people and the nobles, who had cooperated in overthrowing Walter, is disrupted by the nobles; the latter resort to violence in their efforts to exert a preponderance of power within the Signoria, the supreme magistracy of the city, whose seats the people had reopened—quite reasonably and with an eye toward the common good and not partisan advantage—to the nobility. By using violence to intimidate members of the *popolo* in these circumstances, the nobles ignite the war that brings about their own military defeat and political disenfranchisement at the hands of the people. The latter's initial impulse, on Machiavelli's straightforward description (if not his explicit assessment) was, again, to share offices with the nobles rather than to deploy force to exclude them entirely from such offices.

As Machiavelli begins to recount these events, he reports that once the great and the *popolani* expelled Walter, both groups deliberated over constitutional reforms and agreed that a third of the Signoria would go to the nobles and, furthermore, that the nobles would hold half of all the positions in the republic's other magistracies (FH 2.39). By granting the nobles a third of the Signoria's seats, and half of all other offices, the people willingly consent to considerable overrepresentation of the nobility within the city's government, given the nobility's smaller percentage of the citizenry overall.

These reforms make clear the fact that Machiavelli is fully aware that

the Florentine people, no less than their Roman antecedents, were willing to share the highest magistracies with their republic's nobility. It was not the people who created the circumstances under which the nobles would be entirely, and permanently, expelled from such offices. As Machiavelli himself observes at this juncture: "If the great had been inclined to comport themselves with the modesty requisite for a civil way of life, the city would have lived contentedly under this order of government. But the great could tolerate neither companions in private life nor colleagues in the magistracies—they desired to be lords" (FH 2.39). Just as he had in both *The Prince* and the *Discourses*, Machiavelli here attributes an unquenchable appetite or humor for oppression to the nobles—they desire undisputed distinction (status) and rule (power) over all others in the city (P 9, D 1.3–5). Moreover, in contradistinction to what he declares at the outset of book 3 of the *Histories*, Machiavelli, in this instance, shows that the nobles, not the people, behave "unreasonably" in wanting to rule the city "alone," without any "participation" from their class adversaries.

Machiavelli then recounts how daily outbursts of insolence and arrogance on the part of the great against the people thoroughly outraged the latter, who lamented that they had merely swapped one tyrant, in the person of the duke, for a thousand tyrants, in the form of the recently enfranchised nobles (FH 2.39). Machiavelli's description of the resulting circumstances—"insolent displays abounding on one side and indignant ones on the other"—fully comports with Machiavelli's assertion in the *Discourses* that "insolence" is the most frequent expression of the aristocratic appetite to oppress, and that "indignation" or "rage" over such insolence is the most common expression of the people's desire not to be dominated (D 1.16).

The *popolani* soon complain to Florence's archbishop of the nobles' violence and indecency (FH 2.39). The word that Machiavelli uses to describe the nobility's "indecency" in this instance, *disonestà*, calls to mind the opposite quality, *onestà*, that Machiavelli attributes to the people in *The Prince*, when he attests to the latter's superior goodness, decency, and justice over the nobles (P 9). Here, the popular leaders prevail upon the archbishop to once again grant "the people alone" exclusive tenure in the Signoria. But the people do not, in this instance, seek to shut the nobility out of the government altogether, preserving, in some part, their "dignities" by upholding their eligibility to serve in the city's other major magistracies.

Unmoved by this concession, the nobles, especially Ridolfo de' Bardi, then prepare to seize the entire government by force, which prompts the

people to likewise mobilize themselves militarily (FH 2.39). Machiavelli reports how much shouting and tumult ensues at the Palazzo della Signoria as the two sides confront each other: the nobles vociferously support their fellow aristocrats within the Signoria, and the people publicly demand that the noble priors resign their offices. However, Machiavelli reports that many nobles did not, in fact, show up to defend their own magistrates, choosing instead to remain in their houses rather than dare to confront “the entire armed people” (FH 2.39). So much for the nobles’ “military virtue and generosity” later invoked by Machiavelli.

The sitting priors representing the people then take up the cause of the noble priors, at first trying to calm the people’s animosity toward the latter by insisting that the noble members of the Signoria were “men of modesty and goodness.” But, failing in the effort to save the nobles’ offices, they order their noble colleagues escorted safely home through the intensely hostile crowd. It is worth noting that the popular priors do not turn on their noble colleagues (they abide by collegiality, a quality that, as Machiavelli mentioned previously, was not observed by the nobles), and the agitated Florentine people in the piazza do not attempt to harm or kill the noble members of the Signoria while the latter proceed to their homes.

In the ensuing armed conflict between the nobles and the people, the latter ingeniously attack the nobles through an undefended road to the rear of their fortifications. Machiavelli notes that the most intransigent noble family, the Bardi, “lost their spirit,” abandoned their defenses, and surrendered (FH 2.41). The people, who, Machiavelli notes, had treated the nobles humanely at the start of hostilities, now (perhaps because of the massive losses they subsequently incurred) treated the last holdouts, the Bardi, with abject cruelty. Machiavelli remarks that even Florence’s worst enemies would have been ashamed of their behavior: the people, especially “the most ignoble among them,” thoroughly ravaged and burned to the ground all the houses and towers of the Bardi. From a different perspective, though, we might instead consider whether this is a less than fully unjust outcome since, as Machiavelli reported two chapters previously, it was Ridolfo de’ Bardi who initiated this conflict that brought the entire city to arms and cost the *popolo* such massive losses. Indeed, throughout book 2, the Bardi is one of the noble families most guilty of disrupting the civic peace and of threatening the people’s liberty, not least of all by helping to facilitate the rise of the Duke of Athens (e.g., FH 2.32–33, 2.36).

Having thoroughly conquered the great in open battle, Machiavelli describes how the people then reorder the city by distributing all the seats in the Signoria among the upper, the middling, and the minor guilds, and by

banning the nobles from holding any public offices whatsoever (FH 2.42).⁵ Machiavelli comments how the nobles, who were not content with wielding a significant albeit partial portion of the government, ultimately wound up losing *all* of it, as a result of their attempt to seize by force the lordship of the entire city (FH 2.39).

Machiavelli declares here that the nobles were so devastated by this defeat that they never again resorted to arms against the people and that they became “more humane and miserable” (FH 2.42). But his own later accounts of their machinations and behavior during “the War of the Eight Saints” and, as we will observe, the Ciompi Revolt, raise serious questions about the veracity of this assessment. In particular, as captains of the still-powerful Guelf Party, the nobles would later nearly bring the city to civil war by conspiring once again to seize the Signoria by force and expel their adversaries from it (FH 3.8). One could argue that through their surreptitious prodding of the city’s dissatisfied working class they actually do instigate a full-scale civil war in the form of the Ciompi Insurrection (FH 3.12–13).

In any case, as a result of this popular victory over the great, Machiavelli declares, “Florence lost its arms and its generosity” (FH 2.42). But this raises pressing questions: Why is this the case? Weren’t the people both sufficiently armed and tactically adept to beat the supposedly more militarily skilled and valorous nobles? Moreover, since Machiavelli peppers his account here and elsewhere with hints of cowardly behavior on the part of the nobles, just how “generous,” in the sense of military spirit, does he actually consider them to be?⁶ Moreover, why did the victorious people not maintain and expand their arms for the good of the city? Machiavelli later reveals that by mixing with the nobles, increasingly at the latter’s initiative, the people begin to take on all of the nobles’ bad attributes—an appetite for domination—while losing the good attribute that they previously shared with them—military virtue.

III. THE PEOPLE RELENT FROM DESTROYING THE NOBILITY (1295)

I turn now to the second example from the *Florentine Histories*, which I believe demonstrates that Machiavelli does not fully endorse his own indictment of the Florentine people for harboring “unreasonable desires” and for committing “harmful and unjust” acts in their dealings with the city’s nobility. It occurs earlier in book 2 of the *Histories*, after the people’s champion, Giano della Bella, has decided to leave the city rather than

employing violence to enforce his Ordinances of Justice—laws that were intended to restrain the nobles from inflicting, via legal and extralegal means, harm on members of the *popolo*.

While the nobles and the people were poised to engage in open warfare, an informal committee comprised of well-meaning members of the people, the nobles, and the clergy intervenes in the conflict (FH 2.14). As a result of this intercession, Machiavelli shows that the people relent from oppressing—indeed, possibly destroying—the nobles, when they have the opportunity to do so. The episode seems to conform quite closely to Machiavelli's claims in the *Discourses* that the people can be persuaded from behaving rashly and unjustly (most of the time) by the words of "a good man" (D 1.2, 1.5, 1.59) or, in this case, good men. The trilateral commission begs the people not to press their numerical advantage against the nobles and instead to accept the political gains that they have already made. The people, in response, not only relent from armed conflict with the nobles but actually relax the legislative restrictions that they and Giano had previously imposed upon the great.

As the nobles and the guildsmen take up positions against each other around the city, Machiavelli describes how a group of guildsmen, nobles, and clergy took up the role of mediators and attempted to quell the impending conflict by addressing each group directly (FH 2.14). First approaching the great, the mediators insist that the nobility's "arrogance," "misgovernance," and "evil modes of proceeding" have brought them to these straits with the people and compelled the latter to strip them of their honors and offices and to pass punitive legislation against them. They remind the nobles that the ordinances were enacted against them in response to their own malevolent behavior and that they themselves were responsible for their exclusion from the highest magistracy. To attempt to take back forcibly through evil what they had lost through the same, the commission insists, would be tantamount to desiring the ruin of the *patria* and of themselves.

But (presumably because Machiavelli elsewhere exhibits skepticism concerning the great's ability to be shamed into good behavior [e.g., D 1.40, 1.48]) they conclude their entreaty to the nobles with largely tactical considerations (FH 2.14): The nobles, they point out, are clearly outnumbered, and the cowards among them will not fight in the face of "so many numbers, so much riches, and so much hatred" on the popular side. The people, they insist, are on the verge of showing that "the nobility" are that in name only, for many of the latter will not fight, and those who do, will be soundly beaten.

Turning to the people, even if the trilateral commission also addresses them with tactical concerns, it more heavily emphasizes moral considerations. The mediators insist that it was unfair that individual nobles could be so easily sent into exile under the Ordinances of Justice. They remind the people that the nobles had served the city well in war, and that it was “neither good nor just” to assault them with “such hatred.” The nobles might tolerate their exclusion from the Signoria (a claim, by the way, never borne out by Machiavelli with empirical evidence), but they will not endure continued legal vulnerability under the ordinances (specifically, the fact that they could be exiled from the *patria* or executed on the basis of undersubstantiated charges).

The people, according to Machiavelli, then debate the commission’s proposal among themselves: some of them insist on battle now while they have the nobles outnumbered; some suggest that the nobles might be made more content if the people moderated the terms of the ordinances; others insist that the nobles would never be satisfied unless they were made so through violent compulsion (FH 2.14). Ultimately, Machiavelli recounts how the people of “milder and wiser spirit” prevailed on the others, arguing that conciliation would prove less costly than war. Thus, the people disarmed and ordained that legal provisions for additional witnesses be added to the ordinances.

Again, it is worth noting that the mediators appeal to necessity and morality in trying to keep both the nobles and people from going to war, but accentuate the former much more in deliberations with the nobles and the latter much more in pleading with the people. This accords with Machiavelli’s suggestion in earlier works that “steel” is required to deter elites from incorrect behavior, while words on the part of good men are sufficient to persuade the people, who are more inclined toward decency than the nobles, from deleterious courses of action (D 1.58; P 9). As Machiavelli insists in the *Discourses*, insolent aristocrats, the “sons of Brutus,” will not desist in their endeavors to undo institutional orders that both constrain them and empower the people unless their malevolent envy and insatiable appetite to oppress is met with mortal necessity, that is, death (D 3.3).

The lesson is precisely the same in the *Histories*, even if, here, Machiavelli never explicitly makes it. Machiavelli’s descriptions of popular moderation and noble malice in the book conform precisely with Machiavelli’s earlier accounts in *The Prince* and the *Discourses*. In the *Histories*, he simply fails to *accentuate* this distinction in his general evaluations of the people and the nobles. The *Histories*, it would seem, provides much

less direct guidance regarding the “effectual truth” of class politics than do either *The Prince* or the *Discourses*. Be that as it may, the point is that Machiavelli’s descriptions of popular behavior in the *Histories* consistently evince a moderation that Machiavelli fails to explicitly attribute to the people in his general evaluations of them, most famously in the opening of book 3.

IV. THE “EVIL” NATURE AND “INDECENT” BEHAVIOR OF THE FLORENTINE PLEBS? (1378)

To support the argument that Machiavelli, in the *Florentine Histories*, altered his previously declared opinion of the people’s fundamental goodness, scholars often emphasize, firstly, the infamous speech of the unnamed *ciompo* or wool worker during the *Ciampi Revolt* (FH 3.13); and, secondly, Machiavelli’s deeply derogatory references to the Florentine plebs throughout the *Histories*, denunciations that seem to reach a crescendo during his account of the wool workers’ uprising (FH 3.10–14). Such scholars often draw a stark contrast between, on the one hand, the immoral attitudes that Machiavelli seems to be imputing to the people via the anonymous *ciompo*’s speech in the *Histories* and, on the other, the “decent” or “good” nature that Machiavelli attributed to the people in *The Prince* and the *Discourses*. Two important, unprecedented aspects of the speech, they claim, are the blatant duplicity, cunning, and rapaciousness endorsed by the *ciompo*; and his insistence that the people and the nobles are constituted by the same nature—that is, his claim that underneath the filthy rags and fine robes that respectively clothe them, the plebs and the nobles are essentially the same.

There is, however, one insurmountable problem with any attempt to use the anonymous *ciompo* as a proxy for Machiavelli’s “new” view of the common people: his fellow *ciompi* do not ultimately follow his advice. The woolworkers and other plebs, despite the *ciompo*’s exhortations, do not use violence to completely overturn the sociopolitical order of the city, even though they secure the opportunity and power to do so. Therefore, Machiavelli demonstrates, without any explicit commentary on the fact, that the plebeians prove ultimately unwilling to fully engage in the immorality demanded of them by the *ciompo*, and to fully engage in the oppressive behavior that Machiavelli, without reservation throughout the *Histories*, continually shows to be characteristic of the nobility.

As in the two other episodes discussed above, while analyzing the *ciompo*’s speech and the subsequent behavior of the people (or, more spe-

cifically here, the lesser people and the plebs) during the first phase of the Ciompi Revolt, I demonstrate that readers ought to carefully compare Machiavelli's ostensible assessments of the people with the evidence that he adduces concerning their actions. Scholars, here as elsewhere, almost invariably exhibit too little sensitivity to the contrast between words and deeds in Machiavelli's presentation. Machiavelli does indeed remark throughout the *Histories* that it is the nature of the Florentine plebeians to "revel in evil" (FH 2.34); that they invariably throw in their lot with whomever is most "disgruntled" in the city (FH 3.8); that they resort to "indecent" (*disonestà*) behavior during the riots of July 1378; and he expresses rather extravagant indignation over the plebeians' "dishonorable and grievous" demands during the first wave of the woolworkers' revolt (FH 3.15). But Machiavelli's descriptions of their actions, I will suggest, belie such ostensibly harsh criticisms.

Machiavelli begins book 3, chapter 12, by addressing the state of mind of Florence's lower classes during July 1378. The nobles and most powerful guildsmen affiliated with the Guelf Party had incited "the lowest plebs" to burn and pillage during the latest episode of social unrest in the city (FH 3.12). According to Machiavelli, many plebs feared that, with peace being restored, *they* would now be punished for their offenses, and, "as always occurs," they would wind up betrayed and blamed by their social superiors who had, in fact, encouraged them to commit such crimes.

Machiavelli then moves from these particular, recent circumstances to explain more generally why, for quite some time, "the lesser people had hated the city's richest citizens and the princes of the guilds," and why the vast majority of the city's workers overwhelmingly considered themselves insufficiently compensated for their labors (FH 3.12). Machiavelli recounts how, over the past century and a half, members of the Florentine people, enrolled in commercial guilds (the *popolani*), ordered the republic's government to conform to the guilds' division into seven richer, "more honored" guilds and fourteen less wealthy, and hence "less honored," ones (FH 3.12). Two consequences resulted from these institutional developments.

Firstly, a new ruling class, comprised of the ancient nobility and the richest guildsmen, emerged in the republic. The nobility, who may have been excluded from holding public offices, still wielded significant power through their prominence in the Guelf Party—notwithstanding Machiavelli's claims that they had been utterly destroyed by the *popolani* in earlier conflicts. These "arrogant" nobles, according to Machiavelli, "began to bestow favors upon the popolani of the greater guilds" (FH 3.12). Secondly,

this new ruling class set about oppressing the city's lower classes: specifically, the ancient nobility and the new so-called popular nobles "persecuted members of the minor guilds, as well as [the plebs] with whom they were allied" (FH 3.12). In particular, the plebs, the majority of the city's laborers, who had no guilds of their own, were being exploited by their socioeconomic superiors within the major guilds, since they had no recourse to any independent appellate process that they might deem to be fair.

Thus, according to Machiavelli, the consolidation of a new ruling class—which would be completed once the Ciompi Revolt was definitively suppressed and the popular government that emerged out of the revolt's ashes was overturned—comprised largely of Guelf nobles and the members of the richest guilds had actually begun many years before. Furthermore, not only was the military virtue of the warlike nobles being dissipated by their alliance with the commercial "princes of the guilds," as Machiavelli suggests at the start of book 3 (FH 3.1), but the latter, who previously had served as champions of the *popolo's* liberty in struggles with the great, were now, Machiavelli indicates, being corrupted by the appetite for oppression characteristic of the nobility.

It is worth noting that Machiavelli's account here provides some retrospective context for why, in his earlier description, Walter, the Duke of Athens, was able to gain "the grace" of the plebs at the start of his tyranny by executing prominent *popolani*—one of whom, it so happens, was a Medici (FH 2.33). These executions did not perhaps, after all, please the plebs so much because, as Machiavelli declares at that point, it is their "nature" to "revel in evil" (FH 2.34). Instead, perhaps the plebs had good reason to view these wealthy guildsmen as their oppressors and therefore to expect that some measure of justice would be served as a result of such executions. Moreover, we now understand better why the duke further endeared himself to the plebs by providing them with arms and banners (FH 2.36): since the plebs were not organized in any guilds of their own, but rather only subjected to other guilds, they had no right to carry arms and bear standards in their own guild-organized militias until the duke bestowed these upon them for the short tenure of his tyranny.

These then were the long-term circumstances that serve as the backdrop for the infamous speech that Machiavelli attributes to the anonymous ciompo in chapter 13: a context in which the "plebeian men" [*uomini plebei*], both "the sottoposti" working for the wool manufacturers' guild as well as the plebs who were subordinated under other guilds, were, in Machiavelli's words, "fully indignant" (FH 3.13). Also, at this point in the spring of 1378, the plebs were, as Machiavelli reports, quite anxious

as a result of the arson and robbery they had committed at the instigation of malcontents within the city's upper class. At one of the nightly meetings that the plebs were holding to discuss the "common danger" they all faced during these trying times, "one of the boldest and most experienced of their number," whom Machiavelli does not name, addresses his comrades. The anonymous *ciompo* serves, for many scholars, as an amoral, politically realist stand-in for Machiavelli himself in the *Histories*; a figure, moreover, that for others supposedly confirms Machiavelli's mature belief in the common people's inclination toward political evil.

Midway through the speech, the *ciompo* issues the statement on the equal nature of all men that many take as Machiavelli's repudiation of his previous declarations that all cities, all polities, are constituted by two qualitatively different kinds of natures or humors: namely, the desire to oppress characteristic of the nobility, and the desire not to be oppressed characteristic of the people. On the contrary, the *ciompo* confidently declares here:

Be not intimidated by the antiquity of blood with which they reprove us. All men originate from the same beginning; hence all are equally ancient, having been fashioned by nature in the same mode. If you strip us all naked, we are all alike; if we were to cloak ourselves in their garments and they in ours, we would appear noble and they ignoble. What ultimately separates us is only poverty and riches. (FH 3.13)

Few commentators, however, ask the following questions: Why must the *ciompo* exert himself so strenuously in the effort to convince the people of what is supposedly their true nature? Why must he instruct the plebeians in ways of behaving that supposedly should come to them as spontaneously, indeed, naturally, as it does to their social antagonists? In fact, the *ciompo* himself raises the possibility that he is mistaken in his estimation of his comrades' real nature, for, in discussing the pervasive guilt from which they presently suffer, he claims: "if you are this susceptible to conscience and shame, then you are not the men I take you to be" (FH 3.13).

The *ciompo* then sets out the following as the ultimate goals that the plebs will achieve through the violence, fraud, rapacity, and evil he recommends: "We shall either become undisputed princes of the city, or, at the very least, gain such control over a great proportion of it, that not only will our previous offenses be forgiven, but we will also wield sufficient authority and power to threaten our adversaries with entirely new injuries" (FH 3.13). In this spirit, the *ciompo* exclaims near the conclusion of

his speech: "How many times I have heard you complain of your masters' arrogance and your magistrates' injustice! Now is the time, not merely to free yourselves from them but to subject them so entirely to your power that they will have more cause to complain about and to fear you, than you them" (FH 3.13). The people's subsequent actions must be judged precisely with these stated goals of complete authority over the city, or preponderant power within it, in mind.

Machiavelli reports that the nameless *ciompo's* speech fanned the already "inflamed evil spirits" of the plebs, who all agreed to recommence their violence once they increased the number of their confederates. Moreover, he begins the next chapter by writing that the plebs, in response to the *ciompo's* speech, were setting out "to usurp the republic" (FH 3.14). But I will show that the actions that Machiavelli recounts in this and subsequent chapters will prove that the plebs want neither complete mastery over nor even a lion's share of power within the city.⁷

By the end of July 21st, 1378, after extensive rioting and demonstrations, over six thousand *sottoposti* and lower guildsmen formally presented their peace terms to the Signoria (FH 3.14). The plebs demanded the following concessions: that three new guilds be instituted to include workers and lesser people who previously had not been enrolled in guilds of their own; that these three new guilds together be represented by two priors in the Signoria; that the number of priors allotted to the minor guilds be restored from two to three;⁸ that provisions be made for public space where the new guilds could conduct their meetings; that use of a foreign judge by the wool guild be banned; that prisoners presently under indictment or recently condemned be pardoned; and that citizens who had been admonished by the Guelfs have their honors and rights restored. The plebs also insisted upon a two-year amnesty for themselves from sentences for petty crimes and requested favorable fiscal policies from the city's authority overseeing the public debt, the Monte.

Machiavelli reacts to this proposal with the following declaration: "these demands were dishonorable and grave for the republic" (FH 3.15). But just how egregious are they in reality? In assessing them, readers should keep in mind the following considerations: the previous, highly inequitable sociopolitical order of the city laid out by Machiavelli himself; the nameless *ciompo's* declaration of what the plebs' ultimate, highly immoderate goals should be; and the plebs' near-absolute control over the city at this very moment.

Florence's constitutional structure before the revolt was one in which twenty-one guilds shared eight seats in the Signoria: Machiavelli's ear-

lier account (FH 2.42) suggests that the seven major guilds held two seats, and the minor fourteen guilds, split into groupings of middling and lower guilds, enjoyed, respectively, three and two apiece.⁹ Once again, contradicting his own statements at the start of book 3, Machiavelli shows here that the plebs, who had been completely excluded from these arrangements, ask for the passage of laws that benefit the entire citizenry, and not just themselves as the prevailing party. In this regard, it is worth emphasizing what the plebeians actually demand and what they do *not* demand: they leave the major and middling guilds their established seats in the Signoria; they restore the seats of the minor guilds from two to three; they do not call for the abolition of the Guelf Party, hence keeping intact the source of the ancient nobility's dignity and authority; and they call for an end to admonishments, thus attempting to do right by dubiously identified "Ghibelline" citizens. They ask for an amnesty regarding their own crimes, of course, and they demand that the Monte be reorganized in a way that transfers the financial burden of the public debt from rank-and-file guildsmen to the wealthiest members of the guilds.

But, most importantly, by demanding for themselves only two seats in the Signoria the plebs signal that they have no desire to take political preeminence away from the major, middling, and minor guilds, despite the fact that their own membership outnumbers that of these other three sets of guilds combined. In short, despite enjoying a position to impose their will on the city, and despite the nameless *ciompo's* entreaty that they make the republic entirely their own (or at least allow themselves to dominate it), they ask for a decidedly subordinate role within its government.

In the two previous examples from the *Histories* that I examined above, Machiavelli had shown, through his recording of deeds—if not through his general assessments of them—that "the people," the *popolani* of the guild community, did *not* act in anything approaching an oppressive manner toward the Florentine nobles. Here, whatever his extravagant criticisms of the plebs, Machiavelli shows, through his account of their actions and demands, that the plebs desire neither "evil" for the whole republic nor its entire "usurpation" by making themselves "princes of the city"; rather, they seek a political outcome amenable to all of the city's various parts, including themselves and their most stalwart adversaries.

We may conclude, on this basis, that Florence's plebeians do not, after all, have "the same nature" as the nobles in Machiavelli's estimation; they neither desire to oppress nor, when given the opportunity to do so, actively engage in oppression. Rather, the plebeian reform proposal sug-

gests that the *ciompi* merely want inclusion in the guild order; they merely seek institutional guarantees to insure that *they* will not continue to be oppressed, as Machiavelli, without any contravening evidence, shows that they had been, by the nobles and by “the princes of the guilds.” Machiavelli’s descriptions of plebeian behavior seriously undermine the claim that he actually believes what he says about them, either in his own words or in those he attributes to the nameless *ciompo*. In this light, there is more than a little retrospective irony, I think, in Machiavelli’s rhetorical denunciations of the “evil” plebeians’ behavior and of their demands as “indecent,” “grave,” and “dishonorable.”

In fact, the behavior of the lower classes here actually seems to confirm, not qualify—and certainly not contravene—Machiavelli’s description of the plebeians in his earlier writings: to be sure, as Machiavelli states and shows, the common people may lash out violently in response to circumstances of egregious oppression (P 19; D 1.44, 2.2), but if appropriate institutional and organizational resources are available to them, Machiavelli demonstrates time and again that they are much more inclined to behave moderately (P 9; D 1.4, 1.40). For instance, the Roman plebeians claim to want to tear Coriolanus to pieces on the Senate steps but are satisfied with the prospect of trying him for his life in a formal assembly (D 1.7). Furthermore, as Machiavelli was fond of pointing out, the Roman plebs secede from the city rather than burn it down to protest debt bondage and subsequently to negotiate the creation of and then the restitution of the plebeian tribunate. He also describes how, in less dramatic instances, the Roman common people refuse to enlist for military service or resort to tumultuous demonstrations rather than inflict bodily harm in order to gain political concessions from the Roman nobles.

According to the evidence presented by Machiavelli in the *Histories*, the Florentine plebs seem to want merely comparable civic-military arrangements enjoyed by their Roman counterparts, institutions through which they can more ordinarily air their political-economic grievances and gain future concessions without recourse to the riots, arson, and pillaging that they have recently committed in the absence of such institutions. Indeed, how differently would the *Ciompi Revolt* have unfolded if all of the lesser people—*popolo* and *sottoposti* alike—had enjoyed recourse to a magistracy like the Roman plebeian tribunate to formally voice their grievances, and if the entire Florentine elite had been gathered together, like their Roman forbearers, in a Senate house?¹⁰ As I have suggested, Machiavelli shows that the humors characteristic of both Rome and Flor-

ence are fundamentally the same; it is primarily the institutional modes and orders through which they are channeled that differ in any substantive way.

V. THE COMPOSITIONAL CONTEXT OF THE WRITINGS ON FLORENCE

I have shown that much more than meets the eye occurs in Machiavelli's depiction of Florence's social classes and their interactions in the *Florentine Histories*, much more at least than has been noticed by scholars advancing the argument that Machiavelli's later political works exhibit a "conservative" or "aristocratic" turn. But what accounts for the fact that Machiavelli does indeed change the mode of presentation through which he conveys the unequivocal superiority of peoples over nobles and of democratic over aristocratic republics? Why is Machiavelli no longer the full-throated advocate of republics where the people, as a result of their overall decency, generally correct collective judgment, and desire not to be oppressed, rather than the nobility, deserve to hold "the guard of liberty" (D 1.4-5)?¹¹ After all, "conservative-turn" scholars are not wrong to detect palpable changes of tone in Machiavelli's writings of the 1520s, even if they do not interrogate these changes with adequate sensitivity and tenacity. Here, I offer some contextual considerations to help explain what might account for these changes and to argue that such changes are actually much more superficial than fundamental, that is, more rhetorical than substantive.

The revived Florentine Republic (1494-1512), which Machiavelli served as an administrative secretary, diplomatic emissary, and militia organizer for over a decade, was overthrown by an aristocratic coup, foreign intervention, and papal intrigue that returned the Medici family to power. The resultingly unemployed Machiavelli responded by writing to the restored princes, advising them to betray their allies among the nobility and to align themselves instead with the suddenly disempowered Florentine people.¹² As is well known, for his troubles, Machiavelli was implicated in an anti-Medici conspiracy, tortured, imprisoned, and subsequently confined to internal exile.

In 1520, Machiavelli repeated his advice that the Medici ultimately reempower the Florentine people at the expense of the family's aristocratic "friends" in an important memorandum on constitutional reforms solicited by the Medici.¹³ However, in this proposal, "The Discursus on Florentine Affairs," Machiavelli much more tentatively recommends that the

popular assembly, the Great Council, which had been the heart of the 1494 popular government, be given the preeminent institutional role in the restored republic. Machiavelli carefully assures his Medici addressees that their clients (*amici*) among the Florentine aristocracy would not be threatened by the people assembled in the Great Council during the lifetimes of their Medici patrons. Indeed, Machiavelli seems to embed this popular assembly—reduced in size and capacity from its glory days of 1494–1512—within a Venetian-style mixed regime, a vaguely aristocratic republic, in which elite citizens, *ottimati* of signorial rank and middling citizens of intermediate rank, hold the preponderance of power.

However, Machiavelli insists that once the Medici earn their fast-approaching eternal reward, the Great Council should be re-expanded to its previously large size of 3,500 citizens and re-empowered with preeminent legislative, electoral, and judicial authority within the republic. Moreover, he proposes the creation of a plebeian magistracy, the *proposti*, through which the common people could affect these democratic reforms to the republic's constitution. What accounts for the change in Machiavelli's style from straightforward to circumspect popular advocacy in the years 1512 to 1519?

Compositional context, I suggest, is decisive here. When the Medici commissioned the "Discursus" and, almost simultaneously, the *Florentine Histories* from Machiavelli, the family was at the lowest point of their popularity with common Florentines since the expulsion of Piero de' Medici in 1494, and perhaps at the lowest point ever. When the Medici returned to the city in 1512, it was not yet entirely clear how much they would satisfy the *ottimati's* desire to suppress the people and shut down the Great Council. Their subsequent actions would leave no doubt regarding that question, and, consequently, over time they incurred increasing animosity on the part of the Florentine *popolo*.

It would be imprudent, to say the least, for Machiavelli in these precarious circumstances to lavishly praise his patrons' steadfast sociopolitical antagonists, the people and the plebs, in the historical account of the city, the *Histories*, that the former are financing, and to overtly empower those very antagonists in the constitutional proposal, the "Discursus," that the Medici solicited from Machiavelli as a possible basis for contemporary political reforms. Discretion was all the more necessary since Machiavelli himself was so closely and personally associated with both the popular government of 1494–1512 and its chief magistrate, the staunch Medici rival Piero Soderini. Scholars who advance the "conservative-turn" argument either ignore or too readily dismiss this situation when they ana-

lyze the role of the common people in Machiavelli's later writings. Indeed, they completely overlook the incongruity between words and deeds that attends Machiavelli's discussion of the people and the plebs in the *Histories*, and they unconscionably neglect the vibrant democratic potential that Machiavelli definitively, albeit subtly, builds into his constitutional proposal within the "Discursus."¹⁴

VI. CONCLUSION

In this essay, I have laid the groundwork for a broader argument that I hope will demonstrate decisively that Machiavelli's answer to the central question posed in the *Histories*—why is the modern Florentine Republic so inferior to the ancient Roman one?—cannot be derived from any change in motivations or "humors" that he supposedly attributes to modern peoples and nobles. Rather, as I have begun to show, the answer to this question emerges from Machiavelli's analysis of the different "modes and orders" that characterize modern as opposed to ancient republics.

Modern and ancient republics, in Machiavelli's view, exhibit vastly different institutional-constitutional frameworks within which historically constant popular and aristocratic appetites operate and interact. The differences between Florence's defective "modes and orders" and Rome's more vigorous ones, Machiavelli indicates, are attributable to three inter-related factors: the different political dispositions of modern as opposed to ancient founders or reformers (and the diverse kinds of institutions they create or revitalize); the pernicious influence of Christianity over contemporary princely and republican virtue; and the proliferation of artificial versus "natural" types of social division within modern republics.

In the dedicatory letters of both *The Prince* and the *Discourses*, Machiavelli declares that each work contains "everything" he knows—most relevant to our purposes, everything he knows concerning politics. Machiavelli neither explicitly repudiates these claims anywhere in subsequent writings nor asserts that later works such as the *Florentine Histories* deserve to occupy a similarly comprehensive epistemological status within his oeuvre. Therefore, I have been operating under the assumption that the two earlier works continue to serve as authoritative guides for any attempt to understand the arguments of all of Machiavelli's political writings, including later ones such as the *Histories*. On these grounds, I find it disappointing that scholars associated with the "conservative-turn" thesis so rarely read with requisite care the actions of modern political actors—individual and collective agents—as Machiavelli conveys them in

the *Histories* in more direct connection with his depictions and assessments of ancient (and modern) political actors presented in *The Prince* and the *Discourses*.

Machiavelli never declares in his later writings that he has changed his mind with respect to the proper functioning of principalities and republics. He never states in any programmatic terms that he has fundamentally reconceptualized how he thinks princes, founders, reformers, and magistrates ought to behave generally or, especially, how they ought to act vis-à-vis the nobles and the peoples of principalities and republics. His previous assessments, elaborated in *The Prince* and the *Discourses*, must, I argue, be brought to bear with at least equal force as are those that sometimes seem to contradict them within the *Histories* themselves. Put simply, there is no reason to assume that Machiavelli had forgotten or abandoned the political principles that he set forth in his earlier works. It is, in fact, I aver, a profound mistake to read the *Florentine Histories* as if he had. Too much of importance that operates below the level of “mere words” in this complicated, magnificent work is missed if we do.

NOTES

1. Niccolò Machiavelli, *Istorie Fiorentine* [1523], ed. Franco Gaeta (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1962); hereafter “FH” within the text.

2. Niccolò Machiavelli, *Il Principe (De Principatibus)*, composed circa 1513 and published in 1532, ed. G. Inglese (Turin: Einaudi, 1995), abbreviated as “P” within the text; and Machiavelli, *Discorsi* [1513–19], ed. C. Vivanti (Turin: Einaudi, 1997), hereafter “D” within the text.

3. Although they differ to varying degrees on how conservative they believe Machiavelli became, all agree that his views changed decidedly in that direction: Albert Russell Ascoli, “‘Vox Populi’: Machiavelli, *Opinione*, and the *Popolo*, from the *Principe* to the *Istorie Fiorentine*,” *California Italian Studies* 4, no. 2 (2013): 1–23; Francesco Bausi, *Machiavelli* (Rome: Salerno, 2005); Robert Black, *Machiavelli* (London: Routledge, 2013); Humfrey Butters, “Machiavelli and the Medici,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Machiavelli*, ed. J. M. Najemy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 64–79; Mark Hulliung, *Citizen Machiavelli* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 75–78, 86; Mark Jurdjevic, *A Great and Wretched City: Promise and Failure in Machiavelli’s Florentine Political Thought* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014); Mario Martelli, “Machiavelli e Firenze dalla repubblica al principato,” in *Niccolò Machiavelli: Politico storico letterato*, ed. J.-J. Marchand (Rome: Salerno, 1996), 15–31; David Quint, “Narrative Design and Historical Irony in Machiavelli’s *Istorie Fiorentine*,” *Rinascimento* 43 (2003): 31–48; Giovanni Silvano, “Florentine Republicanism in

the Sixteenth Century," in *Machiavelli and Republicanism*, ed. G. Bock, Q. Skinner, and M. Viroli (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 41–70; Maurizio Viroli, "Machiavelli and the Republican Idea of Liberty," *Machiavelli and Republicanism*, ed. G. Bock, Q. Skinner, and M. Viroli (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 143–71; M. Viroli, *Machiavelli* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 126. See also Mario Martelli's introduction to his edition of Machiavelli's *Il principe* (Rome: Salerno, 2006).

4. The following scholars offer important analyses of this passage without necessarily endorsing the "late conservative" thesis: Anna Maria Cabrini, *Per una valutazione delle Istorie Fiorentine del Machiavelli: Note sulle fonti del secondo libro* (Florence: La Nuova Casa Editrice, 1985), 367–70; Gisela Bock, "Civil Discord in Machiavelli's *Istorie Fiorentine*," in *Machiavelli and Republicanism*, ed. Bock, Skinner, and Viroli, 187–89; Gennaro Sasso, *Niccolò Machiavelli: La Storiografia*, vol. II (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1993), 185–99; Harvey C. Mansfield, "Party and Sect in Machiavelli's *Florentine Histories*," in *Machiavelli's Virtue* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 150–51; and Marina Marietti, *Machiavelli: l'eccezione fiorentina* (Florence: Cadmo, 2005). Although see Cabrini, *Interpretazione e stile in Machiavelli: Il Libro Terzo delle Istorie* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1990), 12–14, 93.

5. Machiavelli seems to imply that this division of the people into three parts corresponds with the division of the guilds into major, middling, and minor groupings. To the extent that Machiavelli may be relying on contemporary chroniclers in conveying this impression, there are good reasons to believe that he is mistaken about the precise distribution of seats in the Signoria among the different sets of guilds. See John M. Najemy, *Corporatism and Consensus in Florentine Electoral Politics, 1280–1400* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 141–42.

6. For a serious study that takes Machiavelli's assertion here at face value, see David Quint, "Armi e nobiltà: Machiavelli, Guicciardini, e le aristocrazie cittadine," *Studi italiani* 21 (2009): 53–74.

7. For compelling, alternative readings of the nameless ciompo's speech, see Cabrini, *Interpretazione e Stile*, 85–98; Gabriele Pedullà, "Il divieto di Platone: Machiavelli e il discorso dell'anonimo plebeo," in *Storiografia repubblicana fiorentina (1494–1570)*, ed. Jean-Jacques Marchand and Jean-Claude Zancarini (Florence: Cesati, 2003) 209–66; Jeffrey Edward Green, "Learning How Not to Be Good: A Plebeian Perspective," *Good Society* 20, no. 2 (2011): 184–202; and Yves Winter, "Plebeian Politics: Machiavelli and the Ciompi Uprising," *Political Theory* 40, no. 6 (2012): 736–66.

8. The city's elite had used the circumstances of the Black Death in 1348 to reduce their number of priors by one. See John M. Najemy, *A History of Florence, 1200–1575* (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008), 145.

9. This account of the distribution of seats in the Signoria may exaggerate the number allotted to middling and minor guilds: see Najemy, *Corporatism and Consensus*, chaps. 5 and 6.

10. See John P. McCormick, "Subdue the Senate: Machiavelli's 'Way of Freedom' or Path to Tyranny?," *Political Theory* 40, no. 6 (2012): 714–35, at 730.

11. See John P. McCormick, *Machiavellian Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

12. See Machiavelli, "Ai Paleschi" (1512), in Machiavelli, *Opere I: I Primi Scritti Politici*, ed. C. Vivanti (Turin: Einaudi, 1997), 87–89.

13. See Machiavelli, "Discursus Florentinarum Rerum Post Mortem Iunioris Laurentii Medices," in Machiavelli, *Opere I*, ed. C. Vivanti, 733–45.

14. See, especially, Silvano, "Florentine Republicanism," 56–61, and Viroli, "Machiavelli and the Republican Idea," 154–55.

Political Imagination, Conflict, and Democracy: Machiavelli's Republican Realism

LUCA BACCELLI

But since my intent is to write something useful to whoever understands it, it has appeared to me more fitting to go directly to the effectual truth of the thing than to the imagination of it [*più conveniente andare drieto alla verità effettuale della cosa, che alla immaginazione di essa*]. And many have imagined republics and principalities that have never been seen or known to exist in reality; for it is so far from how one lives to how one should live that he who lets go of what is done for what should be done learns his ruin rather than his preservation.¹

In this well-known passage of *The Prince*, chapter 15, Machiavelli announces the criterion of the “effectual truth” and opposes it to the imagination: the latter appears as something like an ideological false consciousness. This critique seems to reflect Machiavelli’s departure from traditional—theological or natural law—justifications of political power. His distrust of imagination seems to anticipate that of modern philosophers and forebears of the new science, from Francis Bacon to Blaise Pascal. Galileo, for instance, as if echoing Machiavelli, would later contrast the scientific method to “mere phantasies” that are the “outcome of imagination.”²

Machiavelli’s attack on the imagination has been considered by different interpretive traditions. One tradition views him as a thinker who “discovers the necessity and autonomy of politics, of politics which is beyond or, rather, below moral good and evil, which has its own laws against which it is useless to rebel.”³ Such an interpretation attracted a wide consensus during a large part of the twentieth century, particularly in the heyday of empiricist “political science,” which claimed to be based on “objective laws” and “free from value judgments.”

Another interpretive tradition has seen Machiavelli as a republican writer, inspired by moral values, and as the retriever of an “ancient prudence” based on an “empire of laws” and “government *de jure*.”⁴ Although this tradition seemed to be lost during the twentieth century, it has been recovered in the second half of the century and has become a main issue in the historiography of early modern republicanism, that is, “the Machiavellian moment.”⁵

Of course, Machiavelli’s texts contain arguments that support both “realist” and “republican” interpreters. In a sense, the question is: Which Machiavelli do we want, or need? But the traditional realistic interpretations risk pulling Machiavelli’s work out of his context, seeing him anachronistically as the forerunner of political science and then opening the doors to criticism that he possessed an outdated epistemology. In any case, regardless of the ideal of value-free science, the idea that Machiavelli was a neutral technician of politics looks close to a conservative political position, more supportive of the establishment than sympathetic to political change.

On the other side, some of the republican interpretations so clearly display the discontinuities between the different Machiavellian works that it would appear as if these works were written by two—or more—different authors. Emphasizing the linguistic context and the conventions adopted by Machiavelli himself, these interpretations show that his “relatively orthodox contribution to a well-established tradition of Republican political thought [. . .] provides us with a benchmark against which”⁶ to evaluate his innovative contributions. But this approach risks pigeonholing Machiavelli’s writings to a particular framework of literary genres and underestimating the originality and modernity of his thought. Against the background of a remoralization of Machiavelli’s politics, these interpretations suppose that *moderation* is the key to Machiavelli’s republicanism, despite his sympathy for “impetuous” characters and behaviors.⁷ In effect, both interpretive traditions appear to be consistent with the rejection of imagination, if imagination is a factor that ignites political innovation and social change. Both Machiavellis—the cynical realist and the wishful republican lost in the dream of an ancient literary model—seem to be, in the end, conservative characters.

In order to reconsider the question of political realism, one must try not to reproduce for the thousandth time the typical pendulum movement that has characterized the history of critical literature on Machiavelli⁸ but also to acknowledge the discontinuities introduced by Machiavelli to

Western political thought. Machiavelli presents systematic adherence to effective reality as his original contribution and emphasizes the competitive and tragic elements of politics, the dimensions of power and violence. This is not denied by the lead characters of republican historical revision. Pocock writes that *The Prince* is "morally subversive" in so far as it deals with the problem of innovation and of political action in the absence of legitimation. The *virtù*, which is necessary to give "order" in an anomic situation, destroys the generally accepted foundations of legitimacy, such as custom. In the chaotic succession of events mastered by fortune, the new prince ought to decide every time whether it is politically "virtuous" to obey moral rules.⁹ But the *Discourses* too propose a subversive ethics. They express a "militarization of virtue," which becomes "cannibal": in order to be virtuous, the republic cannot but expand [*ampliare*] and subjugate other republics.¹⁰

Quentin Skinner challenges the idea that Machiavelli theorizes the autonomy of politics, separating it from morality. But he adds that Machiavelli introduces a revolutionary reinterpretation of the concept of virtue. He departs from earlier authors in utilizing *virtù* to refer to any kind of qualities necessary to "maintain one's state" and "achieve great things."¹¹ Its relation to republican liberty is reciprocal: *virtù* is the best defense of liberty, and republican liberty is the best condition for the development of *virtù*.¹²

Here there is no opposition between Machiavelli the political realist and Machiavelli the virtuous republican. Moreover, Pocock and Skinner acknowledge that Machiavelli sets up the relationship between ethics and politics in an innovative way. But if their interpretations are grounded, it is clear that Machiavelli does not propose a vision of "value-free" political theory. For Machiavelli, the political theorist cannot help but evaluate. Political action is inspired by principles and values, which can be reduced to neither the mere end of the conservation of power nor to the principles of "reason of state." In this sense, Machiavelli does not "divorce politics from morality." But is the idea that he "emphasizes 'the autonomy of politics'" actually a misunderstanding?¹³

If one looks, for example, at the uses of *buono* [good] in Machiavelli's works, it becomes clear that it is a polysemic term. It generally means everything that has a positive value. Only in a more specific meaning does *buono* signify moral values in particular. Furthermore, some willingly paradoxical passages indicate that moral and political values are expressed in different codes. In such a context, *buono* refers to moral values, *vir-*

tuoso [virtuous] to political ones. In chapter 7 of *The Prince* it is asserted that to give “good government” to Romagna required Remirro de Orco, “a cruel and ready [*espedito*] man,” and in Cesare Borgia coexisted “such ferocity and such virtue.”¹⁴ The example of Agathocles is perhaps even more significant: virtue and wickedness go together; “his crimes [*sceleratezze*] were accompanied with such virtue of spirit and body.”¹⁵

According to the antihumanistic thesis displayed in chapter 18 the new prince must not only be a centaur—half human and half beast—but also share both the nature of the lion and of the fox and therefore use, if necessary, both violence and deceit.¹⁶ This idea returns in *Discourses*, book 2, chapter 13, where it is added: “what princes are obliged to do when they begin to grow great, republics are also obliged to do, until they have become powerful.”¹⁷ Hannibal’s “cruelty, violence, plunder, and every sort of perfidy [*crudeltà, violenza e rapina ed ogni ragione infideltà*]” is linked to his *eccessiva virtù* [extraordinary virtue]¹⁸ and the political ineffectiveness of Piero Soderini’s goodness is ruthlessly diagnosed.¹⁹ Here chapter 3.41 has basic relevance:

when it is absolutely a question [*dove si delibera al tutto*] of the safety of one’s country, there must be no consideration of just and unjust, of merciful or cruel, of praiseworthy or disgraceful; instead, setting aside every scruple, one must follow to the utmost any plan that will save her life and keep her liberty.²⁰

The ends of *salus rei publicae* and collective safety are immediately linked to the value of liberty. Precisely these political ends justify the waiver from moral principles to which Machiavelli here refers. But it is hard *sapere essere non buono*, as is clear again in the classical *The Prince* 15:

For a man who wants to make a profession of good in all regards must come to ruin among so many who are not good. Hence it is necessary to a prince, if he wants to maintain himself, to learn to be able to be not good and to use this and not use it according to necessity.²¹

This theme too recurs and reemerges in the *Discourses*.²² To be “not good” in the right time and in the right way is not easy. There is in Machiavelli the idea of the consciously committing necessary evil; one must “not depart from good when possible, but know how to enter into evil, when forced by necessity [*sapere intrare nel male, necessitato*].”²³ Compared

to moral behavior, political action requires more reflection; it is in some ways a construction, an artifact, a conquest: a political leader must learn “to enter into evil.”²⁴

In political action there are behaviors that are appropriate, or “virtuous,” when they conform to certain political values—such as the maintenance of the state, security, and, in a particular way, liberty—that are autonomous from moral values. Moreover a sort of feedback becomes possible: some immoral behaviors may be justified as far as they conform to some political values. Machiavelli writes, for instance, that in pursuing a good end, “though the deed accuses him, the result should excuse him [*accusandolo il fatto, lo effetto lo scusi*].”²⁵ On the other side, some moral, and even religious, values can contribute to developing an ethos that favors virtuous political action. I would argue that to evaluate political and moral behaviors Machiavelli adopts two different codes, although they are partially overlapping: *virtù-corruzione* [virtue-corruption], mainly, but not exclusively, for the political dimension; and *bontà-sceleratezza/cattiveria* [goodness-wickedness/badness], mainly, but not exclusively, in the moral realm. From this point of view, the political discourse makes itself autonomous from the moral and theological discourse, though it keeps some basic common categories, which are reinterpreted.²⁶

This reading neither adheres to traditional “realist” interpretations nor underestimates Machiavelli’s republicanism. Actually, Machiavelli’s realism has to be qualified. In order to do so, I would suggest three points, which I explore below. First, Machiavelli, far from being a neutral theoretician, assumes a *partisan* perspective—that of the people—and claims that this is a scientific stance. Second, here Machiavelli’s theory of *conflict* is particularly relevant, and thus the interpretation that he considers as virtuous only moderate disputes has to be challenged. Finally, the inclusion of the people in citizenship via political conflict presupposes an idea of the *rule of law* that is far from the traditional, antidemocratic, vision.

I. A PARTISAN POINT OF VIEW

Nor do I want it to be reputed presumption if a man from a low and mean state [*basso e infimo stato*] dares to discuss and give rules for the governments of princes. For just as those who sketch landscapes place themselves down in the plain to consider the nature of mountains and to consider the nature of low places place themselves high atop mountains, similarly, to know well the nature of peoples one needs to be

prince, and to know well the nature of princes one needs to be of the people.²⁷

Machiavelli cannot be more explicit in declaring his social belonging to the people. Moreover, he claims that assuming a definite, partial perspective is an advantage. It endows the political theorist with a privileged perspective. Far from adopting a value-free methodology or assuming a neutral stance, Machiavelli vindicates the epistemological superiority of a partisan point of view.

Nevertheless, several “republican” scholars share the inclination to deemphasize the social meaning of such an expression of membership.²⁸ They see Machiavelli’s preference for a popular state and *governo largo* more as the consequence of Machiavelli’s favor for the Roman, expansive, model of republican constitution than as a partisan choice with a substantive political content. And this preference would not imply a commitment to social equality. While for Skinner *equalità*—a term often recurring in the *Discourses*—is more a legal-political value (the equality of all citizens before the law) than a social principle, for Pocock, it is a moral value. However, most of the occurrences of the term in Machiavelli’s works show that, in addition to a legal meaning, equality before the law has a clear social and even economic meaning.²⁹ In *Discourses*, chapter 1.55, equality is the necessary condition of the republic, as inequality is that of the principality.³⁰ Therefore, in order to constitute a republic where inequality is widespread and where there are many gentlemen, one cannot but *spegnerli tutti* [kill them all].³¹

As is well known, in *The Prince* Machiavelli insists that the people are the best foundation for a prince’s power, and adds that “the best fortress there is, is not to be hated by the people.”³² Machiavelli considers this matter in anything but a “value-free” way: “the end of the people is *more decent* than that of the great, since the great want to oppress and the people not to be oppressed.”³³ Precisely for that reason, in the *Discourses* the role of the “guard of liberty” in a virtuous republic is attributed to the people. And if a republic wants “to expand [*ampliare*] [. . .] in dominion and power,” it has to develop a political and legal system close to the one of Rome: the people must be involved, and a certain rate of social conflict is an inescapable consequence. The hypothesis of a static republic is seen as not realistic, “since all human affairs are in motion and cannot remain fixed” and because of the corruptive effects of long peaceful periods.³⁴

Does Machiavelli wish for the inclusion of the people just because he is interested in an expansive, and aggressive, model of republic? Is such

inclusion a mere instrument of military power? There are reasons to assume the opposite viewpoint. All of Machiavelli's theory and praxis related to militia and *armi proprie* shows an interest that is in the first instance political.³⁵ And if the *Discourses* were written as a contribution to the debates in the Orti Oricellari, a typical gentlemen's environment, its insistence on the necessity of *ampliare* and military strength would be interpreted as an argument in favor of popular inclusion. Machiavelli would tell the republican *ottimati*: "considering that in contemporary Italy a republic such as Florence cannot but be militarily strong, I show you it cannot but involve the people."³⁶

In the *Discourses* Machiavelli compares the anomic condition of the people without a guide to their strength as an organized collective.³⁷ This does not mean that people are politically passive; political activity is the way by which people educate themselves and acknowledge themselves as a social actor. Two chapters are particularly relevant to their *contrappunto*. Chapter 1.57 is entitled "The populace united is strong; each man by himself is weak [*La plebe insieme è gagliarda, di per sé è debole*]" and explains that "on the one side there is nothing more formidable than a multitude unrestrained and without a leader; on the other side nothing is weaker".³⁸ But immediately after this, Machiavelli seems willing to correct a possible misleading impression, adopting the rhetorical form reserved for passages of dramatic importance, such as *The Prince* 15 and *Discourses* 1.4: "I do not know whether I am undertaking a task so hard and full of difficulties that I shall be forced to give up in disgrace or to continue with reproach when I try to defend something that, as I have said, has been condemned by all the writers."³⁹ Chapter 1.58 is indeed entitled "The Multitude is wiser and more Constant than is a Prince [*La moltitudine è più savia e costante che uno principe*]." Machiavelli writes that comparative evaluation of princes' and people's virtues and vices is in most cases biased. Here it is not taken into account whether or not the prince or the people are acting under the constraints of a legal framework or whether they are "regulated by the laws" or "set loose from the laws." If the judgment is unbiased, the people appear more stable and judicious than the princes do:

As to prudence and stability, I say that a people is more prudent, more stable, and of better judgment than a prince. Nor is it without reason that the voice of a people is likened to that of God [. . .]. If, then, we are discussing a prince obliged to keep the laws and a people chained by the laws, we shall see more worth in the people than in the prince.

If we are to discuss either people or prince when unrestrained, fewer defects will be seen in the people than in the prince, and they will be smaller and easier to remedy.⁴⁰

In vindicating the wisdom of the people Machiavelli emphasizes the tight link between their potential or actual virtue, their political role, and the institutional frame.

The most developed constitutional project in Machiavelli's writings is shown in the *Discursus florentinarum rerum*, commissioned by Pope Leo X Medici, in order to stabilize the dominion of his family on the de jure Republic of Florence. Even in that work the partisan option for the people emerges in a clear way. According to Machiavelli, it is impossible to restore the constitutional layout of Cosimo il Vecchio's and Lorenzo il Magnifico's times because the citizens have known a government "that they think more just [*più civile*]."⁴¹ Machiavelli outlines for Florence a transitional model of constitution that foresees the revitalization of the republican institutions under a kind of short-term protectorate of the Medici. Here Machiavelli is undoubtedly inspired by the ideal of mixed government, but with popular preeminence. He drafts a model of constitution in order to satisfy the ambition of the *primi cittadini* [the most important citizens] and the *mezzani* [those in the middle]. But he above all aims for "the whole general body [*universalità*] of citizens, who will never be satisfied [. . .] if their power is not restored or if they do not have a promise that it will be restored."⁴² In particular, he bravely proposes the reopening of the "hall" of the Great Council, the central institution and symbolic seat of the Florentine popular republic, which has been at stake for decades in the struggles between *ottimati* and people. Even the *Discursus*, often quoted by the interpreters who see Machiavelli as a moderate theoretician of traditional mixed government, recommends and privileges those institutional solutions that allow the maximum of popular power under the circumstance.

But what does this view mean? Is it the scholarly exaltation of the Roman citizen's virtue and/or the anachronistic revival of an ethical and political model? Is Machiavelli's position on people and popular government a praise of old times, the record of a past golden age? The complex of Machiavelli's works seems to exclude the possibility that his interest, even in the *Discourses*, can be considered merely bookish. In his service of the Florentine Republic—for example, in organizing the militia—Machiavelli had shown that he takes seriously the principle to imitate the an-

cients. And his quotations from classical authors are often “tendentious,” willingly biased according to a thesis considered momentous for political action.

Are we therefore forced to consider Machiavelli a utopian, who idealized a people devoid of political initiative, living in a contemporary Italy almost completely ruled by principalities and in a contemporary Europe moving toward the affirmation of national monarchies? We too have to be careful not to fall into anachronism. Italian politics of the early cinquecento must not be interpreted from the perspective of the subsequent affirmation of absolute sovereignty. Such a perspective seems to have biased several interpretations of Machiavelli, both those that see him as a forerunner of the “reason of state” and Marxist interpretations such as that of Antonio Gramsci.

Is it possible that republican unrest was still rooted in people’s feelings, beyond some groups of the oligarchic elites? Or were the real people irreversibly affected by political apathy? I suggest an indirect and hypothetical indicator of vivacity and discontent: the relatively large popular participation in Reformation movements during the following decades. One could affirm that in early modern Italy there had been possible alternatives to the state of affairs then displayed in the Counter-Reformation age, including the definitive restoration of the Medici in Tuscany, the Spanish domination, and the gradual involution of the country from an economic, political, and cultural point of view. Machiavelli could be wrong, but he actually inquires into the processes of development of the people, their social role, their articulation, and the way in which the people become a political actor. About all of this, his works show a rich phenomenology, from the “minor” writings to the *Discourses* up to the *Florentine Histories*—his masterpiece from this point of view.

II. THE THEORY OF CONFLICT

The people are seen by Machiavelli as one of the diverse components opposing each other and into which citizenship is irrevocably split: “in every city these two diverse humors are found, which arises from this: that the people desire neither to be commanded nor oppressed by the great, and the great desire to command and oppress the people.”⁴³ The different *umori* express different interests and goals, which bring them inevitably into contrast. As we have seen, Machiavelli considers popular desires more “honest,” but not only. Breaking from a venerable tradition, from Plato and Aristotle to Aquinas, that considers the social order as arising from the

organic interaction of the different social classes, each of them occupying their “natural” place, Machiavelli questions its underlying anthropology by recognizing an unavoidable tendency toward conflict, rooted in the imbalance between the inexhaustibility of human desires and the scarcity of resources with which to satisfy them.⁴⁴ The “humors” of citizenship are not limbs of a body, tied by an innate link, but social components in potential or actual conflict. The conflict can assume different forms—virtuous or degenerative—but it is in any case a fact of politics, especially the politics of republics.

Machiavelli casts the people as political protagonist, and this role plays out in political conflict. The dissensions between nobility and people “kept Rome free”: the “laws that are made in favor of liberty [*leggi e ordini in beneficio della publica libertà*]” are born precisely from the “discord” [*disunione*] between the two chief humors of the republic.⁴⁵ This revolutionary thesis marks a discontinuity in the history of Western political thought in which social and political conflict is traditionally seen as an illness of the political body. And the radical innovation introduced by Machiavelli has hardly been accepted; this is true for the most part of republican writers, from Guicciardini to thinkers, such as Harrington and Rousseau, who were in large part inspired by Machiavelli. All of them criticize him explicitly and directly on this point.⁴⁶

The scandal is not only that conflict is an inescapable element of political life. According to Machiavelli the conflict that expresses the fundamental (*naturali*) humors of the society and is channeled into “laws and orders” is healthy: it ignites institutional innovation aimed to include the people in the citizenship. In such a way freedom is maximized and the republic becomes more powerful. Under other conditions, however, conflict becomes pathological and is a factor of corruption. In this case reciprocal fear is activated and joins with the ruinous formation of “sects.”⁴⁷ Eventually, this contributes to the collapse of the republic. The main theme of the *Florentine Histories* is precisely the pathological forms of social conflict.⁴⁸ Divisions in the Florentine citizenship are represented as linked to the hate and personal clashes between prominent families and the ambition of powerful citizens. Familiar blood feuds produce violent struggles, and from there the disunion and the decadence of Florence escalate.⁴⁹

The distinction between those two forms of conflict has often been interpreted from the point of view of moderation: the virtuous forms of conflict are held to be the less radical and violent, managed by peaceful means⁵⁰ and resolved by “debating [*disputando*]” rather than “fighting [*combattendo*]”;⁵¹ and the “ambition” of the people seems to be the main

factor that leads to violent conflict. But in Machiavelli's narrative, the way to tyranny opens less when conflict is radical than when the people resort to "private remedies" and choose to entrust the protection of their interests and revenge against their enemies to a powerful person,⁵² who pursues his reputation by private methods, that is, "[conferring benefits] on various private persons by lending them money, marrying off their daughters, protecting them from the magistrates."⁵³

I suggest that Machiavelli, rather than juxtaposing "radical" forms of conflict with "moderate" ones, distinguishes between conflict that arises from the confrontation of well-defined social groups, expressing the fundamentally different interests within citizenship, and conflict stemming from the search for personal power, which is connected to the formation of clientele, factions, and armed groups. The first one is virtuous and contributes to liberty; the second one is pathological and leads to tyranny. Furthermore, inequality, which initiates the formation of factions and cliques, emerges as a strong relevant factor in the genesis of potentially destructive forms of conflict.⁵⁴

People and *grandi* play different roles expressing different interests and passions. People desire essentially not to be oppressed, where optimates' aim is to oppress them. The latter's appetites are overwhelmingly more dangerous to freedom. Either way, attempts to remove conflict lead republics to decadence, if not pave the road to tyranny. The best way to stabilize a republic and let it last is to give to the humors "a way of venting ordered by the laws [*una via da sfogarsi ordinata dalle leggi*]."⁵⁵ The constitutional design has to frame institutions that allow ordinary modes of political conflict. The defectiveness of such modes is perhaps the main limit of the Florentine Republic compared to the Roman one. In the former the humors, mainly the people, were forced to recur to extraordinary modes.

This idea is linked directly to the issue of the rule of law.

III. RULE OF LAW AND *GOVERNO DEL POPOLO*

The ideal of the "government of law" was originally elaborated by ancient Greek and Roman thinkers, from Plato to Cicero. Such a classical ideal, at the root of the notion of rule of law, seems to imply an antidemocratic prejudice:⁵⁶ in those writers, the critique of democracy is connected to the institutional choice of mixed government, understood as a constitutional structure in which the different components of the citizenship—the monarchy, the "best," and the "many"—are allocated the different political roles for which they are suited.⁵⁷ These institutional options express an

anthropology of inequality, paradigmatically outlined in Aristotle's *Politics*. This is the theoretical matrix of the thesis that within the citizenship only the supposed "best" (*aristoi, patricii, ottimati*) are fully capable of political deliberation; by contrast, the "many" are seen as suited only to the choice among alternatives already drawn up by the few. In other words, there is a sort of political division of labor: in a virtuous political community the different social classes ought to play their proper role, thereby taking their "natural" place and pursuing their "natural" end. Mixed government in this sense, through such a division of labor, yields an ordered harmony in the *body politic*.

This idea, which reemerged in the political thought of Florentine civic humanism, was shared by republican political thinkers closest to the elite of *ottimati*, such as Francesco Guicciardini, and was formulated with great clarity in James Harrington's *Oceana*. Harrington sees in every republic a "natural aristocracy," naturally inclined to political deliberation and endowed with free time for the affairs of government. On the other hand, the people do not share the same political virtue but are by nature fit for choosing between the alternatives defined by the aristocracy.⁵⁸ While the aristocracy has the power to propose and discuss, the people can only elect the governing body and choose among the options that are presented to them, after a preliminary discussion and selection by the aristocrats.

Those elements—critique of democracy, the organicist theory of mixed government, and an elitist anthropology—are consistent with the vision of political order that expresses a radical aversion to political conflict shared by such writers. Institutional arrangements have to meet an adequate social framework: to prevent the faction from upsetting the polis, Aristotle suggests the prevalence of the middle class,⁵⁹ whereas Harrington states that the causes of the conflict may be removed if an adequate "balance of dominion" is introduced.⁶⁰

In this perspective the rule of law and political conflict seem to be in strong tension with each other. According to Harrington, "government (to define it *de jure*, or according to ancient prudence) [. . .] is the empire of laws, and not of men." Such a government is opposed to the *de facto* one, or "empire of men, and not of laws." If Hobbes, founder of the "modern" prudence, is the champion of the latter, "The former kind is that which Machiavel [. . .] is the only politician that has gone about to retrieve."⁶¹

Following Harrington, some interpreters who stress the importance of the rule of law in the works of Machiavelli tend to understate the significance of his positive evaluation of conflict. Maurizio Viroli maintains that the rule of law—considered the truly significant element of Machia-

vellian republicanism—means moderation. And Viroli insists on the idea that Machiavelli stigmatizes not only the “arrogance” of the nobles but also the ambition of the people. More recently, Erica Benner endorses the claim that “Machiavelli does not take side with any sectional interest” and that he “purports to uphold the ‘rule of law’ against the ‘rule of men’ as the principal antidote to civil disorders.”⁶²

According to Machiavelli the diverse components of the citizenry have different interests and goals but are endowed with the same political capabilities and are equally fit for political activity. Machiavelli not only sponsors the institutions ordered to protect the people from optimates’ oppression, such as the tribunes of the plebs. He also views very favorably the fact that the Roman republic assigned the plebeians the power to propose and discuss laws. Their competence in deliberating, not just in choosing between preselected alternatives or in acclaiming the leader, is fully acknowledged. Machiavelli praises especially the possibility, long guaranteed to Roman citizens, of submitting new laws at the discussion in the comitia and of acting on them “either for or against.” He moreover stigmatizes the eventual usurpation of this power by the powerful.⁶³ Such an evaluation contrasts with the typical pro-optimate republicanism, according to which, in Guicciardini’s words, “only the able and deserving should govern.”⁶⁴

If the end of the traditional theory of mixed government was to limit the “risks” of popular government, Machiavelli argues that the greatest danger for the state comes from the uncontrollable tendency of gentlemen to impose their dominance in such a way that reverses the meaning of the theory. Moreover his analysis of the dynamics of conflict emphasizes the political capacity of the people. In some pages Machiavelli seems to condemn “ambition” on the part of the people like the optimates’ thirst for power. But he adds that, without the “appetites” of the plebeians, Rome would have lost its liberty much more quickly.⁶⁵ This point must not be underestimated. Machiavelli reaffirms the idea that laws in defense of liberty are born from virtuous forms of conflict. Even the ambition of the plebeians, which Machiavelli at times seems to abhor, has virtuous effects, as far as it opposes the passions of the powerful. Mixed government, in Machiavelli, does not express an organic ideal but rather the modern idea of checks and balances, the articulation of powers in such a way that “one keeps watch over the other [*l’uno guarda l’altro*].”⁶⁶

The role of the people as a political protagonist, a role undertaken through political conflict, characterizes the Machiavellian view of the rule of law against the recurrent traditional vision, which is based on a

link between the rule of law, mixed government, and the critique of democracy. This is true even for the *Florentine Histories*. This work is generally viewed as the expression of a moderate turn in Machiavelli's works.⁶⁷ But in that work it is stated quite clearly that *grandi* are, by their very nature, in opposition to the rule of law: the enmity between the people and the powerful is insurmountable "because, since the people wish to live according to the laws, and the powerful to control the laws, it is not possible for them to agree [*perché, volendo il popolo vivere secondo le leggi, e i potenti comandare a quelle, non è possibile cappino insieme*]."⁶⁸ The reversal of the traditional theory is evident: the people seem spontaneously and "naturally" predisposed to respect the rule of law and the powerful to impose their "rule of men."

The rule of law in Machiavelli means neither appeasing conflicts nor attributing a subordinate role to the people. Rather, the rule of law provides the institutional framework for struggles to take place in virtuous forms. Within this framework, conflict can virtuously produce "laws and orders" that increase freedom, and this generates a virtuous feedback effect on the institutional framework. In this way conflict is not a degenerative factor but rather acts to counteract the entropic tendency of the republic toward corruption.

The rule of law, understood as lacking an antidemocratic meaning, remains a central feature of Machiavellian republicanism, and its relevance has to be considered in evaluating the role of the people.⁶⁹ Antonio Negri, in reconstructing an alternative strain in Western modernity, has situated Machiavelli at the origin of the modern genealogy of constituent power.⁷⁰ But Negri tends to underestimate how, according to Machiavelli, the people, as a contributor to political conflict, produces "laws that are made in favor of liberty." On the other side, not every claim, not every struggle, is virtuous. In order for the conflict to be virtuous, the multitude must organize itself, *constitute* itself. The people who are able to speak the *vox Dei* are the people "that command and are well organized [*ordinato*]." Negri stresses that, unlike Hobbesian theory, in Machiavellian theory the people maintain a political and social autonomy in front of the established political body. But in their development as a political subject, and through the framing effect of conflict, being "chained by the laws"—the result of rules and institutions—is crucial. Despite some republican interpretations, we cannot consider the appeal to moderation by the wise gentleman in the *Florentine Histories* 3.5 as fully giving voice to Machiavelli's theory. But neither does the *ciompo's* nihilistic egalitarianism in 3.15 represent fully the author's point of view. The constituent power of the multitude

is exercised inside legal forms and political institutions, establishing an inescapable link between popular activism, democracy, and rule of law.



For many interpreters, political realism is naturally linked to a conservative point of view: “the reality principle” is opposed to “the principle of hope.”⁷¹ In this essay I have tried to show that this is not the case with Machiavelli. Machiavelli is a realist in as much as he recognizes the functional autonomy of politics from morality. This does not mean that he gives up endorsing any values (first and foremost liberty) or that politics should be understood through the moral lens of “good-bad.” His realism must be analyzed through a strategic dimension, the opportunistic interplay of interests and the autonomous logic of power.

But the image of Machiavelli’s realism would be one-dimensional if one did not give an account of another element: according to Machiavelli, *andare drieto alla verità effettuale* does not mean to deny the possibility of change, of a creative and transformative agency. *Virtù* is not a moral value superimposed to political action; it rather means the ability to see the narrow space of possibility let open by fortune and necessity, the capacity to grasp the “quality of times.” In this sense one cannot pass smoothly from the political dimension to the moral one because Machiavelli’s republican realism is elaborated from a partisan point of view, that of the people. Against the background of the history of Western political thought—whose mainstream is harshly antipopular and critical of democracy—Machiavelli stands out as a radical innovator, from both an epistemic and a political point of view. Strictly linked is the radically new theory of political conflict, seen as a potentially virtuous factor of institutional innovation and as the process by which the people enter citizenship.

As a conclusion, let me go back to the beginning. Machiavelli’s disapproval of abstract, ideological imagination expresses itself in a theory of political innovation. From this point of view, the final exhortation of *The Prince*, with its quasi-prophetic mood and its mythical images, is particularly impressive. As is well known, the philological problem about the exhortation and the dedicatory epistle being successively added to the book has a theoretical meaning: Is their content extrinsic to that of the twenty-five chapters?⁷²

Confined in the prison of Turi, Antonio Gramsci could access neither critical editions nor philological literature. His interpretation of Machiavelli has an evident political aim. But according to Machiavelli, to assume

an explicitly defined point of view gives the interpreter an advantage. Gramsci notes that at Machiavelli's time "the prince had no real historical existence" and suggests reading the final exhortation as the conclusion of "a 'live' work, in which political ideology and political science are fused in the dramatic form of a 'myth.'"⁷³ So the final exhortation is not extrinsic to the book: there "Machiavelli merges with the people, becomes the people [. . .]. The entire 'logical' argument now appears as nothing other than an auto-reflection on the part of the people."⁷⁴

Five hundred years ago Machiavelli wrote *The Prince* while experiencing a triple crisis. There was the crisis of Italy, despite its economic and cultural role in the European Renaissance: divided between regional states and foreign dominions, it had become a battlefield and object of struggle between France and Spain. There was the crisis of Florence, which had been displaced from its pivotal position in the Italian geopolitical equilibrium and had again lost its republican liberty. There was the personal crisis of Machiavelli, a former leading actor in Florentine politics and diplomacy, now in disgrace after the Medici restoration. Machiavelli was dividing his time between the management of his little farm, the *ingaglio-farsi* [sinking into vulgarity] in the inn, the study of the classical authors, and the aspiration to resume a practical role, even to "roll a stone."⁷⁵ But it was precisely in his darker years that Machiavelli expressed his most innovative theoretical contributions. In proposing a creative and partisan solution to such a crisis his political realism generates a surplus of political imagination.

NOTES

1. Niccolò Machiavelli, *De principatibus*, in *Tutte le opere*, ed. Mario Martelli (Florence: Sansoni, 1992), 280 (English translation by Harvey C. Mansfield [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998], 61).

2. In Thomas Hobbes and Baruch Spinoza the critique of imagination on a theoretical level is linked with the political one, and the latter directly condemns utopian philosophers (*Political Treatise* 1.1). As is well known, in recent times a huge series of philosophers revived the issue of the relationship between politics and imagination, from Cornelius Castoriadis to Jacques Derrida to Slavoj Žižek. Cf. Chiara Bottici, *Imaginal Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

3. B. Croce, *Elementi di politica* (1925), in *Etica e politica* (Bari: Laterza, 1967), 205 (English translation *Politics and Morals* [New York: Philosophical Library, Hubner & Co., 1945], 59).

4. James Harrington, *The Commonwealth of Oceana* (1656), in “*The Commonwealth of Oceana*” and “*A System of Politics*”, ed. John G. A. Pocock (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 8–9.
5. Cf. obviously John G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975).
6. Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 1:180.
7. Cf. Maurizio Viroli, *Machiavelli* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 125.
8. Cf. Giuliano Procacci, *Machiavelli nella cultura europea* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1995).
9. Cf. Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*, 156–82.
10. Cf. *ibid.*, 215–18.
11. Skinner, *Foundations*, 134.
12. *Ibid.*, 180–86.
13. *Ibid.*, 134.
14. Machiavelli, *De principatibus* 7, 267–68 (Mansfield translation 29, 31).
15. *Ibid.*, 269 (35).
16. *Ibid.*, 283 (69–70).
17. Machiavelli, *Discorsi sopra la prima Deca di Tito Livio* 2.13, in *Tutte le opere*, 163 (English translation by Allan Gilbert, in *The Chief Works and Others* [Durham: Duke University Press, 1958], 357). If not otherwise noted, the following quotations of Machiavelli are from those editions.
18. Cf. *ibid.*, 3.21, 227 (478–79).
19. Cf. *ibid.*, 3.30, 236–37 (495–98); cf. also the merciless *Epigramma I*, in *Tutte le opere*, 1005 (English translation in *Chief Works*, 1463).
20. Machiavelli, *Discorsi* 3.41, 249 (519).
21. Machiavelli, *De principatibus* 15, 280 (Mansfield translation 61).
22. Cf. Machiavelli, *Discorsi* 1.27, 109–10 and 1.41, 125–26 (254–55, 284–85).
23. Machiavelli, *De principatibus* 18, 284 (Mansfield translation 70).
24. Antonio Gramsci hypothesizes that Machiavelli intended to educate the subalterns with political realism, since one who belongs to “the traditional governing stratus acquires most automatically the characteristics of the political realist” (*Quaderni del carcere* 13, ed. Valentino Gerratana [Turin: Einaudi, 1977], 1600 [English translation by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, *Selection from the Prison Notebooks* [New York: International Publishers, 1971], 135–36]).
25. Machiavelli, *Discorsi* 1.9, 90 (218).
26. For a deeply argued interpretation of Machiavelli as a moral philosopher and his Greek (more than Roman) sources, cf. Erica Benner, *Machiavelli’s Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009). In my view Benner’s emphasis on the philosophical dimension of Machiavellian thought, set on a line that links Plato to Kant, risks neutralizing its political meaning.
27. Machiavelli, *De principatibus*, 257 (Mansfield translation 4).
28. On the opposite side, John McCormick investigates “Machiavelli’s class politics” (*Machiavellian Democracy* [New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011], 9) in

the light of a partisan option that has clear social and economic meaning. Against the aristocratic tradition of republicanism Machiavelli makes “class conflict central to republican discourse and democratic practice” (12).

29. In *Discorsi* 1.2, 80 (198) *civile equalità* is opposed to “*avarizia* [in ancient Italian the term meant both stinginess and greed],” “ambition,” “violence against women”; the first opposition reveals a clear economical dimension of equality. In 1.6 Lycurgus’s laws are told to produce “*più equalità di sustanze, e meno equalità di grado* [more equality of property and less equality of rank],” 85 (208): the double valence, economic and political, of equality is explicit. Note that the economic equality is an effect of the laws: in Machiavelli economics is in the last instance subordinated to politics, as it will be in Hobbes.

30. The uncorrupted peoples, such as the Romans in the early republic and the Germans (or the Swiss) at the time of Machiavelli, do “not allow any citizen of theirs to be a gentleman or to live in the fashion of one,” and if any gentlemen “come into their hands, they put them to death,” so maintaining a “*pari equalità* [complete equality],” *ibid.*, 137 (308). *Gentiluomini* are defined by Machiavelli as “who without working live in luxury on the return of their landed possessions, without paying any attention either to agriculture or to any other occupation necessary for making a living,” *ibid.*, 137–38 (308). This is clearly a definition based on economic factors. The very presence of such individuals *inimici d’ogni civiltà* makes the introduction of republican government impossible.

31. On the other side, in order to institute a monarchy “where there is great equality,” it is necessary to draw “away from that equality many of ambitious and restless spirit,” make them masters of “castles and possessions” and give them “aid with property and men [*favore di sustanze e di uomini*]” such as to make them “gentlemen in fact,” *ibid.*, 138 (309).

32. Machiavelli, *De principatibus* 20, 291 (Mansfield translation 87).

33. *Ibid.*, 271 (39). Italics added.

34. *Ibid.*, 1.6, 85–86 (209–10).

35. As noted by Gramsci, Machiavelli is politically one-sided even in the *Arte della Guerra*: the idea of maximizing the popular contribution to the army produces misunderstandings and errors from a strictly military point of view, e.g., on artillery and fortresses; cf. Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere* 13, 1572–73 (140–41).

36. Cf. McCormick, *Machiavellian Democracy*, 36–61. The features and the virtue of the people depend on his political and moral condition: cf. Machiavelli, *Discorsi* 1.16, 99 (235); 3.8, 213 (451).

37. Cf. *ibid.* 1.4, 83 (204–5).

38. *Ibid.* 1.57, 140 (312).

39. *Ibid.* 1.58, 141 (313).

40. *Ibid.* 141–42 (316–17).

41. Machiavelli, *Discursus florentinarum rerum post mortem iunioris Laurentii Medices*, in *Tutte le opere*, 25 (English translation *A Discourse on Remodeling the Government of Florence*, in *Chief Works*, 104).

42. *Ibid.*, 28 (110).

43. Machiavelli, *De principatibus* 9, 271 (Mansfield translation 39). Here there

is no space to analyze the different terms adopted by Machiavelli, in a not always coherent way (e.g., *popolo*, *plebe*, *universale*, *moltitudine*; and *grandi*, *ottimati*, *senato*, *gentiluomini*).

44. Cf. Machiavelli, *Discorsi* 2.preface, 145 (323). It is easy to see here the anticipation of the Hobbesian analysis of conflict. Note that “desires” and “reasons” are not to be understood in a strictly material meaning. According to Hobbes there are two different kinds of conflict, relating to two different kinds of passions: “sensual passions” aimed at utility and “mental passions” aimed at glory; cf. Barbara Carnevali, “Glory,” *Communications* 93 (2013): 49–67. Both these dimensions of conflict can be found in Machiavelli’s text: the conflict of interests and the struggle for recognition. Relating to the second one, Machiavelli outlines a seminal inquiry on reputation (seen both as a resource and as a danger for the republic), the different (“public” or “private”) means to obtain it, and the institutional devices that can manage the social distribution of glory and honor. Cf. Machiavelli, *Discorsi* 2.28, 235 (492–93).

45. Machiavelli, *Discorsi* 1.4, 83 (202–3). For a systematic reconstruction of the theory of conflict in the *Discourses* cf. Gabriele Pedullà, *Machiavelli in tumulto: Conquista, cittadinanza e conflitto nei “Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Tito Livio”* (Rome: Bulzoni, 2011).

46. Cf. Harrington, *Oceana*, 32–37; Skinner, *The Foundations*, 181–82.

47. Cf. Machiavelli, *Discorsi* 1.7: “injury would have been done by individuals to individuals. Such injury produces fear; fear seeks for defense; for defense partisans are obtained; from partisans rise parties in states; from parties their ruin” (87 [212]). Cf. *ibid.*, 1.8, 89 (216).

48. The most impressive representation of extreme violence, even of cannibalism, by the multitude in Florentine political struggles can be found in the narration of the lynching of Messer Guglielmo d’Assisi and his teen son, cf. Machiavelli, *Istorie fiorentine* 2.33, in *Tutte le opere*, 686 (English translation in *Chief Works*, 1132). An extreme egalitarian ideology, violent up to nihilism, is expressed by the *ciompo* [carder] who talks in 3.13, 3.14, 701 (1159–60).

49. The narration begins in 1215, with the murder that derived from the hatred between Buondelmonti and Uberti, which then took the form of the struggle between Guelfi and Ghibellini.

50. Cf., e.g., Benner, *Machiavelli’s Ethics*, 152–53, 252–53.

51. Machiavelli, *Discorsi* 3.1, 690 (1140); cf. 3.5, 693–94 (1146).

52. This dynamic emerged in Roman history after the agrarian laws: the legal framework became incapable of channeling conflicts in an “ordinary” way, i.e., through political action and “ordinary remedies.” Cf. *ibid.* 1.37, 120 (274); 1.40, 124 (282–83).

53. There are both “public” and “private” methods to gain reputation. While the former must be open to all citizens, the latter are “very dangerous and altogether injurious”: “These make men partisans of their benefactors and give the man they follow courage to think they can corrupt the public and violate the laws” *ibid.* 3.28, 235 (492–93). Cf. Machiavelli, *Istorie fiorentine* 7.1, 792–93 (1337); 3.5, 693 (1146). About the conflicts originated from private interest of prominent families see also 2.33, 681 (1122). Of course self-promotion and self-interest can be powerful motivators of political action for the *individuals* belonging to both classes. Machiavelli seems to presuppose that

(1) this is more relevant for the *grandi* than for the people (their ends are supposed to be “more honest” even in this sense); (2) in the virtuous forms of conflict selfishness does not prevail over class general interest. The institutional framework can contribute to (2), as I will try to show in the next section. Let me thank an anonymous referee of the University of Chicago Press for raising this question.

54. Cf. Machiavelli, *Istorie fiorentine* 7.1, 792 (1336).

55. Machiavelli, *Discorsi* 1.7, 87 (my translation); cf. 1.34, 1.35; on dictatorship as an “ordinary” method to manage “extraordinary” events see Marco Geuna’s contribution (chapter 11) to this volume.

56. In Aristotle’s *Politics* (1292a–1293a, 1295a–1296b) the concept is introduced in the context of a critique of radical and “demagogic” forms of democracy, in which it is the poor multitude that governs, rather than the laws: the worst forms of democracy, those further from the ideal of the rule of law, are those in which the institute of *mistophoria* permits even workers to participate in assemblies; the best forms of democracy are of the *polis* of peasants, who have little time for politics and leave governing to the middle class. Cf. also Plato, *The Statesman* 300c–303b; Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Pro Cluentio* 53, 146; *De re publica*, 3.22, 33; *De legibus*, 1.16, 43–44.

57. The “republican” critique of democracy continues up to the works of Kant, the philosophical *authoritas* of the first theorists of the *Rechtsstaat*; cf. Immanuel Kant, *Die Metaphisik der Sitten* (1797), in *Gesammelte Schriften* (Berlin-Leipzig, 1907), 6:319, 321–22.

58. For Harrington, attributing to the people the faculty of debating means letting them fall into “an anarchy as those of Athens”; cf. Harrington, *Oceana*, 137 ff. Republics with a “natural” aristocracy, e.g., Sparta, Rome, and Venice, are contrasted and preferred to those with a “plebeian” tendency, such as Athens, Switzerland, and Holland.

59. Cf. Aristotle, *Politics* 1295a–1296b.

60. Cf. Harrington, *Oceana*, 71. In the first pages of the *Preliminaries* Harrington repropose the apology of democracy of peasants in *Politics* 1318b–1319b, as democracies are less exposed to “shakings and turbulence”; cf. Harrington, *Oceana*, 5.

61. *Ibid.*, 8–9.

62. Benner, *Machiavelli’s Ethics*, 2–3; cf. 279–87.

63. Cf. Machiavelli, *Discorsi* 1.18, 103 (242). For a systematic interpretation of the institutional devices proposed by Machiavelli—“characterized by class-specific, popularly-empowering and elite-constraining institutions”—see McCormick, *Machiavellian Democracy* (16). McCormick notes that Machiavelli gives a more “deliberatively democratic” reading of Roman political procedures than they actually were, a (voluntarily or not) tendentious interpretation revealing his option for an inclusive republic “that allows greater popular discussion over and control of policy formation, lawmaking, and magistrate behavior” (78, cf. 98–100).

64. Francesco Guicciardini, *Ricordi*, C 109, in *Opere* (Turin: UTET, 1970) (English translation *Maxims and Reflections of a Renaissance Statesman* [New York: Harper & Row, 1965, 69]).

65. Cf. Machiavelli, *Discorsi* 1.37, 120 (274); cf. McCormick, *Machiavellian Democracy*, 86–89.

66. Machiavelli, *Discorsi* 1.2, 80 (199).

67. For an opposed point of view cf. Filippo Del Lucchese, "Disputare e combattere: Modi del conflitto nel pensiero di Machiavelli," *Filosofia politica* 15, no. 1 (2001): 71–95; *Conflict, Power, and Multitude in Machiavelli and Spinoza: Tumult and Indignation* (New York: Continuum, 2009).

68. Machiavelli, *Istorie fiorentine* 2.12, 666 (1093–94).

69. To give account of his original critique to philoaristocrat humanists, McCormick has opposed Machiavelli to republicanism. But this is not necessary to attribute the "republican" label only to characters such as Rucellai or Guicciardini and their theoretical followers; one can qualify Machiavelli as a philopopular, democratic republican. Moreover, McCormick fittingly sees Philip Pettit's neorepublican theory in the light of elitist early-modern republicanism (McCormick, *Machiavellian Democracy*, 145–69), but in contemporary theoretical debate we can find different versions of radical democratic republicanism. For a sharp critique of Pettit's "unpolitical" conception of democracy see Nadia Urbinati, *Democracy Disfigured: Opinion, Truth, and the People* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), esp. 116–22. Urbinati notes that "in relation to democracy, contemporary neo-Roman republicanism plays the same role as liberalism after World War II" (121).

70. Cf. Antonio Negri, *Il potere costituente: Saggio sulle alternative del moderno* [1992] (Rome: Manifestolibri, 2002) [English translation *Insurgencies: Constituent Power and the Modern State* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999]].

71. Pierpaolo Portinaro, *Il realismo politico* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1999), 14–15.

72. According to Mario Martelli's thesis *The Prince* would have been composed over several years and the exhortation was composed in 1517–18, when Lorenzo de' Medici became Duke of Urbino and the Medici dominion—including the Papal States, whose pope was Leo X—was covering a large part of Italy; cf. Mario Martelli, "La logica provvidenzialistica e il cap. XXVI del *Principe*," *Interpres* 4 (1981–82): 262–384; *Saggio sul "Principe"* (Rome: Salerno Editrice, 1999).

73. Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere* 13, 1555 (125).

74. *Ibid.*, 1556 (126). Cf. also Louis Althusser, "La solitude de Machiavel" (1977), English translation in *Machiavelli and Us* (London-New York: Verso, 1999), 126–30.

75. Cf. Niccolò Machiavelli to Francesco Vettori, December 10th, 1513, in *Opere*, 1159–60 (English translation by Allan Gilbert, *The Letters of Machiavelli: A Selection* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961], 139–44). Note that Gramsci, too, wrote notebooks on Machiavelli while experiencing the crisis of European workers' movement, the crisis of Italy ruled by fascism, and his political and personal crisis.

"Armi proprie e improprie" in the
Work of Some Representative Italian
Readers of the Twentieth Century

MICHELE BATTINI

In what follows, I study the relationship stated in some of Niccolò Machiavelli's writings between his conception of *"armi proprie"* (an army made of citizens, peasants included) and his reflections on the reform of the institutions of the Republic of Florence. The *"riforma militare"*—that is, the just solution to the question of military and political force—was to Machiavelli the core of political reform for constructing a republic based on *"governo largo,"* or inclusive of all citizens, those living in the urban territory and those living in the countryside.

To the analysis of Machiavelli's issues and texts, I will then add the interpretations of them by some representative Italian scholars of the twentieth century, such as Federico Chabod and Antonio Gramsci. I will especially focus on Gramsci's interpretation of Machiavelli, marked by the urgent problem of rethinking the question of political/military force in relation to the action of the working-class movement after the defeat of the revolutions in the aftermath of World War I in Western Europe, the catastrophe of the market society in 1929, and the ensuing reorganization of the forces of production by Fordism and Americanism. I will finally conclude with some reflections on a very recent and, in my view, original reading of the same problem—namely political/military force—as it has been recently proposed by Adriano Sofri (the founder and leader of the 1970s extraparlimentary leftist movement Lotta Continua) in the light of the sunset of the national state (as foreseen by Gramsci), the global integration of financial economies, the unification of the global market, and, as a consequence, the threat that the latter represents to democracy (by which I mean both political rights and the protection of social rights associated with labor, which I see as part of the protection of human rights). The principle of an international legal system and jurisdiction to prosecute

and punish crimes against humanity (massacres, tortures, and genocides) lacks its own political/military force; it lacks an international coercive power, or *armi proprie*. It is not irrelevant that both Gramsci and Sofri attempted their own reflections on politics *post res perditas*, after their political defeat and incarceration, just like the Florentine secretary. I propose to analyze these modern interpretations of a few pages of the *Discourses* in which we may find the synthesis of Niccolò Machiavelli's view as it was expounded in *Le parole da dirle sopra la provisione del danaio*, the *Discorso sull'ordinare lo Stato di Firenze sopra le armi*, the *Discorso sopra l'ordinanza e milizia fiorentina*, and finally the *Legazioni*.

I

In the last few decades, scholars who have studied Machiavelli and the republican tradition—the idea of liberty before liberalism¹—within the context of early modern Europe (and in particular the crisis of the Italian states under the threat of the territorial states) have documented the relevance of that tradition, not only in relation to the republics (the belt of city-states from the North Sea and the Baltic Sea to the Mediterranean) but also the monarchical states.² The republic, or the city-state, represented Italy's authentic form of political life in the modern age. This judgment, which was early on advanced by Simonde de Sismondi, Carlo Cattaneo, and Jacob Burckhardt, has been documented and confirmed by Marino Berengo, Hans Baron, and John M. Najemy.³

As secretary of the Ten, and thus an *uomo pubblico* yet not a member of the institutions on which the sovereignty of the Florentine Republic resided, Machiavelli had to deal constantly with the problems of the military autonomy of the republic, namely both the militia and Florentine diplomatic policy at the imperial, French, papal, and Venetian courts. In 1494, the question of securing Florence against the threat coming from the European powers competing for hegemony on Italian soil, and against domestic conflicts and the alteration of Florence's "constitutional" equilibrium provoked by the rebellions of the peoples of Val di Chiana and Pisa, became Machiavelli's obsession. He tried to deal with the problem of the military autonomy of the republic by demonstrating that its security could be ensured only by amending the military weakness caused by the mercenary armies and thus by building a popular army based entirely on the military service of Florence's citizens and peasants. In a word, Machiavelli thought that solving the problem of security meant including the people in the

governo largo of the republic. The necessity of linking together military reform and political reform, force and consent, would return in his subsequent works, *The Prince* and *L'Arte della guerra*, both of which were written by Machiavelli as the "ideal" secretary of the Florentine Republic, but also, and without hypocrisy, as a would-be magistrate of the new Signoria transfigured in an imaginary prince and mimicking, if only in the literary form, the model of the humanists, as for instance Leonardo Bruni and Coluccio Salutati, who had also played important roles in the government of Florence (Machiavelli's father, Bernardo, was himself a close friend of Bartolomeo Scala, the chancellor of Florence from 1464 to 1497).

The history of the project of a nonmercenary militia, or *armi proprie*, is based on an idea that is pivotal to the understanding of Machiavelli's political thought. This idea developed in his mind precociously, a few years after Machiavelli became secretary of the Ten, in particular when in 1500 he was sent to the "*campo pisano*" (the military field of the war for the reconquest of Pisa). There, he was impressed by the uncivil disorder of the mercenary troops paid by the Florentine Republic, and conversely by the unity of the rebellious people of Pisa, who were able to keep in check the mercenary army of Florence for several years.

It was in the writings he composed before the *Ordinanza sulla milizia* that Machiavelli devised the necessity of *armi proprie* for the defense of the republic.⁴ As a matter of fact, several other Florentines had discussed the reform of the militia before Machiavelli, namely Leonardo Bruni, Matteo Palmieri, and also (as Gennaro Sasso has observed) Enea Silvio Piccolomini, not a Florentine yet interested in glorifying *florentina libertas*. In Machiavelli's time the issue acquired a new and different meaning, however, because it coincided with an awareness that the solution to the question of an autonomous military force was the condition for countering the dramatic crisis of the republican institutions and the autonomy of the republic. As is well known, the principle of *armi proprie* was opposed by the *ottimati*, who were afraid that weapons in the people's hands could become a terrifying means of subversion. The *ottimati's* fear was well considered, because it rested on a consolidated knowledge of the social conflicts within the city and between the city and the countryside: "topics that the very 'affairs' (*cose*) of the Florentine society suggested and that run against Machiavelli's project," as Sasso wrote.⁵

In his writings in preparation for the *Ordinanza*, Machiavelli insisted thus on the idea that a *stato "bene ordinato"* requires not only a popular militia but also "*iustitia*." Yet only in the *Discourses* did the relation be-

tween security and justice rely explicitly on a very clear nexus between military reform and political reform, so as to make possible institutions that would represent the interests and needs of the whole social body.

Thus, Machiavelli's reflection on the nature of *dominium* ("*natura del governo del dominio*") in *The Prince* and the *Discourses* relied also upon a realistic analysis of the inability of Florence's leading class to tackle the problem of defense against external enemies and hostile subjected cities—as well as an analysis of the character of the government already discussed in the *Legazioni* and the *Commissarie* to the courts of Cesare Borgia, of France, and of the empire (and also in his *Ritratti*, composed between 1508 and 1512). To Machiavelli, the empire had no political relevance (more important were the "*liberissime città*" of Germany and Switzerland). The case of France was different: it had become increasingly more relevant to him as a monarchy that had "*infinite costituzioni buone*"⁶ (or as a temperate monarchy, as it was also appreciated by Claude de Seyssel, who proposed it as another possible path of the "*vivere politico*," no less dignified than the republican one).⁷ To Machiavelli, both a republic and a temperate monarchy were a "*costituzione buona*," the opposite of the "*potestà assoluta, la quale dagli autori è chiamata tirannide*."⁸ Tyranny was not a "*forma del vivere politico*."

In Machiavelli's conception of politics, based as it was on the sense of crisis and the instability of all political forms and institutions (as according to Polybius's scheme of *anacyclosis*), the reordering of the Republic of Florence (or of a temperate principality) was above all a problem of force, of militia, of the art of "arming."⁹ This explains why, when comparing the modern Republic of Venice (an aristocratic order not open to foreigners) with the ancient republic of Rome, Machiavelli preferred the latter because of its *governo largo* and its ability to give arms to the people. Rome, although frequently subjected to social disorders, had shown the trajectory through which also a modern republic (not only a territorial state ruled by a prince) could face the challenges coming from both external enemies and the rebellion of subjected cities (in particular those, like Pisa, that never forgot freedom and the ancient order, "*il nome della libertà e gli ordini antichi sua*").¹⁰ The defense of the republic should thus be organized by means of *armi proprie*.

Machiavelli's position was very different from Guicciardini's, who celebrated, on the contrary, the virtues of Venice's *stato misto* (and disparaged the Roman model) because it was able to create magistracies fit for an ordered administration of the countryside.¹¹ Guicciardini linked the problem of "*ampliare*" (territorial expansion) not so much to an objective

lack of equilibrium between the Italian republics and the large European states but to a realistic analysis of the weakness of the political space of the small states within the Italian and the European context. In a lucid acceptance of the existing reality and within the economy of the existing relation of forces, the state of the Medici seemed to Guicciardini preferable to the powerless "*governo di una moltitudine*."¹²

Donato Giannotti, who was the secretary of the Ten during the restored republic of 1527, would have replied to Guicciardini by proposing, like Machiavelli, the institution of a militia *propria* that included all the *cittadini* who paid taxes but were not yet allowed to enjoy full citizenship rights. Dealing with the new fall of the republic, Giannotti would argue again for the necessity of arming all the citizens, not only in order to guarantee the defense of the city but also to constitute a form of government that leaned on the people in order to contain the power of the *grandi*.¹³

II

Jérémie Barthas has demonstrated with substantial evidence, in chapter 10 of this volume, that a sentence in the *Discourses* (2.10), "*I denari non sono il nervo della guerra, secondo che è la comune opinione*" ("contrary to popular opinion, wealth is not 'the sinew of warfare'"), represents the core of the reflections entertained by Machiavelli, in the years he served as secretary of the Ten of Liberty, on the question concerning the financial means for the recruitment of the militia.

"Pensando continuamente i Magnifici et excelsi Signori priori di libertà e Gonfalonieri di Giustizia del popolo fiorentino a tutte le cose le quali abbino a essere la conservazione della vostra città, atteso massime alla lunga guerra che per ancora dura per la ribellione della città di Pisa, e sapendo il nervo della guerra e il mantenimento della libertà di ciascuna repubblica essere il denaro . . .": these are the words of the measure taken in 1498, a crucial year for the history of the Florentine Republic.¹⁴ Against this position, Machiavelli situated at the center of his *Discourses* the question of *armi proprie* and resorted again to the problem of force as crucial for any republic that had a *governo largo*, an institutional order that Machiavelli linked to the financial system of the city of Florence and its effects on the stability of the republic.¹⁵ We do not yet know with certainty the demographic dimensions of Florence and the proportion of citizens with full political rights compared to the number of all the taxable inhabitants in the years between 1480 and 1558. Anthony Molho and Christiane Klapisch-Zuber have calculated that less than 30 percent of the

citizens owned 50 to 60 percent of the entire Tuscan wealth,¹⁶ thus stressing the dramatic social consequences of the system of public debt of the republic toward the few *grandi*. Actually, the costs of a professional and a mercenary army were at the origin of the pathology of the public debt, made worse in 1494 by some imprudent political choices and probable frauds, especially during the war against Pisa. The text of the commission made in December 1498, with its reference to wealth as the "sinew of warfare," can be explained within that context.¹⁷ Indeed, that commission was conceived as a choice for inverting the process of the public debt that the republic had contracted with some few rich families.

Through the quattrocento, fiscal pressure was essentially directed toward real estate income, according to a policy aimed at protecting the resources to be destined for commerce and industry. Historians of northern Italy's communes and city-states think that it was the growth of extraordinary military expenses that contributed to raising and consolidating the public debt to the powerful aristocratic families, the *ottimati*, which possessed a huge financial capital and were thus the only citizens who could advance the money necessary to create an army well enough equipped to protect the city. In Florence, the public debt had thus become a source of speculative profits of extraordinary dimensions for the *ottimati* (among them, the urban elite of bankers in particular) and thus the main cause of the corresponding impoverishment of the state's resources and of the fiscal pressure on the countryside. Precisely in the case of Florence, Jérémie Barthas has estimated that an average of 15 to 20 percent of the people of the superior classes became the exclusive owners of the investment in the public debt, which means that no more than 150 families controlled the majority of the debt (the most important were the families of Nerli, Salviati, Bardi, Del Giocondo, and Strozzi).

This picture becomes more worrisome if we consider that the officials of the financial ministries (the Uffiziali del Monte) were asked, when they accepted their tenure, to advance a large sum of money to the republic, which they would receive back with high interest only at the end of their mandate. The consequence of this method was that the public debt found itself in a deadly conflict between magistrates' public service and private interests, because those who were supposed to elaborate financial laws were the same very people who had advanced huge amounts of money to the republic. It was thus natural that those magistrates tried to disentangle themselves from the control that the republic (through the Gran Consiglio) exercised on the Monte. The Gran Consiglio was the soul of the republic, the representative organ that in 1494 was enlarged with the

inclusion of several thousands of new citizens, thus becoming a natural force against the *ottimati*. And, predictably, Machiavelli's thoughts on the nature and the exercise of political power developed, as Felix Gilbert observed, within that context of this conflict.

Machiavelli's occasional writings, triggered by the financial urgencies of organizing the defense of the city, beginning with the commission of 1498, are the *Discorso sopra Pisa* (1499), the text on the people of Valdichiana, the *Missione al campo sotto Pisa* (1500), and the *Provvedimenti per la riconquista di Pisa* (1509), in addition to other *Legazioni* and *Commissarie*. In all of those texts, the weakness of the republic is denounced and attributed to its true causes: the unreliability of professional armies, the danger coming from the large debt that these armies required, and the necessity of a military reform based on *armi proprie*. An armed people was also seen as the obligatory solution to deflate the control of the *grandi* on the treasury, namely their purchasing power of the public debt, which was also acquired thanks to the vertical institutions of Florentine corporations.¹⁸

Reform of the financial system was thus the key to breaking the vicious circle between forced loans, debt consolidation, and oppressive taxation of the countryside, while military reform was the solution for the reconquering of the "national" state (namely, the entire territory of Tuscany with its stubborn, rebellious cities, such as Pisa). To Machiavelli, it was thus urgent to toughen the *governo largo* and counter the social selfishness and political factionalism of the *grandi*.¹⁹ With strong determination, Soderini attempted showdowns with the *grandi*: in 1502 with the financial reform and in 1506 with the military reform. Yet those attempts revealed a political design inspired by an idea of the republic that was distant from the paradigm of the communal tradition and rooted instead in a vision of financial policy that already anticipated a mercantilist conception of politics.

III

Machiavelli's republican design—financial, military, and political—was crudely discussed and attacked by contemporary and subsequent political thinkers, such as Innocent Gentillet, Alberico Gentili, and Pierre Bayle. Yet the image of Machiavelli as an "amoral technician of politics" and even a supporter of tyranny was never completely amended, not even within later historiography, where it was authoritatively sustained by, for instance, Meinecke, Macek, and Senellart, among others.²⁰

Very different is the case of those who have deemed Machiavelli's re-

publicanism distant from the idea of "reason of state" and from a modern conception of a monetary economy based on the separation between capital and labor. For instance, Federico Chabod has not judged Machiavelli's position inferior to that of Botero on the reason of state, nor has he shared military historians' criticisms of Machiavelli's presumed lack of true competence on this issue.²¹ Chabod demonstrated, however, a wavering in Machiavelli between the admiration of republican principles (hence his enmity for mercenary armies) and his admiration of the *condottieri* like Francesco Sforza, Giovanni l'Acuto, and Facino Cane. The "system of condottieri," Chabod argued, was not actually that of mercenary militia while, on the other hand, Machiavelli's design for organizing a republican militia was an indication of a view that was still within the horizon of a medieval commune. Machiavelli transported the new model into the old medieval commune (a transferring move he made also in relation to the republic of Rome). Yet his originality on this issue consisted in his decision to integrate the financial dimension with the political and military ones, so as to advance a new conception of the state by means of a new conception of the army. The scholar who early on understood this Machiavellian project was Luigi Russo, even though he criticized Machiavelli for imagining a national militia in a country, like Italy in the sixteenth century, that was "empty of cynicism, discipline, and national conscience" ("*vuoto di cinismo e di disciplina e di consapevolezza nazionali*"). Because of this error, Machiavelli, who used to deride miracles, was himself subject to the utopia of the good urban militia born from new laws ("*il derisore dei miracoli soggiace al miracolo delle milizie buone che nascono dalle nuove leggi*").²²

Critiques of Machiavelli have thus been contradictory: for having anticipated historical times or, better still, for having imagined a possibility that his realism could not have justified (Russo); or for having remained within a communal horizon (Chabod). Both criticisms neglect, however, the fact that Machiavelli, precisely because he was aware of the social conflict in the city and of the political conflict in the Consiglio Maggiore (that is, between "*i molti e i pochi*"), proposed as equally necessary both military reform and reform of the public debt (with the commissions of 1498 and, moreover, of 1502, and then with the reform of the Monte in 1505). The organization of a modern army, an army not made of mercenaries but of citizens, had among its conditions the expropriation of the control over the public debt by the *ottimati*, as well as the social and patriotic unity of the countryside, the people of the city, and the superior classes.

In his design of *armi proprie* and of a secure state based on a popular

army, Machiavelli learned from the experience of the rebellious cities like Pisa, which was able to resist Florentine reconquest by rejecting its own aristocrats' proposal to surrender and collaborate with Florence and electing new leaders trusted by both the urban people and the peasants, who were thus included fully in the life of the city. Michele Luzzati has shown that the Republic of Pisa (initially rebellious, above all, because of the support of the French army of Charles VIII) had witnessed a true revolution in the relation between the city and countryside: the liberation from Florence's dominion had caused an overturning of power relations within the city between the various political factions (and divergent social interests) of the most wealthy and important families: the "ancient families" and the "men of quality" were already involved in commercial relations with Florence and were forced to accept the decision of the government of Pisa to be independent and pursue the war against Florence, in order not to risk popular rebellion.²³ The war was waged by Pisa as a "*guerra di popolo*."

Indeed, starting in 1499, Pisa's peasants had regained representation and powers of decision in the republic thanks to their full participation in military actions, as is proved by the testimonies and annals of the time, as for instance those of Cerretani and Pietro Vaglianti. On May 6, 1499, the elders and the Gonfaloniere of Pisa devised the extension of the privileges enjoyed by the urban citizens to the citizens of the countryside ("de cetero tucti li contadini veri del contado di Pisa si intendino essere et sieno in perpetuo immuni et exempti da ogni gravessa, balzello, imposta, angaria, come non propri i cittadini pisani . . . et in la ciptà di Pisa familiarmente godere tucte le immunità, franchigie, privilegii, officii et dignità che godeno li ciptadini pisani, come se di ciptadini pisani nati fussero").²⁴ The external attack from the French army had broken the political equilibrium of the states of the peninsula and the class solidarity among the oligarchies of the various city-states (and among the hierarchy of the social classes within each city), so as to reveal unpremeditated social blocks between popular classes and new urban elites against the old oligarchies, and to make possible the emergence of the peasants as a new component of the citizenry with the result that the traditional separation between city and countryside was broken.²⁵

Machiavelli realized the importance of this revolution when he directly experienced Pisa's resistance against Florence, which was strengthened by the political and military contribution of the citizens, as he himself witnessed when he met with the peasants who were part of Pisa's delegation participating in the peace treaty of Piombino in 1509. Also on that occasion, the representatives of the countryside, having been included

since the beginning in Pisa's republican government, said that they would prefer to starve as citizens and free members of their government than to be prosperous as dominated peasants ("*suti accettati da principio nel governo*") said they would prefer "*stentare come cittadini e governatori che godere come contadini,*" rather than being "*comandati*").²⁶

The relationship between freedom and the unity of the people in a strong republic ("*rapporto libertà-unità nel popolo di una forte repubblica*") was among Machiavelli's experiences of his own time that helped him overcome the old contraposition between city and countryside, to the point of proposing to arm also the peasants for the defense of the city²⁷—although he was well aware that "giving arms to the peasants" would certainly be risky, as recognized by Parenti in Machiavelli's *Florentine Histories*. The choice of arming the people was at that point a component of political strategy and of the modern "art of war" that could be used by a republic or a monarchy, indifferently ("*può essere usata da una repubblica, o un regno*"). The art of war had thus to be "*ben ordinata*" according to political goals and technical rules, because only if well ordered could the war proceed well ("*usarla come si deve*")²⁸. The "good order" of the *armi proprie* is thus based not on wealth or the acquisition of resources, as in the case of mercenary militia, but can only exist if "good soldiers" are formed, trained, and persuaded that the reasons for which they fight are their own reasons, interests, and needs. The question of force in a well-ordered republic consists thus in the question of citizenship and the integration in the government of the urban people and the people of the countryside, whose convinced participation can make more prudent both the military and the political leadership: "With respect to prudence and stability, I would say that the people is more prudent, more stable, and of better judgment than a prince."²⁹ This conviction makes sense of the change ("*governo largo*") that took place in republican thought with Machiavelli. Indeed, according to Coluccio Salutati or Leonardo Bruni (see the latter's *Epistula ad Magnum Principem Imperatorem*³⁰) republican freedom could be preserved with the strength of solidarity and fraternity, wherein fraternity could exist among the few who fought, those who were equals in the common participation in the government of the city, a few aristocratic and wealthy families, or the *grandi*.

Machiavelli accepted, on the contrary, the challenge of the inclusion of the people, which he considered more prudent, more stable, and wiser than the *grandi* and the prince: fraternity here came to be enlarged so as to include the commoners. Yet Machiavelli did not ignore the difficulty of keeping together classes that were situated at the extremes of the so-

cial hierarchy (Machiavelli was well aware of the history of the conflicts between the few and the many). For this reason, he went back to the ancients. When, at the end of a day spent in business, hunting, and playing some games in the tavern, after having exchanged some words with people passing by, having eaten "such food as I can grow on my wretched farm or pay for with the income from my tiny inheritance," and after time spent "playing card games" and getting into "endless arguments" with the "bumpkins" in the local inn, Niccolò went back home and in his study took off his work clothes, "covered in mud and filth," and "decently dressed" entered "the ancient courts of ancient men. There I am warmly welcomed, and I feed on the only food I find nourishing, and was born to savor" ("*nelle antique corti degli antiqui huomini, dove, da loro ricevuto amorevolmente, mi pasco di quel cibo che solum è mio, et che io nacqui per lui*").³¹

When he was writing this famous letter to Francesco Vettori, on December 10, 1513, Machiavelli had already lost everything (the republic had fallen) but not the lucidity of his own design: social conflict existed but should not become lacerating to the point of jeopardizing the strength of the state. The lesson from the history of the Roman republic (a republic that was always "*tumultuaria*") was precious, because it admonished him of the urgency of mediating (through the creation of "*buoni ordini*," that is, at the constitutional level) the recurrent conflict between the senate and the plebs (thus, by means of good laws and solid institutions, avoiding the degeneration of the conflict into a civil war). In this case alone could social conflict turn out to be healthy for the republic.³²

Yet this was not the case in Rome and with the Gracchi.³³ Rome's republican institutions plunged into a crisis because the Gracchi stubbornly persisted in pursuing agrarian reform to the point of triggering a social struggle that became overt civil war and marked the death of the republic, with the dictatorships of Marius, Sulla, and Caesar.³⁴ The *Discourses* and chapter 9 of *The Prince* propose again a reflection on the decline of republican liberty in ancient Rome as related to the decline of an independent peasantry and a republican army.³⁵

Machiavelli wrote that the reform proposed by the tribunes of the plebs in order to restore the ancient agrarian laws (*ager publicus*) that the wealthy had violated was the cause of profound social conflicts that provoked the end of the Roman republic:³⁶ the Roman *grandi* were indeed willing to open the magistracies to the people but not to relinquish their property, because "men value their property more than honors." Political conflict should never be transformed into a frontal social conflict, as in

fact happened in Rome.³⁷ The Gracchi wanted to restore the *ager publicus* in order to fight against the concentration of wealth, but they provoked instead a crisis of the republic.

Thus Machiavelli opposed the Gracchi's reckless plan because of its consequences, but at the same time he held great wealth a very grave danger for liberty and the preservation of republican institutions. One may thus guess that his criticism of the Gracchi did not refer to their antiplutocratic position but to their political method, namely the plan of restoring an outmoded system (*ager publicus*). We may detect here some "incoherence" or at least some uncertainty in Machiavelli's position, because his support of the reform of the Monte was precisely the result of a social choice (or a classist choice) that was not after all different from that of the Gracchi, derived from the idea of constructing a popular republican militia. The Gracchi, too, linked the new agrarian law to the reform of the legions.

In chapter 9 of *The Prince*, in discussing the conflict between the few and the many as an eternal foundation of politics, Machiavelli suggested that the *new* (nonhereditary) prince would be able to organize the people in their conflict against the *grandi*. Even more explicit was the image of a new kind of prince he proposed in the *Florentine Histories*, when the *ciompo* (a leader of the rebellious textile workers) addressed a vehement appeal to his comrades to invite them to combat with no hesitation against the wealthy few and to risk much in order not to lose everything ("*rischiando molto per non perdere tutto*").³⁸ Machiavelli's analysis of the *ciompo*'s mind brings him to a vehement apology for class violence, when it is ineluctable.

The pursuing of social justice should not push us toward a desperate struggle and the destruction of social and moral cohesion, but republican liberty requires the defense of the people from the domination of the arrogant *grandi*, hence its inclusion in the *governo largo* of the republic.

IV

Machiavelli, Antonio Gramsci wrote, aimed at creating links between the countryside and the city and enlarging the functions of the urban classes so to induce them to give up their feudal and corporatist privileges over the countryside and gain the rural classes' consensus to the state. Machiavelli's *The Prince*, Gramsci continues, is thus a manifesto for the territorial and social unity of the modern republic: antiaristocratic, antifeudal, and anti-*grandi*. Machiavelli implicitly overcame mercantilism and already developed some ideas that were typically physiocratic: he conceived

a military reform and a reform to the financial system as a way to break the aristocratic oppressive taxation of the countryside, and to increase the real wealth of the state, that is, the agricultural wealth. Gramsci stressed also that his friend, the economist Pietro Sraffa, had grasped the importance of a possible link between Machiavelli and William Petty, whom Karl Marx defined as the founder of political economy.³⁹

To that of William Petty, John Pocock has added several other names of the Machiavellian moment, like Harrington and Toland. We cannot ignore, however, Simonde di Sismondi, to whom the ideal of the commune represented the true form of civic life in modern Italy since, as Machiavelli himself had foreseen, it was the solution to the social conflicts provoked by a free market economy.⁴⁰ As for Gramsci, Machiavelli and his prince are instead logical and rational categories, examples of the force that knows and wants "to lead the people toward the foundation of a new state" ("*condurre il popolo alla fondazione di un nuovo Stato*").⁴¹

Historians have not sufficiently stressed Gramsci's polemic against Chabod's interpretation of Machiavelli in his early writings and have not observed that, just a few years after the publication (under the leadership of Togliatti) of the pages Gramsci dedicated to Machiavelli in his *Prison Notebooks*, Chabod modified his own position on Machiavelli's conception of *armi proprie*. In his new reading, Chabod would see Machiavelli's view as the consequential development of the polemic against mercenary armies and of a conception consistent with "citizen arms," essential to the independence of Florence "from the king of France, the Pope, and the Duke Valentino" ("*dal re di Francia, Viniziani, Papa e Valentino*"). To Chabod, Machiavelli's conception seemed to reflect the naturalist philosophy of the equilibrium between human forces and *Fortuna*: force and prudence, Chabod concluded, became for Machiavelli "the sinew of all forms of political power that ever existed and would exist" ("*il nervo di tutte le signorie che furono o che saranno mai al mondo*").⁴²

Gramsci was instead interested above all in the change of the relationship between political struggle and military struggle in capitalist society, after the radical change followed by the industrial revolution and the advent of a market economy, and the changes that followed the revolutions of 1848, which included the expansion of parliamentarism, trade unionism, the party system, and vast bureaucracies, public or private ("*l'espansione del parlamentarismo, del regime associativo sindacale e di partito, del formarsi di vaste burocrazie statali o 'private'*").⁴³ After World War I, technological innovation, the transformation of the organic composition of capital, and Americanism, with its techniques of production pivoting on

mass conformism, had supported the reaction of the modern elites against social conflict and the catastrophe of 1929. But Gramsci doubted that Italian corporatism was an adequate version, while he had no doubt that the reference points of the modern prince needed to be deeply changed.

Antonio Gramsci worked on *The Prince* in the years 1930–31. In jail, he possessed at least three editions of Machiavelli's book: one edited by Casella in 1929 (printed by the Fascist-sponsored published Littorio), one glossed by Federico Chabod in 1924, and finally, one edited by Luigi Russo in 1931. Along with Chabod (and Benedetto Croce), Gramsci defined Machiavelli as the most lucid among the Italian writers on the modern state.⁴⁴ In Italy, the limiting legacy of "syndicalist" readings (that is, of the centrality of the corporatist city-state and the medieval communes) and the absence of the formation of the "intellectuals" (the civil servants and the bureaucrats with the task of connecting the coercive and military apparatuses of the state with civil society) had impeded the construction of the nation-state. The medieval commune was a corporatist state unable to overcome the corporatist model and to become a new modern state or, as Machiavelli had predicated in vain, a state able to reorganize the hegemony of the city over the countryside through the organization of a modern army ("I comuni furono, dunque, uno Stato sindacalista che non riuscì a superare questa fase e a diventare uno Stato integrale, come indicava invano il Machiavelli, che attraverso l'organizzazione dell'esercito voleva organizzare l'egemonia della città sulla campagna").⁴⁵ Thus the organization of a popular militia (not mercenary troops and not even a professional army) brought Gramsci, too, to discuss the question of taxation and financial reform.

Yet in his *Notebooks* and his letters to Tatiana Schucht and Piero Sraffa, Machiavelli's issue of *armi proprie* becomes part of Gramsci's broader reflection on how the workers' movement's politics had to change after the defeat of the "war of maneuver" (revolutions in Russia and Europe from 1917 to 1920). The military question thus became the form of the clash between workers and the state, and then of the attack by the Fascists against the labor movement (which could not have as a matter of fact any permanent form of army, as the agrarians and the industrialists, allied to the Fascists, had in 1921–22). In 1929–31 this question returned in Gramsci's notes on Machiavelli within the context of a new proposal: that of the anti-Fascist constituent assembly to be structured according to committees of workers and peasants in polemic against the sectarian strategy, radical and classist, which was instead adopted by the Fourth Congress of the Communist International (1928) and then endorsed by the Italian

Communists (1929). Gramsci's notes on Machiavelli are pretty much incomprehensible outside of this contest and, thus, outside the context of Gramsci's opposition to his own party, with the consequence of remaining isolated and being abandoned by his very comrades while in jail. Gramsci thus wrote in 1933 that the financial catastrophe of 1929 was not to be read as the "final crisis of capitalism" and the beginning of an epoch of revelations, but quite the opposite. World War I had been not only a military defeat but also a crisis induced by the deep tensions between civil society and the market that accumulated in the nineteenth century, and by the rivalries between the European states. "All the Post-War is a crisis," both because of the clauses of the peace treaties signed in 1919 at Versailles and of the monetary and diplomatic policies adopted by the states after the war. The agreement between the "cosmopolitanism" of economics and the nationalistic tendencies of politics represented the core of the modern epoch. After 1929, the catastrophe of what Karl Polanyi defined as the civilization of the nineteenth century (a civilization founded on a self-regulating market) required, according to Gramsci, a new organization of the relationships between economy and politics on a global scale. Facing the crisis and tensions between cosmopolitan capitalism and nationalism, the modern state, which Machiavelli had theorized in its nascent form, was in an irreversible decline.

The leading classes, the industrialists and financial elites above all, seemed to go back to "social regressive corporative groupings," able to express only an "economic-corporatist" vision, much like the "revolutionary" Soviet state, although in reverse. In all Europe, therefore, the "modern state" was going through a profound "process of disintegration," which Gramsci defined, much more radically, as more "catastrophic" than the process of the separation of spiritual power (the intellectuals organized in the church apparatus) from political institutions that started in the Middle Ages with the conflict between empire and pope.⁴⁶

The self-defense reaction of the European states thus manifested, on the one hand, a corporatist economy with an antisocialist Caesarism, and on the other the centralized planning of the Soviet Union, which was marked by voluntarism and the absence of realism, and was developing toward a despotic system. Machiavelli was the author who allowed Gramsci to rethink one by one the categories of politics in the midst of the crisis of European civilization and the advent of Americanism and Fordism.

Perhaps the more daring strategy was that of the new American industrialism, namely the Fordist reorganization of the relationship between capital and labor founded on the scientific rationalization of the factory

but also on the conformism of mass consumption, collective behavior, and private and moral ethics, from family to sexuality. To Gramsci, Fordism and Americanism thus constituted a new horizon and an "organic mutation" that had a "progressive" nature, even if it was explicitly organized against the workers' movement.

Americanism was a form of revolution, though "passive." It was destined to expand itself at the global level (*"verificando una trasformazione delle basi materiali della civiltà europea"*) thanks to a Fordist regulation of the relationships between capital and labor, the creation of an organic society based on consumption, and the reorganization of the social basis of democracy. This was a "passive" revolution because it was a passage from the nineteenth-century civilization based on the free market to an order based on a "pragmatic economy" that did not occur at the initiative of the subaltern classes (incapable of political initiative). Gramsci thought that Americanism and Fordism were the result of the necessity of building a new kind of organized and planned economy. They were the connection between the old economic individualism and the new planned economy (*"Si può dire genericamente che l'americanismo e il fordismo risultano dalla necessità immanente di giungere all'organizzazione di un'economia programmata e che i vari problemi esaminati . . . dovrebbero essere gli anelli della catena che segnano il passaggio appunto dal vecchio individualismo economico all'economia programmata"*)⁴⁷: an economic *form* that Gramsci considered even superior to the Soviet command economy because it did not suppress the market but regulated it on the basis of a reciprocal agreement between social groups. At the same time, Gramsci doubted that within the institutions of the Italian corporatist state (fascism) the basis of a mixed economy, pragmatic in its own way, could develop, even if he did not exclude that fascism could evolve and set up the conditions of a mixed economy.

The great transformation that occurred in the nineteenth century and that reached its acme with World War I, the revolutions, and the catastrophe of 1929 was in the process of producing a new capitalist revolution in the relationship between capital and labor that would force a now-defeated workers' movement to abandon the military strategy that was inaugurated with the revolutionary cycle initiated by the French revolution. All changed with the end of the "autonomy of national economies" and the crisis of the autonomy of civil society within the totalitarian state; even the "war of maneuver," the revolutionary war of the years 1917–1920, would give way to a "war of position," to the hypothesis of a gradual conquest of hegemony within civil society and the overcoming of the modern state,

which was based on the separation between governing and governed, civil society and the state. According to Gramsci, with the end of the epoch characterized by the modern state, *armi proprie* and *governo largo* would change their meaning: the political party seemed incapable of prefiguring the new form of the relationship between governing and governed, while the entrepreneurial and technical leadership of society (the organic intellectuals of the Fordist factory) would have to include the man-worker, a worker who was involved and directly interested in the growth of national income, capitalist production, and the social redistribution of wealth. Here the question of force was no longer military in kind but one of checks and balances, of the working competences that from below would erode and dissolve the traditional state.

In paragraph 17 of Gramsci's *Notebook* on Machiavelli, we read that one has to set up and solve the problem of the relationships between structure and superstructure in order to make a correct analysis of a determinate historical period ("è il problema dei rapporti tra struttura e sovrastruttura che bisogna impostare esattamente e risolvere per giungere a una giusta analisi delle forze che operano nella storia di un determinato periodo e determinano il loro rapporto").⁴⁸ Machiavelli is seen here thinking like a "political man in action," a "creator," who does not operate in the void but relies upon a realistic analysis of the "*realtà effettuale*" of the relationship of forces that are in a continual motion, in order to dominate and transform them. Gramsci is aware that Machiavelli's realism (much like the one he aims at) is not self-sufficient, because neither an individual nor a book can change reality. In the new context of Americanism, force is not located in the state, in *armi proprie*, or in the prince (namely, in the working class and its party). Class political groups must be redefined beyond their class dimension; the protagonists of social change must be enlarged and the political and political-military vision must be also changed.⁴⁹

V

Machiavelli preferred the dangers and fatigues associated with his function in the Republic of Florence to the peaceful (and pacified) life of the scholar. Gramsci did not read Machiavelli in the tranquil silence of a library but in jail, in order to continue his own "practical" struggle. Adriano Sofri, who had studied Machiavelli at the beginning of his would-be academic career (his dissertation was indeed on Gramsci), went back to the work of the Florentine secretary after having "truly tried" to make a revo-

lution in democratic Italy, as he had even promised to Palmiro Togliatti in a youth polemical exchange at the Scuola Normale of Pisa in 1962.

The historian Adriano Prospero, in reviewing Sofri's book on Machiavelli, wrote that "we all know what then happened to him": that is to say that he spent years in jail for his leading role in the far left extraparliamentary movement Lotta Continua. In reality, even today we know very little, and we do not yet have a satisfying interpretation of the last part of the history of the Italian workers' movement in the 1960s and 1970s, and of the social organizations of the revolutionary Left in those years. We don't know how and why that movement and its revolutionary experience were defeated, yet we know well enough about the revolutionary attempt made by some young workers and students of the 1960s and 1970s of "truly trying."

Adriano Sofri tried, in his own way, to think about a new "war of maneuver," in direct polemic against Togliatti's own rendering of Gramsci's idea of the "war of position," a strategy of endless accumulation of political resources by the leading party of the Left (the Italian Communist Party) made of electoral consent, support by the unions, connection to the cooperative organizations of production and distribution, and the extended experience in some Italian regions of municipal socialism. Sofri dared to demonstrate that that political accumulation of consent produced immobility and was de facto incapable of being utilized in a politics of revolutionary alternative. The historian Luciano Cafagna defined the politics of the Italian Communist Party as a "strategy of obesity": that party, he suggested, did not want to make a revolution, and could not even make the reforms it promised because it was barred from competing for a majority due to being "communist," and moreover, the very organization of Fordist capitalism, namely a consumerist society and mass communication, blocked its strategy for power. Yet Sofri thought, instead, that a modern collective prince would no longer be a party but a collective intelligence constructed from within society—precisely as Gramsci had thought—thanks to the work of conscious actors "internal" to the social movements within the conflicting relations, not as intellectuals external to the classes and entitled to be intellectual by belonging to a party. Sofri's project had, however, grave defects: in particular, the lack of consciousness of the ecological "limits" of industrialism and of the crucial impact of gender issues—that is to say, the lack of the meaning of *armi proprie* in that specific revolutionary experience, with the goal of disaggregating the state from below by mobilizing civil society's counterpowers. The defeat of those radical projects changed the entire scenario of Italian politics. The tragedy of Aldo

Moro (the prime minister abducted and executed by the Red Brigades along with the men escorting him), the collapse of the Soviet bloc in Poland, the war between Iran and Iraq, the war in Yugoslavia, and the massacre in Sarajevo: all these experiences that Sofri monitored and recollected in his work testify to his lucid detachment from the "revolutionary" epoch of his political movement and his early political experience.

Sofri's book on Machiavelli comes after those experiences. It is first of all a document of *politica pratica*, the author's rich experiences (sometime at the risk of his life), and his readings: with a "long experience in modern things and a continual study of ancient things" ("*lunga esperienza delle cose moderne e una continua lezione delle antiche*").⁵⁰ Reflecting on his own life trajectory, Sofri rethinks the meaning of the word *Fortuna* in his book on Machiavelli and discusses the meaning of *Fortuna's* images and representations in the form of an elusive and beautiful woman requiring a dramatic hand-to-hand fight in order to be subjected.

In a direct polemic against "*machiavellismo*," which he defines as a "betrayal" of Machiavelli's thought, Sofri reflects thus on the meaning of the temptation of politics ("*tentazione della politica*"). Politics is first of all the "art of power and its preservation and, for Machiavelli in particular, politics is the art of war" ("*arte del potere e della sua conservazione e, in primo luogo, per lui Machiavelli l'arte della guerra*"). Thus politics changes in

violence, which overwhelms the person who decides to follow it and that separates him from his mates and from humanity. . . . The autonomy of politics from morals seems rather the secession of the life of the Prince from that of all private persons. . . . And if we want to face again the question of political morality in today's society, we have to go back to that knot and loosen it. . . . Responsibility makes you decide, if you are a good prince, not so much to do the right thing or the wrong one, but to do what is necessary, what you think it is necessary, to the defense against an aggression or in order to acquire a victory in war. You do not put at risk simply yourself . . . but the entire community and, at the end, the whole world.⁵¹

Even in a telematic democracy or "streaming" politics, Sofri concludes, only one decides and is responsible at the end of the day; only one has in his hand the power to drop or not a bomb; this is the specificity that always identifies the political actor (today's Prince), whose worst anguish is that of knowing that there might be justice even in using horrendous

means of destruction. As Machiavelli wrote: "*Perché tra gli uomini privati le leggi, le scripture, e' patti fanno osservare la fede, et fra i signori le fanno osservare l'armi.*" Because of this, even today the art (not science) of politics is tragic.

Sofri's reading is centered essentially on *The Prince*. Yet the problem that Sofri discusses pertains in reality to all princes, past and still to come, be it the famous chancellor of the Republic of Florence, the modern sovereign state, the sovereign people, or the leader of a government. Today, in a time of financial, communication, and institutional globalization, the actor on the stage of a politics that is marked by the decline of the sovereign state is like a prince without a state but not without wealth and *armi proprie*.

Machiavelli wrote that the prince must be interested in the wealth of the nation and the art of war. Sofri glosses: since men and armies find wealth and bread but wealth and bread do not find men and armies, the prince must be interested in war and nothing else.⁵² In the case of Machiavelli, the question was that of the war against the adversaries of the Florentine Republic and the Italian fatherland.

Italy and *Fortuna* are depicted as two opposite female figures, as men imagine them; thus the prince has to fight against *Fortuna* in order to violate and dominate her. But what if *Fortuna* takes the shape of Nature? According to Giacomo Leopardi, it is as difficult to defeat *Fortuna* as Nature ("*donna formidabile anche quella, che però non si lascerebbe battere, né si batterebbe con l'Islandese o con altri uomini, indifferente com'è alla loro esistenza*").⁵³ Leopardi's Nature, the heir of the figure of *Fortuna*, is remorseless and ferocious, very different from Machiavelli's *Fortuna* as a woman. Genial, courageous, and ferocious was also the princess Caterina Sforza. Machiavelli met her during his first mission, in 1499, and wrote about her with embarrassment and an excessive quickness.⁵⁴

To Machiavelli, the prince was also the imaginary leader of the *ciompi*, whom he made harangue the rebels in his evocation in the *Florentine Histories* of the conflict between the working classes ("*popolo magro*") and the Signoria in 1378. That discourse by the proletariat "Prince" comes at the end of Machiavelli's thought on social conflict as an interpretative conclusion: the leader of the *ciompi* was more reliable than the wealthy few; he was immune of the suspicion of being, like the wealthy, greedy for domination.

For Machiavelli as depicted by Sofri, the *ciompo* and the prince are not leaders of opposite factions in a "strenuous class struggle" but instead two

different models of the same form of a political actor. "It is possible to become a prince by following the most diverse trajectories," with great and horrendous ideas at the same time, as indeed are those expressed by the *ciompo* in his talk to his comrades (but in fact invented by Machiavelli): property is theft and the origin of patrimony is robbery, hence the biggest crimes are rewarded while the smaller ones are punished. Sofri comments: "The *Istorie fiorentine* came then to be admired by Marx, who was right as they are wonderful."⁵⁵

Sofri is interested not in textual exegesis (although his is a refined one) but in the rethinking of politics in the actual "state of the world," and not because he believes, as do the hypermodernists who are interested in Machiavelli, that Machiavelli is "actual." There is no similarity between the Italian city-states of the quattro-cinquecento and the large corporations of our globalized age.⁵⁶ *The Prince* is not a text for *managers*, and the question for us is not that of figuring out how long the state will survive in its confrontation against multinational corporations. If anything, Sofri denounces the idea that it is convenient for those corporations to ally themselves with the autocratic states in order to lessen the legal ties on their freedom to operate in the global market. Multinational corporations' attraction to China is an exemplary case. The force of armies is necessary for the expansion of markets, but it does not produce the export of democracy: to the contrary, it favors the import of autocracy within the *res publica* of modern democracies, because of the expropriation of traditional territorial sovereignty and legal jurisdiction of states by financial and industrial powers that are not restricted by geopolitical borders and the constraints imposed by legal transparency and democratic accountability.

"In relation to the world," Sofri writes, "Europe is today the equivalent of an Italian province facing the European states in the sixteenth century, and is split in the same way and is marked by the same blindness. The prince is no longer a man (but a woman, like Caterina Sforza, or, with some virtues, Angela Merkel)," is neither a party nor a "collective intellectual." In Europe, "bureaucracy dominates and the optimists call it technocracy. It has its own army which is made of twenty-eight national armies." Yet it does not have at all *armi proprie*, which would be necessary to protect legality and human rights, and also it lacks an "international police force, for which no telephone number exists." Much like the Florentine Republic, Europe too lacks *armi proprie* in order to be democratic as it wished. Machiavelli had treated the problem of *armi proprie* as the urgent and contingent form of the question of force (his central theme),

indispensable to war and the basic condition for the existence of states, yet "force is not less important today, but for the opposite reason: to impede and avert the war, all wars."⁵⁷

NOTES

1. See J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975); Fasano Guarini, *Machiavelli and the Crisis of Italian Republics*, in *Machiavelli and Republicanism*, ed. G. Bock, Q. Skinner, and M. Viroli (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 17–40; Q. Skinner, *Machiavelli* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), and *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978). See also H. G. Koenigsberger, "Schlussbetrachtungen, Republiken und Republikanismus im Europa der frühen Neuzeit aus historischer Sucht," in *Republiken und Republikanismus im Europa der frühen Neuzeit*, ed. H. G. Koenigsberger (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1988), 285–302. Concerning the events that accompanied the transition of Florence from republic to a Signoria, the bibliography is too rich to be fairly mentioned. It is enough for me to mention the most prominent authors: R. von Albertini, G. Silvano, C. Ruth, H. Butters, J. N. Stephens, M. Ascheri, G. Cozzi, A. Knapton, A. Savelli, and E. Grendi.

2. G. Dilcher, "The Urban Belt and the Emerging Modern State," in *Resistance, Representation and Community*, ed. P. Blickle (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 291. But see also the classical work by F. Venturi, *Utopia e riforme nell'Illuminismo* (Turin: Einaudi, 1970), 31.

3. M. Berengo, "Il Cinquecento," in *La storiografia italiana negli ultimi vent'anni*, Atti del Convegno, (Milan: Marzorati, 1970), 495 (in his chapter, Berengo developed what he had already studied in *Nobili e mercanti nella Lucca del Cinquecento* [Turin: Einaudi, 1965]). Also crucial is the work of H. Baron, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), and of J. M. Najemy, *Stato, Comune e "Universitas,"* in *Origini dello Stato: Processi di formazione in Italia fra Medioevo ed età moderna*, ed. G. Chittolini, A. Molho, and P. Schiera (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1994), 245–63.

4. On the "military" thought of Machiavelli see F. Gilbert, "Machiavelli: The Renaissance of the Art of War," in *Makers of Modern Strategy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1943), 3; and P. Pieri, *Guerra e politica negli scrittori italiani* (Milan-Naples: Morano, 1935), 1–71. On the precocious coherence of political and military thought in Machiavelli, see F. S. Nitti, *Machiavelli studiato nella vita e nelle dottrine, con l'aiuto di documenti e carteggi inediti* (Naples: Dekten e Rocholl, 1876), I:317; O. Tommasini, *La vita e gli scritti di Niccolò Machiavelli nella loro relazione col machiavellismo* [Rome, 1883–1911] (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1994–99), 334; and also of course F. Chabod, "Il segretario fiorentino, 1953," *Scritti sul Machiavelli* (Turin: Einaudi,

1964), 241. See again the classical research written by P. Pieri, *Il Rinascimento e la crisi militare italiana* (Turin: Einaudi, 1952); C. C. Bayley, *War and Society in Renaissance Florence: The De Militia of Leonardo Bruni* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1961) (reviewed by F. Gilbert, *American Historical Review* 68, no. 4 [July 1963]: 1054–56); and especially M. Hornqvist, *Machiavelli and Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) and "Machiavelli's Military Project and the 'Art of War,'" in *The Cambridge Companion to Machiavelli*, ed. J. M. Najemy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

5. G. Sasso, *Niccolò Machiavelli: Storia del suo pensiero politico* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1980), 178 and see also 161.

6. *Ritratto delle cose di Francia*, in *Arte della guerra e scritti politici minori*, ed. S. Bertelli (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1961), 164–182. Cfr. also *Discorsi* 3.1. On these passages by Machiavelli see J. J. Marchand, *Niccolò Machiavelli: I primi scritti politici (1499–1512)*, (Padova: Antenore, 1975), and Machiavelli, *Discorso dell'ordinare lo Stato di Firenze alle armi*, in *Arte della guerra e scritti politici minori*, 5; see also N. Rubinstein, "The Beginnings of Niccolò Machiavelli's Career in the Florentine Chancery," *Italian Studies* 2 (1956): 72–91.

7. Cl. De Seyssel, *La Monarchie de France* (1518), ed. J. Fujol (Paris: Librairie de Argenne, 1961). Concerning the problem of the French state see Sasso, "'Principato civile' e tirannide," in *Niccolò Machiavelli e gli antichi e altri saggi*, II:351–400.

8. *Discorsi* 1.25.

9. *Discorsi* 1.16. See C. Dionisotti, *Machiavellerie: Storia e fortuna di Machiavelli* (Turin: Einaudi, 1980), 101–53. On *anacyclosis*, see G. Sasso, "La teoria dell'anacyclosis," in *Studi sul Machiavelli* (Naples: Morano, 1967), 161–222.

10. *Principe* 5; *Discorsi* 1.6, 2.2, 2.4. See I. Cervelli, *Machiavelli e la crisi dello Stato veneziano* (Naples: Guida, 1974) and G. Silvano, "Dal centro alla periferia: Niccolò Machiavelli tra Stato cittadino e Stato territoriale," *Archivio Storico Italiano* 150 (1992), 1105.

11. F. Guicciardini, *Dialogo del reggimento di Firenze*, ed. G. M. Anselmi (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1994), 22, 65, 92–93, 111, 95, 180. See also A. Brown, introduction to F. Guicciardini, *Dialogue on the Government of Florence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), xx–xxi. On the relationships between Guicciardini and Machiavelli, see G. Sasso, "Guicciardini e Machiavelli," in *Francesco Guicciardini, 1483–1983: Nel quinto centenario della nascita*, ed. Istituto Nazionale di Studi sul Rinascimento (Florence: Olschki, 1984), 3–130.

12. Guicciardini, *Dialogo del reggimento di Firenze*, 93. See also Guicciardini, *Considerazioni intorno ai Discorsi del Machiavelli* 2.19 in N. Machiavelli, *Discorsi sopra la prima Deca di Tito Livio* (Turin: Einaudi, 1983), 575–76.

13. D. Giannotti, *Discorso di armare la città di Firenze, fatto dinanzi ai magnifici signori e Gonfaloniere di giustizia l'anno 1529*, in *Opere politiche*, ed. F. Diaz (Milan: Marzorati, 1974). On Giannotti see also R. Starn, *Donato Giannotti and His Epistolae* (Geneva: Droz, 1968), 11–56; and G. Cadoni, *L'utopia repubblicana di Donato Giannotti* (Milan: Giuffrè, 1978).

14. J. Barthes, *L'argent n'es pas le nerf de la guerre* (Rome: Ecole Française de Rome,

2012). (Barthas refers to the Archivio di Stato di Firenze, Provisioni, Registri, 189, fol. 108v). See A. Molho, *Lo Stato e la finanza pubblica: Un'ipotesi basata sulla storia tardomedievale di Firenze* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1994), 226n2.

15. N. Machiavelli, *Legazioni Commissarie: Scritti di governo (1498–1505)*, vols. 1–4, ed. Fredi Chiappelli (Bari: Laterza, 1971–75). See F. Gilbert, *Machiavelli e Guicciardini: Pensiero politico e storiografia a Firenze nel Cinquecento* (Turin: Einaudi, 1970), 51.

16. A. Molho, "Investimenti nel Monte delle doti di Firenze: Un'analisi sociale e geografica," *Quaderni Storici* 21 (1986): 147–70; and also D. Herlihy and C. Klapisch-Zuber, *I toscani e le loro famiglie: Uno studio sul catasto fiorentino del 1427* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1998).

17. Molho, *Lo Stato e la finanza pubblica*, 238.

18. See J. Najemy, "Guild Republicanism in Trecento Florence: The Successes and the Ultimate Fates of Corporate Politics," *American Historical Review* 84 (1979): 53–71.

19. Dionisotti, *Machiavellerie*.

20. See F. Meinecke, *Die Idee der Staatsräson in der neuren Geschichte* (Munich-Berlin: Oldenbourg, 1924) [Italian translation *L'idea della ragion di Stato nella storia moderna* (Florence: Sansoni, 1970), 25–48].

21. F. Chabod, *Il segretario fiorentino* (1953), in *Scritti sul Machiavelli*, 322–39 (in particular 337, but also 274–88).

22. L. Russo, *Prolegomeni a Machiavelli* (1931), now in *Machiavelli* (Bari: Laterza, 1945), 50–51.

23. G. M. Luzzati, *Una guerra di popolo, lettere private del tempo dell'assedio di Pisa* (Pisa: Pacini, 1973), 106. See also by the same author the introduction to P. Vaglianti, *Storia dei suoi tempi (1492–1514)* (Pisa: Nistri-Lischi, 1982), ix–xxxviii. The main sources for the story of the war are the history of Vaglianti (cited by Luzzati from the autograph preserved in the Biblioteca Nazionale di Firenze, 2.4.42) and the *Storie fiorentine* by B. Cerretani (sixteenth-century MS, Biblioteca Nazionale di Firenze, 2.3.74). On the role of Charles VIII, see V. Fanucci, "Le relazioni tra Pisa e Carlo VIII," *Annali della Regia Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa: Classe di Lettere* 16 (1894): 3–83.

24. Archivio di Stato di Pisa, Comune C, n. 8, cc. 61–62 (cf. Luzzati, *Una guerra di popolo*, 121) and P. Parenti, *Istorie fiorentine*, ms. Biblioteca Nazionale di Firenze, 2.4.170, c. 75v.

25. See G. Volpe, "Intorno ad alcune relazioni di Pisa con Alessandro VI e Cesare Borgia, 1499–1504," *Studi Storici* 6 (1897): 495–587 and 7 (1898): 61–144.

26. Cerretani, *Storie fiorentine*, 345, and N. Machiavelli, *Legazioni e Commissarie*, ed. S. Bertelli (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1964), 11:1166–67 (but Bertelli reads Machiavelli's testimonies in a way that is different).

27. The citation is from C. Vivanti, "Lacerazioni e contrasti," in *Storia d'Italia* (Turin: Einaudi, 1972), 1:909–10. See also Luzzati, *Una guerra di popolo*, 127–28 (in particular note 50).

28. N. Machiavelli, *Dell'arte della guerra* 1.1 and *Discorsi* 2.10.

29. *Discorsi* 1.58 (*Discourses on Livy*, trans. Peter Bondanella [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997], 143).

30. H. Baron, *Humanistic and Political Literature in Florence and Venice at the*

Beginning of the Quattrocento (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1949), 181–84 (see E. Garin, *Scienza e vita civile nel Rinascimento italiano* [Bari: Laterza, 1965], 11–12).

31. In Niccolò Machiavelli, *Selected Political Writings*, trans. and ed. David Wootton (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett, 1994), 3.

32. *Discorsi* 1.2, 3, 4, 5.

33. M. Geuna, "Machiavelli e il ruolo dei conflitti nella vita politica," in *Conflitti*, ed. A. Arienzo and D. Caruso (Naples: Libreria Dante e Descartes, 2005), 19–57. See also F. del Lucchese, "Disputare e combattere: Modi del conflitto nel pensiero politico di Niccolò Machiavelli," in *Filosofia Politica* 15 (2001): 71–95 (and also *Tumulti e indignatio: Conflitto, diritto e moltitudine in Machiavelli e Spinoza* [Milan: Ghibli, 2004]).

34. B. Fontana, "Sallust and the Politics of Machiavelli," in *History of Political Thought* 24 (2003): 86–108. See also C. F. Konrad, "From the Gracchi to the First Civil War (133–70)," in *A Comparison to the Roman Republic*, ed. N. Rosenstein and R. Morstein-Marx (London: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 167–99; and K. J. Hölkenskap, *Reconstructing the Roman Republic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

35. *Discorsi* 1.4, 1.6, 1.37.

36. *Discorsi* 1.37 (the mention is of course to classical authors Livy and Appian).

37. *Discorsi* 1.37 (*Discourses*, trans. Bodanella, 102).

38. *Istorie* 3.13.

39. A. Gramsci, *Studi particolari sul Machiavelli come economista* (Reviews and bibliographic notes of Notebook 28, ed. for the first time in *Opere di Antonio Gramsci, Quaderni del carcere, Note sul Machiavelli, sulla politica e sullo Stato moderno* [Turin: Einaudi, 1949], 211.) See J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*.

40. J.-Ch. L. de Sismondi, *Storia del Risorgimento, de' progressi, del decadimento e della rovina della libertà in Italia* [Lugano, 1833], in *Storia delle Repubbliche italiane* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1996), 4.

41. Gramsci, "Noterelle sulla politica del Machiavelli" (Notebook 30), in *Opere di Antonio Gramsci*, 4.

42. F. Chabod, *Il segretario fiorentino* (1953), in *Scritti sul Machiavelli*, 321ff.

43. Gramsci, "Lotta politica e guerra militare" (Notebooks 16 and 30), in *Opere di Antonio Gramsci*, 59 and 62ff.

44. Letter of Antonio Gramsci to Tania Schucht, 14 November 1927 in A. Gramsci and T. Schucht, *Lettere 1926–1937*, ed. A. Natoli and C. Daniele (Turin: Einaudi, 1997), 153–54. See also the letters of 17 November 1930 (p. 606) and of 23 February 1931 ("it was a fixed idea [of professor Cosmo, n.d.r.], since 1917, that I should write about Machiavelli"), p. 670. On the editions of Machiavelli's works used by Gramsci in jail, see p. 690n3.

45. Letter of Antonio Gramsci to Tatiana Schucht, 7 September 1931, in Gramsci and Schucht, *Lettere 1926–1937*, 791–792. See G. Vacca, *Vita e pensieri di Antonio Gramsci 1926–1937*, (Turin: Einaudi, 2012), 105ff.

46. A. Gramsci, "Quaderno 6 (VIII), 1930–1932, Miscellanea," in *Quaderni del carcere*, ed. Valentino Gerratana (Turin: Einaudi, 1975), 690–91.

47. "Quaderno 22 (V), 1934, Americanismo e fordismo," in *Quaderni del carcere*, 2139–81.

48. "Quaderno 13 (XXX), 1932–34, Noterelle sulla politica del Machiavelli," in *Quaderni del carcere*, 1578–79.

49. *Quaderni del carcere*, 1386–89.

50. A. Sofri, *Machiavelli, Tupac e la principessa* (Palermo: Sellerio, 2013), 9–344. See A. Prosperi, “Il Principe e la principessa: Così la signora di Forlì sedusse Machiavelli,” *La Repubblica*, 13 December 2013.

51. Sofri, *Machiavelli*, 57–59.

52. *Ibid.*, 100.

53. *Ibid.*, 120. Sofri’s thoughts are inspired by the best secondary bibliography, which comprises the work of G. Sasso, D. Fachard, E. Garin, J. Najemy, F. Gilbert, C. Dionisotti, G. Macchia, and C. Vivante, along with G. Inglese, *Per Machiavelli: L’arte dello Stato, la cognizione delle storie* (Rome: Carocci, 2006) and C. Ginzburg, “Machiavelli, l’eccezione e la regola: Linee di una ricerca in corso,” *Quaderni Storici* 30 (2003). Sofri’s reading presupposes also the “training” usage of the “Machiavellian” literature for managers (P. J. Galie and C. Bopst, “Machiavelli and Modern Business: Realist Taught in Contemporary Corporate Leadership Manuals,” in *Journal of Business Ethics* 65 [2006]), along with gender historiography: Laura Roost, *Machiavelli’s Princess: The Impact of the Princess on Gender, Realism, and Political Leadership*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 2009).

54. Sofri, *Machiavelli*, 123.

55. *Ibid.*, 284.

56. U. Beck, *Was ist Globalisierung?* (Frankfurt am Mein: Surkhamp Verlag, 1997), 64.

57. Sofri, *Machiavelli*, 295–98.

What Does a “Conjuncture-
Embedded” Reflection Mean?
The Legacy of Althusser’s Machiavelli
to Contemporary Political Theory

MARIE GAILLE

I. INTRODUCTION

Machiavelli depicted himself as a passionate reader who retreated at night to his cabinet in order to read and ask questions to some authors who helped him reflect upon political matters. Five centuries later, readers of Machiavelli practice the same passionate kind of reading of his works. Machiavelli read ancient authors through the mediation of translations and comments elaborated throughout the centuries up to his time. He read them and questioned them to enlighten his own time. Our position as readers is not so different. In various ways, as he did, we enroll him to stress an issue, to advocate for or to discuss a thesis, to address a question relevant to our era. We turn to him with our own issues in mind. Most of the time, they are utterly different from the ones he tackled. As a result, when and if we “use” Machiavelli’s thought, the only legitimate ways to do so are probably indirect.¹ Besides, we must take into account, according to Lefort, the fact that we decipher his provocative thought through a chain of mediators we cannot escape.²

Louis Althusser (1918–1990) is part of this continuously growing chain of mediators. He developed an early and intense interest in Machiavelli’s thought, as the examination of his archives and writings shows. In 1962, he dedicated a course to him, of which he prepared a second version ten years later. Throughout the 1970s and even the 1980s, he modified it at various times. This course has been posthumously published.³ In addition, he referred to Machiavelli in various other texts. In *La Soutenance*

d'Amiens (1975), he mentioned his "method" as being a way to locate one's thought in an impossible locus in order to make thinking possible.⁴ Finally, in 1986, he wrote "Machiavel philosophe."⁵

In this chapter, my intention is not to assess Althusser's capacity to offer us an enlightening guidebook to accompany us in our reading of Machiavelli's works. It may be that Althusser provided us with misleading glosses.⁶ In a way, the opening words of *Machiavel et nous* indicate to us that this is not necessarily Althusser's primary concern. In fact, while he dedicated a tribute to Claude Lefort's "acute," "intelligent," and "far reaching" interpretation of Machiavelli, he set for himself another kind of work.⁷ He wished to offer "another view," linked to readers that were contemporaneous to Machiavelli and based on what he called some "associations."⁸

Starting from this observation, my contribution aims at another goal. It focuses rather on Althusser's Machiavelli as an entity of its own. Thanks to its analysis, it intends to formulate an issue that is still crucial for contemporary political thought and to justify the interest in the Althusserian comment on Machiavelli's thought: that of a "conjuncture-embedded" political reflection. Althusser's reading of Machiavelli offers us an exceptional opportunity to approach this issue.

I will try to demonstrate this in four steps. While taking account of the surprise and even shock entailed by the works of Machiavelli, Althusser emphasized the role played by the idea of newness, of beginnings. Because of this, he leads us to consider the challenge addressed by Machiavelli to political theory: that of being able to develop a conjuncture-embedded thought (section 2). This interest expressed by Althusser for the Machiavellian concept of conjuncture has been most often interpreted as being part of his arsenal for overcoming a deterministic approach to history (section 3). However, giving some credit to this interpretation must not prevent us from observing Althusser's difficulty in describing this idea of conjuncture with proper words (section 4). Now, rather than a hypothetical overcoming of historical determinism thanks to Machiavelli, this difficulty may be the most precious legacy of Althusser's Machiavelli. This is evidenced, at least partly, by the fact that it became a decisive incentive for some of his former students. They too have looked for a way to develop a conjuncture embedded political thought. Emmanuel Terray's approach to political issues, elaborated as a midway between "philosophy" and "anthropology," will illustrate this search (section 5).

II. THE REASONS FOR ASTONISHMENT: THE DETERMINATION OF POLITICAL ISSUES BY CONJUNCTURES

In *Machiavel et nous*, Althusser began by evoking the surprise, and even the shock, felt while reading *The Prince* and the *Discourses*.⁹ *Solitude de Machiavel* expresses this astonishment in even stronger words and presents Machiavelli as a substantially strange and isolated political thinker, whose destiny is to remain a "foreigner" within Western thought.¹⁰

Machiavel et nous offers a detailed account of this surprise, due to the issue raised by Machiavelli himself: the newness of events and, more radically, the newness of beginnings. I will focus on this writing and follow its argument in order to understand the implication of this surprise for Althusser. Machiavelli appeared to Althusser as the thinker par excellence of beginnings, as he claimed to bring to light a new way of political thinking, related to practice and "effectual truth."¹¹ He was seen as the one that helped us tackle the issue of the foundation of a state, as Hegel and Gramsci had already noted. In addition, Althusser stressed the difference between a Marxist approach to this issue, based on market economy and class struggles, and the Machiavellian perspective focused on the "aleatory" dimension of the foundation of a state. This foundation was described as depending on many factors (economic, but also linguistic, geographic, cultural, historical, etc.), whose combinations formed a random set of conditions more or less favorable to such a foundation.¹²

After having commented on this aspect, Althusser came back to Machiavelli as a thinker who claimed to propose a new approach for political thinking. Althusser related this claim to the ambition of defining the laws of history and of grounding an actual political science. Of course, this immediately appeared as contradicting one of the main features of Machiavellian political thought, that of being inherently unfinished and focused on the specificities of each historical context. While Lefort emphasized the fact that Machiavelli's main insight about politics was that it cannot be the subject of complete knowledge, Althusser considered this aspect as a contradiction. For him, the search for the laws of history, if there are any to be found, was in opposition to any form of singularity.¹³

I will come back to this supposed contradiction later on. But for the time being, let us continue to follow Althusser in his presentation of Machiavelli as the first theorist of conjuncture. The next point is, to him, that Machiavelli opened up the way to consider political issues within their concrete and specific determinations. This meant not only to be

aware of the singularities of each situation but also to reflect on the issue at stake only once it has been understood how it transforms a general and abstract formulation into a particular one. According to this perspective, for Althusser, theoretical language is dismantled and reshaped into the form of singularity.¹⁴

III. MACHIAVELLI AS AN ALLY TO OVERCOME STRUCTURALISM AND HISTORICAL DETERMINISM

It has often been stated that Althusser became a reader of Machiavelli because of his interest in the “aleatory” dynamics of politics: a crucial issue that Machiavelli has clearly grasped and expressed for any founder of a state.¹⁵ In this respect, according to Mikko Lahtinen, Althusser intended to show that Machiavelli looked for an art of governing able to tame the “aleatory” and create durable political forms. This first point is frequently followed by another argument, according to which Machiavelli contributed to Althusser’s reflection on materialism. Banu Bargu, among others, thus considered that “casting Machiavelli as a materialist philosopher” offers Althusser the opportunity to “rethink historical materialism.”¹⁶

This function would be even more important in regards to Althusser’s relationship to Marx,¹⁷ and is the leading interpretative line elaborated by Vatter in an in-depth study of Althusser’s relationship to Machiavelli.¹⁸ Vatter argued that Althusser’s position develops as a “self-overcoming” of Marxism and has been in this way able to influence various politically involved thinkers, such as Antonio Negri, or some former students of him, for example Étienne Balibar. Miguel Vatter himself also pursued an “after Marx” approach, but a specific one in comparison with the “after Marx” designed by these philosophers. With this perspective in mind, he paid particular attention to one of the critiques addressed to Marxist theory: the idea that Marxist theory is unable to give an account of historical becoming, “due to its reliance on the flawed assumption that history follows deterministic laws and processes.”¹⁹

Balibar spotted an ambiguity in Althusser’s thought, occasioned by two contradictory interests: appraisal of the conjuncture and acknowledgment of the complexity of structure.²⁰ According to him, the tension created by these two lines of thought has remained unresolved. For Vatter, in a different way, Althusser indeed took the criticism of historical determinism seriously.²¹ But he also enrolled Machiavelli in his cause in order to elaborate a way to remedy this flaw, and according to Vatter, he was thus able to escape this theoretical tension. To be more specific, after hav-

ing considered for a while the Gramscian path to solve this problem,²² Althusser would have found in Machiavelli the theoretical means to ground the autonomy of politics (that is, the "permanence of social antagonism") and to emancipate oneself from "the base-superstructure schema of Marxist theory."²³ This emancipation would be made possible by the consideration of the singularity of events that no causal scheme can account for: "The self-overcoming of Althusser finds its ripest formulations in the posthumously published texts, where he explicitly affirms the primacy of the event over the structure, and inscribes into theory a decision, perhaps also his most ancient *parti pris*, for materialism over against dialectics, singularity over against causality, popular resistance over against institutional domination, communism over against Marxist-Leninism, from which contemporary post-Marxist thought may still have something to learn."²⁴

In order to settle his argument about the consistency of the Althusserian views on the dynamics of politics, Vatter made several interpretative steps. The first one referred to Althusser's interest in the thesis of an insuperable political antagonism.²⁵ The second was linked to the question that Althusser has identified as basic in Machiavelli's political thought: that of the necessary conditions for the emergence of a new state, or to call it differently, the Gramscian issue of the "new prince." His third step was a comment about the move made by Althusser to question the conditions of maintaining such a new state, in other words the conditions thanks to which the republican form of government could reproduce the constituent power and then establish itself on a long-term basis.²⁶ Related to this move, Vatter pointed to the role given to the "people" in Althusser's interpretation of Machiavellian republicanism: "Althusser's reading of the people in Machiavelli, on the contrary, allows for the possibility that the people express their political agency precisely by inscribing a resistance to institutionalization, an inscription which is achieved both internally and externally, to the political form as such. That political body which contains, in its form, the resistance to its form of domination, Machiavelli calls 'republic,' to be carefully distinguished from 'democracy' as a form of government."²⁷ Thus "the people" is the name of "the source of resistance to the reproductive powers of the political."²⁸

Vatter provided us here with a reading of Althusser's interpretation of Machiavelli that happened to be very close to the Machiavellian-Marxist conception of democracy developed by Miguel Abensour.²⁹ This is an interesting point to be noted as Abensour urged us to consider the inner resources of Marxism in order to conceive of democracy. Thus, he did not, as

Althusser did according to Vatter, “exit” from Marxism to find an answer to this requirement. In both cases, despite this important difference, Machiavelli plays a decisive role. It thus appears that his thought may be used in various and even diverging ways: in order to highlight a hidden side of Marx or to overcome his supposed flaws. To comment further on this point would take us away from our topic, but it would certainly deserve more attention.³⁰

Finally, Vatter revealed himself unconvinced by Althusser’s argument. To him, Althusser did not go far enough. Indeed, he gave up the “structuralist perspective” and adopted what he called the “perspective of the eventual.”³¹ However, “his interpretation remains reductive in one crucial respect: it fails to develop the implications of such a discourse for an understanding, not of the arcana of political domination, but of the possibilities of political freedom. By claiming that ‘Machiavelli is interested only in one form of government: the one that allows a state to last,’ *Althusser himself collapses the point of view of the people into that of the prince.*”³² On the contrary, according to Vatter, the point of view of the people never left Machiavelli’s concern. He insisted on the necessity to stick by Machiavelli, rather than by Althusser, in order to define the actual conditions of political liberty: “Althusser’s reading of the Roman Republic solely in terms of the problem of duration of the state misses these other dimensions of Machiavelli’s discourses that are essential to the project of rethinking political freedom in a post-Marxist context.”³³

IV. FACING THE MACHIAVELLIAN CONCEPTION OF “CONJUNCTURE”: ALTHUSSER’S INTERPRETATIVE BATTLE AND ITS OUTCOME

Much could be discussed about the supposed divergence between Machiavelli and Althusser stressed by Vatter to conclude his argument about a Machiavellian after-Marx. It could be observed that Vatter did not discuss the idea, implicit in Althusser’s reading, according to which Machiavelli considered politics independently from economics. Here though lies a delicate interpretative issue. It is obvious when one reads the *Florentine Histories*, in which the insuperable civil conflict is clearly not independent from economical aspects (status, inequalities of wealth). But it would also require further analysis of *The Prince* and the *Discourses*.³⁴ However, let me concentrate here on the question of conjuncture.

Vatter followed Althusser as far as the latter paved the way for political thought on “the emergence of the world of forms out of events.”³⁵ He de-

parted from him when he viewed in Althusser's analysis of the republican regime a "collapse" into a frame of thought that neglected the role of both the event and of the people, and thus lost sight of the conditions of political liberty. It is not certain that Machiavelli's thought fully supports this perspective. Does he not rather try to consider both the insurgent and the institutional dimensions of politics, the event and the form in the same frame of thought?³⁶ Again, this is not the place to develop further this discussion of Vatter's interpretation of Machiavelli, but we may keep it in mind as we turn back to Althusser's Machiavelli.

The idea of conjuncture, as I mentioned in the first part of this chapter, appeared as the central expression of Althusser's interest in Machiavelli. In fact, we are soon to acknowledge how the idea of conjuncture raised some questions rather than solved problems in Althusser's thought. It did not imply, according to him, the disappearance of the "laws of history or of politics."³⁷ In fact, to him, these laws still existed but had to be considered within the context to which they applied. To express this idea with accuracy, Althusser tried different types of wording. At first, he commented on the distinction between theory and practice, insisting on the fact that theory was subverted by political practice. He then spoke of the "variations" of the laws of history. He also introduced the word "emptiness" to point at the contingent space in which practice came to shape new political forms. He finally went on to describe the specific nature of *The Prince* as a political manifesto and Machiavelli's work as a kind of political action.

Later on, in the second part of *Machiavel et nous*, meaningfully entitled "Théorie et dispositif théorique chez Machiavel," he came back to this issue of the proper relationship between the singularity of circumstances and the laws of history, practice, and theory. The fact is that the prominence of practice in Machiavelli's thought seems to contradict the presence of what Althusser called, again in various ways, "a theory of history," "a general theory of history's laws," or even "the theses about universal history."³⁸ There, we see that Althusser struggled hard in order to make Machiavelli's thought consistent and achieve a combination of the ideas of perpetual movement and of an immutable order of things. As we know, he relied on the Machiavellian use of the notion of historical cycle, understood as that of a shift of "virtù" and "fortuna" throughout time and space, to solve this issue, before coming back to the examination of his central concern: the foundation of a state and the conditions of its duration, as Machiavelli elaborated it.

Althusser did not raise any questions about his decision to rely on the notion of historical cycle nor about his conviction that the ideas of per-

petual movement and of immutable order of things are contradictory in Machiavelli's thought. However, there would be many elements to refer to in Machiavelli's works to claim that such a questioning is relevant. It seems that, in a way, Althusser created a difficulty that did not exist for Machiavelli, probably because he introduced an interpretative filter linked to his critique of a structuralist and/or deterministic and/or teleological vision of history. Now, we, as contemporary readers, may be bewildered by the fact that Machiavelli considered that human beings display the same desires and civil passions throughout time and space and, at the same time, always thoroughly define the specific circumstances of the action. But Machiavelli's primary concern, like his contemporary Guicciardini, was to pay enough attention to the subtlest variations of the "effectual truth," rather than to formulate a consistent conception of human history. In addition, Machiavelli's concern lay in the question of the appropriate imitation: To what extent must and may an action be reproduced? In this line of thought, he above all developed a critical use of history in order to be able to spot the differences between specific contexts and address the proper recommendations to the political agent, to discriminate between what may and may not be imitated.³⁹ It is doubtful that he viewed as a contradiction what Althusser considered as such.

If Althusser did not express doubts about his own reading of Machiavelli in this respect, the variety of the formulations he used to describe the matter of conjuncture reveals his difficulty to come to terms with the Machiavellian focus on the particular circumstances of an action. We may interpret the fact that some of these phrases are "late handwritten addenda"⁴⁰ in the same manner.

V. THE ONGOING QUEST FOR A "CONJUNCTURE-EMBEDDED" POLITICAL THOUGHT

Filippo Del Lucchese has suggested that the best way of interpreting these texts is to preserve their ambivalence, complexity, and stratification.⁴¹ Following this idea, we may consider that, in Althusser's comments on Machiavelli, something remains unresolved and has still to be examined in the future. In this last section, I would like to examine how this suggestion was actually embraced by some of Althusser's former students and show how it led them to develop their own conjuncture-embedded political reflection. At least two of them have brilliantly made this Althusserian legacy their own: Balibar and Terray. They did so not by coming back to Machiavelli's works as *commentators*, though they occasionally

analyzed his works,⁴² but rather forging a way of theorizing that gives a decisive place to social reality and particular circumstances.

In search for the proper words, we saw that Althusser directed our attention to several features of Machiavellian thought: its orientation toward the "effectual truth"; its defiance vis-à-vis philosophical speculation and generalized affirmation; its strong inclination to consider the singularity of each situation in order to determine the appropriate action; and his refusal of abstract analysis. These features may be related to each other. But they are not synonymous with each other, despite the fact that Althusser shifted from one to the other in a conceptually loose way. However, Althusser expressed the *effect* produced by these Machiavellian features on "political theory" quite clearly and unambiguously: the emergence of an imperative, as strong as the Kantian moral one, according to which the conjuncture must determine the content and orientation of theory.⁴³ Consequently, the capacity to observe and describe it appears as the main quality both for a political agent and thinker.

While Balibar could determine a way to answer this requirement from within political philosophy, Terray, also educated as a philosopher, decided to embrace the career of a political anthropologist in order to reach the same goal. He developed a significant line of thought to give an account of this shift and its reasons. He has dedicated attention to this issue as such, while Balibar has practiced a conjuncture-embedded political theory without commenting so much on it. I thus propose here to turn toward Terray's reflection as a striking attempt to answer the Machiavellian methodological imperative.

Throughout his works, Terray showed himself convinced by the idea that social life is dominated by violence and conflict. He also considered that these express themselves in ways that are always very diverse and specific. In this respect, he explored two types of very different references. The first one relates to medical Hippocratic thought. He referred to the model of knowledge suggested in the Hippocratic works, according to which physicians must constantly go back and forth between the categories they elaborate to define diseases and the examination of particular cases. He derived from this epistemological model the idea that, to physicians, reality undergoes constant changes and never appears the same.⁴⁴ Consequently, physicians try to elaborate a knowledge that gives place to an organized view of such reality without simplifying it.⁴⁵ With this perspective in view, they have created general categories that function as "frames" to consider particular cases. What's more, they are always ready to redefine these categories. According to Terray, political thinking

must follow the same methodology in order to be able to grasp the specific dimension of each moment in history.

Terray's study of Clausewitz's art of war was a second landmark on his way to a conception of political knowledge as an inherently unfinished science of singularities.⁴⁶ To him, Clausewitz faced the same challenge as physicians: the description of a substantially diverse experience.⁴⁷ He appeared as a theorist of social sciences to Terray because he conceived of concrete situations not as examples but as the object itself of science. He battled against speculation to show that the "laws" of war were at best probability laws. These two references (to Hippocratic thought and to Clausewitz) contributed deeply to determine a conjuncture-embedded political thought in Terray's work.

What interests us here is that these two references are related to Althusser's influence. As a matter of fact, in 2008, Terray was offered the opportunity to elaborate a reflective meditation on his work. He stressed the role played by Althusser in directing his intellectual efforts toward such a conception of political knowledge: to Terray, Althusser created the "conditions of realism" while opening the way to an examination of specific conjunctures.⁴⁸ Terray underlined that this new path was not an easy one to choose. To explore it, he explained that he became an anthropologist rather than a philosopher, considering that the ambition to reduce chaos thanks to speculative reason was an illusion.⁴⁹ But according to him, anthropology in itself was not the solution. There were traps to be avoided, namely that of "sociological Platonism"⁵⁰ and that of "nominalism." One must escape abstractions and generalizations. They were nothing but simplifications of reality. One must also escape radical empiricism.⁵¹ In this line of thought, it is no wonder why Terray gave up the Marxist rigid analytical frame he used as a young anthropologist⁵² to develop later on an in-depth historical and ethnographic study, his *histoire du royaume Abron du Gyaman: Des origines à la conquête coloniale*.⁵³

Related to the issue I have been discussing, it is a remarkable fact that this orientation did not actually mean a rejection of philosophy for Terray. As a matter of fact, he stressed that his choice of anthropology was made because of his desire to encounter reality. To him, anthropology keeps looking for an answer to the questions raised by philosophy.⁵⁴ Consequently, this choice did not express a refusal of theory as such but rather his decision to elaborate theory in a different way. As we know, Balandier's anthropological work and the Manchester school's attention to changes and conflicts and to the dynamics of history have been crucial for such

an elaboration. Political theory, according to this line of thought, must be anchored in the analysis of particular situations.

VI. CONCLUSION

Althusser commented on Machiavelli as he did on other political thinkers. They all belong to the sphere of the "classics" read and taught in philosophy classes: mainly Machiavelli, but also Spinoza, Rousseau, Montesquieu. Each of these authors played a significant theoretical part in Althusser's own reflection, at various phases of it. We may consider that his reading of Machiavelli was a way to carry on with his interpretation of Montesquieu's thought as a first essential step, before Hegel, toward an experimental science of history.⁵⁵

However, within this sphere of classical political thinkers, Althusser probably gave a unique place to Machiavelli: that of being "in between" a political frame of thought inherited from the ancients and influenced by religion, and a political frame based on the idea of social contract and natural law, considered as that of the bourgeoisie.⁵⁶ So, he did not only stress the uniqueness of this stance and the isolation associated with it. He also emphasized our own difficulty to think in a Machiavellian way, as the second frame of thought was victorious over every alternative political language. As a consequence, we may argue that among these classics, Althusser had a special interest in Machiavelli: he viewed him as a lever to highlight our conceptual and political limits and to open up the door to a radical criticism of the second frame of thought. In other words, he related Machiavelli to Marx, which led him to the apparent paradox of their shared isolation.⁵⁷

The stress on the relationship between Machiavelli and Marx may be considered part of the Althusserian legacy. But this cannot be affirmed beyond a certain level of generality. It is certainly possible to describe a political frame of thought that takes into account class struggles as "Machiavelli's theorem," as Balibar does.⁵⁸ But this affirmation implies leaving aside the question of whether the Machiavellian civil conflict is comparable or even compressible into the Marxian view of class struggles. From this point of view, Abensour's reflection on Marx's "Machiavellian moment" gave evidence of a thorough attempt to ground in a precise and specific way the supposed relationship between Machiavelli and Marx.⁵⁹

As far as Althusser is concerned, one may consider that Machiavelli has remained above all useful to him, both in order to criticize bourgeois

political thinking and to find a way to escape certain theoretical difficulties related to a deterministic interpretation of history. This could lead us to think that the relationship of Althusser to Machiavelli is a topic that belongs to the past.

The intention of this chapter was to show, on the contrary, that it is still a significant issue for contemporary political thought. I would argue this significance is related to the fact that Althusser did not come to terms with Machiavelli: his most important legacy lies in his unfinished work. In order to show this, this chapter has departed from the interpretation of Althusser's reading of Machiavelli as being only a strategy to escape from a certain type of Marxist historical determinism and elaborate a criticism of structuralism. This shift has led to emphasizing the complexity and the ambivalence of Althusser's interpretation: he leaves us with the task of designing a fully elaborated conjuncture-embedded political theory. Some of his former students made this task their own, making it clear that there are several ways to answer this requirement. I mentioned Balibar and Terray who responded to Althusser's ambition in different ways. In Terray's work, it finally appeared as a never-ending quest, accomplished through various means: in addition to scholarly studies, he adopted several writing styles and had numerous political involvements.

Althusser's former students also clearly emphasized one of the implications of this type of political theory. It meant that Althusser was somehow uncomfortable holding this double stance of philosopher and "political agitator,"⁶⁰ always at the same time both theoretical and militant. He was certainly not far from it, as is suggested both by his comment on the "manifesto" style of Machiavelli's *Principe* and by what he called his "hallucinatory" awareness of the intimate connection between what is personal and subjective and what is objective and political.⁶¹ While inspired by Althusser's Machiavelli, Balibar and Terray created styles of thought and writing in which "the Personal is Philosophical is Political"⁶²: a far-reaching and meaningful echo of *The Prince's* dedication. This suggests to us an open road to present and future elaborations of other types of "conjuncture-embedded" political theories.

NOTES

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1. Marie Gaille-Nikodimov, *Conflit civil et liberté: La politique machiavélique entre histoire et médecine* (Paris: H. Champion, 2004).
2. Claude Lefort, *Le travail de l'œuvre Machiavel* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972).
3. Louis Althusser, *Machiavelli and Us*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London and New York: Verso, 1999), from *Écrits philosophiques et politiques, tome II*, ed. Fr. Matheron (Paris: STOCK/IMEC, Biblio essais, 1997).
4. Louis Althusser, *La Soutenance d'Amiens*, in *Solitude de Machiavel*, ed. and with an introduction by Yves Sintomer (Paris: PUF, ActuelMarx, 1998), 205.
5. This text is part of the IMEC Archives.
6. Gopal Balakrishnan, *New Left Review*, Friday, June 3, 2001. The relevance of Althusser's interpretation of Machiavelli is a frequently raised issue. See on this topic Mikko Lahtinen, *Politics and Philosophy: Niccolò Machiavelli and Althusser's Aleatory Materialism* (Leiden: Brill, 2009); Filippo Del Lucchese "On the Emptiness of an Encounter: Althusser's Reading of Machiavelli," trans. Warren Montag, *Decalages* 1, no. 1 (2010), art. 5, 3; Banu Bargu, "Machiavelli After Althusser," in *Breaking the Form: Machiavelli and the Crisis of Republicanism*, ed. Filippo Del Lucchese, Fabio Frosini, Vittorio Morfino (Leiden: Brill, 2015). (I quote from the manuscript before its publication.)
7. Louis Althusser, *Machiavel et nous*, in *Écrits philosophiques et politiques, tome II*, 43.
8. *Ibid.*, 44.
9. As with many commentators, he first relates to this surprise, speaking of "saisissement" (*ibid.*, 46).
10. Louis Althusser, *Solitude de Machiavel*, in *Solitude de Machiavel*, 318.
11. According to the translation proposed by Harvey C. Mansfield, Jr., *The Prince*, chapter 15 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 60. See on this matter Mohamed Moulfi, "Lectures machiavéliennes d'Althusser," in *Breaking the Form*.
12. Althusser, *Machiavel et nous*, in *Écrits philosophiques et politiques, tome II*, 52–53.
13. *Ibid.*, 58–59.
14. *Ibid.*, 63.
15. Lahtinen, *Politics and Philosophy*, and "Machiavelli was Not a Republicanist—or Monarchist: On Louis Althusser's 'Aleatory' Interpretation of *The Prince*," in *Breaking the Form*.
16. Bargu, "Machiavelli After Althusser," in *Breaking the Form*. As far as the late Althusser is concerned, see Vittorio Morfino and Luca Pinzolo, "Le primat de la rencontre sur la forme: Le dernier Althusser entre nature et histoire," *Multitudes* 2, no. 21 (2005): 149–58; and Vittorio Morfino, *Le Temps et l'Occasion: La rencontre Spinoza-Machiavel* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2012).
17. Moulfi, "Lectures machiavéliennes d'Althusser," in *Breaking the Form*.
18. Miguel Vatter, "Machiavelli and the After Marx: The Self-Overcoming of Marxism in the Late Althusser," *Theory & Event* 7, no. 4 (2004).
19. *Ibid.*, § 4.
20. Étienne Balibar, "L'objet d'Althusser," in *Politique et philosophie dans l'œuvre de Louis Althusser*, ed. Sylvain Lazarus (Paris: PUF, 1993), 94.

21. Louis Althusser, *Marx dans ses limites* (1978), in *Écrits philosophiques et politiques, tome I*, ed. and pres. Fr. Matheron (Paris: STOCK/IMEC, Biblio essais, 1999).
22. Louis Althusser, *Montesquieu: La politique et l'histoire* (Paris: PUF, 1959).
23. Vatter, "Machiavelli and the After Marx," § 5.
24. *Ibid.*, § 8.
25. *Ibid.*, § 19.
26. *Ibid.*
27. *Ibid.*, § 27—see also § 26.
28. *Ibid.*, § 22.
29. Miguel Abensour, *Democracy Against the State: Marx and the Machiavellian Moment* [1997] (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2011).
30. Warren Montag mentions Laclau and Mouffe's elaboration on the idea of "radical democracy," in "Politics: Transcendent or Immanent? A Response to Miguel Vatter's 'Machiavelli After Marx,'" *Theory & Event* 7, no. 4 (2005). On this topic, see Étienne Balibar, "Une citoyenneté européenne est-elle possible?," in *L'Amérique, l'Europe, la guerre: Réflexion sur la médiation européenne* (Paris: La Découverte, 2003), 127; Marie Gaille, "Désir de liberté, citoyenneté et démocratie: Retour sur la question de l'actualité politique de Machiavel," *Asterion* (2015), <http://asterion.revues.org/2623>.
31. Vatter, "Machiavelli and the After Marx," § 21.
32. *Ibid.*, § 36 (emphasis added).
33. *Ibid.*, § 40. Here, Miguel Vatter advocates for a conception of democracy that is very close to Rancière, in *La Méésentente* (Paris: Galilée, 1995), as he himself notices (note 57).
34. See my paper "Peut-on être riche et bon citoyen? L'Aristote humaniste au secours de l'esprit capitaliste florentin," *Asterion* 5 (2007), <https://asterion.revues.org/696>. See also Filippo Del Lucchese, "Crisis and Power: Economics, Politics, and Conflict in Machiavelli's Political Thought," *History of Political Thought* 30, no. 1 (2009): 75–96; J. Barthas, *L'Argent n'est pas le nerf de la guerre: Essai sur une prétendue erreur de Machiavel* (Rome: Collection de l'École française, 2011).
35. *Ibid.*, § 41.
36. It is the perspective I have advocated for in my book *Conflit civil et liberté*.
37. Althusser, *Machiavel et nous*, in *Écrits philosophiques et politiques, tome II*, 63.
38. *Ibid.*, 80–81.
39. See my book *Conflit civil et liberté*, chap. 5.
40. François Matheron, introduction, 39–41, and critical notes, 169–171, to Althusser, "Machiavel et nous," in *Écrits philosophiques et politiques, tome II*. See on this matter Del Lucchese, "On the Emptiness of an Encounter," 7–8.
41. Del Lucchese, "On the Emptiness of an Encounter," 14.
42. Balibar, "Une citoyenneté européenne est-elle possible?"; Emmanuel Terray, "An Encounter: Althusser and Machiavelli," in *Postmodern Materialism and the Future of Marxist Theory: Essays in the Althusserian Tradition*, ed. A. Callari and D. F. Ruccio (Hanover and London: Wesleyan University Press, 1996); and Emmanuel Terray, "La politique contre la loi," in *Combats avec Méduse* (Paris: Galilée, 2011).
43. Althusser, *Machiavel et nous*, in *Écrits philosophiques et politiques, tome II*, 60.
44. Emmanuel Terray, *La politique dans la caverne* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1990), 90–91.

45. Ibid., 91.
46. Emmanuel Terray, *Essai sur Clausewitz* (Paris: Fayard, 1999).
47. Ibid., 58
48. Emmanuel Terray, "Dernière séance," in *Cahiers d'études africaines* 2-3-4, nos. 198-199-200 (2010): 535.
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52. Emmanuel Terray, *Le marxisme devant les sociétés primitives: Deux études* (Paris: Maspéro, 1972).
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54. Emmanuel Terray, "Dernière séance," 531
55. Céline Spector, "Couper le maître en deux? La lecture althusserienne de Montesquieu," "Althusser, 25 ans après," special issue of *La Pensée*, no. 382 (April-June 2015): 85-97.
56. Althusser, *Solitude de Machiavel*, in *Solitude de Machiavel*, 323.
57. Ibid.
58. Balibar, "Une citoyenneté européenne est-elle possible?," 127.
59. Abensour, *Democracy Against the State*.
60. Louis Althusser, *Lettres à Franca, 1961-1973*, ed. and with an introduction by Fr. Matheron and Y. Moulien-Boutang (Paris: Stock/IMEC, 1998), 750-51.
61. Ibid., letters of April 26, May 21, and October 23, 1963. See Yoshihiko Ichida and François Matheron, "Un, Deux, Trois, Quatre, Dix Mille Althusser? Considérations Aléatoires sur le Matérialisme Aléatoire," *Multitude* 2, no. 21 (2005): 172.
62. Eva Feder Kittay and Licia Carlson, *Cognitive Disabilities and Its Challenge to Moral Philosophy* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 393.

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