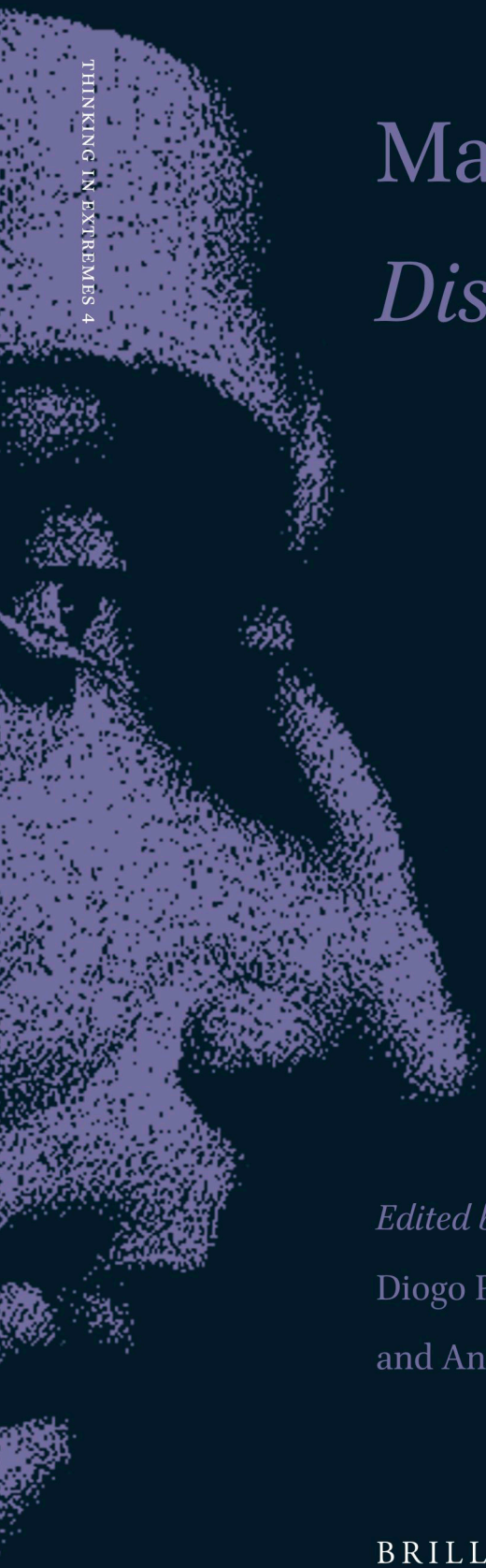
THINKING IN EXTREMES 4



Machiavelli's *Discourses on Livy*

Edited by

Diogo Pires Aurélio

and Andre Santos Campos

BRILL

Machiavelli's Discourses on Livy. *New Readings*

Thinking in Extremes

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Abbrevations

References to Machiavelli's works are based on the edition, or the editions, used by each author in this volume, and they are made according to the following system of abbreviations:

A *Arte della guerra/The Art of War*;
AS *L'asino/The Golden Ass*;
D *Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Tito Livio/Discourses on Livy*;
IF *Istorie fiorentine/Florentine Histories*;
P *Il Principe/The Prince*.

For each of Machiavelli's texts, the abbreviations are followed by the indication of the book (if existing) in Roman numerals, the chapter and the page of the quoted edition in Arabic numerals.

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Introduction

Diogo Pires Aurélio and Andre Santos Campos

Of all of Machiavelli's known works, the *Discourses on Livy* is arguably the most elaborate and complex. Its somewhat labyrinthine prose, length and 'absolutely original structure'[1] indicate that it was intended for a smaller audience than *The Prince* – the latter being a 'little work' (an *opusculo*)[2] that, with its vehement style, assertive tone and vigorous rhythm, became famous as soon as the first copies were made public. In the words of Claude Lefort, referring to the intellectual landscape of forty years ago, 'outside of the circle of historians, political scientists and Italianists, those who currently read the *Discourses* are few',[3] this despite the fact that the work was 'commented, discussed, secretly explored and even imitated' for centuries as a source of inspiration for opponents of absolutism who clamoured for free institutions, that is, for a monarchy under the rule of law or even, in some cases, a 'well-ordered republic'.[4]

This positive reception of the *Discourses* was far from unanimous, however. For instance, Guicciardini, Machiavelli's contemporary and friend, openly opposed the *Discourses*' view on the participation of the plebs in city life and the alleged virtues of disunity.[5] And Jerónimo Osório, a Portuguese cleric, immediately came out in defence of Catholicism.[6] Even if there had been no other cases, the swiftness of these reactions demonstrates the work's vulnerability to critique in light of its radical deconstruction of the ancient and Christian concepts that structured the existing mindset.

Whether positive or negative, the influence of the *Discourses* has nonetheless outlived the controversies at play in the historical context in which it appeared. It remains a key resource not only on the subject of republics but also on the main concepts required to discuss politics in the modern age, the intrinsically controversial and radical nature of which is laid bare by Machiavelli: power and law, authority and equality, order and conflict, war and peace.

1 Dionisotti 1980, p. 259

2 Letter to Francesco Vettori, 10/12/1513, in Machiavelli 1998, p. 110.

3 Lefort 1985, p. 9.

4 Ibid.

5 Machiavelli 2000, pp. 341–345.

6 Lusitanus 1542, III.2. Bishop Osório, who knew Reginald Pole, another critic of the *Discourses* to whom he dedicated his *De Justitia,* strongly disputes Machiavelli's blaming Christianity for the 'destruction of honour and glory, and even the annihilation of military valour'.

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The essays in this volume aim to clarify and analyse the reasons for the significance and enduring presence of the *Discourses on Livy*, as well as the core subjects emerging from the work's structure. To do so, a preliminary step is necessary: we must shed light on the unique character of the *Discourses* and on how it shook the intellectual world of the sixteenth century to its core.

1 'Unknown Waters and Lands'

The originality of the *Discourses* is immediately evident in its format and style. Unlike *The Prince,* which, despite its break with the doctrinal status quo, fits easily into the traditional genre of 'mirrors for princes' that date back at least to Xenophon, the *Discourses* does not fit into any typical literary genre of the time. It is neither a treatise nor a history book. Despite what one may infer from the title, it is also not a mere commentary on a classical text (a reasonably common genre throughout the Middle Ages and the Renaissance). Machiavelli was the first to acknowledge this 'anomaly', in the preface to book I, when he claimed to have 'decided to take a path as yet untrodden by anyone'. Several interpreters have since elaborated on this singularity. Dionisotti, for instance, observes that whereas *The Prince* fits into a tradition of small treatises divided into chapters (the *trattatello*), 'behind the *Discourses* there is nothing, either in Latin or in the vernacular'.[7] More recently, Giorgio Inglese describes the work as 'a crossing between a political treatise, ordered by subjects, and humanist commentary, as a series of continuous glosses', classifying it as a 'treatise-commentary'.[8] Filippo del Lucchese, on the other hand, speaks of 'a puzzling book', stressing that 'the *Discourses* appear as a collection of texts on several different matters, often confusedly placed side by side'.[9]

The differences between the format of the *Discourses* and the treatise genre are easily recognisable. The *Discourses* possesses neither the depth, the systematicity, nor the connection between the subject matter and the arguments one expects from a treatise. The discussions are often incomplete, only to reappear a few chapters later, in a different context. The meaning of the terms frequently varies depending on the theme. The narrative often loses its thread among the irregular sequence of demonstrations and examples, which sometimes derive from the past and sometimes from a time still within living memory.

Similarly, and despite what the title suggests, the *Discourses* is different from the type of commentary – entirely subordinated to a classical work – that is

7 Dionisotti 1980, p. 258.
8 Inglese 2007, p. 98.
9 Lucchese 2015, p. 43.

characteristic of Scholastic writers. Livy's text doubtlessly serves as a leitmotiv, but Machiavelli is not concerned with its interpretation. On the contrary, he refutes essential parts, selects specific passages arbitrarily, his eyes set on his own reality, and, above all, uses it to question the view of history in which the dominant political concepts are rooted, which he considers powerless to deal with the endless crises that marked Italian cities for centuries. However, beneath the apparent disorder of the exposition and its many subjects, with echoes of the 'learned variety' (*dotta varietà*) that Poliziano had invoked against the humanist exegesis of the *Quattrocento*,[10] a novel conception of the republic springs from the *Discourses*. And 'even if it were only because of the structure', as Dionisotti puts it, 'the leap in the Latin scholastic and humanist tradition to a work in the vernacular, to a classical author who will remain outside of that tradition, to such a risky subject, of immediate interest to the general public, would be prodigious in itself'.[11]

The genealogy of the *Discourses* likely contributed to its occasional low levels of fluency and the overlapping of discursive strata that it contains. Not much is known of the actual date of its composition, although a few clues suggest that it took some time to write, in all likelihood with several interruptions in between. Machiavelli's famous letter to Francesco Vettori from December 1513 informs us that he compiled a text on principalities, which is most likely *The Prince*. And, in the second chapter of *The Prince*, Machiavelli claims not to deal with republics because he 'has reasoned on them at length another time', thus referring to another text which could be a first draft of the *Discourses*. Correlatively, the *Discourses* explicitly mentions or alludes to this 'treatise of principalities' five times (D II.1.128; II.20.175; III.6.219; III.19.261; III.42.302). In addition, the *Discourses* touches on events that occurred as late as 1517 (D II.10.148; III.27.274), and two figures who are mentioned in it as still being alive, Cosimo Rucellai in the introductory letter and Emperor Maximilien in D II.11, both died in 1519. The *Discourses* was thus likely composed in the period from 1513 to 1519, although Machiavelli could have started writing the book well before that date, continuing to make changes to the original draft well until 1527, the year of his death.[12] Unfortunately, the location of the original manuscript of the *Discourses*, should it still exist, remains unknown. The only remaining handwritten copy, which is presumed to have been made directly from the original, is in the British Library. We do know that the first two print

10 Goodman 1998, pp. 108–131.

11 Dionisotti 1980, p. 258. See also Machiavelli 2000, p. xxiv, where Vivanti underlines Dionisotti's words on this topic.

12 On the composition of the *Discourses,* see Gilbert 1953; Vivanti 2000; Inglese 2007, pp. 93–97; Sasso 2015, pp. 101–162.

runs (which were copies of the original manuscript) appeared in 1531, one in Rome by Antonio Blado, the other in Florence by Bernardo Giunta.

The little that is known of the composition of the *Discourses* means that we should look elsewhere when seeking to understand the reasons for the book's original format. Its internal structure is most likely due to Machiavelli's unique style and the deep conceptual rupture operated by the work itself. Machiavelli's writing does not follow any of the traditional models and does not fall easily within an established canon. His language echoes the vocabulary of traders and artisans in everyday life rather than the notarial wording that pervaded the standard political and legal writings, with which he was familiar from his days as secretary to the Chancery. The strategy employed in the exposition is not, as with a treatise, a deductive sequence that progresses seamlessly through rigorously defined terms towards a pre-determined conclusion. On the contrary, we find leaps and shifts, shortcuts, abandoned lines of reasoning, questions that are raised and arguments subsequently dropped and replaced by others that have reappeared in the meantime with new twists. In one chapter, ostensibly definitive assertions crop up, only to give way, further on, to others that diverge from them in a dynamic that runs through the entire text. In this sense, the *Discourses* always seems like a work in progress.

Although it is not a dialogue (a rhetorical form that was prevalent in Renaissance Platonism), the *Discourses* is an open discussion revolving around Livy's *Ab Urbe Condita*, somewhat similar to those that took place in the *Orti Oricellari* (Rucellai Garden) between Machiavelli and young Florentines who were sympathetic to the republican regime, including the two men to whom the work is dedicated. The *Discourses* certainly bears the mark of the playwright who wrote the *Mandragola*, not only with regard to its style but also its subject. Both epistemology and Platonism-inspired discourse are ill-adjusted to political reality, which requires theoretical-practical reflection in constant dialogue with history and the contingency of facts, so as not to remain merely in the realm of utopia. Far from aiming at yet another timeless theory, Machiavelli's goal was to 'to find new modes and orders', a task 'no less dangerous' than the one he establishes for himself of seeking 'unknown waters and lands': 'driven by that natural desire that has always been in me to work, without any respect, for those things I believe will bring common benefit for everyone' (D I.Pref.5).[13] Under the guise of an atypical exegesis of Livy's work, the *Discourses* reveals the passion of the politician committed to action and to providing others with the means to act and to save Florence from a generally diagnosed crisis.

13 All references to the *Discourses* in the English language are drawn from Machiavelli 1996.

2 'The Effectual Truth of the Thing'

Political decision-making and deliberation are typically not subject to the regularities that one could recognise as laws of nature. The contingency and intrinsic mutability of political matters prevent the determination of necessary and universal laws. According to J.G.A. Pocock, this raises 'in an acute form the problem, which could become crucial, of the intelligibility of the particular, the local, the transitory'.[14] Ancient and medieval thinkers were mainly focused on trying to establish the principles by which rulers should guide their actions, drawing up what the normative structure of a well-ordered city would be if men acted according to reason. Theorising within this conceptual framework could never be more than a variation on the same canon, losing sight of what is taught by experience and the lessons of the past. One of the reasons for the *Discourses*' seeming innovativeness is the fact that Machiavelli refuses to view the city simply as a metamorphosis of an ideal model. Instead, he tries to understand 'the effectual truth of the thing' (P 15): intrinsically fluid, driven by interests and passions, without a compass to show the way. Such is 'truth' in politics. The widespread culture, however, advocated surrender to a supposed 'necessity' of events, dictated by 'fortune' or 'providence', while legitimising the social hierarchy and the status quo as expressions of the natural order of things. Machiavelli questions the foundations of this view, shared by the Renaissance humanists, and opposes their interpretation of the history of the Roman republic. Some examples will suffice to reveal the extent of the *Discourses*' disruptive effects.

Machiavelli's first and most brutal blow against this prevalent culture is his rejection of the role it gives to concord as an essential condition for a republic's greatness and prosperity. By upending the allegation, so dear to the humanists, that it was the uprisings and instability brought on by the plebs that delivered Rome to tyranny, Machiavelli concludes the exact opposite. First, far from being the reason for the fall of the republic, 'the disunion of the plebs and the Roman senate made that republic free and powerful' (D I.4.14; D I.37.80). Secondly, despite the instability for which it is often blamed, 'the multitude is wiser and more constant than a prince' (D I.58.115). Both arguments had already been outlined in *The Prince*. This fact, if complemented with what the *Discourses* state about the need, in certain circumstances, for a 'dictatorial authority' to fight the corruption of the republic (D. I.34), is enough to counter the idea (still commonly held until a few decades ago) that a sort of heteronomy was at

14 Pocock 1989, p. 81

play: a monarchist Machiavelli in *The Prince*, and a republican Machiavelli in the *Discourses*. In the latter, however, the break with tradition is confirmed in successive chapters and developed in unequivocal terms that could not have been missed by his contemporaries, as is made clear by the criticism levelled by Guicciardini, a cultured statesman from the high nobility who defended the *vivere civile* (civil way of life). Guicciardini claims, first, that Rome 'was forced to dilate through the force of arms and concord' because powerful peoples surrounded it; second, that 'due to its ignorance, the people is incapable of deliberating on important things'; and finally, that 'to praise disunity is to praise sickness in a patient because of the goodness of the medicine that was applied'.[15]

However, Machiavelli does not merely rescue the plebs from the subordinate role to which it had been reduced by traditional political thinking. He also questions the very idea of virtue that lies behind this reasoning. According to Cicero (one of the humanists' major sources of inspiration), 'nature has given men such a need for virtue and such a desire to defend the common safety that this force has overcome all the enticements of pleasure and ease'.[16] From this perspective, virtue is a 'desire' or a natural inclination, the ramifications of which – justice, generosity, courage, devotion to the fatherland – sustain the community, which in turn is at the root of personal fulfilment. The virtue of the citizens ennobles them and, at the same time, ennobles the fatherland in a virtuous cycle that offsets corruption. Machiavelli disagrees with this alleged harmony and complementarity insofar as the common good requires private evils on occasion; that is, the greatness of the fatherland often rests on the fickleness and wrongdoing of political agents. In his words, 'where one deliberates entirely on the safety of his fatherland, there ought not to enter other 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' (D III.41.301). This reveals a conflict with which classical and medieval thought was utterly unacquainted: an act may be ignominious in the private sphere but virtuous when it comes to the common good. For example, 'although the use of fraud in every action is detestable, nonetheless in managing war it is a praiseworthy and glorious thing' (D III.40.399). Machiavelli illustrates this combination in relation to Romulus, who murdered his brother to ensure the perpetuity of the city he wished to found: 'a prudent orderer of a republic … should contrive to have authority

15 Machiavelli 2000, pp. 338–344.
16 Cicero 1999, p. 2.

alone; nor will a wise understanding ever reprove anyone for any extraordinary action that he uses to order a kingdom or to constitute a republic' (D I.9.29).

The source of political organisation is, therefore, an extraordinary action, the effects of which stretch out over time, becoming ordinary actions through *mores* – institutions and customs. These *mores* express a new order crystallised in what Machiavelli calls 'education', the primary instrument of which is religion. *Mores* preserve virtue and offset corruption by keeping private interests from superseding common interests, thereby guaranteeing individual freedom. The Roman republic lasted as long as it did only because the 'education' of its people inclined it towards what the common interest demanded in the circumstances, that is, the desire to conquer as the only way to remain free.

This view bears no resemblance to the historical conditions of sixteenth-century Italy as seen through the eyes of Machiavelli, according to whom Roman 'education' was wrecked by Christianity: 'The ancient religion did not beatify men if they were not full of worldly glory, as were captains of arms and princes of republics. Our religion has glorified humble and contemplative more than active men … And if our religion asks that you have strength in yourself, it wishes you to be capable more of suffering than of doing something strong' (D II.2.131). In this regard, the reactions were also swift and first came from figures within the Catholic Church. In 1542, bishop Osório penned the treatise *De nobilitate christiana* (On Christian Nobility), in which he unleashes his wrath on the *Discourses* for blaming Christianity for the 'destruction of honour and glory, and even the annihilation of military valour'. Speaking of a 'plague that has become widespread', and stressing that he 'would have left the dead in peace, had not the evil he caused through his very corrupt writings been so great', the bishop goes on to decry the decadence of Rome, which he attributes to the abandonment of the original virtues of the people, and the natural finitude of all things in the 'world beneath the moon'. This decadence has nothing whatever to do with the Christian religion, which praises bravery and 'open warfare without quarter in favour of the salvation of the people or religious zeal'. One need only recall the courage of the martyrs in the first years of the Church, writes Osório, or the military victories achieved through divine providence by Christians such as Constantine and Charlemagne.[17]

What is noteworthy about Osório's reaction is that it differs from the outwardly benevolent way in which the Papal hierarchy dealt with the *Discourses* until 1559, when Paul IV created the Index of forbidden books and included Machiavelli's lengthier work among its 550 entries. In fact, one of the first two

17 Lusitanus 1542, III.2.

print runs of the *Discourses*, supposedly based on the original text held by cardinal Ridolfi, a nephew of the Pope, had appeared in Rome in 1531 with Papal privileges, assembled by a group of collaborators of Monsignor Gaddi, a cleric with close ties to Leo X. This contrast is undoubtedly also due to the challenges that the Papacy faced from dissident movements led by Luther and Henry VIII, who shook the atmosphere of the Renaissance and made the idea of reforming beliefs and customs less scandalous and rare. However, the fact remains that Machiavelli levels Church doctrine in the same way that he levels the humanist interpretation of the Roman republic. If Christianity weakened republican institutions, argues Machiavelli in anticipation of Osório's criticism, this arose 'without doubt more 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 as that we can to defend it' (D II.2.132).

3 Machiavellian Moments

Republicanism is undoubtedly the towering theme of the *Discourses.* It comes as no surprise that Machiavelli inspired a whole tradition of anti-absolutist thinkers, including such authors as Spinoza and Rousseau. The fact that he was also the author of *The Prince*, regarded as a manual for tyrants, was no obstacle for many republicans and radicals who interpreted this 'little work' as a hidden criticism of, rather than a guidebook for, authoritarian governments. In addition to emphasising the value of popular support for governments, *The Prince* does not conceal Machiavelli's sympathy for how republics express freedom, even when they are subdued: 'in republics there is greater life, greater hatred, more desire for revenge; the memory of their ancient liberty does not and cannot let them rest' (P 5.21). In this way, Machiavelli's complete *opus* can be seen as a coherent and unequivocally republican whole.

Much like *The Prince*, the *Discourses* nevertheless is not bereft of a certain amount of ambiguity. True, the author asserts straightforwardly that 'the people makes lesser errors than the prince, and because of this can be trusted more than the prince' (D I.59.121); that the 'common good is not observed if not in republics' (D II.2.130); and, in consonance with passages in *The Prince* on the difficulty of the *riscontro,* that is, the need for the politician to adjust to changes in times and circumstances (P 25), that 'a republic has greater life and has good fortune longer than a principality, for it can accommodate itself better than a prince to the diversity of times through the diversity of the citizens

that are in it' (D III.9.240). However, Machiavelli also states that 'it is necessary to be alone if one wishes to order a republic anew, or to reform it altogether outside its ancient orders' (D I.9.28-29); that 'the dictatorial authority did good, and not harm, to the Roman republic' (D I.34.73); and that 'a multitude without a head is useless' (D I.44.92). There is no shortage of chapters in the *Discourses* that Machiavelli could have written for *The Prince*, such as D III.19, entitled 'Whether to Rule a Multitude Compliance Is More Necessary Than Punishment'. In this light, both the criticism of those who look kindly on republics – such as Guicciardini, who leans towards the Venetian model, or even cardinal Pole, who opposes the absolutism of Henry VIII but is no less opposed to Machiavelli[18] – and the diversity of interpretations of the *Discourses* seem intelligible.

What exactly does Machiavelli mean when he speaks of republics? The complexity of Machiavelli's text leaves room for several interpretations. Over the past few decades, Machiavelli studies have even witnessed a curious phenomenon: the distinctive political proclivities of Machiavelli's various interpreters have given rise to a variety of answers to this question. Broad categories such as republicanism, liberalism, populism, and post-Marxism qualify Machiavelli's different interpreters to the extent that one can almost speak of 'several Machiavellis' coexisting in the current scholarship.

The period between the French Revolution and the end of the Second World War was dominated by the figure of Machiavelli as a theoriser of the 'reason of state', an amoral kind of reasoning based on facts rather than values, ends rather than means, that might have inspired twentieth-century dictatorships, as theorised first by Friedrich Meinecke (1924) and later by Leo Strauss (1978; but first published in 1958) and Ernst Cassirer (1966), both refugees in the United States. According to Strauss, this would correspond to 'the old fashioned and simple opinion according to which Machiavelli was a teacher of evil'.[19] It fell to another German refugee, Hannah Arendt, without expressly denying this opinion, to indirectly inspire a return to and re-appreciation of the *Discourses*. Indeed, Arendt called attention to 'the fact that since the Second World War historians have been more inclined to consider the western world as a whole than they have been since the early nineteenth century'.[20] The so-called 'republican' Machiavelli emerged from this idea when J. G. A. Pocock developed his famous thesis on the connection between the republicanism of the American founding fathers and seventeenth-century English republicanism,

18 Prosperi 1998.
19 Strauss 1978, p. 9.
20 Arendt 1990, p. 215.

namely Harrington's, who is said to have been inspired by the Renaissance humanists, including Machiavelli, who were themselves indebted to a rediscovery of Cicero and Aristotle. Pocock intended 'to study how it happened that Englishmen could begin to project an image of themselves and their society in Machiavellian terms' and how, '[e]xported to the Atlantic's western shores, this contributed powerfully to the complexity of American values'.[21] The project's originality, erudition and reasoning were sufficiently appealing to establish a new trend. In 1978, drawing on Pocock's and Baron's (1961) research into Italian Renaissance cities and the values of civic humanism, Quentin Skinner stated that 'it is essential to an understanding of Machiavelli' *Discourses* to recognise that he too is basically concerned to uphold the same set of values'.[22] More recently, Skinner would summarise the essence of Machiavelli's republicanism, according to the commonly named Cambridge School, by recalling that the author of the *Discourses* states 'first, that no city can ever attain greatness unless it upholds a free way of life; secondly, that no city can ever uphold a free way of life unless it maintains a republican constitution. With this statement …, Machiavelli not only presents a wholehearted defence of traditional republican values; he also presents that defence in a wholeheartedly traditional way'.[23] Similar arguments can be found in the writings of Philip Pettit (1999), who views republican freedom as liberty of non-domination, present in Machiavelli, as opposed to the liberal conception, which defines it as 'liberty of non-interference'.

Concurrently, a liberal interpretation of Machiavelli, drawing inspiration from Strauss, argues that 'the orders and laws of Machiavelli's republic', as claimed by Markus Fischer, 'no longer seek to make men virtuous: it is sufficient that they be satisfied'.[24] According to another supporter of this 'liberal' Machiavelli, Paul A. Rahe, 'the grand synthesis articulated by Pocock, suggesting an essential continuity in republican thought … from Aristotle to Machiavelli, from Machiavelli to James Harrington, and from Harrington to Thomas Jefferson' is 'almost entirely wrong', since 'the republicanism of the American founders was in most regards a liberal republicanism' and 'they were the heirs of a series of revolutions in political thought that set Machiavelli at odds with Aristotle and classical republicanism, Harrington at odds with Machiavelli, and Jefferson at odds with Harrington'.[25]

21 Pocock 1975, p. 330.
22 Skinner, 1996, p. 156.
23 Skinner, 1993, p. 141.
24 Fischer 2006, p. lx.
25 Rahe 2006, p. xx.

Criticism of Pocock's and Skinner's republicanism also lies at the heart of a more radical, 'democratic' Machiavelli. John P. McCormick is perhaps the most outstanding representative of this interpretation. His portrayal of Machiavelli emphasises the centrality of the people. He suggests that current representative democracies should adopt Roman republican institutions such as the 'tribunes of the plebs', often praised by the Florentine. 'Cambridge-associated scholars', writes McCormick, 'highlight with considerable skill certain normative advantages that republicanism offers in contrast with contemporary liberal democracy .... However, Cambridge interpretations for the most part overlook Machiavelli's criticism of social domination'.[26]

This 'populist' Machiavelli should, however, be distinguished from the 'post-Marxist' Machiavelli. The latter was contrived in the last half-century or so, utterly unreactive to the republicanism-liberalism debate. It emerged chiefly from the works of Claude Lefort, who regarded Machiavelli as a theorist of democracy, conceived of as a regime in which politics springs from conflict, which is immanent in society and therefore irredeemable by utopia.[27] This interpretation gained momentum with Louis Althusser, who in his final phase found in Machiavelli a kind of materialism that expresses a rejection of transcendence or determinism and entails a conception of political action as intrinsically contingent, unpredictable and rooted in the random 'encounter' between virtue and fortune.[28]

Either of these interpretations remains a source of inspiration for many of the studies that continue to be dedicated to Machiavelli and, more specifically, to the *Discourses*.

4 New Readings

The widespread priority given to *The Prince* when tackling Machiavelli's political thought has influenced Machiavelli studies to the extent that the *Discourses*, even when given the attention it deserves, is rarely considered in isolation. Instead, the typical approach to the *Discourses* consists in inquiring into its relation to *The Prince*. *Machiavelli's* Discourses on Livy*: New Readings* is unconventional in the sense that it detaches itself from this trend and focuses explicitly on the *Discourses*. It is also unprecedented insofar as it is the first edited volume in any language centred entirely on the *Discourses*.

26 McCormick 2011, p. 10. See also, more recently, McCormick 2018.

27 See Lefort 1972.

28 See Althusser 2006 and 2011.

As a collective work, *Machiavelli's* Discourses on Livy*: New Readings* is exposed to the problem of the 'several Machiavellis' mentioned above. The world's leading experts on the *Discourses* are often representatives of different approaches to Machiavelli's political thought and the *Discourses*. Assuming that ignoring the problem is not an option, the chief aim of this volume is to offer a multitude of 'readings' of the *Discourses* that focus on its most noteworthy topics in a 'new' way, that is, to provide a broad picture of the *Discourses* from the various viewpoints of current Machiavelli studies and their challenges.

Rather than constituting a book on the current status of Machiavelli scholarship, however, these *New Readings* function as a critical guide to the *Discourses* that relies on Machiavelli studies. In addition, just as the *Discourses* is not a commentary on Livy's *Ab urbe condita*, this volume is not a commentary on the *Discourses*. These *New Readings* neither mirror the tripartite structure of the *Discourses* nor follow the chronological order of Machiavelli's line of reasoning. Instead, they centre on basic topics that surface time and again in Machiavelli studies and on which the *Discourses* have much to reveal – Machiavelli's writing style, his conception of history, the relation between liberty and tyranny, his republicanism, his view of society as a plural and conflictive body, the role of religion in political contexts, his notions of *virtù* and morality, and his insights on political economy, the impact of conspiracies, diffidence and war in politics. These topics are continuously debated because they are fundamental to understanding the complex web of terms, arguments, and episodes that are woven into the *Discourses*, each of which remains open to discussion and reinterpretation. They function as doorways through which to enter the *Discourses*. The fact that they pervade all the three books that comprise the *Discourses* means that their order of appearance cannot reproduce the *Discourses'* structure. Instead, they are combined in a way that allows the reader to work through the building blocks of the *Discourses* without losing sight of the particularities of Machiavelli's actual text.

In Chapter 1, Gabriele Pedullà inquires into the literary and philosophical genre of the *Discourses*, given that no text of the kind had been published previously, a novelty that received acknowledgement and high praise from Machiavelli's contemporaries. Pedullà argues that it is paramount to understand how Machiavelli came to contrive this 'new way of reading' and shows that the historical importance of the *Discourses* also resides in its unprecedented 'style of thought' and 'discourse-form', which influenced Western political thought for nearly three centuries.

In Chapter 2, Cary J. Nederman examines and disentangles the 'back story' that culminated in Machiavelli's inclusion of Polybian political doctrines in

the first book of the *Discourses*, seeking to explain how Machiavelli came to endorse a Renaissance version of the theory of *anacyclosis*.

Chapter 3, by J. Patrick Coby, scrutinises the value of liberty in the *Discourses*, given that Machiavelli is often ambiguous on how to balance his defence of the people's guardianship of liberty with his praise of expansionist Rome. Coby's position is that liberty and greatness relate as stages in a cycle. Liberty has many facets, and greatness is one of its stages of development, depending on the historical circumstances and the agent in question.

In Chapter 4, Marie Gaille focuses on civil conflict in the *Discourses*. She aims to show how Machiavelli immersed his readers in the dynamics of civil conflict by providing tools of analysis to assess the implications of conflict, good or bad, depending on its relations to freedom. Gaille clarifies that civil strife for Machiavelli is neither the antithesis of public order nor a threat to the harmony of the body politic as such, but rather an intrinsic element of political society as a plural and conflictive body.

Chapter 5, by Fabio Raimondi, explores the relationship between republic and constitution in the *Discourses*, stressing that what is distinctive about Machiavelli's republicanism is that republics combine not only the three classical forms of government but also the humours. Raimondi explores the consequences of this assertion and concludes that republican constitutions, understood almost in the medical sense, are capable of modifying human nature.

Chapter 6, by Marco Geuna, draws on Machiavelli's attention to Pope Gregory the Great's efforts to expurgate Christianity from pagan antiquities in order to shed light on the Florentine's criticism of Christian religion within political contexts, more specifically on the connection between religious sects and the use of violence.

Camila Vergara, in Chapter 7, expands on 'constituent' interpretations of Machiavelli, in line with Antonio Negri's work, with the purpose of interpreting Machiavelli's ideas on foundings and renewals as setting the framework for a republican theory of constituent power in which the common people are the guardians of liberty. Through this lens, the constituent power is presented as a necessary means to preserve the original thrust of free government built on the plebeian struggle against oligarchic domination.

Miguel Vatter's essay in Chapter 8 addresses the problem of evil-doing in Machiavelli's political thought in relation to his employment of rhetorical tropes. Contradicting recent arguments to the effect that Machiavelli's apparent praise of violent and evil actions is not what it appears, Vatter seeks to recover the connection between immoralism and rhetoric in Thucydides in

order to formulate a new hypothesis that makes sense of Machiavelli's theory of ethically contradictory actions.

Chapter 9, by Diogo Pires Aurélio, focuses on the notion of the people. To reach a satisfactory account of how Machiavelli can conceive of 'unity in disunity' in the *Discourses* without falling into a paradox, Aurélio brings to the fore another epistemological operator, namely a provisional notion of the people that falls short of being a totality, prior to any division, which Machiavelli refers to as the 'fatherland'.

Alessandro Campi's text, which constitutes Chapter 10 and reproduces in part some of his previous work on Machiavelli, pays special attention to one of the most extended chapters of the *Discourses*, often published autonomously, namely chapter 6 of book III on the topic of conspiracies. Campi maintains that, despite Machiavelli's aversion to conspiracies as a political strategy, he intended to construct a 'general theory of conspiracies' that analyses them as a form of political struggle with its intrinsic specificity, both from a theoretical and a practical-technical standpoint.

Chapter 11, by Jérémie Barthas, concentrates on the political economy of the *Discourses*, especially Machiavelli's assertion that, 'contrary to common opinion, money is not the sinew of war' (D II.10.147). By identifying a series of implicit cross-references between D II.10 and other chapters of the same book, Barthas sheds light on the relation between war aims, finance and politics. A comprehension of this articulation ultimately proves valuable for the appreciation of Machiavelli's overall theoretical project.

Chapter 12 builds on the previous chapters by focusing specifically on war as it appears mainly at the beginning of the *Discourses*. Thomas Berns's thesis is that war for Machiavelli is the expression of an intrinsic link between the inside and the outside of a city. He calls this feature 'political porosity'. In other words, the idea that the genesis of any order necessarily involves conflict and disorder transpires to international relations in the sense that domestic order and liberty typically require external aggression and conquest.

The volume closes with a chapter whose thematic scope extends beyond the actual text of the *Discourses*, but which has proven unassailable in the history of Machiavellianism as a heuristic source of access to the *Discourses*: Francesco Guicciardini's commentary on Machiavelli's book. Mark Jurdjevic situates Guicciardini's *Considerations on the Discourses of Machiavelli* within a more extended pattern of intellectual sparring between the two thinkers and shows that the *Considerations* should be interpreted less as Guicciardini's definitive response to the *Discourses* and more as one moment in a complex exchange of ideas.

In the end, this collection of essays, regarded as a unit, provides sufficient evidence that the *Discourses* is a challenging book. These *New Readings* illustrate some of the controversies that emerge from the complexity of the *Discourses*. They are, however, neither explanatory nor suggestive of the correct way, if there is one, to read Machiavelli's text. They strive merely to facilitate a genuine understanding of, and thereby an authentic encounter with, Machiavelli's thinking. If these *New Readings* can be a sufficiently robust pedestal on which the *Discourses* might stand, putting a spotlight on Machiavelli's book and instigating further interest in its study, they will have served their purpose well.

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CHAPTER 1

'A Never Again Attempted Work': The Discourse-Form and the *Discourses on Livy*

Gabriele Pedullà

1 Niccolò Machiavelli: The Modern, the Ancient

In common perception, Niccolò Machiavelli is still synonymous with political modernity. The first to have made him a turning point in Western philosophy is probably Francis Bacon, who – in *The Advancement of Learning* (1605) – reconnected his own scientific method based on induction (instead of deduction) to Machiavelli's original attitude towards ancient historians.

> The form of writing which of all others is fittest for this variable argument of negotiations and occasions is that Machiavelli chose wisely and aptly for government; namely, *discourse* upon histories or examples. For knowledge drawn freshly and in our view out of particulars, knoweth the way best to particulars again. And it hath much greater life for practice when the *discourse* attendeth upon the example, than when the example attendeth upon the *discourse*. For this is no point of order, as it seemeth at first, but of substance. For when the example is the ground, being set down in history at large, it is set down with all circumstances, which may sometimes control the *discourse* thereupon made and sometimes supply it, as a very pattern for action; whereas the examples alleged for the *discourse*'s sake are cited succinctly and without particularity, and carry a servile aspect toward the *discourse* which they are brought in to make good.[1]

The persistence of this interpretation is clearly perceptible even in the arguments of the many scholars – from Ugo Foscolo to Ernst Cassirer – who, in the last two centuries, have associated Machiavelli with the discovery of a 'scientific' (that is, 'realistic') dimension of social life as a system of power relations, even nicknaming him the 'Galileo of politics'.

1 Bacon 1996, VIII.2; my italics.

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After the French Revolution, new arguments for Machiavelli's modernity were put forward – and not always positive. The revolutionaries were accused of having separated politics from morality and religion,[2] and this same notion, first used to attack them, quickly became instrumental in casting Machiavelli as the inspirer of Robespierre's Terror. As F. Mazères wrote in 1816:

> For twenty years France has only turned around in a circle of evils because, since then, the divorce of politics and morality has been proclaimed aloud as necessary, and the people, victim of a corruptive and corrupted opinion, genuinely repeats this fateful axiom born of Machiavellianism: *There is no crime in politics*; an axiom that unfortunately leads its last government in these terms: *everything that politics commands, justice authorises.*[3]

This idea enjoyed considerable success during the nineteenth century. However, if it implied Machiavelli's condemnation at the beginning, occasionally it was reused in a favourable light, starting with German scholar Friedrich Wolff, who in 1828 defended the idea that politics had to be separated from religion (and ethics) to promote the necessary changes – like the liberation of Italy mentioned at the end of *The Prince*.[4] In fact, this positive evaluation progressively imposed itself all over Europe, until in 1924 Benedetto Croce repeated Mazères' formula making it even more famous.[5]

Machiavelli's proverbial modernity remained unquestioned during the twentieth century when even his detractors accepted it. For instance, when Leo Strauss and his followers attacked Machiavelli for being the single author who destroyed the classical (Greek and Roman) approach to politics, where individual moral virtue was considered a necessary prerequisite to ruling a State, one can recognise the same paradigm at work.[6] However, between 1975 and 1978, three important thinkers, in part independently of each other, tried

2 Necker 1800, p. xiv.

3 Mazères 1816, p. 3.

4 Wolf 1828. Similarly, around the same time, Friedrich Hegel presented Machiavelli as the first theoretician of the supremacy of the State over the moral scruples of the individuals and as the prophet of a post-feudal world.

5 Croce 1981. See also Pedullà 2018b. The best synthetic history of Machiavelli in modern political thought is Barthas 2010.

6 Strauss 1958. Some of Strauss' arguments have been recently reformulated in an original way by Hankins 2019.

to relegate *The Prince* and the *Discourses on Livy* to a pre-modern past.[7] In their influential monographs, John G.A. Pocock and Quentin Skinner insisted on the continuity of the Machiavellian project with humanistic and especially ancient theory (Greek theory for Pocock and Roman for Skinner), valorising the *longue durée* of European republicanism.[8] In the same year of 1978, in which Skinner published *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, Michel Foucault delivered a series of lectures at the Collège de France on *Security, Territory, Population*, where he distinguished between traditional sovereignty and modern governmentality, and placed Machiavelli amid the traditionalists.[9]

All these interpretations were extremely bold and ambitious, and it is not unlikely that the crisis of the 'standard' paradigm about Machiavelli that they represent had something to do with the disenchanted attitude towards the category of modernity itself, in the very moment when the notion of postmodernity became increasingly fashionable – from Robert Venturi to Daniel Bell, and from François Lyotard to Fredric Jameson.[10] But the main problem with Pocock's, Skinner's and Foucault's approach is that they all built their periodisation on a single issue: freedom for the first two, governmentality for the latter. Even if both issues were very important (whether that of the conception of liberty or that of the emergence of the modern State), it is always possible to raise other matters that easily belie such 'continuist' readings of Machiavelli and offer a different historical segmentation. Machiavelli is close to tradition on some aspects and extremely innovating on many others.[11] As I have illustrated elsewhere at quite some length, this is particularly the case with Machiavelli's theory of conflict, which undoubtedly offers a powerful argument in favour of his modernity.[12] Hence, the choice of a single topic – as central and decisive as it can be – entails too high a degree of arbitrariness, because it is sufficient to focus on another central issue to trace a completely different narrative.

Should one therefore simply refrain from proposing such kinds of periodisation, then? I do not think so. Here I offer a different solution to the problem of Machiavelli's position in Western philosophy by leaving aside the contents

7 A few years earlier, Berlin (1972) had reconnected Machiavelli to the ancients on a completely different basis, by presenting him a typical neo-Pagan figure of the Renaissance (in a very Burckhardtian way).

8 Pocock 1975; Skinner 1978.

9 Foucault 2007. The transcripts of this course were published in French only in 2004.

10 See Anderson 1998. Around the same time, Wood (1968) saw in Machiavelli's conflictualism a powerful antidote to the bureaucratization of modern society. On Wood and Machiavelli, see Pedullà 2021.

11 For Machiavelli's position in the history of republicanism, see Pedullà 2020.

12 Pedullà 2018a.

of his works and concentrating on his peculiar 'methodology' and 'style of thought',[13] especially in his *Discourses on Livy*. In other words, if Machiavelli – as every original author – is extremely innovative in many respects but looks somehow traditional in many others, a less ambiguous answer might come from the study of his way of thinking and intellectual processes.

2 From Philosophy to History: Machiavelli's 'Counterfactual Conditionals'

To discuss Machiavelli's modernity, one has to start with his attitude towards the classics. Machiavelli addresses this issue at the very beginning of the *Discourses,* where he adopts one of the fundamental concepts of ancient and humanistic literary theory: that of imitation.

> Considering … how much honour is awarded to antiquity, and how many times … a fragment of an ancient statue has been bought at a high price because someone wants to have it near oneself, to honour his house with it, and to be able to have it imitated by those who delight in that art, and how the latter then strive with all industry to represent it in their works; and seeing, on the other hand, that the most virtuous works the histories show us, which have been done by ancient kingdoms and republics, by kings, captains, citizens, legislators, and others who have labored for their fatherland, are rather admired than imitated. … I can do no other than marvel and grieve … [I]n ordering republics, maintaining states, governing kingdoms, ordering the military and administering the war, judging subjects, and extending empire, neither prince nor republic may be found that has recourse to examples of the ancients. This arises … from not having a true knowledge of histories, through not getting from reading them that sense nor tasting that flavour that they have in themselves. From this it arises that the infinite number who read them take pleasure in hearing of the variety of accidents contained in them without thinking of imitating them, judging that imitation is not only difficult but impossible. (D I.Pref.5-6)

Such an explicit statement on the exemplarity of the ancients created enormous problems for those who presented Machiavelli as the founder of modern

13 I borrow the expression 'style of reasoning' from Crombie (1994) and Hacking (2002). On this terminology, see the acute remarks by Gayon (1996).

political thought. For instance, Friedrich Meinecke wrote in 1924 that in the *Discourses* 'the spirit of antiquity was certainly not signalised in him (as it was in so many humanists of the Renaissance) by a merely learned and literary regeneration … With a Romantic longing he gazed towards the strength, grandeur, and beauty of life in antiquity, and towards the ideals of its *mondana gloria*'.[14] But of course, Romanticism has nothing to do with Machiavelli's peculiar interest in Roman history; nor was the apparent contradiction between his will to open 'a path as yet untrodden by anyone' (as stated at the beginning of the *Discourses*), and his loyalty to the lesson of the ancients a problem for him. In Renaissance literary theory, imitation and innovation/emulation could be easily combined;[15] because, as Amedeo Quondam has recently shown, from Petrarch onwards, the couple *antiquus-modernus* was generally used in close correlation: 'modern' being essentially those who strove to recover the ancients' lessons and succeeded in their difficult attempt, differently from medieval authors, who were unable to really grasp that priceless legacy of Rome even when they asserted that they were its legitimate heirs. In other words, Renaissance authors could claim to be 'modern' exactly because they had entered into a reviving dialogue with the Greek and Roman masterworks and had learned how to imitate them to the point that they could be even more 'classical' than the ancients.[16] On these bases, the so-called *querelle des ancients et des modernes* was about to begin.[17]

'Making it new'[18] and imitating the highest models of the past were not in contradiction. For this reason, Machiavelli encourages his readers to walk 'in the footsteps of the ancients' precisely as his contemporaries commonly did. At the same time, however, while for Machiavelli the classical world still stands as the highest achievement of human civilisation (a sort of a peak, never reached again after the fall of the Roman Empire), his cult of antiquity has little in common with that of the humanists, to the point that the *Discourses* are a deeply revolutionary work that marked a real turning point in the history of political thought.[19] Humanist thinkers aimed to recover the ancient philosophical tradition and to write works that could compete with those of their models both in form and in content, at most 'updating' a timeless political prudence with some examples taken from contemporary history – without moving away from

14 Meinecke 1957, p. 31.
15 Pedullà 2010.
16 Quondam 2016.
17 On the *querelle des Ancients et des Modernes* during the fifteenth century, see Baron 1959.
18 As Ezra Pound's battle cry would later sound.
19 The *Discourses* can be profitably read in the humanist debate over whom, when, and how to imitate (Pedullà 2010).

Ciceronian and Aristotelian principles. Improvements were possible, but the fundamentals of the system remained unquestioned.

During the fifteenth century, some authors had been particularly explicit on this subject, making clear that their writings essentially intended to recover a loss.[20] Ten centuries of Dark Ages had made it necessary for the humanists to fill a void, to restore a damaged artwork in a struggle against time and oblivion by putting together all the remaining fragments of ancient wisdom in a new synthesis. In other words, only the loss of Greek and Roman tracts legitimised their writing – even if such a show of modesty was also part of a typical *captatio benevolentiae*.

Machiavelli, to the contrary, turns his back on Plato, Aristotle, Xenophon, Cicero, and Seneca, and – instead of focusing on their philosophical writings – extolls the practical wisdom of the Romans, that is to say, the principles of government that made them the rulers of the Mediterranean. Already Livy (*Ab Urbe condita* XXVI.22) and Cicero (*Tusculanae disputationes* I.1-2) had praised Roman political practice against the abstract wisdom of the philosophers, and such a proud statement was occasionally repeated by some humanists;[21] nevertheless, Machiavelli pushes this argument much further. Quite polemically, the *Discourses* and *The Prince* are intended to retrieve a lost knowledge, which – even before the medieval fracture – was hidden by a useless deluge of generic precepts. As Leo Strauss rightly wrote, 'Machiavelli's admiration for the political practice of classical antiquity and especially of republican Rome is only the reverse side of his rejection of classical political philosophy'.[22] From this point of view, Machiavelli was 'modern' in the Renaissance meaning of the word and the current one: with the *Discourses,* he did something completely unprecedented, which broke with the past.

Ancient history had extraordinary importance for political theorists during the fifteenth century, of course. In their treatises, however, it is used primarily as an inexhaustible source of examples. Raised on Aristotle's pages, the humanists had no difficulty recognising that politics has a practical dimension linked to experience and that abstract principles can be insufficient. In this situation, ancient (or even modern) histories were to offer an essential aid, making concrete a set of rules that otherwise might be scarcely effective. In fact, the humanists often used examples of comportment that were negative, by excess or by defect, in order to promote a behaviour that, instead, struck an Aristotelian happy medium. It was a little bit like modern ballistics, where – to

20 Quirini 1977, p. 123; Patrizi 1608, I.2.

21 Biondo 1559, pp. 54, 119; Patrizi 1608, I.2; Rucellai 1770, p. 949.

22 Strauss 1953, p. 178. See also Althusser 1999, p. 64; Mansfield 1998, pp. 8–11.

hit a target – one first has to determine its exact location with a short and a long throw.

With Machiavelli, though, the past is no longer asked to provide anecdotes to illustrate the doctrines of the philosophers effectively. Rather than for their memorable judgments or their biographical portraits of generals and politicians, historians are Machiavelli's natural partners because their works give readers the chance to practice a sophisticated political role-playing. Why, at a certain moment, have events taken a particular turn? How could one have avoided an undesired outcome (if one could have)? What can modern readers learn from the comparative analysis of phenomena that look similar, although they are distant in time and space? These kinds of questions are at the core of Machiavelli's speculation.

Good historical works offer the opportunity to discuss such problems, hypothesis after hypothesis. Especially important for Machiavelli was what in today's philosophical terminology is called 'counterfactual conditionals'.[23] This aspect of Machiavelli's methodology has been overlooked by modern scholars, but it deserves to be evaluated in all its novelty. Ancient political thinkers rarely (or never) made recourse to it, whereas, on the contrary, both *The Prince* and the *Discourses* are packed with counterfactual speculations about events that had a particular outcome but which could have ended differently: no less than twenty one passages in *The Prince* and around one hundred in the *Discourses*. Accustomed to following in their developments all the different alternatives that open up in the present before opting for the 'lesser evil', Machiavelli does not forgo doing the same in the past: a past that, in his view, has something to teach only to the extent that one can imagine it as still open to any kind of result – that is, exactly as the political actors of the time perceived it. In order to restore the original uncertainty to what is now unchangeable, Machiavelli considers it indispensable to carry out a sophisticated thought experiment, reconstructing the concrete options that were on the table then but also exploiting the superior awareness of those who, afterwards, are able to judge the decisions taken. Admiring the winners and denigrating (or pitying) the losers is useless if one does not understand why things went in a certain way and does not identify the exact moment in which the events took a particular direction as the consequence of a precise choice (right or wrong, and therefore to be imitated or avoided). Without such a mental exercise one would risk falling back into the purely 'hedonistic' and 'antiquarian' attitude towards the past that Machiavelli denigrates in the proem of the *Discourses* (and later in

23 Goodman 1947.

the *Art of War* as well) as a sterile form of admiration for the great deeds of the ancients.

These counterfactual analyses are almost entirely absent from previous political treatises, whereas they are frequent in Greek and Roman historiography, from which Machiavelli seems to have learned them.[24] In fact, starting with Herodotus (*Histories* VII.139), to whom we owe the first counterfactual speculation ever made by a historian (regarding the choice of the Athenians to face the army of Xerxes rather than surrender or emigrate to the West), all the major ancient authors from Thucydides to Tacitus had made ample use of it, with true 'pieces of bravura' such as the pages in which Livy discusses what would have happened if Alexander had decided to move against Rome instead of Persia (*Ab Urbe condita* IX.17–19).[25] It is only with Machiavelli, however, that speculation about unrealised pasts becomes a normal tool of political analysis for the first time.

From this perspective, as for the *Discourses*, for Machiavelli Roman history offered a sort of supplementary vantage point: reading either Livy or Dionysius, one could learn from the people who better reacted to the unexpected challenges that each community must inevitably face, from within and from without. In other words, if the study of the past is always precious for Machiavelli because it helps to raise useful questions in advance when compared to other figures and republics, Romulus and his descendants had the significant merit of almost always providing the right answer too.

3 Commenting Livy: Machiavelli's Political Hermeneutics

The valorisation of history as the main source of political prudence required a new approach to the writings of the ancients, and it is precisely this new approach that the first readers discovered in the *Discourses*. With Machiavelli's commentary to Livy, one of the hegemonic forms of early modern political philosophy was born: the *forma discorso* – that is, the 'discourse-form'. It did not take much for Machiavelli's friends and contemporaries to realise the scope of this breakthrough, that – though perpetuating the cult of the ancients – proposed a completely different mode of talking about politics.[26] For instance,

24 Other influences cannot be excluded since counterfactual reasoning was a tool often used by classical orators and widely theorized by Cicero and Quintilian in their rhetorical works.

25 Morello 2002.

26 The fact that, in his eulogy of Machiavelli quoted at the beginning of this chapter, Bacon uses the word 'discourse' six times in a few lines is a proof of his fascination for the Florentine's new method.

Iacopo Nardi (1476–1563), one of the direct witnesses of the meetings held at the Orti Oricellari, where the ideas of the *Discourses* were first presented, described Machiavelli's commentary to Livy as 'a work certainly on a new topic and never again attempted (as far as I know) by any other author'.[27]

There is no better way to test Nardi's bold assumption than comparing the *Discourses* to similar works circulating in Machiavelli's time.[28] The enormous differences are immediately evident: at the beginning of the sixteenth century, the literary genre of commentary allowed only two codified types – and Machiavelli's book corresponds to neither. The first model included the scholastic expositions of the revered Greek and Arab philosophical authorities, and the glosses to Justinian's *Corpus iuris civilis* and to Dante Alighieri's *Commedia*, and was recognisable for its size and format: large volumes, where the original work was printed in the centre of the page and methodically annotated almost word by word in smaller font along the margins. Priests, men of law, and philosophers were interested in the literal meaning of the authoritative texts they were commenting on. For this reason, the first goal of this kind of commentary was to enable the readers to understand it through a paraphrase; cross-references to other passages and works potentially relevant for the interpretation were added in the case of juridical texts and, sometimes, of philosophical ones, while with the *Commedia*, historical, theological, and allegorical explanations were offered wherever necessary to the full understanding of Dante's work.

More recent (but no less prestigious) was, on the other side, the humanistic collection of philological *castigationes* or 'corrections'. These commentaries responded to different needs and had different goals. Ancient works had reached modern readers in a corrupt form, and philologists checked and corrected the manuscripts, making them readable again thanks to their conjectures; moreover, historical explanations were added whenever it was considered useful to clarify a ritual, a gesture, a mythological allusion, a law, a famous event, etc. This emphasis on textual criticism and erudite linguistic and stylistic issues was not the only difference, however. Contrary to the university commentaries, the humanistic ones were selective and discontinuous, flexible and extensible, as the authors of such *castigationes* did not focus on every passage of the annotated work, but just on the problematic ones, even if the comments and the corrections could be extremely numerous all the same. This is, for example, the case of Ermolao Barbaro's *Castigationes Plinianae* (1492), with no less than 5,000 philological amendments.

27 Nardi 1858, vol. II, p. 72.

28 As Dionisotti (1993), p. 44, rightly pointed out, before Machiavelli 'there is no commentary of any kind on Livy, and none like it on any classical author'.

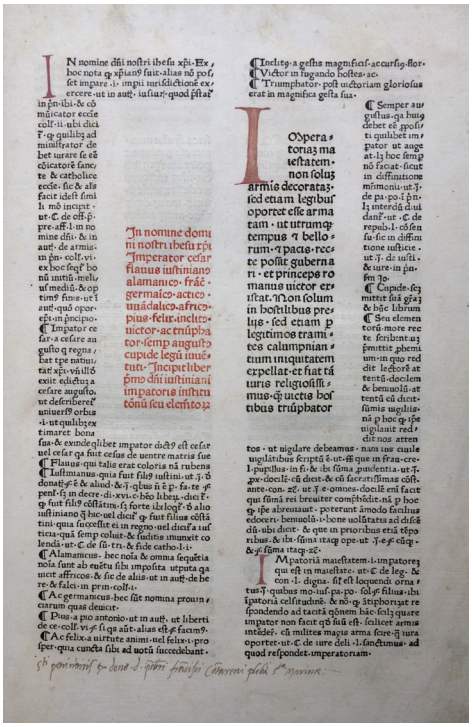

FIGURE 1.1 Justinian, *Institutiones*, Ulrich Han and Simon Chandella de Lucca, Rome 1473. Private collection.

FIGURE 1.2 Cristoforo Landino, *Comento sopra la Comedia di Dante Alighieri poeta fiorentino*, Nicolò di Lorenzo dalla Magna, Florence 1481. Dedication copy to the Signoria. https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cristoforo_Landino

In particular cases – such as Angelo Poliziano's *Miscellaneorum centuria*, first published in 1489 – a single volume could discuss passages taken from different authors and works. It is easy to explain the reason why a sophisticated philologist-poet Poliziano opted for such a solution: while a full commentary would have forced him to give routine explanations, the 'anthological' nature of the *Miscellanea* let him concentrate only on the passages where a really difficult textual problem was present without wasting his time with elementary rectifications and explanations. Moreover, it is not unlikely that Poliziano was influenced in his choice by an author widely read at his times, Aulus Gellius, who in his *Noctae Atticae* (in twenty books) discussed a great number of topics in a very similar way, apparently without a recognisable order and structure, somehow flying from flower to flower.

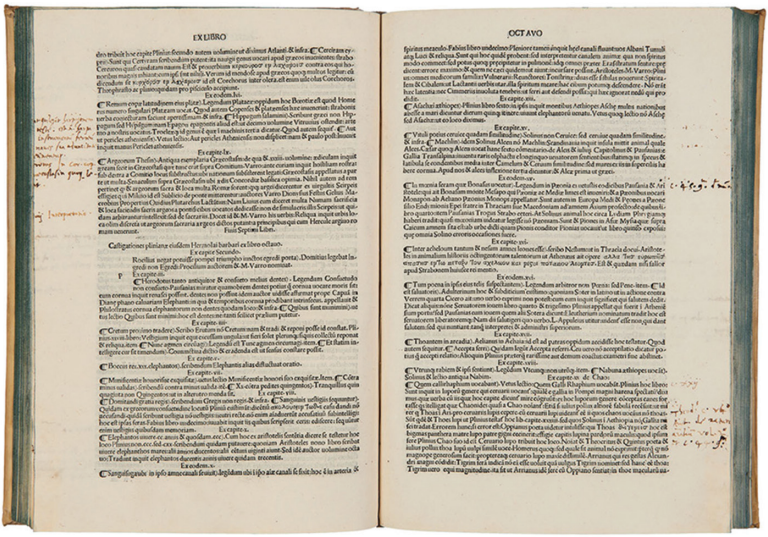

FIGURE 1.3 Ermolao Barbaro, *Castigationes Plinii*, Barbaro, Venice 1492–1493. Private collection.

It is difficult not to think that the memory of the extreme freedom of the *Miscellanea* left probably some trace in the *Discourses*.[29] However, Poliziano's recollection of *castigationes* is important for Machiavelli also for another reason. A typical chapter of the *Miscellanea* starts with a historical or philological difficulty (a passage metrically or grammatically incorrect), discusses previous explanations of the text, and offers a new solution by citing some parallel passages from other authors. In some cases, though, Poliziano does not stop his inquiry here and uses single textual or historical problems to raise more general questions, giving birth to lengthy, broader meditations that look like self-sufficient 'essays' on a given topic – just as it would happen a few years later in the *Discourses on Livy*. Take, for example, some chapter titles from the *Miscellanea*:

> I. Cicero defended from a false accusation in regard to his explanation of the meaning of a neologism in Aristotle, *endelecheia*.
>
> XV. Who the author was of the *Sybaris*, about whom Ovid wrote, and about the Sybaritic pamphlets in Martial, and likewise the luxury of the Sybarites in general.

29 Dionisotti 1993.

XLIX. A comparison of the epigrams of the Greek Posidippus and the Latin Ausonius on the image of Occasio; then a most beautiful description by the Greek Callistratus.

LVIII. The origin and ritual of the Secular Games, and other related matters besides; and I go on to cite a Sibylline oracle; next, certain things are explained in passing, and others are not unprofitably refuted.

XC. What a great man Theodore Gaza was, and yet how greatly he erred when translating one of Aristotle's *Problems*.[30]

From a single detail to a wide-ranging problem, and then again and again, for a total of 100 mini-essays. The result is that, even at the level of the typographical organisation of the page, the *Discourses* (with its 142 chapters) resemble the *Miscellanea* significantly.

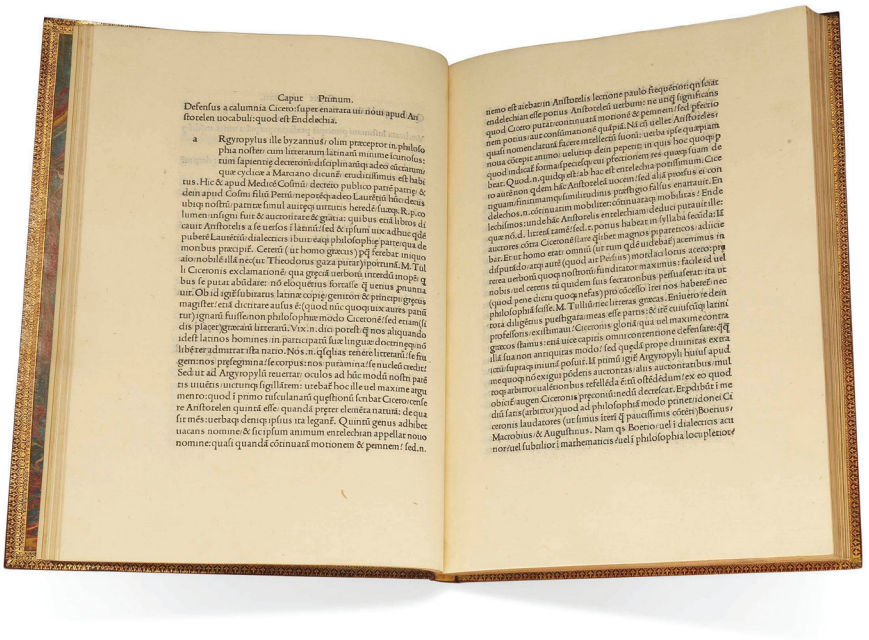

FIGURE 1.4 Angelo Poliziano, *Miscellaneorum centuria prima*, Antonio di Bartolommeo Miscomini, Florence 1489. Private collection.

30 Poliziano 2020.

Having been trained as a humanist, Machiavelli was clearly familiar with these kinds of works. He was close to the greatest Florentine philologist, Marcello Virgilio Adriano, who taught at the local university and was the secretary of the other chancellery of the republic (and thus a sort of a senior, and more prestigious, colleague);[31] it is even possible that Machiavelli's transcriptions of Lucretius' *De rerum natura* and Terentius' *Andria* in the 1490s were intended to produce a new printed edition of them; and scholars demonstrated that very often that Machiavelli made good use of Cristoforo Landino's *Comento sopra la Comedia* (a typical university commentary, but in Italian).[32] Nevertheless, compared to them, Machiavelli sets down a new path, introducing with the *Discourses* a form of exegesis that was utterly distinct from pre-existing ones.

How does his commentary to Livy work, in fact? As for the *Discourses*' structure, Machiavelli's choice not to reproduce the commented work (like the university commentaries) and his extreme freedom in selecting the passages to be discussed resemble the philologists' *castigations*. And yet, as for the content, the *Discourses* do not practice any sort of textual and historical criticism, distancing themselves from the humanistic commentaries. For this reason, Livy appears at times to be nothing more than an excuse for reflections that take the base text just as a starting point and aim to discuss broader questions, well beyond the narrow historical events told by his favourite Roman historian. In the previous two centuries, starting with Petrarch, few authors had benefited from the humanists' editorial labours as much as Livy,[33] but efforts to that point had aimed to make his history as complete and philologically accurate as possible. On the contrary, Machiavelli shows little interest in discussing grammatical exceptions, reviewing mythological references or finding the most authoritative versions; in his pages no concern for such issues ever surfaces. Instead, the *Discourses*' gamble is to draw directly from Livy what Machiavelli considers the highest source of all political wisdom: Rome's practical experience. And the way to do it was for Machiavelli to combine originally the previously available models of commentary to give birth to a new method of historical close reading. Only when underlying this fact can the *Discourses*' novelty in the history of political theory be genuinely understood.

31 Godman 1998; Brown 2010; Black 2013.

32 The importance of this work for Machiavelli was first suggested by Raimondi (1993).

33 Billanovich 1981.

	SCHOLASTIC COMMENTARIES	HUMANISTIC *CASTIGATIONES*	MACHIAVELLI'S *DISCOURSES*
Discuss a single work	yes	yes / no	yes
Reproduce the commented text	yes	no	no
Elucidate the text nearly word by word	yes	no	no
Ignore philological-erudite issues	yes	no	yes

FIGURE 1.5 Types of renaissance commentaries[34]

4 The Discourse-Form in Early Modern Europe

Nardi started writing his *History of Florence* in 1553, and he could not have imagined that very soon a real flood of works inspired by the *Discourses* would belie his last assertion. In just a few years, unpredictably, 'nobody' became legion. The success of the commentary to Livy's hermeneutics spread quickly through Europe from Italy,[35] to the point that the word *discorso* (and its equivalent in other Western languages) progressively took on a sort of technical meaning. Basically, the term started being associated with two main ideas: a free commentary like the one dedicated by the Florentine secretary to Livy (but potentially applicable to other authors), and, more in general, a collection of random meditations on politics (but potentially also on other topics).

For instance, when in 1582 Remigio Nannini chose *Considerazioni civili sopra l'Istorie di Messer Francesco Guicciardini e d'altri istorici trattate per modo di discorso* as a title for his commentary to Guicciardini's *History of Italy*, the expression 'per modo di discorso' (that is: 'by mean of discourse') is employed to signal that Nannini intended to follow in Machiavelli's steps by discussing Guicciardini just like Machiavelli had discussed Livy. Similar imitation of the *Discourses* would include the following works: Vincenzo Dini, *Discorsi sopra il primo libro della terza deca di Tito Livio* (1560); Scipione Ammirato, *Discorsi sopra Cornelio Tacito* (1594); Antonio Ciccarelli, *Discorsi sopra Tito Livio* (1598);

34 Pedullà 2018a, p. 28.

35 On 'Reason of State' thinkers imitating the *Discourses*, see Figorilli 2018.

Filippo Cavriana, *Discorsi sopra i cinque libri di Cornelio Tacito* (1600); Stefano Ambrogio Schiappalaria, *Osservazioni politiche e discorsi pertinenti a' governi di stato trattati assieme alla vita di Giulio Cesare* (1600); Aldo Manuzio, *Venticinque discorsi sopra Tito Livio: della seconda guerra cartaginese* (1601); Fabio Frezza, *Discorsi politici e militari sopra vari luoghi di diversi scrittori gravi* (1617: on different ancient authors); Virgilio Malvezzi, *Discorsi sopra Cornelio Tacito* (1622); Giovanni Andrea Salice, *Discorsi politici utili in pace e in guerra al reggimento de' principi* (1627: on single maxims by different ancient authors); Anton Giorgio Besozzi, *Discorsi di filosofia militare* (1629: the third part being a commentary to Julius Caesar's *Commentarii*); Laurent Melliet, *Discours politiques et militaires sur Corneille Tacite* (1642); Jan Gruter, *Discursus politici in Cornelium Tacitum* (1679); Nicolas Amelot de la Houssaye, *Tibere: Discours politiques sur Tacite* (1683).

Occasionally, like in Nannini's case, a free, discontinuous commentary was applied to a modern, and even very recent, texts: Innocent Gentillet, *Discours sur les moyens de bien gouverner un royaume* (1576: on Machiavelli); Remigio Nannini, *Considerazioni civili sopra l'Istorie di Messer Francesco Guicciardini e d'altri istorici trattate per modo di discorso* (1582); Apollinare Calderini, *Discorsi sopra la ragion di Stato del signor Giovanni Botero* (1597); Fabio Albergati, *Discorsi politici* (1602: on Bodin).

If Ciccarelli's work is just an expurgated rewriting of Machiavelli's, in the other cases one can appreciate the original ways authors like Ammirato, Manuzio, Malvezzi, and Ameot de la Houssaye very deftly applied the *Discourses on Livy*'s method to other ancient historians, with a growing preference for Tacitus and Julius Caesar (and special attention for military questions);[36] and, clearly, all of them imitated Machiavelli also in employing counterfactual arguments to defend their hypotheses. Sometimes, in the title *considerazioni, osservazioni,* or *commentarii* are preferred to *discorsi*, but the approach remains substantially the same. Such are the following cases: Caspar Facius, *Politica Liviana: quibus pacis et belli artibus imperium Romorum partum, auctum, multiplicatum fuit sub regibus* (1613); Lodovico Zuccolo, *Considerazioni politiche e morali sopra cento oracoli d'illustri personaggi antichi* (1621); Pio Muzio, *Considerazioni sopra Cornelio Tacito* (1623: a commentary on selected sentences by Tacitus rather than on his whole history); Francisco de Quevedo, *Vida de Marco Bruto* (1644: on Plutarch); Virgilio Malvezzi, *Considerazioni con l'occasione d'alcuni luoghi delle vite d'Alcibiade e di Coriolano* (1648: on Plutarch); Traiano Boccalini, *Commentari sopra Tacito* (posthumous, 1677; the author's title being *Osservazioni sopra Tacito*).

36 For a quantitative analysis of the rise of Tacitus in Italian political thought, see Valeri 2011.

Other political thinkers wrote their volumes in the footsteps of Machiavelli as well, but without any reference to previous texts (ancient or modern), somehow imitating the *Discourses*' freest chapters, according to the second meaning of *discorso*. One has the feeling that, for these authors, the word *discorso* alludes to a short meditation on a political topic, often introduced by a question or a binary alternative in the title, without any systematic approach and with the greatest freedom in moving from one subject to another in the different 'discourses' that give shape to the whole work (an impression that the *Discourses on Livy* easily offer). This occurs, for instance, in the following works: François de la Noue, *Discours politiques* (1587); Paolo Paruta, *Discorsi politici* (1599); Johann Hieronymus Im-Hof, *Discursus politici* (1655); Pedro Fernandez Navarrete, *Discursos politicos* (1621); Algernon Sidney, *Discourses concerning Government* (posthumously published in 1698); David Hume, *Political Discourses* (1752).

Very often, when the work had more systematic ambitions, the connection with the hermeneutics of Machiavelli's commentary to Livy was even lighter, but the choice of the word 'discourses' in the title proves all the same how fashionable the Florentine had made the term *discorso* (and its equivalent in other Western languages) across Europe. Some examples will suffice: Bartolomeo Cavalcanti, *Trattati overo discorsi sopra gli ottimi reggimenti delle republiche antiche e moderne* (1571); Antonio Lupicini, *Discorsi militari sopra l'espugnazione di alcuni siti* (1587); Tiberio Gambaruti, *Discorsi e osservazioni politiche* (1612); Melchior Goldast, *Politica imperialia, sive discursus politici* (1614); Marcantonio dell'Orgio Melfitano, *Discorsi militari* (1616); Carlo Teti, *Discorsi delle fortificazioni* (1617); Lodovico Zuccolo, *Discorsi* (1617); Cristoph Besold, *Discurus politici singulares* (1626); Fernandez de Villarreal, *Epitome genealógico del eminentíssimo Cardenal Duque de Richelieu y discursos politicos sobre algunos acuerdos de su vida* (1641); Alejandro Domingo de Ros, *Cataluña desengañada: discursos politicos* (1646); Michael Christian Tieroff, *Discursus politici duodecim* (1657); Johan de la Court, *Politike Discoursen* (1662); Leopold I. Vilém Habsburský, *Discursus politici de ratione status* (1664); Jacques Bénigne Bossuet, *Discours sur l'histoire universelle* (1682); Charles Davenant, *Discourses on the Publick Revenues, and on the Trade of England* (1698).

Even if the success of Machiavelli's 'style of reasoning' was pan-European, Italy remained the epicentre of the movement, as becomes clear from some translation choices of the printers. For instance, when Michel de Montaigne's essays were first translated into Italian, the publisher renamed them 'discourses' somehow suggesting to the reader to interpret his *Essays* (1580) in the light of Machiavelli's commentary on Livy: Michiel de Montagna, *Saggi ovvero*

discorsi (1633). And the same thing would happen again a few years later with Diego de Saavedra Fajardo's *Idea de un principe politico christiano* (1640), translated into Italian as *L'idea d'un principe politico cristiano con esempi storici e discorsi morali* (1648). Evidently, though Machiavelli was censored and prohibited by the Index, his long shadow was still everywhere in those years.[37]

It is essential to clarify one point. In those years many authors were inspired by the *Discourses*' method, even if they did not write Machiavelli-like commentaries and collections of brief political considerations. The 'Machiavellians' declined the lesson of the *Discourses* in many different ways, sometimes even switching from one option to another, like Virgilio Malvezzi, who in his youth wrote a very Machiavellian commentary to Tacitus but eventually composed a series of political biographies of famous princes from Roman and Jewish history probably reminiscent of Xenophon's *Cyropedia* where it is easy to recognise Machiavelli's lasting influence: *Romulo* (1629), *Tarquinio il Superbo* (1632), and *Davide perseguitato* (1634).

The *Discourses*' influence resulted in a dramatic shift toward history as a repository of worldly wisdom and the principal auxiliary (*ancilla*) of political theory. Given the way we read Greek and Roman historians today, it is easy to backdate this attitude, missing the importance of Machiavelli's novelty. As Arnaldo Momigliano wrote in a brilliant (but too often overlooked) essay, starting with the *Discourses* in early modern Europe 'the ancient historians (or at least some of them) are given a function as masters of political thought which in antiquity they had seldom performed. Thucydides, Xenophon, Polybius, Livy, and Tacitus are used by men who want to learn and teach what politics is about and how wars must be fought. As guide of political action these historians are made to compete with Plato and Aristotle.'[38] The die was cast. And from this moment, in the wake of Machiavelli, the comparative study of history (and, later, of ethnography) would be one of the main strands of European political thought.

James Harrington declared it very eloquently in 1656: 'No man can be a politician, except he be first a historian or a traveller'.[39] However, probably nobody explained the revolution triggered by the *Discourses* better than Alberico Gentili (1552–1608), the famous Italian jurist who fled to England for religious

37 The importance of the discourse-form in Western philosophical tradition is far from being recognized; for instance, D'Angelo (2012) fails to include it in the principal philosophical genres.

38 Momigliano 1984.

39 Harrington 1992, p. 205.

reasons and taught at Oxford for more than twenty years. In the third book of his *De legationibus* (1585), after having insisted on the ambassador's need to handle the examples of the past perfectly, Gentili discusses the philosophical knowledge that will be essential to him. And it is in this context that Gentili sketches a brief but incisive eulogy of Machiavelli, cast as the inventor of an unprecedented method of interpretation.

> To achieve a knowledge of history we must also acquaint ourselves with the part of moral philosophy that deals with custom and civic life. Indeed, this is well-nigh the soul of history, which creates unity and makes it possible to explain the causes of all things (those said, those made, and those that happen). It also ensures that historical information will not be barefaced and disarmed but rather lead to certain, fruitful experiences. Nor shall I be embarrassed to state that Machiavelli is better than anyone at this activity and suggest that he and his golden observations on Livy be imitated. (III.9)

The description of Machiavelli as a coherent republican that follows is so famous that we can easily skip it. The lines after this description, however, are generally neglected, while they are indispensable for understanding what Gentili and his contemporaries could find so extraordinary in the *Discourses*.

> We want histories to be used to think philosophically, not to learn grammar (*non grammatizet sed philosophetur*). In truth, each discipline needs the other. A philosopher devoid of historical knowledge is like someone who embarks on a straight path but, because he moves forward in the dark, can never know where he is; nor can he avail himself of the goods that are only visible when the sun is high in the sky. The historian proceeds instead in broad daylight amidst the brilliance of the great undertakings of the past, but being unable to follow the road (because the view opens up freely all around him), he ends up proceeding at random and with no destination. Indeed, when the time comes to pass into action, what will happen, I ask you, if the historian tries to make use of the many examples he has observed? For every example there is a counter-example ... Thus, it is the philosopher's job to judge the examples ... With this eulogy I welcome philosophy united with history: may each give orders as a commander in its own right, without wavering and without flattering the other, and may each determine simply which examples we must follow and which we must avoid. I shall accept nothing else. I do not accept a philosopher-ambassador without a profound knowledge of history ... Those who are

> experts in these matters teach that politicians who have studied even a little philosophy are completely useless to government: they understand nothing (as everyday experience also shows), they are much less fit than others to run public affairs and even lack common sense … A pure philosopher is unsuited for these types of undertakings. (III.9)

In Gentili's mind, by teaching men how to read the examples of the past, the *Discourses* opened a sort of 'third way'. Instead of endless rewritings of Aristotle's and Cicero's precepts, or a superficial moralising interpretation of Sallust, Livy, and Valerius Maximus (both of little use), Machiavelli originally closed the gap between history and philosophy. On one hand, he avoided the risk of dispersion implicit in the mere accumulation of historical anecdotes through a comparative analysis of the eternal laws that govern human actions; but, on the other hand, he corrected the doctrinal rigidity of the latter too by testing its abstract principles with an abundance of past examples.

5 Thomas Hobbes against Machiavelli's Discourse-Form – and beyond

Whoever reads the *Discourses* faces a 'style of reasoning' that has no precedent in the political thought of the ancients. As Nardi and Gentili rightly saw, Machiavelli inaugurated a new model of reasoning, where the study of the past becomes even more relevant than philosophy for political theory. What does not change in his writings, however, is the constant reference to the ancient world – a fidelity to the Roman model that, as seen, embarrassed some of the interpreters who most insisted on his modernity. Contrary to what Bacon thought, the novelty of *The Prince* and the *Discourses* is not to be found in the opposition between medieval deduction and modern induction, but has to do with the neglect of Aristotelian and Ciceronian principles to the benefit of Roman 'modes' (*modi*) and 'institutions' (*ordini*), and through the adoption of a new genre that enables the reader recover them.

Machiavelli's project was identified with his historical hermeneutics to the point that – in his fight against the *Discourses*' project – Thomas Hobbes expressly came to refuse ancient history as a touchstone for political theory. In fact, according to Hobbes, between the spread of the civil wars and the worship of the Greco-Roman models, there was a specific connection that had to be broken at its source. Machiavelli is never mentioned explicitly, but the repeated use of the word 'discourse' leaves little doubt about the identity of Hobbes' adversary.

> The liberty whereof there is so frequent and honourable mention in the histories and philosophy of the ancient Greeks and Romans, and in the writings and *discourse* of those that from them have received all their learning in the politics, is not the liberty of particular men, but the liberty of the Commonwealth. ... In these western parts of the world we are made to receive our opinions concerning the institution and rights of Commonwealths from Aristotle, Cicero, and other men, Greeks and Romans, that, living under popular states, derived those rights, not from the principles of nature, but transcribed them into their books. ... And by reading of these Greek and Latin authors, men from their childhood have gotten a habit, under a false show of liberty, of favouring tumults, and of licentious controlling the actions of their sovereigns; and again of controlling those controllers; with the effusion of so much blood, as I think I may truly say there was never anything so dearly bought as these western parts have bought the learning of the Greek and Latin tongues. ... As to rebellion in particular against monarchy, one of the most frequent causes of it is the reading of the books of policy and histories of the ancient Greeks and Romans; from which young men, and all others that are unprovided of the antidote of solid reason, receiving a strong and delightful impression of the great exploits of war achieved by the conductors of their armies, receive withal a pleasing idea of all they have done besides; and imagine their great prosperity not to have proceeded from the emulation of particular men, but from the virtue of their popular form of government not considering the frequent seditions and civil wars produced by the imperfection of their policy. From the reading, I say, of such books, men have undertaken to kill their kings, because the Greek and Latin writers in their books and *discourses* of policy make it lawful and laudable for any man so to do, provided before he do it he call him tyrant.[40]

A translator of Thucydides' *Histories* into English, Hobbes was clearly ready to recognise the importance of past examples for a politician. He does so, for instance, in chapter eleven of the *De cive*. His true polemical target was then only a particular way of speculating on the ancients' deeds. 'Reason of State' thinkers had accepted Machiavelli's method, even if they extolled the kingship's supremacy over other forms of government and blamed republican institutions, somehow shifting from Livy to Tacitus; nevertheless, recent

40 Hobbes 1996, II.29; my italics.

insurrections and civil wars had proved that this was not enough to preserve the domestic peace. Greek and Roman historians were not neutral, and taking their narratives as a starting point, as Machiavelli had taught to do, inevitably resulted in subversive (that is pro-republican) actions. Then, to convince the readers that a stable submission to a sovereign was more desirable and to push back anarchy, a completely different approach was needed. And Hobbes, who was also an admirer of Galileo Galilei (to the point that, according to some scholars, the *Leviathan*'s conception of 'negative freedom' would be a sort of political transcription of his physics), took inspiration from mathematics and science to provide a completely different kind of arguments. The euclidean method had greatly impressed Hobbes for its clarity and its strength of persuasion, and – as Ioannis Evrigenis has shown – he tried to apply it to political discussion by combining a 'science of rhetoric' with and a 'rhetoric of science'.[41]

Machiavelli's *Discourses*' basic assumption reads: 'Learn from the Romans, as nobody did better than them'. Hobbes instead asked his readers to do a thought experiment about the state of nature to show how submission and peace are preferable to anarchy and war. From this perspective, even if historical and ethnographic examples did not disappear from his writings, his paradigm of contract had the precise purpose of offering an alternative to the hermeneutics of the *Discourses* – that is, the leading forms of political argumentation in Europe at the beginning of the seventeenth century.

In light of the state of nature thought experiment, the Roman way appeared less desirable – the risk was too high to decide to follow in its footsteps. Obviously, Machiavelli and Hobbes still have much in common. This is why they have been placed together so often to epitomise the early modern break with ancient political philosophy. This affinity is the result of all that Hobbes learned from *The Prince* and the *Discourses* on the nature of human passions, on necessity, on fear, on the weakness of every virtue not checked from the outside, on the value of lesser evils (and the list could be much longer). Consequently, their proximity on so many single topics too often occluded the extension and depth of Hobbes' recession from Machiavelli. However, as soon as one focuses on their 'style of reasoning' and method, the enormous distance between the *Discourses* and the *Leviathan* manifests itself. Only in one aspect was Hobbes' approach truly Machiavellian: the decisive use of counterfactual hypothesis, which is at the core of the project of the *Leviathan* with the theory of the 'state of nature' and of the 'war of all against all'. From this point of view, Hobbes ingeniously discovered how to use Machiavelli against Machiavelli.

41 Evrigenis 2014, pp. 22 and 59.

Clearly, to fully appreciate the *Discourses* in their absolute originality one has to avoid any teleological temptation. Machiavelli does not represent a sort of midstream on the way to a full modernity that only Hobbes was able to reach, but rather a completely different (and alternative) approach that influenced political theory for more than two hundred years and that one must understand and appreciate in its own right. On this basis it is even possible to sketch a periodisation in three stages of early modern European political thought:

1. Political Humanism – as an imitation of classical political philosophy through the recovery of ancient genres, forms, concepts, and historical examples (the humanists).
2. Political Classicism – as an original hermeneutics of ancient history aimed to the rediscovery (and imitation) of Greek and Roman practical wisdom (Machiavelli and his followers, including some later authors like Montesquieu and John Adams).[42]
3. Political Galileism – as a thought experiment intended to take the central position previously occupied by ancient historiography, even if occasionally supported by historical and ethnographic examples (Hobbes and the social contract theorists).

This periodisation requires two clarifications. First, the expression 'political classicism' has the advantage of emphasising how the 'Machiavellian moment' coincided, in Europe, with the season of the undisputed continental leadership of Italian literary models on the basis of their strict imitation and rigorous codification of Greek and Romans genres (with their alleged rules, their formal topoi, their sententious moralities, their historical and mythological references). In this perspective, the discourse-form appears to rest clearly on a modern 'style of reasoning', but remains still deeply rooted in classical culture: the discovery of an original philosophical genre paradoxically made possible by the passionate effort to recover the lessons of the ancients – just like it happened, for instance, with lyrical opera at the end of the same sixteenth century.

Secondly, the three 'phases' are not clearly distinguished but tend to overlap. Works not too dissimilar from those of the humanists would be written long after the publication of the *Discourses*; similarly, the success of the paradigm of the contract and the dream of a politics *more geometrico demonstrata* would not put an end to Machiavellian tradition. Moreover, syncretic experiments

42 On Montesquieu's heavy debt towards the *Discourses* in his *Considerations on the Causes of the Greatness of the Romans and their decadence*, see Levi-Malvano 1912. In 1790, Adams wrote a commentary to Enrico Caterino Davila's *Historia delle guerre civili di Francia* (1630), the *Discourses on Davila*, where he explicitly took up Machiavelli's discourse-form.

were made by authors like Baruch Spinoza and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (who combined the paradigm of the contract with the cult of Rome and Sparta) and by the American Founding Fathers (who eclectically referred to John Locke and Machiavelli). Only Romanticism, in fact, made both Roman political theory and history less and less fashionable for political philosophers, also causing the *Discourses*' long misfortune, *grosso modo* from 1800 to 1950.

That period is clearly finished. In the last fifty years or so, the Cambridge school greatly contributed to the rediscovery of the importance of Machiavelli's commentary to Livy and its republican lesson. It is time now to appreciate the *Discourses*' novelty: both without reading it as a simple step among many others in the Renaissance recovery of a Roman legacy (like the Skinnerians) and without indiscriminately projecting it towards our modernity (like the Hegelians, the Crocians, and the Straussians). Machiavelli was unquestionably modern in his relationship with the past, but his modernity – the modernity of the discourse-form – is not *ours*. Simply put, we do not write *Discourses* anymore.

That does not mean that we cannot learn from Machiavelli. But to recognise the immense distance that separates us from him is the best way to start a new, inspiring conversation.[43]

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43 An earlier version of this essay was presented at the conference 'The Italian Roots of Modernity: Machiavelli and Galileo', held at the Universities of Harvard and Tufts, 10–11 November 2016. I would like to thank Mario De Caro, Ioannis Evrigenis, and James Hankins for their precious remarks, and Jérémie Barthas for reading and commenting on this final version.

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CHAPTER 2

Machiavelli and the Lingering Mystery of Polybius VI

Cary J. Nederman

In a deservedly famous essay, the esteemed historian and classicist Arnaldo Momigliano declared that 'Machiavelli was the first to appreciate Polybius as a political thinker'.[1] Momigliano's reference is to D I.2, in which the early sections of the *Histories* VI on constitutions and constitutional change are adapted in order to defend the Roman republican system of government. Indeed, some of the finest Machiavelli scholars of recent times have examined extensively the Polybian dimensions of D. In two important articles, Gennaro Sasso emphasized the fundamental role played by Polybius, and especially his account of constitutional change, in D.[2] The Polybian elements found in D have been further highlighted by Elena Fasano Guarini (1993) and Eugenio Garin (1990). Momigliano's judgement has taken hold almost without exception in the ever-burgeoning literature on Machiavelli. Yet certain dilemmas remain unsettled. Perhaps the most pressing issue concerns the source of Machiavelli's familiarity with Polybius VI. The Greek text of Book VI (and the other fragments of the incomplete *Histories*, known collectively as the *Excerpta antiqua*) was, without doubt, available in Florentine humanist circles as early as the 1440s.[3] But Machiavelli knew no Greek, and a Latin translation of the *Excerpta antiqua* was not to be published until 1549.[4] So, obvious questions arise: when, where and how did Machiavelli come to access Polybius VI? I shall address these issues in the final section of this chapter. At present, however, it is first of all necessary to survey both the key features of Polybius's political theory and Machiavelli's appropriation of it in D.

1 Momigliano 1975, p. 88; although see Nederman 2016.

2 Sasso 1987, I, pp. 3–118.

3 Hankins 2019, pp. 305–318. A complete Latin version of Books I–V had been published in 1454 and was widely available (de Keyser 2016, p. 4).

4 See de Keyser 2016, p. 5.

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1 The Political Theory of Polybius VI

Although usually viewed primarily as a historian of the middle period (third and second centuries BCE) of the Roman Republic, Polybius has also been recognized as the theorist *par excellence* of the idea of the 'mixed constitution', presenting in Book VI of his *Histories* an expression of political mixture in its 'characteristic form'.[5] This theory was, in turn, folded into a conception of the cyclical course of constitutional change, according to which a mixed regime such as Rome's tended to slow or stunt the inevitable natural pattern of growth and degeneration that Polybius observed in simple, unmixed constitutions.[6] Admittedly doubt has been expressed about the 'originality' of Polybius' doctrine,[7] as well as about the relationship between his work as a historian and his contribution to political theory.[8] We should focus attention, however, on Polybius' primary project, namely, to explain by what means – especially, what sort of constitutional mechanism – Rome succeeded in rising rapidly to the status of a world power from inauspicious, even failed, beginnings.[9] This distinctive contribution to political theory is baked into the entirety of the *Histories*.[10] Polybius presages it in remarks he makes throughout the first five books of the *Histories*. In Book I.64, he promises to offer an 'account of their [Roman] system of government, which will receive from me the prominence it deserves and will repay careful attention from my readers. Even though it makes a glorious spectacle, it has so far remained more or less obscure, thanks to the ignorance of those who have written about it, or to their total inability to compose a clear and useful account'.[11] Similar nods toward what is to come may be found at I.1, III.2, III.118 and V.111. Polybius sought to draw a direct connection between the character of the Roman constitution and the eventual emergence of Rome at the centre of a vast military and political empire.[12]

5 Fink 1962, p. 3.

6 Nippel 1980, pp. 142–158; Podes 1991.

7 Cumming 1969, I, passim.

8 Cf. von Fritz 1954. For a balanced evaluation of Polybius as historian and theorist, see Brand 2019.

9 Wallbank 1972, pp. 130–156; Hahm 1995; Inglis and Robertson 2006; Balot 2010; Erskine 2013.

10 Nelsestuen 2017.

11 I generally follow Polybius 1962, although I have on occasion consulted Polybius 2010. I will refer to the text by book and chapter number.

12 It is worth remembering that Polybius wrote as a relative outsider – a Greek living under Roman rule but writing in Greek – and in difficult personal circumstances occasioned by his enforced residence inside the walls of Rome. His project seems driven by the desire to

For Polybius, Rome's ability to survive and expand, even in the face of the aftermath of the Second Punic War, with its army's near destruction at the hands of Hannibal and the Carthaginian forces, reflects its internal principle of stability that overrode (at least temporarily) the inherent tendency of all constitutions toward corruption over time. His observation leads him in Book VI to offer some more general reflections on the principle of political change and development. He commences his analysis in VI.4-9 with an exposition of a general law of nature, namely, that all things have their beginnings, their growth, their perfection, their decline, and their end. This law is, Polybius says, valid for all mortal beings. In the case of political institutions, Polybius explains that a very precise and detailed pattern consistent with the law of nature can be detected – what he terms *anacyclosis ton politeion*, the cycle of constitutions. Originally, humankind lived in a state of complete lawlessness, gathering in herds like wild beasts for the sake of mutual protection. The man who excelled in physical ability and prowess became the natural leader – a primitive or archaic monarch – to whose will the others submit. Over time, however, fixed rule bends humankind toward a more sociable attitude and the inculcation of moral precepts, which render people more amenable to peaceful interaction, so that the 'leading and most powerful man' throws the weight of his authority on the side of such moral notions.[13] Consequently, the basis of the monarch's power changes from fear to respect; and instead of monarchy, we speak of kingship. Inevitably, however, the king's descendants degenerate by yielding to their appetites and exploiting their position of privilege, engendering hatred, envy and resentment among the populace, in which case the kingship turns into tyranny. The noblest, most high-spirited and most courageous among the subjects unite to lead the people against the tyrant and to expel him. This small group is then naturally acclaimed worthy of leadership, and an aristocratic constitution emerges. But once again, the passage of generations produces dissolution. The original liberators are succeeded by progeny who have no experience of misfortune and who lack moderation, and so, devoting themselves to the pursuit of wealth and wine, the aristocracy transforms into an oligarchy. An angry commons drives out the dissipated oligarchs and proceeds to establish the masses as the controlling element in the constitution. Not surprisingly, democracy follows the path of its predecessors, according to Polybius. Once a generation grows up that has no memory of the viciousness of the oligarchs, men become self-absorbed, so that freedom and

make sense of Roman dominion to a non-Latin, in particular, Greek-speaking, audience of conquered cities and peoples. See Millar 2002, pp. xiii–xiv.

13 Polybius 1962, VI.6.

equality lose their meaning. The people are corrupted by demagogues who achieve power by resort to bribery and reliance on public greed and avarice. Democracy thereby devolves into a regime, termed ochlocracy, typified by the rule of violence, and run by the tools of massacre, banishment and plunder, until its population becomes nothing more than a group of savages once again. In this way, the natural cycle both closes and simultaneously recommences.

Only a small portion of VI is extant. From the surviving text, however, we can discern that Polybius' intention in his reconstruction of Roman historical development was to demonstrate how Rome succeeded in sidestepping the process of constitutional *anacyclosis* by acquiring a constitution of a distinctive (and more stable) sort. Once this constitution emerged (Polybius appears to place the date at c. 450 BCE with the codification of the Law of the Twelve Tables), it was no longer possible to speak of Roman political order as founded on one or another of the simple constitutional forms – kingship, tyranny, aristocracy, oligarchy, democracy, or ochlocracy. Instead, Rome combined elements of the three non-corrupt constitutions in such a way as to balance the natural forces tending toward disintegration. Polybius held that the Roman constitution managed to escape, at least temporarily, from the process of *anacyclosis*, conferring upon its mixed government a measure of strength and vigour that yielded the internal basis for Rome's meteoric rise to imperial might.

More specifically, Polybius claims that the Roman remedy for *anacyclosis* may be found in the inclusion within the constitution of three distinct elements, 'each of them possessing sovereign powers, and their respective share of power in the whole state had been regulated for such scrupulous regard to equality and equilibrium that no one could say for certain, not even a native, whether the constitution as a whole was an aristocracy or democracy or kingship'.[14] In other words, not merely did Rome integrate the three good forms of a simple constitution into a single unit, it did so in such a fashion that no faction could gain superior authority in governing the whole. These factions – reflected in the *officia* of the consul, the Senate, and the popular assembly – possess specified powers that are distributed among them in such fashion that each part is reliant upon the others, since 'each of the several parts can, when they choose, oppose or support each other'.[15] Thus, Rome's constitution institutionalized social conflict by according to the various segments of society – and most especially nobles and commons – a corresponding political body (magistracy or assembly) through which each could express its wishes and grievances and could ensure that the others were proscribed from unilateral

14 Polybius 1962, VI.11.

15 Polybius 1962, VI.15.

action. As Polybius observes, by combining 'together all of the excellences and distinctive features of the best constitutions', Republican Rome could rest assured 'that no part should become unduly predominant and be perverted into its kindred vice; and that, each being checked by the others, no one part should turn the scale or decisively out-balance the others; but that by being accurately adjusted and in exact equilibrium, the whole might remain long-steady, like a ship sailing close to the wind'.[16] We encounter here the core of Polybius' explanation for Rome's ability to escape from the destructive effects of *anacyclosis* and thus to repair itself at such rapid speed that it was able to surprise and defeat its enemies. The corrosive effects upon civic virtue that ruined other political orders were eliminated by the balancing of the positive qualities found in the Roman constitution. Generation after generation, Rome was able to draw upon its human resources across the social spectrum to renew itself, where other political systems gave out in exhaustion. Such vitality permitted Rome to acquire and to keep hold of its empire. In this regard, Polybius explicitly compares Rome to what he regards as the greatest of Greek *politeia*, that of Sparta. While praising Sparta for the internal concord and freedom from external domination that were achieved under the constitutional order that was imposed by its lawgiver, Lycurgus, Polybius notes that this system did not prove adequate to the acquisition and maintenance of imperial dominion.[17] By contrast, Rome's constitution is ideally suited for this most glorious of aspirations. This ties back, of course, to the main lesson of Polybius' *Histories*: to reveal why Rome, perhaps more than any other city, was worthy of conquering Greece and the rest of its territories. Even more than the mightiest political and military power of the Greek world, Rome's constitution was exceptionally well organized and adapted to the fortunes and vicissitudes of imperial domination.

2 Machiavelli's Appropriation

A substantial body of literature affirms the vast and profound theoretical implications of Machiavelli's debt to and adaptation of Book VI of the *Histories*. Without question, Machiavelli's account of history, and of Rome's history in particular, shows the unmistakable marks of Polybius at work.[18] D I outlines

16 Polybius 1962, VI.10.

17 Polybius 1962, VI.50.

18 See, for example, Vatter 2000, pp. 51–62; Raimondi 2005, pp. 49–62; Hörnqvist 2009, pp. 29–52; Cristante 2011, pp. 31–39; Regent 2011, pp. 751–772.

in detail the cyclical rise and decay of constitutions, as described in Polybius' *Histories*. Furthermore, Machiavelli's commendation of republican rule is based on the Polybian idea that this sort of mixed constitution is a possible way to forestall the otherwise inevitable corruption, collapse, and regrowth of political regimes. Machiavelli sees the products of natural forces and fortune at work. This understanding of history and the nature of regimes leads him to praise the Roman Republic and its political institutions so passionately.

Machiavelli (D I.2) begins his discussion of the different types of constitutions by stating that he is only interested in those cities which 'have from the start been governed in accordance with their wishes, whether as republics or principalities'.[19] He enumerates six basic forms of government:

> Those who have written about states say that there are to be found in them one of three forms of government, called by them principality, government by the best (*ottimati*), and popular (*popolare*) rule. … Others – and with better judgement many think – say that there are six types of government, of which three are very bad, and three are good in themselves but easily become corrupt… For the principality easily becomes tyrannical. From the best the transition to the government of the few is an easy one. The popular form is without difficulty converted into license (*licenzioso*) (D I.2).

Having established the pure constitutions (both the good forms and their respective degenerate forms), Machiavelli then articulates an explanation of the origins of human government closely resembling that found in the *Histories* of Polybius. In this account, men at first lived 'scattered like the beasts' until they decided to gather into a community 'in order the better to be able to defend themselves' with the strongest and most courageous man chosen as a leader. A sense of what is good and what is wicked soon developed, and laws and punishments were laid out. Over time, the people began to accept a hereditary rule, rather than choosing for themselves. From this the rulers easily slipped into tyranny: '[The prince's] heirs soon began to degenerate as compared to their ancestors, and, forsaking virtuous deeds, considered that princes had nought else to do but to surpass other men in extravagance… with the result that the prince came to be hated, and, since he was hated, came to be afraid, and from fear soon passed to offensive action, which quickly brought a tyranny' (D I.2). The great men of the community eventually gathered the strength to overthrow the tyrant and ruled according to law at first. However,

19 I follow Machiavelli 1975, although with occasional modifications in line with Machiavelli 1971.

their descendants likewise were seized by avarice and ambition, and the governance of those who are best devolved into that of the wealthy few. The masses grew tired of this iniquitous rule and overthrew the oligarchs, replacing them with a popular constitution. The laws of this regime were not respected for long either, however, 'for license (*licenza*) quickly supervened, in which no respect was shown either for the individual or the official, and … all sorts of outrages were constantly committed' (D I.2). In an attempt to quell the chaos, a principality was once again established, and the cycle starts afresh.

Machiavelli is well aware of the problems inherent in this historical model that traces continual rise and collapse. In fact, he argues, the result of such frequent corruption and resulting rebellion is that states are continually unstable and fall victim to their stronger neighbours: 'There can scarcely be a state of such vitality that it can undergo often such changes and yet remain in being. What usually happens is that, while in a state of commotion … a state becomes subject to a neighbouring and better organized state' (D I.2). Machiavelli turns to a mixed form of government for the solution to this dilemma:

> I maintain, then, that all the forms of government mentioned above are far from satisfactory, the three good ones because their life is so short, the three bad ones because of their inherent malignity. Hence prudent legislators, aware of their defects, refrained from adopting as such any one of these forms, and chose instead one that shared in them all, since they thought such a government would be stronger and more stable, for if in one and the same state there was principality, elite (*ottimati*) and popular forms each would keep watch over the other. (D I.2)

The idea that republicanism provided a means to balance the elements of society, and thus to break out of the continuous cycle of degeneration, collapse and rejuvenation was, of course, not original; it too echoed the arguments found in Polybius' *Histories*. The need to cope with *anacyclosis* shaped the institutional design favoured by Machiavelli.

Machiavelli's account of Roman history thus accords with a conception of the cyclical nature of historical change. However, Rome enjoyed an exemption from this process. When its kings were overthrown, there remained a mixture of monarchic and elite elements in the political structure; later, a popular component was added to the government as well:

> In spite of the fact that Rome had no Lycurgus to give it at the outset such a constitution as would ensure it a long life of freedom, yet, owing to friction between the plebs and the Senate, so many things happen that chance effected what had not been provided by a lawgiver … [When] it came to

> pass that its princes lost their sovereignty… those who expelled them at once appointed to two consuls to take the place of the prince … (D I.5)

Machiavelli points out that two of the three critical elements were present in the republican structure. The only one yet to be incorporated was the people: 'This came about when the Roman nobility became so overbearing… that the populace rose against them, and they were constrained by the fear that they might lose all to grant the populace a share in the government' (D I.2). Thus, the Romans achieved the best type of constitution not by some supernatural design but as a result of a combination of purely naturalistic, even accidental, factors.

The balance between the three different interests in the state gave to the republic a considerable measure of vitality and longevity which other regimes were unable to match. Machiavelli carefully points out in D that Rome's internal conflicts, though they may appear detrimental to some, were, in fact, one of the Republic's most important assets: '[T]hose who condemn the quarrels between the nobles and plebs seem to be cavilling at the very things that were the primary cause of Rome's retaining her freedom… Nor do they realize that in every republic there are two different dispositions … and that all legislation favourable to liberty is brought about by the clash between them' (D I.4). By giving weight to each of the classes, Rome was able to stave off the vicious cycle of decay and reform to which most regimes were subject; its institutions were, therefore, worthy of profound admiration. For Machiavelli, the perpetual clash between patricians and plebeians constituted the cornerstone of Roman republican liberty – an insight which, while not perhaps strictly Polybian in character, certainly comports well with the constitutional theory of VI. To the extent that this is the case, one may dispute Hanan Yoran's assertion that 'the cyclical theory … presented at the outset of the *Discorsi* as the framework for Machiavelli's political reflections … immediately breaks down'.[20] On the contrary, traces of Machiavelli's Polybian propensities are spread throughout the entirety of D.

3 The Polybian Mystery

With these considerations in mind, let us now return to the vexed problems raised at the outset of this chapter concerning when, where and how Machiavelli encountered Polybius VI, given the absence of a Latin translation in the

20 Yoran 2010, p. 267.

1510s. A number of years ago, Jack Hexter (1956) addressed the quandary by pointing to the French royal councillor Claude de Seyssel, who served both King Charles VIII and his successor Louis XII.[21] Seyssel was clearly familiar with Polybius VI, and we may be far more confident about how he acquired his knowledge thereof. The widely travelled classical scholar Janus (or Jean or Giano) Lascaris (c.1445–1535), an émigré from Constantinople following its sack, translated the section of the *Excerpta* containing VI.3-18 into Latin.[22] At the apparent request of King Louis, he and Seyssel collaborated on producing several translations of classical works into the French vernacular, the introductions to which drew on VI.[23] Hence, Seyssel certainly possessed, or otherwise enjoyed unfettered access to, a copy of it. Hexter's thesis was that Seyssel, as a result of his close contact with Lascaris, was perfectly positioned to transmit the Latin Polybius VI to Machiavelli during one of the Florentine's three lengthy diplomatic missions to the French court during the early 1500s. J.H. Whitfield proposed an alternative hypothesis to resolve the conundrum of how Machiavelli might have accessed VI. According to Whitfield, citing Angelo Maria Bandini's late eighteenth-century catalogue of the Laurentian Library, the collection of Lorenzo de' Medici included at least two manuscripts (one supposedly dated to 1417) that contained fragments of Polybius VI.[24] As John Moore decisively demonstrated, however, both manuscripts must be dated to the sixteenth century (and perhaps after 1550), thus rendering it impossible that they were possessed by Lorenzo, who died in 1492.[25]

A discovery by Carlo Dionisotti suggests another source for awareness of Polybius VI c.1500.[26] Dionisotti identified a work by the Florentine humanist and political figure Bernardo Rucellai, entitled *Liber de urbe Romana*, probably started in 1502 and completed by 1504, that makes explicit reference to Polybius VI (1770, cols. 164–165). Rucellai's book was composed (and later published) under the guise of a commentary on a pseudo-classical text named *De*

21 See Boone 2000.

22 Among his other activities, Lascaris journeyed twice to the Peloponnese to obtain Greek manuscripts on behalf of Lorenzo de' Medici, Il Magnifico. It seems entirely plausible that among the numerous texts with which he returned to Italy – two hundred alone from his second expedition, to Mount Athos – was included some version of Polybius VI, presumably contained in the *Excerpta antiqua*. (Lascaris's arrival in Florence from his second expedition occurred after Lorenzo's death. See Walton 1972, p. 7 and Speake 1994.) I will say 'translation' throughout the following, but in fact de Keyser (2016, pp. 17–18) demonstrates that Lascaris actually translated the early sections of VI twice.

23 Seyssel 1991, p. 180; see also pp. 163–165.

24 Whitfield 1969, pp. 195–198.

25 Moore 1965, pp. 59–60.

26 Dionisotti 1980, pp. 138–140. see also Dymond 2021.

regionibus urbis attributed to 'Publius Victoris' and 'Sextus Rufi' (figures almost certainly invented by Rucellai himself).[27] On account of Rucellai's reference, it has been surmised that either a manuscript or an epitome (presumably in Latin) must have been available in late fifteenth- or early sixteenth-century Florence. Dionisotti's explanation for the presence has generally been accepted and endorsed.[28] But Dionisotti's uncovering of Rucellai's mention of VI raises almost as many questions as it answers. Rucellai's reference to Polybius VI does not discuss in any detail the key elements of Polybius's political theory, including his classification of constitutions. He simply states that 'by no means do I set aside the opinion of Polybius the Megalopolitan not only that the Roman Republic takes precedence over all others, but that no more perfect a system can be devised [*excogitari*]'. The decline of the republican constitution may be assigned, in Rucellai's view, to 'the times of the Gracchi, Cinni and Sulla and others like them', whence the 'blame game' commenced: People could not restrain their disquiet about the excessive power of the Consuls, or the turbulence incited by the Tribunes, so that they 'vituperated against the whole body of the Republic'. By contrast, a 'recte interpretati' of Polybius VI would lead these complainers to recognize their world from an entirely different perspective. Alas, our 'natural mortality' makes it difficult to distinguish virtues from vices; sadly, this is true of republics as well since although the plan is to create a constitution that embodies virtue, 'vice will at the same time step to the fore'. This is the ultimate reason that the Empire replaced the Republic, as Polybius clearly foresaw. Rucellai proceeds to draw a comparison between Rome and Sparta as founded by Lycurgus, just like Polybius.[29] May we infer from this that Rucellai was familiar with the specific features of Polybius VI that addressed the various systems by means of which political power was distributed, let alone Polybius's conception of the nature and pattern of constitutional change? Whence did Rucellai's acquaintance with the text of Polybius VI originate? Quite simply, on the basis of the passage explicated above, no confirming evidence may be adduced that Rucellai himself ever apprehended the substance of the conceptual framework of political order and change articulated in Polybius VI.

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27 On the latter, see Jacks 1990, p. 456 and notes 20, 25. Interestingly, the nature of Rucellai's text was apparently unrecognized by the standard study of his life and work; see Pellegrini 1920, pp. 3–4, 15–16 and 23; also Miscosi 1934, pp. 240–242. On Rucellai generally, see Gilbert 1949.

28 Oddly, Pasquale Pasquino (2009, p. 398 note 12) remarks: 'As is known, the mystery was resolved by C. Dionisotti who showed that Polybius' text on the *anacyclosis* was translated (!) into Latin by a member of Machiavelli's social environment, Bernardo Rucellai'.

29 Rucellai 1770, col. 165.

Other scholars have stepped into the breach of uncertainty with the suggestion that Machiavelli was not drawing directly on Polybius at all. One name that has been forwarded is Dionysius of Halicarnassus, whose *Roman Antiquities* certainly contains some echoes of Polybian theory.[30] But even the leading exponent of this ascription, Gabriele Pedullà, is muted in his admission that 'in the *Antiquities* there is nothing like the systematic reconstruction of Roman institutions offered by Polybius' and that Dionysius at best echoes 'the Polybian origin of this line of thinking …'.[31] Pedullà draws his conclusions based on circumstantial extrapolation, namely, that 'Dionysius was well known to Italian men of letters'.[32] It is true that scholars have identified Polybian elements in the *Antiquities*.[33] But Pedullà's explanation of how Machiavelli drew this theory from Dionynius staggers the imagination. His argument is essentially that Machiavelli culled a quasi-Polybian account of constitutional change from a twenty-book treatise that runs to 7 volumes in the Loeb edition and then distilled that position into a single chapter of D that just happens to mirror the core of the political theory articulated in a few short sections of *Histories* VI. Beyond violating Ockham's razor, Pedullà's claim is prima facie highly improbable. So far as I can determine, Machiavelli never relies on the *Antiquities* elsewhere in his corpus, unlike Polybius, whose ideas also show up in A. On an evidentiary basis, we must eliminate Dionysius as a plausible alternate source for D I.2.[34]

More satisfying and better substantiated is a restated and updated version of the Hexter thesis advanced by John Monfasani and supported by Jeroen de Keyser. Monfasani offers compelling textual evidence for Machiavelli's appropriation of Lascaris's Latin rendering of Polybius VI in D as well as A.[35] Given the convoluted state of preceding scholarship, Monfasani's argument is surprisingly elegant. He builds from a series of quite logical deductions, as well as from direct textual comparisons, to the prima facie plausible conclusion that Machiavelli undoubtedly possessed access to Lascaris's Latin version on the grounds that no other reasonable explanation can be adduced in light of

30 Barthas 2015, p. 560.

31 Pedullà 2018, pp. 187, 188.

32 Pedullà 2018, p. 186.

33 Trompf 1979, pp. 181–182.

34 Alison Brown (2010, pp. 78–79) proposes very briefly that Lucretius might have proven to be a useful source for Machiavelli's view that humanity's primitive condition was an animalistic one without a sense of justice. She compares the Epicurean teaching to Polybius (p. 29 note 50) but demonstrates no awareness of the controversy about how Machiavelli accessed VI.

35 Monfasani 2016, pp. 44–45.

the evidence. Monfasani moves beyond Hexter's problematic postulation that Machiavelli's contact with Seyssel was the likely source of the transmission of Polybius VI. According to Monfasani, Machiavelli's familiarity with the Polybian text *must* have resulted from his interactions with the Rucellai family during his participation in the *Orti Oricellari* circle during the mid-1510s. Monfasani thereby resolves the conflict between the apparently incommensurable theses advanced by Hexter and Dionisotti: Machiavelli enjoyed direct access to Lascaris' Latin version, but compelling evidence exists that this occurred via connections with the Rucellai family. Jeroen de Keyser concurs unconditionally. That 'Lascaris' translation was the one used by Niccolò Machiavelli', de Keyser maintains, is 'now proved by John Monfasani'.[36] De Keyser's contribution is to analyze carefully the manuscript, evidence that affirms the role played by Lascaris. Problem definitively solved.

Or perhaps not. As Monfasani lays out his case, some striking assumptions remain unaddressed. These are encapsulated in a single sentence: 'Dionisotti's discovery, however, that in his *De Urbe Roma* of Bernardo Rucellai (d. 1514) could speak of Polybius' book VI, suggest [sic] that Lascaris was in contact with the Rucellai long before 1515 and that Machiavelli's access to his translations came not so much from any contact with Lascaris as from his association with the Rucellai who possessed a copy of the translations'.[37] At least two unacknowledged premises are in play here. First, Monfasani posits that Bernardo Rucellai could only have obtained Lascaris's Latin version of Polybius VI directly from its translator. Since there is no specific evidence of a connection between the two men, this presumption is unwarranted. Monfasani admits as much when he remarks that 'it remains unclear when Rucellai became acquainted with Lascaris' translation of Polybius'.[38] What leads us to believe that the transmission of the text resulted from personal interaction? There would have been many avenues through which such a work might be obtained short of direct engagement between Bernardo Rucellai and Lascaris. Second, no evidence supports the notion that the Rucellai family 'possessed' the translation by Lascaris at all. Certainly the extant manuscript affords no indication to that effect. That Bernardo knew of the Latin Polybius VI seems beyond dispute. But his mention of it in *De urbe Roma* is so fleeting as to suggest that he might not have had a manuscript in front of him at all. If he did, one would think that he might have made more extensive use of its discussion of Polybius' analysis of the Roman republican constitution. In any case, the brief passage

36 de Keyser 2016, p. 17.
37 Monfasani 2016, p. 47
38 Ibid.

in *De urbe Roma* that refers to VI does not inspire confidence that Rucellai's knowledge was especially comprehensive. In turn, if the unsubstantiated presumption that the book was among the contents of the Rucellai family library is set aside,[39] the conclusion that Machiavelli must have encountered it years later from that source cannot be comfortably sustained. Consequently, the edifice neatly constructed by Monfasani proves to be built on unstable (or at least somewhat shaky) foundations.

This raises a somewhat larger question. Did Machiavelli necessarily rely on Lascaris's version of Polybius VI at all? The underlying assumption is that the only available Latin translation c. 1500 was that by Lascaris. Prima facie that seems reasonable enough. But some linguistic evidence deserves consideration. There are distinctive markers contained in Lascaris's rendering that are not reproduced in D. Specifically, Lascaris translates Polybius's terms for the two evil regimes comparable to aristocracy and democracy as 'oligarchia' and 'oclocratia'.[40] Machiavelli does not follow suit. Instead of 'oligarchia', his phrase is 'stato di pochi'; in place of 'ochlocracy', he uses 'licenzioso'. Why doesn't his choice of words follow Polybius in Lascaris's translation? Certainly not because Italian equivalents were unavailable to him. 'Oclocrazia' may be found in the work of Machiavelli's near-contemporary Gian Giorgio Trissino (1478–1550); 'oligarchia' was in widespread use as early as the thirteenth century.[41] Yet neither word can be found *anywhere* in the Machiavellian corpus. The same holds for three of the other four forms of constitution that Polybius specifies: 'kingship' becomes 'Principato', 'aristocracy' is converted to 'Ottimati', and 'democracy' is transformed into 'il Governo Populare'. Only 'tyranny' remains linguistically stable.[42] Hence, it is at least misleading, and perhaps inaccurate, to posit that Machiavelli in D I.2 simply parroted Polybius's account of 'the ways

39 There is presently no inventory of Rucellai's library. Rita Maria Comanducci's very extensive catalogue of Bernardo's letters (1996) offers no hint of any connection to Lascaris. Likewise, neither Pellegrini (1920) nor Gilbert (1949) discusses the contents of the Rucellai family holdings. The manuscripts themselves bear no evidence of possession by Bernardo or anyone else in the family. By contrast, it has been definitively established by McCuaig (1982) that Sallust played an oversized role in his major historical writings, strongly suggesting that the works of the Roman were in the Florentine's hands.

40 Lest anyone regard this to be evidence in support of Pedullà's thesis, Dionysius likewise uses 'oligarchy' but he doesn't have an equivalent for an ochlocratic system, because he simply jumps over that stage in the process of constitutional change and moves straight to tyranny.

41 Marazzini 2018, XI, pp. 801, 867–868.

42 One of Lacaris's translations – the one on which I have relied here – may be found digitally at https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Reg.lat/1099/0031. The digitalization of other version is located at https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Vat.lat.2968.

in which simple forms of government devolve into their corrupt variant (from monarchy to tyranny, aristocracy to oligarchy, democracy to ochlocracy)'.[43]

All of this is perplexing. The scholarly literature takes for granted that the only Latin translation of Polybius VI before the 1520s was that by Lascaris. Is this warranted? On the one hand, there is no extant manuscript to suggest otherwise. But on the other, Machiavelli's consistent failure to employ Polybius's constitutional terminology – in D and everywhere else – hints at an alternative source, one that perhaps rendered VI into Latin less literally than did Lascaris. Let me be clear that I postulate this hypothesis speculatively, based on lingering quandaries; it could only be confirmed if a manuscript of a different translation turned up – unlikely, but not impossible. Yet, after all, we know that Greek versions of the *Excerpta antiqua* had circulated in Italy since at least the mid-fifteenth century.[44] Why would a humanist in the decades prior to Lascaris have refrained from producing a Latin version? This seems to me to pose an intriguing unresolved question.[45]

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43 Pedullà 2018, p. 184. Najemy 2010, p. 99 says essentially the same thing.

44 For some intriguing possibilities see, for instance, di Benedetto 1978, p. 185; Dionisotti 1983, pp. 187–188; Hankins 2019. Di Benedetto surveys a 'curious' library inventory made by Gaspero Zacchi da Volterra (d. 1484), which lists among his holdings 'Polbii Megapolite omnes historiae'. Wilson (2017, pp. 75–76) regards this to be an elaborate 'joke', although he admits that 'an allegedly complete Polybius … is one of the *least incredible* entries relating to lost texts' (emphasis added).

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CHAPTER 3

Machiavelli on Liberty

John Patrick Coby

1 Liberty Defined

No great mystery enshrouds Machiavelli's conception of liberty.[1] Liberty, in the first instance, is self-protection from the abuse of power. Self-protection requires association by class, of which typically there are two, called humours: the people (*il popolo*) and the great (*i grandi*). The former want not to be oppressed; the latter want to oppress (P 9; D I.4.1).[2] Liberty then is the byproduct of the institutional empowerment of the humours, which in Rome took the form of the tribunate for the people, the plebeians, or plebs, and the senate for the great, the patricians, or nobles. The contest between the humours, resulting in tumults and factional stalemate, was the hidden cause of all laws favouring freedom, argues Machiavelli. Military training was one such law (D I.1.4).

Liberty, it seems, depends on a human race divided by class; or liberty remains a possibility, notwithstanding this division, if each class, and the people especially, is up to the task of self-defence. By disposition, a free people are, or must be, aggressive, envious, distrusting, and ungrateful. In other words, a free people are 'bad', according to the common use of the word. They resemble somewhat the great, described as 'malignant', and Machiavelli goes so far as to postulate a uniform human nature: 'all men are bad' (D I.3.1); 'men are more prone to evil than to good' (D I.9.2); 'men ascend from one ambition to another' (D I.46.title). But the class divide is reinstated by the effects of life in society, which, unlike the wilds of nature (D I.16.1), afford humans unequal opportunities for acquisition, exciting ambition in some and depressing it in others. With their appetites persistently depressed, the people settle for lives of deprivation and struggle, directing their energies towards acquiring daily necessities. They become a passive, unenterprising, at-rest population until threatened, that is,

1 Scholars who give extended attention to the liberty theme in Machiavelli include Colish 1971, Danél 1997, Vatter 2000, Skinner 2002, Tarcov 2007, Benner 2009, Stacey 2013, and Levy 2014. Not all would agree, however, that Machiavelli's treatment of the subject is unmysterious, nor do they necessarily confine themselves, as does this paper, to political meanings of liberty.

2 Citations of P are from the Mansfield translation (1998), and of D from the Mansfield and Tarcov translation (1996). Instead of page numbers, I prefer to mention paragraph numbering, which, when supplied, shows as the last number in the sequence.

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by a great bent on oppression. At which point the people rise in resistance, taking on some of the spirited qualities of their class opponents. The humoral difference still shows by the fact that the people are intermittently prideful and only when stimulated from without (D I.5.4; I.6.2; I.37.2), while the great are self-starting acquirers always on the move. Liberty is produced and maintained when the humour of the people, in reaction, behaves like the humour of the great—or when the people are bad.

But a free people are also good, for they internalize and practice civic virtue, defined as selfless devotion to country, respect for superiors, piety, frugality, and obedience. An oxymoron is thus the people's nature, though with opposing parts reconciled in this way: they are good towards their friends; they are bad towards their enemies.[3] Sometimes friends include all their fellow citizens, as when the city is under attack by hostile neighbours. In times of war, the people follow their leaders, ally with their betters, and sacrifice for the common good. But when the city is at peace, the circle of friends contracts to include class members only; class opponents become enemies and the targets of the people's suspicion and jealousy. The community shrinks, the community expands, and the people, if free and virtuous, alternate between the two poles of their nature.

The great are of a different temper. Intelligence is their defining attribute, not goodness (though in Roman history some patricians were plainly good [e.g., Lucius Quintius Cincinnatus in D III.24]). Lacking in numbers, the patricians were the weaker partner in the regime, despite their wealth, their offices, and their family ties. From their base in the senate, they issued opinions (*senatus consulta*) meant to steer the republic, but they did not rule as such.[4] And rarely did the patricians confront the plebs directly. The patrician mode was rather to temporize (e.g., D I.2.7; I.33) – to deceive, deflect, and delay. Patricians gave 'willingly' what could not be withheld – for example, when the senate in 405 B.C.E. voted state pay for the soldiers laying siege to Veii (D I.51). The soldiers accepted gladly what they saw as a free gift but what in reality was a necessary concession, for without pay the ten-year siege could not have been sustained. Anticipation is another term for giving freely. When at their best (or most shrewdly malignant), patricians anticipated plebeian requests, making grants, as with pay, before the tribunes could demand the same and

3 Plato's warriors are similarly described as an oxymoronic mix, likened to noble dogs who are savage towards strangers, gentle towards familiars (*Republic* 375a-376c). See Zmora (2004, pp. 440–442), who reconciles the two sides of the people's nature by reducing the good side to 'passive patriotism'. Clarke (2013) treats the good side (faithfulness, loyalty) as a liability threatening the health of republican government. Grant (1997, pp. 18–56) puts all of politics in a middle ground between friendship and enmity.

4 Lintott 1999, pp. 3–4, 87–88, 196–199.

take the credit. Anticipation, Machiavelli continues, is the easiest and least scandalous mode of stopping ambitious individuals in their tracks; applied consistently, anticipation would have resulted in the triumph of the patricians and the end of the tribunate (D I.52.1). Patricians also temporized by deflection, as when they deflected onto one of their own plebeian outrage against their entire order. The plebs 'vented' themselves against Coriolanus, who took the lead in, and the blame for, a patrician plot to force the plebs to give up the tribunate (D I.7.1; also I.40.7).[5] Lastly, there is delay, perhaps the principal form of temporizing. The weak may count as a victory a defeat that unfolds over decades or centuries. For nearly a century, from 462 to 367 BCE, the patricians prevented plebeian election to the consulship, replacing the office, when pressed, with the military tribunate with consular powers, to which plebeians were eligible, but to which none was elected for 45 years (445-400 BCE) (D I.47.1; also I.11.1).[6] And for three centuries patricians successfully blocked plebeian demands for enforcement of agrarian laws, i.e., property caps and equal distributions of newly acquired lands. During this long campaign, patricians frequently resorted to cooptation, a temporizing manoeuvre whereby one of several tribunes was bribed, extorted, or flattered into thwarting his colleagues and assisting the patrician side (D III.11.1).[7] The dam finally burst during the tribunates of the Gracchi brothers (133-121 BCE), whereupon Rome descended into 100 years of civil wars that ended the republic (D I.6.1; I.37.1-2).

Liberty, in the second instance, is a share in the exercise of power. Machiavelli uses the expressions 'a free way of life' (*vivere libero*), 'a civil way of life' (*vivere civile*), and 'a political way of life' (*vivere politico*) to connote varying degrees of power-sharing in regimes that are not absolute and tyrannical (e.g., D I.2.7; I.9.1; I.25). The tribunes expanded their powers from defensively protecting plebeians accused of crimes (*provocatio*, *auxilium*) (D I.3.2; I.44.1; I.49.3) and vetoing official decrees (*intercessio*), to offensively accusing patricians (D I.7.1; I.45.3) and arbitrating their disputes (D I.50.1).[8] Other offices of state eventually opened to plebeian participation, including the consulship, the censorship, and the praetorship (D I.5.2). Additionally, the plebeians early on had an assembly of their own, the *consilium plebis*, that made laws for plebs and that in time merged with the *comitia tributa* and made laws for everyone.[9]

5 Mansfield 1996, p. 246.

6 The consulship was restored in 367, at the insistence of plebeians (D I.39.2), and in 342 one of its two offices was set aside for plebeian candidates (Lintott 1999, p. 37).

7 The full powers of the tribunate resided in each of it ten members (as of 457 BCE). Thus, any one tribune could veto the decision of the other nine (Heitland 1909, pp. 62–63).

8 Lintott, 1999, pp. 121–28. McCormick stresses the importance of the tribunate in the Roman constitutional order (2011, pp. 92–97; 2018, pp. 135–136).

9 Von Fritz 1954, pp. 451–452; Nicolet 1980, pp. 217–226.

Other free practices included civic equality (D I.17.3; I.55.4-6; III.25), a citizen army (D I.21.1; I.43), public delegation of authority (D I.34.1), the election of officials (D I.58.3; III.34.4), and short terms of office (D I.35).[10] The Roman republic, by involving the people in the exercise of power, was a democratic mixed regime, unlike the Spartan republic that excluded the people and was an aristocratic mixed regime (D I.6.2). As republics, both states were free, but the fuller meaning of liberty applied only to Rome.

Rome, though, was not a democracy, a simple regime governed only by the people, because patricians shared in power as did a consulate performing executive functions in lieu of a king. A simple regime – kingship, aristocracy, democracy – concentrates power in one person or group and is premised on the belief that the rulers are good and should have unrestrained power to accomplish maximum benefit for all. If, or when, the rulers turn bad – probably because of the temptations of power, but certainly because of hereditary succession (D I.2.2-3; I.10.4) – a new group takes charge (by revolution), replacing old badness with new goodness, decadence with health. Machiavelli is unimpressed, however, in part because regime change is more tumult than a state can long survive (D I.2.4); but also because mixed regimes are premised on the more realistic belief that rulers are bad – meaning selfish, insolent, shortsighted, and cruel.[11] Bad people in office are wont to do bad things, so bad people should be checked and watched, not set loose and trusted. People are good (rulers and subjects alike) only when they have to be (D I.3.2), when danger threatens and only collective action can save. In such times, out of necessity, the divided power of mixed regimes coalesces, or the scattered parts of sovereignty combine, enabling now good people to do good and useful things. But when the danger recedes, and the danger-induced goodness abates, bad people experience again the constraints on their power that mixed regimes provide. Reactive or negative liberty, practised by bad people in easy times, oscillates with active or positive liberty, practised by good people in hard times. The mixed regime is superior to simple regimes because it better reflects the good and bad sides of human nature.

In one other respect was Rome a democratic mixed regime. Rome conferred on its plebeian population the unofficial and ill-defined title of 'guard of freedom'.[12] The tribunes performed this function (D I.4.2; I.40.7), defending the

10 Colish 1971, pp. 341–342; Viroli, 1990, pp. 152–156; Winter 2019, pp. 149, 153.

11 Pedullà 2018, pp. 121–126.

12 Guicciardini expresses puzzlement over the title, since in his view guardianship is part of governance and is proper to simple regimes, and since in Rome's mixed regime nobles and plebs alike guarded liberty against usurpers (Atkinson and Sices 2002, pp. 394–395).

liberty of the city – and not simply of the plebs – by preventing ambitious individuals from supplanting the republic (D I.29.3; I.46). Dictators, consuls, censors, and senators did, or could do, the same (D I.5.4; III.1.3; III.8.1; III.28), but primary reliance was placed on the tribunes, because they belonged to and served the more moderate people, who, desiring 'not to be dominated', had 'a greater will to live free'; and, being unable to 'usurp' freedom themselves, would 'not permit others to seize it' (D I.5.2). Sparta, conversely (and Venice among the modern states), entrusted this responsibility to the nobles, further adding to the aristocratic character of its regime.

Liberty, in the third instance, means the rule of law. This lesser, attenuated form of liberty is akin to justice and security. Liberty as law, however, is not the preserve of republics, for even monarchical regimes can provide and be tempered by it. France, says Machiavelli, is 'a kingdom that is moderated more by laws than any other kingdom of which knowledge is had in our times' (D I.58.2). Princes can opt to rule by law, and those who do 'will find that a small part of them [previously free people] desires to be free so as to command, but all the others, who are infinite, desire freedom so as to live secure' (D I.16.5). Freedom, as in command, cannot be allowed to subjects, for popular rule is inconsistent with princely rule. But only 40 or 50 citizens in a republic exercise and covet such freedom; all others are satisfied with law, justice, and security, which may encompass property rights and the protection of women (P 17). A law-bound prince is perhaps what Machiavelli means by a civil prince, the subject of P 9.

In a fourth, and still thinner instance, liberty means civic independence. Merely to escape the control of a foreign power is to enjoy freedom of a sort. At the moment of its founding, a city is free if it is not a dependent colony of a mother state (D I.1.4). It may be inhabited by non-native peoples and live under the orders of an authoritative figure – even so, it is counted free. Rome, whether founded by Aeneas in flight from Troy or by Romulus leading settlers from Alba Longa, 'had a free beginning, without depending on anyone' (D I.1.5). Florence, by contrast, was founded under the Roman empire; and deformed by the experience, it was unable to 'make any gains other than those conceded to it by courtesy of the prince' (D I.1.3; D I.49.3).

2 Liberty Defended

The case for liberty overlaps with the case for republics and the people. Liberty, as said, is the condition of the people (and of the dominating nobles indirectly), the consequence of their not being oppressed and, in some cases, of

their sharing in power and defending the state from usurpers. But are the people competent practitioners and guardians of liberty? Most writers, and Livy included, think not: 'That nothing is more vain and inconstant than the multitude so our Titus Livy, like all other historians, affirms' (D I.58.1). Machiavelli is of a different mind, however, and announces himself the first-ever defender of the popular cause, taking on himself 'a hard task full of so much difficulty'. The task in question is a fair comparison of princes and of peoples in power, shackled or unshackled by law, 'for everyone who is not regulated by laws would make the same errors as the unshackled multitude', and 'all err equally when all can err without respect' (D I.58.1). But, Machiavelli avers, when likes are compared, the people, shackled, prove to be 'more prudent, more stable, and of better judgement than a prince' (D I.58.3). The proof of their prudence and better judgement is as follows: the people's voice is the voice of God; the people possess a 'hidden virtue' allowing them to forecast their future; the people are nearly unerring in their choice of policies and candidates and never confer dignities on infamous men. Likewise, the proof of the stability or constancy of the people is established by their centuries-long horror of horrible things (e.g., the Roman people's aversion to the name of king). Also, states increase rapidly when under popular rule, justifying the conclusion that 'governments of peoples are better than those of princes', exceeding principalities 'in goodness and in glory'. And though not matching princes as orderers of laws and civil lives, the people attain equal glory as maintainers of whatever orders have been given (D I.58.3). On the other side, when unshackled by law, a licentious and tumultuous people can be returned to goodness by the persuasive speech of a distinguished individual, whereas assassination is the only remedy for a lawless prince. The anarchy of popular misrule is itself nonthreatening, and only future effects are feared (tyranny); while the tyranny of princely misrule is presently threatening, and a better future is anticipated by all (freedom). The wrath of the people is directed against those who would 'seize the common good', the wrath of a prince against those who would 'seize his own good'. Finally, the unfavourable opinion of the people, propagated by writers, results from the fact that the people in power are lenient towards their critics; a prince, conversely, is a persecutor (D I.58.4). In the next chapter, D I.59, Machiavelli adds trustworthiness to his panegyric, claiming that the people, in republics, are more trustworthy allies than are princes. And in an earlier chapter, he states that the people are less ungrateful than are princes, having fewer causes for avarice and suspicion; further, that ingratitude in a republic, like tumult, is actually a benefit, as it helps to keep a city free (D I.29.3).

Machiavelli's most confident remarks in support of liberty and republics come in D II.2. Peoples of the ancient world loved liberty most because they

experienced first-hand the advantages of life in a free state. Free states increase in size and wealth, enjoying sudden spurts of growth once a free way of living is adopted (D II.2.1; I.58.3). They grow because they put the common good ahead of the particular good. Free living is a spur to marriages and procreation, opportunity and enterprise. Riches multiply because 'each willingly multiplies that thing and seeks to acquire those goods he believes he can enjoy once acquired'. Again, law matters, protecting an individual's inheritance and the fruits of his labour. Political ambition is stimulated in individuals, as the possibility of officeholding (becoming 'princes') exists for themselves or their children. Even rivals are improved by life in republics, competing to advance the public good along with their private advantage (D I.58.3). Elsewhere it is said that free states (Rome especially) are better able to expand because they utilize the energy and optimism of their liberty-loving citizens (D I.4.1; I.6.3-4). And having expanded, they endure longer, because for leaders they have, through their mode of election, 'infinite virtuous princes who are successors to one another'; principalities, on the other hand, are lucky to have two virtuous princes in a row (D I.20.1). This larger pool of experienced leaders allows free states to adjust to the changing times and thus assert some measure of control over fortune: 'Hence it arises that a republic has greater life and has good fortune longer than a principality, for it can accommodate itself better than one prince can to the diversity of times through the diversity of the citizens that are in it' (D III.9.2). To this list of benefits, *The Prince* adds that republics provide inoculation from princely rule, or eventual escape should it occur, because free institutions are never forgotten, and the name of liberty is a rallying cry for rebellion (P 5).[13]

In sum, liberty is a good because it releases the productive energies of the body politic, leading to increases of dominion and wealth; and because the people – prudent, constant, trustworthy, and grateful – are fully capable of sharing in power. Accordingly, republics are better than principalities.

3 Liberty Attacked

We need not read far into the *Discourses* before discovering that not all is right with liberty. In the very first chapter, it is stated that wise founders select sites

13 Pocock 1975, p. 165. Pocock goes further in his praise of republics. Calling the republic a 'structure of virtue', he includes among its advantages the development of man's nature as a 'political animal' (p. 184). But whether Machiavelli would accept this implied linkage to Aristotle is open to question. See Sullivan 1992, pp. 309–318; Vatter 2000, pp. 20–21; Rahe 2008, pp. 22–55; and Levy 2014, pp. 6–8.

that impose necessities and remove choice. This they do because choice, or liberty, is the cause of corruption – idleness and discord – whereas necessity is the cause of goodness – industriousness and unity: 'there is greater virtue to be seen where choice has less authority' (D I.1.4; also II.12.3; III.6.10). The same point was suggested before, that people are selfless in times of war and scarcity, self-indulgent in times of peace and plenty (D II.25.1). But more, it seems, is required of a wise founder than simply preferring a barren site over a fertile site, because the wisdom of this selection depends on others making it too (all content to live off their own and not wishing to command others), and Machiavelli warns that such a concert is not to be expected. Thus, truly wise founders replace nature's necessities with the necessities of law. Military orders are the example in D I.1. In D I.2 and the following chapters, the example is the mixed regime, where the organized opposition of class keeps opponents and rulers in check. Laws, though, are made by men exercising some degree of choice, so law affords more freedom of action than does the necessity of the sterile site. Such freedom, however, is not always a detriment, for one drawback to nature's necessities is that, while sure, they are beyond human control – a sterile site prevents expansion should expansion become an imperative – whereas law can be changed (D I.18). But is law an adequate replacement for nature, retaining enough necessity to forestall corruption with equal effectiveness? Probably not, because Machiavelli devotes three chapters to investigating the question of whether liberty can *coexist* with corruption, taken to be inevitable (D I.16–18). The results of his inquiry are none too encouraging: a republic cannot be maintained in a corrupt city, and the loss of virtue can only be corrected by modes that are 'almost impossible', namely, 'little by little' reform and reform 'all at a stroke'. The former mode requires a man of foresight (unlikely 'ever to emerge') able to persuade a sightless multitude (likely 'never [to] be able');[14] the latter mode requires 'violence and arms' and either a good man willing to use bad means or a bad man willing to serve good ends.[15] In cases where corruption is advanced, this latter mode is the only mode, because nothing less than 'an almost kingly power' can correct insolent men unwilling to be checked by law (D I.18.4–5).[16] And while the progress of corruption is ordinarily slow (the cen-

14 It bears noting that much of Roman history is an example of little-by-little reform, of continuous foundings and managed accidents, and that half the reason for Machiavelli's admiration of Rome is that it preserved its virtue for so many centuries, even while expanding in size and power (D I.1.1, 5; I.34.3; I.49.1). See Zuckert 2014, pp. 267, 294.

15 While such combinations are rare, Machiavelli has a marked affinity for them (D I.9.4; I.10.6; I.55.5; II.30.5; III.1.3; III.22.3), and increasing their occurrence is arguably the main purpose of the *Discourses*.

16 Raimondi 2018, pp. 9–17.

turies it took Rome to subdue the Mediterranean world), corruption can occur in a flash, Machiavelli observes (D I.42.title).

If the people are easily corrupted, and only an uncorrupted people are fit for liberty (D I.55.2), what is the status of those estimable qualities ascribed to the people in D I.58 and used to prove their superiority to princes? As it happens, much of the evidence is suspect. To take but two examples:[17] It is stated there that the people, possessing a 'hidden virtue' and channelling the wisdom of God, accurately forecast their future (D I.58.3). But the opposite is contended in D I.53 and supported by events in Roman, Greek, and Florentine history, and by the authority of a famed poet. The people cry '"Life!" to its death and "Death!" to its life', writes Dante; thus, if good and ill futures are correctly foreseen, they are not correctly understood or chosen. Moreover, the people are easily persuaded to launch themselves into reckless adventures. Rome's several ill-advised battles fought against Hannibal and sold to the public by demagogic leaders serve as proof of how 'much are peoples blinded in these mighty opinions' (D I.53.2). The same holds for Athens's calamitous Sicilian Expedition (415–413 BCE), undertaken against the advice of Nicias, and Florence's failed siege of Pisa (1505 CE), undertaken against the advice of 'many wise citizens' (D I.53.5). From all the above, Machiavelli concludes 'that there is no easier way to make a republic where the people has authority come to ruin than to put it into mighty enterprises'. At least in cases of mighty enterprises and for a people 'of any moment' (D I.53.5), the popular consensus ('universal opinion') *does not* 'produce marvellous effects in its forecasts' (D I.58.3) – unless by marvellous effects Machiavelli means total disasters!

A second example touches on the alleged competence of the people operating as an electorate. Machiavelli claims that the Roman people's choice of candidates was nearly flawless over centuries of elections. But Machiavelli reports in D I.48 that plebeian voters were manipulated by the nobles and that the elections were effectively rigged. For the nobles recruited as candidates plebeians too vile to elect or patricians too worthy to refuse; so if the plebs always judged rightly of candidates – 'particulars', the message of D I.47 – they achieved this record of success courtesy of outside coaching. It was not then by accident that for 45 years the plebs failed to elect a single military tribune from their own ranks. And while it may redound to the credit of the people that words can return them 'to the good way' and to the discredit of princes that only 'steel' can supply a cure – and while the 'greater cure' proves the 'greater errors', as Machiavelli further asserts – it is not at all clear that killing a

17 For a complete account, see Coby 1999, pp. 255–261.

tyrannical prince is harder than reforming a corrupt society, or that the former cure is indeed the 'greater cure' (D I.58.4; also I.10.6; I.18.5). One argument in favour of principalities is that they are less virtue-dependent and so less vulnerable to the ill effects of corruption.

What though of the many practical benefits of liberty spoken of in D II.2? They too are not as clear-cut as they appear. For example, Rome was victorious in its wars because it fought its enemies one at a time (D II.1.1). Machiavelli is at pains to show that Rome's good fortune was in fact Rome's sound strategy. In the campaign against Tuscany (Etruria) just to the north, Rome conquered Veii, one of the twelve cities of the Tuscan league, without having to engage the combined might of the confederation – an obvious case of one-by-one warfare (though mentioned in the following chapter). Veii was detached from the confederal whole because the liberty-loving Tuscans could not abide that Veii had given itself a king to better provide for its defence against Rome. So offended were the Tuscan confederates by this abandonment of republicanism, that they refused their assistance to Veii in its hour of need (D II.2.1). It seems, therefore, that ideological purity – the love of liberty carried to the point of blind intransigence – caused the Tuscan confederation to neglect its own interest and fall prey to the Roman strategy of one-by-one conquest. When faced with a comparable threat the century before, against a Latin alliance, Rome augmented executive power with the creation of the dictatorship (D I.33.1). On the occasion, Rome avoided using the name of king so as not to disturb its people's hatred for the same – a mark of the people's constancy, it has been said (D I.58.3). But such constancy by the Romans was mostly a fraud (D I.2.7; I.25.1), while the more genuine constancy displayed by the Tuscans was the reason for their undoing. Nor is Machiavelli much impressed with names: 'it is forces that easily acquire names, not names forces' (D I.34.1).

Corcyra provides another example of liberty-loving gone awry. During the early years of the Peloponnesian War, the demos of Corcyra, locked in battle with the city's oligarchs, sought and received succour from Athens (425 BCE). Gaining the upper hand, the demos inflicted unspeakable cruelties on their class opponents. Machiavelli's purported lesson is the vehemence with which lost freedom is avenged; but another, implied, lesson is the subjection to outside powers that such vehemence can produce (D I.2.4; I.7.2). Party strife made Corcyra a pawn in a great-power struggle and a client state of Athens. And the barbarism exhibited at Corcyra is a reminder that the liberty of the people and their devotion to the common good need not encompass the liberty and the good of individuals, who often are 'crushed' (D II.2.1).

Seen from the other side, the examples of conquered and subjected states call into question the value of civic independence, one of the meanings of liberty

identified earlier. Rome's military and diplomatic policy, which proceeded by force and by fraud, compelled or deceived adversaries into submitting to Roman rule. Some even surrendered willingly, expecting better government by Roman praetors than by their own elites (D II.32.2). Over time, subdued Italians became Roman citizens (to varying extents), subsuming their identities as Veientes, Hernici, Volsci, Samnites, etc. (D II.3). Did they lose by the exchange? Is association at higher levels always a mistake? If so, free families should resist joining into free villages, free villages into free cities. Indeed, the solitary individual, being freest of all, should remain forever in a state of isolation. The love of liberty is more intense the more locally liberty is practised, but such love and such liberty can interfere with combinations needed for defence or better living. Machiavelli contends that the 'unhappiest [state] is that of a prince or a republic brought to the extreme where it cannot accept peace or sustain war'. Freedom does not make states happy if freedom cannot be defended but will not be given up. For such states 'must either throw themselves forth as prey for whoever aids them or be left as prey for the enemy' (D II.23.2). Circumstances matter, and in circumstances where the cost of freedom is inordinate, or where compensatory benefits avail – peace, prosperity, legal rights – the wiser course may be amalgamation in a larger union (D I.12.2). And since only a handful of citizens ever take full advantage of free-living or concern themselves with glory, what harm do they suffer by trading the thick identity of a village Samnite for the thin identity of an imperial Roman?

In fact, Machiavelli's praise of liberty in D II.2 is offered chiefly as a compliment to Roman imperialism. In amassing its empire, Rome had to overcome the stiff resistance of republics spread throughout central and southern Italy. The love of liberty, remarks Machiavelli, was what made these cities so obstinate and fierce. At the same time, their defeat at the hands of Rome afforded opportunities for displaying Rome's 'excessive virtue', or 'rare and extreme virtue' (D II.2.1-2).[18] Machiavelli then traces the absence of republics in the modern world to 'the Roman Empire', that 'with its arms and its greatness, eliminated all republics and all civil ways of life'. Christianity, or 'our religion', by glorifying 'humble and contemplative more than active men', is given as the reason why no republican revival has yet occurred in the West (D II.2.2). But it was Rome in the first place that destroyed these republics.

That record of despoliation notwithstanding, Machiavelli chooses Rome as the ancient republic most serviceable for imitation by moderns, often speaking of the greatness that it obtained (e.g., D I.6.4; 34.3; II.Pr.3; II.9), a greatness,

18 Benner construes these adjectives as a criticism of Rome (2009, pp. 215–216).

we now learn, that came at the expense of liberty. Since Machiavelli makes it his purpose to resuscitate Rome (D I.Pr.2) – that destroyer of liberty! – should we conclude that Machiavelli regards liberty as an instrumental good only, useful for gathering strength and delivering worthy opponents for conquest in battle – who by their defeat add lustre to the conqueror's glory – but not a primary value in its own right?

Some scholars think so; some do not. Mark Hulliung, insisting on the prominence of the imperial theme in Machiavelli's thought, describes Rome as a predator state whose free institutions supplied the energy for its expansion: 'Social conflict . . . fuels a machine of war, the Roman republic bent on greatness'; and: 'Republicanism is predatory . . . such is Machiavelli's striking claim'.[19] Quentin Skinner appears to agree, though perhaps without a strong means-end correlation intended. Searching for prehumanist correspondences with the *Discourses*, he represents greatness as the civic goal and liberty as its cause: 'Machiavelli fully endorses the long-standing view that the highest ends to which any city can aspire are those of civic glory and greatness'; and: 'The essence of Machiavelli's republicanism' is 'that no city can ever attain greatness unless it upholds a free way of life'.[20] Maurizio Viroli reverses the relationship, elevating liberty to the end and demoting greatness to the means: 'Machiavelli was arguing not that we should give priority to the pursuit of greatness over the preservation of the *vivere politico*. Expansion and war . . . can have no priority over the liberty and the good order of the city'.[21] Mikael Hörnqvist, also looking for humanist and prehumanist precedents, regards liberty and greatness as complements reflecting the internal and external ends of a healthy republic: 'Far from being two contrary or separate values, liberty and acquisition are thus inextricably connected; they lend each other mutual support, and they constitute together the nerve centre of the healthy republic'.[22] Still another scholar, John Plamenatz, sees liberty and greatness as opposites and concludes that Machiavelli never could decide between them: 'Though he loved freedom . . . he also loved Italy, and wanted her to be great. . . . He never succeeded in reconciling his two stronger passions: for political freedom and for the independence of Italy'.[23]

19 Hulliung 1983, p. 26. Fisher adopts the same view (2000, pp. 88–89).
20 Skinner 1990, pp. 137, 141; see also 1978, pp. 157–158.
21 Viroli 1990, pp. 159–160; 1998, pp. 115–116, 121–143.
22 Hörnqvist 2004, pp. 74, 186–187.
23 Plamenatz 1992, p. 82.

The position taken here – somewhat different from the above – is that liberty and greatness relate as stages in a cycle, equally valid and equally welcome. One is not the inferior good appreciated as the precondition for the superior (however inferior and superior are decided); nor are they complements exactly, not when the logic of imperialism is carried to its conclusion;[24] and nor are they irreconcilables, moral opposites, demanding total commitment to one at the expense of the other.

Before making that case, however, an excursus on middle ways and extreme ways is necessary.

4 Middle Ways and Extreme Ways

Machiavelli insistently, and famously, rejects the middle way: The Romans 'always fled from the middle way and turned to extremes' (D II.23.1).[25] In the matter of judging conquered cities, Rome 'either benefited them or eliminated them' (D II.23.1), whereas the Florentines 'used that middle way that is very harmful in judging men', exiling, fining, or degrading fallen foes (D II.23.2). Of the extreme Roman mode, says Machiavelli, 'it is notable and deserves to be observed so that it can be imitated' (D II.23.1); while of the middling Florentine mode (and Samnite mode among the ancients), he says, 'one ought to flee altogether from the middle way, which is harmful' (D II.23.4).

The middle way that Machiavelli scorns appears in numerous forms throughout the *Discourses*. It is, as in D II.23, retributive justice, or the aspiration to give in rewards or punishments exactly what is due, thus falling between the extremes of giving too much reward (caressing) or giving too much punishment (eliminating). In a related form, it is a political ideal, the nontumultuous politics of the aristocratic mixed regime ('the true political way of life and true quiet of a city') where domestic forces are forever harmonized, balanced,

24 The danger of coming to Machiavelli from Florentine history is that Florence's power, regional at best, never encountered the problem of greatness devouring liberty. Huilling speaks to this point: '[Leonardo] Bruni's imperialism quit after reaching the outer limits of Tuscany because he recalled the history of ancient Rome. . . . For Machiavelli, however, there was no turning back, no halfway measures were acceptable – it was all or nothing . . .' (p. 26). Scholars who read Machiavelli's advice as less than 'all or nothing' (certainly for Florence and perhaps for Rome) include Zuckert – defensive confederation (2014, pp. 264, 270, 273–274, 278, 281; 2017, p. 185); Levy – multipolar competition (2014, pp. 41–48); and Winter – invisible administration (2018, pp. 161–165). Cf. Coby 1999, pp. 118–121, 245–247.

25 Hörnqvist 2004, pp. 103–112.

and at rest (D I.6.4). It is also a forced compromise grudgingly accepted by the parties or the least bad of several bad options. Examples are the military tribunate with consular power, a mean between patrician consuls and plebeian consuls (D I.47.1); another is the man of quality who tries hoeing to a middle way between befriending or opposing his prince (D III.2.). In ethics too there is a middle way, conduct between the 'altogether wicked' and the 'altogether good' (D I.26.; I.27.title – but see below). Here one encounters princes who set their sights on wicked ends but who, encumbered by conscience, fear, or small-mindedness, permit themselves commission of one or two crimes but not the number needed to accomplish their objectives, or who vacillate in the selection of means, settling for half measures implemented in slow-motion. Steady adherence to any of these middle ways is quite impossible. Either they seek escape from nature's 'true way', which is acquisition (D II.19.1; also P 3), or nature's motions, 'the times', turn against them, disfavouring caution for impetuosity, or impetuosity for caution. Thus, Machiavelli recommends surrendering to character and proceeding 'as nature forces you' (D III.9.1), the ultimate extreme way.

But there are other middle ways that do not violate nature's true way, that are themselves modes of acquisition.[26] One example, perhaps unexpected, is the virtuous prince of P 15–19. Far from surrendering to character, this prince strives to have no character at all so as to be free to alternate between qualities that lie in a middle way of praise-winning behaviour, while avoiding extremes ways of blame-incurring behaviour – who is liberal, merciful, faithful, when lovable qualities pay; or is miserly, cruel, faithless, when fearsome qualities pay – and who thus stays always in the good graces of the humours. Comparable to an actor on a stage, the characterless prince is a performer, changing personae like costumes to suit the changing moods of his audience. Such a prince is a consistent crowd-pleaser and master of his personal fortune.[27]

This middle-way acquiring is not restricted, however, to cleverly flexible princes seeking selfish advantage without limit. For some acquisitive modes

26 Strauss 1958, pp. 240–244.

27 The table below combines Machiavelli's comments on rule by love and rule by fear with the list of qualities presented in P 15 and discussed in following chapters; and it adds moral categories taken from D I.26–27. It shows a middle way consisting of actions deemed 'good' because in line with conventional morality, but also of actions deemed 'honorably wicked' because excused by necessity. (Four qualities fall outside the middle way, because they are only described as blame-incurring.) Providing a praise-winning lane for 'honorably wicked' conduct might be regarded as the essence of Machiavelli's ethical innovation. The mastery of fortune that these chapters from *The Prince* imply is, however, disputed in P 25 and D III.8–9, with fatalistic reflections on the fixity of character.

are moderate and cooperative, with acquired goods shared and not hoarded.[28] The primary example is the Roman mixed regime, structured to endure and expand while evolving over time. Its founder, Romulus, shared power with patricians (senate) and the people (citizen army) (D I.9.2; I.11.2; I.19.1), and he shared glory with reformer princes who reformed *inside* of ancient orders (D I.9.title). Rome was an amalgam of old and new – a combination of ancient republicanism and modern cosmopolitanism. It espoused the republican principle of private poverty/public wealth (D III.25), but in practice it was never as austere and egalitarian as Sparta (D I.37.1; I.6.2–3), nor as pious as contemporary Germany (D I.55.1–2); and it certainly was not isolated, but rather an expansionist power encountering new nations on its ever-advancing borders; on the other hand, Rome was fully timocratic, deriving its wealth from conquest, not industry (D II.19.1; III.5). Its military policy relied chiefly on indirect warfare, alliances that absorbed and subordinated partners, and on repeated raiding that achieved victory in less time than sieges, but in more time than stormings (D II.32.2). A preference for defensive wars fought at home cost Rome the chance of acquiring a kingdom at the moment of winning a battle (D II.12.1). And Roman equanimity, based on knowledge of the world, was a

EXTREME WAY BLAME	MIDDLE WAY PRAISE		EXTREME WAY BLAME
CONTEMPT	LOVE (Gentleness, Peace)	FEAR (Strength, War)	HATRED
'Altogether Good' (D I.26)	'Good' (P 15)	'Honorably Wicked' (D I.27)	'Altogether Wicked' (D I.26)
	liberal	mean (miserly)	
	giving		rapacious
	merciful	cruel	
	faithful	faithless	
effeminate & pusillanimous (unarmed—P 14)	humane	fierce & spirited proud	
	chaste		lascivious
	honest	astute	
	agreeable	hard	
light		grave	
	religious	unbelieving	

28 For a possible parallel, see Benner (2017, pp. 171, 184), who distinguishes between 'go-it-alone' and 'collaborative' realism.

virtuous mean between insolence in good fortune and abjectness in bad (D III.31.2–3). Other approved middle ways include law as a mean between necessity and choice; plebeians trained to be both proud and humble; temporizing nobles, whose tactics fell between resistance and capitulation; and, of course, liberty, a state between domination and servility.

Some of this material repeats from the preceding review of liberty, which is not surprising because the middle ways endorsed by Machiavelli bespeak his genuine regard for liberty,[29] just as the extreme ways bespeak his genuine regard for greatness – or so it is here contended.

5 Liberty and Greatness

Acquisition is the true way, but the qualities needed for acquisition represent the true goal. These qualities, called *virtù*, are the boldness of the lion and the craftiness of the fox (P 18). They are for their own sake, the human good that Machiavelli most admires and hopes to revive.[30] They appear in different forms and concentrations, depending on person and class. In the people, *virtù* is civic virtue manifesting as love of liberty, a 'Don't Tread on Me' defiance of abusive power, but also a willingness to cooperate for common benefits. In the nobles, *virtù* is foxy astuteness, the temporizing cleverness by which the nobles manage the conflict of the orders, while their love of power, the ambition to command and dominate, turns virtuously outward, towards conquest, when checked domestically by the plebs.[31] In the prince, *virtù* is greatness, conquest on a grand scale earning the prince glory. *Virtù* then is intelligent fighting, whether for liberty, for domination, or for fame. When all three acquiring types combine, Rome (or its equivalent) is the result.[32]

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29 What though of the prince who travels the middle way of praised behaviour? Is he an agent of liberty? Yes, if only inadvertently. He is told, pursuant to saving his state, that he has more freedom of action than he might realize, but that in choosing between good and bad qualities, he must be ever mindful of the opinions of his subjects, whose praise and blame are everything to him. Such advice effectively obliges the prince to attend to his subjects' interests simultaneous with attending to his own. The middle-way prince, therefore, is part of the republican subtext of *The Prince*, along with befriend the people, arm the people, forego fortresses, etc. (Tarcov 2007).

30 Animal strength and animal intelligence represent for Machiavelli the real human good and are real human virtues, whereas 'humane' and 'humanity' in P 18 are but outward appearances. Huilling 1983, p. 23; Levy 2014, p. 36.

31 Winter 2018, p. 160.

32 Hörnqvist 2004, p. 191. By conflating the prince with the nobles, Mansfield (1996, p. 24) reduces three acquiring types to two and aligns them with the two humours.

Rome passed through phases. It began, under kings, as a village along the Tiber; it ended, under caesars, as an empire bestriding the world. In between, it was a republic with a democratic bent and a regional, then a peninsular, and finally a Mediterranean power. Machiavelli is not so partial towards the republican phase as to be hostile towards the imperial, for Rome was incipiently both: 'Those who read what the beginning was of the city of Rome . . . will not marvel . . . that afterwards the empire that the republic attained arose there' (D I.1.1).[33] Moreover, Machiavelli appeals to necessity to justify expansion, and he accepts tumult between the classes 'as an inconvenience necessary to arrive at Roman greatness' (D I.6.4). Expansion and greatness are requirements of nature; grow or die is the rule (D II.Pr.2). By the same token, republican Rome is not merely a prelude to imperial Rome, with liberty viewed as the means by which strength is acquired, and greatness the end to which strength is put. Machiavelli respects and defends them both. He is a constitutionalist who analyzes the counterbalancing offices of Rome's mixed regime and who counsels shared power, the rule of law, middle ways, and common goods. Caution is advised (D II.27). He also is an imperialist who celebrates Rome's attainment of world dominance and who strives to persuade contemporaries to take up the cause of national greatness. Extreme ways, exemplary punishments, *uno solo* founders, and new princes (usurpers) all meet with his approval. Impetuosity is advised (P 25). In the former case, virtue is distributed between the humours and dispersed across states. Equals combat, bringing out the best in their opponents; none though is excellent, illustrious, and memorable. In the latter case, virtue is collected in one champion, whose final victory is both the culmination and the termination of the competition. The triumphant state is singular and glorious, but without challengers it soon loses its edge and its virtue declines. Rome destroyed all republics in the ancient world, and Rome then destroyed itself – by prolonging commands (D III.24), abusing election laws (D I.18.3), paying tribute (D II.30.2), hiring mercenaries (P 13), etc. But

33 Machiavelli uses the word 'empire' in a loose sense to mean riches, power, expansion, in which case expansionist Rome was imperial throughout its history, whether led by kings, consuls, or caesars. He also uses the word to mean Rome under the emperors, as in, 'when Rome became an empire . . . those emperors' (D I.10.4). In this latter sense, Rome's empire had a fairly clear beginning – and its republic a fairly clear end – allowing for approximate division into republican and imperial phases. The imperial phase might also include conquests outside Italy by the late republic. Machiavelli places the 'ultimate greatness' of the consular republic in 265 BCE, just before the start of the Punic Wars (D I.20). The statement is oblique, however, with alternate interpretations possible: for either 'ultimate greatness' refers to something other than territorial extent, or the year 265 marks the beginning of the republic's decline and of Rome's transition to empire.

with the fall of Rome, other states regained their liberty.[34] Virtue did not disappear, or even diminish, for the sum of virtue is constant, Machiavelli affirms, wherever virtue happens to locate: 'I judge the world always to have been in the same mode and there to have been as much good as wicked in it. But the wicked and the good vary from province to province'. No empire succeeded the Roman empire, keeping 'its virtue together'; rather Roman virtue was 'scattered in many nations where they lived virtuously': Franks, Turks, Germans, etc. (D II.Pr.2).

It matters little to Machiavelli whether virtue is scattered across multiple republics or concentrated in one great empire, so long as virtue survives. Machiavelli is determined to ring every ounce of virtuous liberty out of republics, to prolong their life and time on the stage. He advises returning to first principles as a virtue restorative (D III.1.1). But when a republic has run its course, succumbing to corruption and autocratic rule, its passing permits the emergence of virtue in another form, no less prized – greatness in place of liberty. Hence, there is no desperate attempt to hold on to republican Rome, no tragic regret in reporting its demise, because virtue in all its forms is admirable. And even though Rome eventually did destroy itself, Rome still is Machiavelli's choice, because Rome was the free republic, then world empire, most in accord with nature's motions.

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34 Machiavelli's failure to solve the corruption problem and so ensure a permanent escape from the cycle of regimes (the mixed regime, offered as an escape [D I.2.4-5], in fact moves along its own, extended, cycle –Romulus to Caesar in the case of Rome) is, ironically, part of Machiavelli's work to 'bring common benefit to everyone' (D I.Pr.1), for the decline of the strong provides opportunity for the rise of the weak. See Coby 1999a, pp. 616–617.

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CHAPTER 4

The *Discourses on Livy*: A 'Commentary' on the Effectual Truth of Civil Conflict

Marie Gaille

Altercation, argument, confusion, controversy, difference, discord, disorder, disagreement, dispute, dissension, disunion, division, fury, civil war, hostility, scandal, sedition, tumult, upset: all of these terms appeared either scattered or in succession, with no apparent order or criterion for their selection in the works of Machiavelli. We easily understand that wars and civil conflicts under various shapes were at the forefront of his political scenery. However, by only rarely defining the terms he employs, Machiavelli did not facilitate the task for readers seeking to understand what they meant to him and to highlight their scope in his analysis of the history of ancient and contemporary cities and kingdoms. Still, those terms hinted at a strong interest in wars and conflicts.

The diversity of terms Machiavelli drew upon to describe civil conflict is meaningful. Some of these terms conveyed the common perception, which he intended to overcome. Other terms were carefully chosen for their ability to point out distinctions, in order to shed light upon a variation in the intensity of civil conflict, from verbal dispute to armed battle, and guide the reader towards an assessment of positive or negative types of conflict.

In this contribution, we focus on civil conflict. This is not to discard the issue of war, which is crucial in the *Discourses*, as evidenced by Thomas Berns in 'Politics of Porosity: War and Freedom in Machiavelli's *Discourses*', chapter 12 of this volume. The kingdoms, empires and city-states evoked by Machiavelli in this work, chiefly Rome, are continually facing attacks or waging war, whether to expand their territory or struggle for their independence. As we show, both external war and civil conflict may also have a strong connection. However, the analysis of civil conflict deserves a particular focus – this issue is the backbone of the *Discourses*.

To introduce Machiavelli's thinking on civil conflict, we first introduce the participants in this conflict and examine how the *Discourses* specifically contribute to their analysis compared to *The Prince* and the *Florentine Histories* (I). We then show how Machiavelli immersed her/his reader into the dynamics of civil conflict by providing a detailed description of its common perception, its motives, its various forms and the passions and emotions to which it is

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associated (II). We pursue our examination by highlighting Machiavelli's aim: that of providing tools of analysis to assess the implications of conflict, good or bad, regarding their relationship to freedom (III). Finally, we comment upon two aspects that relate to Machiavelli's thinking on civil conflict: the conception of the people as a political actor and the vision of the body politic (IV).

1 Descriptive Elements of the Conflicting Sides in the *Discourses*

1.1 *The Antagonism between the People and the Great: The Core Conflict*

In the *Discourses,* Machiavelli offered a rich description of Rome's composition and the disunion that seems to structure the relationship between two parts of it. At first (in D I.2), Machiavelli wrote of the powerful [*potenti*] and the multitude [*moltitudine*], but also of the plebs and the Senate, the nobility, or even the optimates, and finally of the people. In chapter 3 and most of chapter 4 of Book I, the use of the terms 'plebs', 'nobility', and 'nobles' prevailed. However, in chapter 4, the terms used in chapter 9 of *The Prince* reappear in Machiavelli's statement of his essential thesis:

> They do not consider that in every republic, are two diverse humours, that of the people and that of the great, and that all the laws that are made in favour of freedom arise from their disunion, as can easily be seen to have occurred in Rome. (D I.4; see also D I.39)

The pairing between the great and the people covered and included all the other types of couples cited earlier. Although the plebs/Senate, plebs/nobility, and people/nobility pairings do not disappear as the book goes on, the one between the people and the great, which appears when Machiavelli describes the antagonism occurring in the history of every city, is the most striking. As a result, it acquired generic status. Hence, even if the description of the city offered in P 9 and D I.4 did not embrace all of the possible historical configurations, it was nevertheless the only valid one when Machiavelli treated the subject of their opposing desires and appetites, a conflict that gave rise to the type and transformations of the government adopted by the city.

1.2 *The Scope of the Socio-Economic Dimension*

In the *Discourses*, the categories 'people' and 'great' did not embody socio-economic strata. Instead, they were related to shared interests or situations to be defended. The members of these groups are united by a certain desire, and the fact that they share it is what brings them closer together. Economic

considerations are indeed not entirely foreign to Machiavelli's conception of these categories. However, the relationship between these desires or appetites and an economic condition is never determined. Instead, in chapter 55, Machiavelli was concerned with defining a feeling that would mediate the relationship between desires or appetites and economic conditions. For example, he made a distinction between various ways of distributing wealth, depending on the type of nobility hosted by the city: true or false, and the number of such nobles. True 'nobles' own land and rule over subjects: they 'live idly in abundance from the return of their possessions without having any care for cultivation or for other necessary trouble in living' (D I.55). Differently, the prosperity of those who are 'nobles' only in name – like the Venetians – is based on 'trade and movable things' (D I.55).

However, Machiavelli defined the conditions that permitted various sorts of regimes – monarchy, republic – based on the feeling of equality or inequality engendered by these means of distributing wealth, rather than directly on the basis of the wealth itself. If true 'nobles', for example, were great in number, there was very little chance that a republic would be established, because this type of regime is based on a feeling of equality, and such a feeling would not develop in a context marked by subjection to long-established landowners.

1.3 *The Description of Conflict in the* Discourses *in Comparison with* The Prince

In *The Prince*, Machiavelli proposed a vision of political bodies made of two sorts of inhabitants, regardless of place and time: on the one hand, 'the people', designated by a singular collective noun, and, on the other, 'the great'. Machiavelli used the term 'people' in different contexts as well, especially when writing about matters of war. In those cases, the term designated the entire population of a city or territory fighting an enemy army. However, in P 9, he described the people as a group within the city and a balance of power between the two entities. They were defined in relation to each other. The ambition of the great was to dominate the people, whereas the people wanted to be free of domination. P 19 seemed to challenge the thesis put forth in P 9. In the former chapter, Machiavelli investigated a likely explanation for the fact that certain Roman emperors who have 'always lived excellently' and 'shown great virtue of spirit' were nevertheless assassinated or overthrown. This investigation prompted Machiavelli to introduce a third humour, that of the army, defined by a desire or humour: the soldiers' greed (P 19). *The Prince* thus offers two descriptions of the city, one of them binary and the other ternary.

The *Discourses* not only shed light on the fact that the description provided in P 9 did have a special status but also related it to the analysis of the

institutional dynamics of a political body. In *The Prince*, the ruler, be he ancient or modern, invariably faced a set of constituted communities – the people, the great, the soldiers. He did not exercise his power over a city in which men come to claim, for themselves, to the detriment of others or in opposition to their domination, a share of magistracies. In the *Discourses,* on the contrary, Machiavelli examined the movements and struggles for the acquisition of an institutional status; in other words, the right to participate in the processes of deliberation and decision-making in Rome.

The main example is that of the tribunes of the people:

> Hence, when the Roman nobility became insolent, for the causes that will be told below, the people rose up against it; so as not to lose the whole, it was constrained to yield to the people its part, and on the other side, the Senate and the consuls remained with so much authority that they could keep their rank in that republic. Thus arose the creation of the Tribunes of the plebs … (D I.2)

Machiavelli referred to the gradual transformation of the Roman 'plebs' from an anonymous multitude or mass, devoid of structure, to a full-fledged political power, conquering visibility first and an institutional status later. However, Machiavelli did not centre his analysis on this process. Instead, in the subsequent chapters, he wrote about the communities that were already constituted, and the antagonistic relationships they maintained. His goal was to make it understood why, in Rome, the opposition between them resulted in laws that favoured freedom and military power, whereas in Florence this opposition led to conflict characterised by assassination, exile, and political instability.

Nevertheless, he returned to the question twice: in D I.6, the comparison between Rome and Sparta enabled him to establish a link between the politics of conquest, costly in human lives, and the conquest of an institutional status by men who were initially considered to be foreign to the Roman *urbs*; in D II.3, he noted the factors that caused Rome's growth, based on openness to foreigners and conquest. Therefore, we need to keep in mind the idea of the permeability of the Roman city and its advantages, particularly in terms of military power. This perspective contributes to challenging the idea that the city is a finished, immutable structure. Machiavelli's analysis of the way the plebs conquered an institutional role, in particular, showed that the magistracy must not be thought of as a position that is reserved for a group (which deserves it by virtue of talent, nobility, etc.) within the city. On the contrary, these positions are accessible to all those who conquer them.

2 Immersing the Reader into the Dynamics of Conflict

2.1 *A Single and Basic Conflict with a Variety of Forms*

Despite the variety of terms mentioned in the introduction, Machiavelli focused on one and single opposition. This opposition takes place between the desires of the great and those of the people, which cannot be gratified together. However, the variety of terms is itself justified by the fact that their antagonism may take different forms. In addition, the desires of the great and those of the people, made to be the centre of our attention, are not described in a one-sided way. In most cases, the crux of the matter is the desire to dominate and the desire not to be dominated. However, we also encounter the verbs 'command' and 'oppress' (P 9) and, speaking of the people, Machiavelli mentions 'a greater will to live free' (D I.5), and also a 'too great a desire of the people to be free' (D I.40).

As a result, we face a complex phenomenon described richly in the *Discourses*. In the configuration in which the desire driving the people is not 'too great', the desire of the great was defined in simple terms by Machiavelli. The verbs he used referred to a superior stance, and to the expression of this superiority to the other. 'To oppress', in particular, meant 'to burden someone', to put pressure on him. Under it, Machiavelli subsumed all of the different ways in which the great gratified their desire, depending on whether the state was a republic or a principality. In a principality, the great could be 'nobles' in the sense that Machiavelli conferred upon this term so that the people were the subjects not only of the king but also of the nobles. In a republic, the great's desire for superiority was expressed by a desire to occupy the magistracies. In fact, for them, it was the only position from which they could dominate the people. In either case, the point was to impose a prevalence, based on the great's feeling of inequality. Such a prevalence did not rely upon the consent of the people, or on a competence recognised by all: when Machiavelli stated that the great desired freedom, he meant, to put it in Foucault's words, a 'freedom of egoism, of greed – a taste for battle, conquest and plunder … that can be exercised only through domination'.[1]

The desire of the people first seemed to arise from a reaction to the desire of the great: the people wished to be neither oppressed nor dominated. However, Machiavelli sometimes gave popular will a positive connotation, as the way to fulfil a more fundamental desire: to live in security (D I.16).[2] The people's desire, like that of the great, had thus a malleable aspect: it was expressed

1 Foucault 2003, p. 148.

2 See P 7 and 21 on the feeling of security.

differently depending upon the form of government, principality or republic. In a principality, it consisted of a desire for protection from the prince, explicit in the civil principality – but in fact present in every sort of principality (P 9). The expression of popular will was more complex in a republic, according to Machiavelli. It was a desire for participation in both senses of the term: to share common characteristics with, and to take part in. If, to assure their superiority over the people, the great wished to monopolise the magistracy, the people wished, on the contrary, to share these positions with them, to ensure that the great would be unable to dominate them.

2.2 *A 'Passionate' Conflict*

Machiavelli associated the manifestation of several passions, notably hatred, fear, ambition, and envy, with this disunion.[3] Two types of passion were discussed in his analysis: those which attest to the relations between the great and the people – hatred and fear – and those associated with the insatiable aspect of desire – ambition and envy. Hatred played a predominant role. Anger and the desire for revenge were associated with it (D III.7). The other major passion is fear or dread – Machiavelli used the terms interchangeably. Ambition (for power) and envy (of glory, wealth, or honours), related to fundamental human discontent, were also repeatedly demonstrated in civil conflict.[4] They ranked alongside hatred and fear as secondary causes of civil conflict or its escalation. Competition for honours, glory, or wealth, creating a situation where these goods are rare, was not in itself a source of contention. Instead, it was the resentment and ambition of some, and the fear of others of losing these goods – especially when women and property were at stake, according to Machiavelli – which engendered and fuelled civil discord (D I.5).

Overall, Machiavelli granted a central role to memory and imagination in the relationship linking passions to civil conflict. Memory and imagination preserved the passions: memory, by drawing support from past experience, and imagination by fictitiously transposing into the future events that were likely to occur. In Machiavelli's eyes, the fact that men have been robbed of their property is an especially indelible memory, aroused continuously by the aching need they feel for their lost possessions. This memory reinforced their hatred for those who stole from them (D III.23). Imagination also fueled the passions that were the source of conflict, as in the case of the wealthy that were hostile to the poor chiefly because they feared and imagined the loss of their property, not because they faced any real threat of losing it (D I.5).

3 See Del Lucchese (2004: 219) on fear and hope.

4 See Vincieri 2000, p. 22.

Hatred, fear, ambition, envy: the people and the great did not equally share these passions. As a result, characteristic behaviours were associated with the humours. The people tended to be turbulent and uncontrollable, whereas the great tended to be insolent and arrogant (D I.46). Of course, cases could occur where the great were fearful and the people envious or ambitious. To use a musical metaphor, fear was the dominant chord in popular passions, while ambition set the tone for great.

2.3 *Consistency of the Description of Conflict in the* Discourses *with* The *Prince and the Florentine Histories*

While the descriptive elements of conflict were not necessarily the same in *The Prince,* the *Discourses* and the *Florentine Histories*, Machiavelli's account of the dynamics of civil conflict was remarkably coherent in the three works, especially in the evocation of the passions and feelings. For example, the *Florentine Histories* associates hatred with indignation [*sdegno*][5] (which became a source of many demonstrations of civil conflict and its escalation) and fear with suspicion [*sospetto*].[6] In *The Prince*, Machiavelli pointed out that fear was often the root of contention (P 3). He noted that fear did not necessarily lead to passivity and submission and could also be a source of action. Thus, fear of the great may drive the plebs to support a private citizen and make him a prince (P 9). Likewise, in the tumult of the Ciompis, fear was what motivated the assemblies of the wool-carders, in which they discussed 'the events that had taken place' and showed 'one another the dangers they were in'.[7]

As far as the question of equal sharing of these passions by the people and the great is concerned, we also encounter remarks and observations in *The Prince* and the *Florentine Histories* consistent with the vision developed in the *Discourses*. Although hatred seemed to be common to both, fear appeared to be a passion of the plebs while ambition and envy were those of the great (P 19). The great were well aware of this, and used their power to awe and amaze the people to their advantage. Cesare Borgia staged the spectacular murder of his minister, leaving his subjects 'satisfied and stupefied' (P 7); the bishop of Volterra presents himself in his ecclesiastical robes to calm an angry mob (D I.54). This very manipulation is exposed in the revolt of the Ciompis: 'Dress us then in their clothes, and they in ours; without doubt we shall seem noble and they ignoble'.[8]

5 See for example, FH 3, pp. 1102–1103.

6 See FH, p. 1097.

7 FH, p. 1159.

8 FH, p. 1160.

3 From a Causal Analysis of Conflict to an Assessment of its Consequences

The description of these opposing desires and the passions associated with them lead neither to a theory of the genesis of conflict nor to an explanation of the causes of its perpetuation. True, in D I.2 Machiavelli mentioned the emergence of social classes which resemble the people and the great, to some degree: on the one hand, the multitude, weak and timid, and on the other, those who stood out due to a combination of qualities, both moral and material – magnanimity, generosity, wealth, and nobility. However, we cannot match these categories with those of the people and the great defined by their desires in D I.4. In addition, Machiavelli explicitly set aside the classification of governments that was the backbone of the analysis in D I.2. Finally, the reasons for the perpetuation of the desires of the great and the people did not seem to elicit any particular interest from him. At most, in D III.56, he mentioned the fact that customs and mores were perpetuated by family education. Machiavelli's writings situated her/his reader in a historical period when the differentiation process between the people and the great had already occurred, when their humours had already been composed. In Machiavelli's work, civil conflict is devoid of an origin or assignable cause: it appears as something that has always existed. *The Prince,* the *Discourses,* and lastly, the *Florentine Histories* do not differ in this respect. Machiavelli does not provide a causal explanation of civil conflict in any of these works.

In sharp contrast, he showed himself deeply interested in the consequences of conflict. He elaborated his own thinking in opposition to this common perception of civil conflict. A series of terms attested to this common perception in his work, all referring to ways in which conflict is sensed or felt: cries [*grida, gridare*], turmoil [*la turba*], roars [*romori*], disturbances of the existing situation [*perturbare*], the fury or energy of the troublemakers [*furore*], confusion [*confusione*], tumult [*tumulti*]. By applying these terms, Machiavelli made explicit the source of the common negative judgement on civil conflict. The clamour, the chases in the streets, the disturbances, and the rallies in public squares engender an unpleasant impression, inspiring fear.

To go beyond the common perception, Machiavelli introduced subtle distinctions. First, he intended to grasp the varying degrees of the intensity of civil conflict. Although the word 'tumult' is, to some degree, neutral from this standpoint, the expression 'civil war' was applied only once by Machiavelli. It referred to an extreme intensity of civil conflict, as opposed to a more attenuated form which could be described by the term 'dispute', for example. Similarly, there were differences of degree ranging from 'controversy' to 'scandal',

from 'contention' to 'sedition'. These differences derived from the level of violence in the means employed – the fundamental question being whether the citizens 'took up arms' [*venire nelle armi*], 'came to blows' [*venire alle zuffe*], or simply fought with words [*venire a parole*]. We find the same range of degrees in Machiavelli's description of the actions of the antagonistic persons or groups. These antagonists could simply be the 'partisans' of a leader – for example, the Orsinis and Colonnas who, honoured with many offices and commands, became the partisans of Cesare Borgia – but also the 'factious' (P 20). From taking a stand to physical confrontation, they engaged in the broadest variety of behaviour – accusation, insult, threat, calumny –, and likewise clashed in a variety of ways – destruction, looting, pillaging, burning, and killing.

Secondly, Machiavelli's discriminatory work consisted in evaluating what it is appropriate to call 'good' and 'bad' conflicts, although Machiavelli did not use these terms himself. In other words, Machiavelli judged whether the outcome of the conflict is positive or negative for a city's free development. For example, the term 'scandal', applied to disturbances in Florence which were engendered by the absence of 'an order' (D I.8) making it possible to accuse citizens and punish calumniators, gave this conflict a negative cast. Some of the terms Machiavelli used to designate the parties in conflict – *parte* [sides], *i partigiani* [partisans], *i aderenti* or *i seguaci* [followers], *le sette* [sects], and *i fazioni* [the parties] – also connoted his disapproval. This was the case with 'parties' as applied to the actions of the Gracchus brothers, responsible for the end of freedom in Rome, and also with the term 'sect' to designate the common practice of calumny in Florence.[9]

In order to distinguish between conflict with negative effects and conflict with positive effects on the free becoming of the city, we need to consider first the conviction that the emergence and survival of political freedom were associated with the strife opposing the great and the people.

Let us first define this notion of freedom. In the *Discourses*, the freedom at stake is the *civitas libera,* the type characterising a republican government, which must not be mistaken with the liberal conception of freedom deriving from the Hobbesian definition.[10] The republican freedom Machiavelli had in mind referred to the rise of the city-states in northern and central Italy: that is, cities independent of a monarchic rule to which they had earlier been subject.[11] This freedom was also opposed to the authority the *signori* claimed to exert. The city-states could not be free unless their citizens effectively took

9 See D I.37 and D I.8. See also, on this matter, FH, p. 1336.
10 Skinner 1998, p. 10.
11 Skinner 1978.

part in the political life of the city – by paying their taxes, participating in the magistracy, and fulfilling their military duty.[12] In these cities, freedom was above all a property of oneself,[13] in the sense that the city-states were self-governing and no external source of authority – a lord, the empire, or the papacy – governed or made laws for the inhabitants. Understood in this context, the concept of freedom Machiavelli dealt with thus qualified two states of being: the independence of the city-state in relation to any outside power, and republican government.

In D I.4-8, Machiavelli outlined in a somewhat provocative tone two theories that make civil conflict the crucible of freedom. On the one hand, he asserted that Rome's republican institutions appeared and survived for several centuries due to to civil conflict (D I.4). On the other hand, he maintained that these institutions were strengthened all the more when Rome was a people's republic, as opposed to an aristocratic one. This relationship between freedom and the disunion of the great and the people put law at the centre of Machiavellian history. To fulfil their wish to avoid being dominated, the people sought the establishment of institutional representation and laws guaranteeing and protecting their status from the ambition of the great. For the law subjects the great and limits, or even forbids, their dominion. It puts all citizens on an equal footing, as illustrated in D I.7-8. In those chapters, Machiavelli established a comparison between Rome and Florence, regarding the procedure a group of citizens must follow to accuse one of the members of the community. Florence lacked institutions making such an accusation possible, whereas Rome was endowed with them. The absence of this formal legal procedure in Florence led to an increase in calumny in the public squares, not to mention vigilante justice in which persons or groups sought revenge by private, violent means. It hindered the popular struggle against the ambition of the 'powerful citizens'. Inversely, the procedure for accusation in Rome, requiring the accuser to put forth proof, kept all the members of the community from accusing individuals without reason. Moreover, it constituted a public venue for settling disputes, and its authority was recognised.

It was customary for the Roman people to raise a tumult, to obtain a law or to refuse military conscription (D I.4). Livy describes many tumultuous events, popular outcries against enlistment in the army. For example, when the Sabines attacked in 457 BCE, military enrolment was negotiated in exchange for an increase in the number of popular Tribunes.[14] Likewise, during the war

12 On this issue, see Viroli 1988.

13 Esposito 2000, p. 23.

14 Livy 1922, III.30, p. 101.

against the Fidenates and the Etruscans (445 BCE), the plebeians were granted the right to marry into patrician families.[15] Livy seemed to regard this phenomenon, whereby rights were bartered for participation in battle, as an ineluctable event in the course of Roman history. Rome and its empire lasted for so many centuries that institutional adjustments were necessary.[16] Moreover, Livy usually interprets these adjustments from the viewpoint of the unity and concord of the Roman populace. Although Machiavelli draws upon Livy as a source of examples, the viewpoint from which he interpreted them is different, exclusively that of the '*vivere libero*'. He revised Livy's history to define the conditions of this *'vivere'*, particularly in the following examples: that of the creation of plebeian Tribunes, and that of Appius's tyranny. In Livy's account of the secession of the plebes to Mons Sacer (494 BCE) and the creation of the tribunes, the explicit concern of the Senate was the unity of Rome's citizenry, and Livy related the history from the senatorial viewpoint. Harmony was the very subject of the historical account.[17] In addition, Titus Livy considered the episode of the tyranny of Appius from the viewpoint of freedom and civil concord, whereas, according to Machiavelli, freedom was the only issue at stake (D I.6). The explanation suggested by Machiavelli of the tyranny of the Decemvirate, and of Appius, in particular, emphasised the inability of the great and the people to moderate their desires in order to protect freedom (D I.6). Because Machiavelli explicitly refers to Livy's history much more than usual on this issue, the reader could be led to believe that he agreed with the ancient historian's analysis of the creation of the Decemvirate. Machiavelli's portrayal of Appius was based mainly on Livy's. Still, the two texts were quite different: although Titus Livy mentioned that the government of Appius endangered freedom, concern for concord and reconciliation predominated in Machiavelli's concluding statements (D I.6).

The freedom emerging from the effective struggle of the people against the great's desire to dominate is not the freedom of the people strictly defined as a group. It is the freedom of the city. Laws specifically enable the people to assuage their desire not to be dominated, but in Machiavelli's estimation, they constituted a framework for a *'vivere libero'* beneficial to the city as a whole in terms of prosperity, happiness, and power. Such a judgement reflected a topos of Florentine political thought initially developed by Leonardo Bruni in his biographies of Dante and Petrarch – that of freedom as the element which

15 Livy 1922, IV.5–6, p. 279–273.
16 Livy 1922, IV.4, p. 269–273.
17 Livy 1922, IV.32, p. 323.

stimulates overall growth and creativity, boosting artistic development, economic prosperity, and political power.[18]

Popular tumults, which lead to laws promoting freedom, must therefore be envisaged from the standpoint of the people's desire and the perspective of the entire city. Not only do they fulfil the desire, but they also result in government by free republican institutions – a positive outcome in Machiavelli's works, from disunity to civil conflict.

However, Machiavelli was not boundless in his praise of civil conflict. Instead, he elaborated on conflict to evaluate its effects, both positive and negative. On the latter aspect, he intended to show that, unlike the desire of the great, the desire of the people could take on another form (mentioned in his accounts of the history of Rome and Florence): it could be, or become, the desire to dominate or conquer honours and riches, like the great, and as such, tip a city into a time of violence and destruction. In that case, the city was divided by a conflict opposing two identical and competing desires. In order to understand the reasons for this transformation and the configuration to which it leads, we must return to the critical idea in Machiavelli's judgement of the antagonism between the great and the people: that of the development of an excessive desire.

This point is made clear mostly in the *Florentine Histories*, in which Machiavelli emphasised the role played by popular desire, a desire that goes beyond the desire not to be dominated in the case of Florence.[19] However, the *Discourses* also brought their contribution to the analysis of the transformation of popular desire, displaying the corruption process in Rome, and proposing a substantial explanation of desire itself as the nest of its own excess:

> The cause is that nature has created men so that they are able to desire everything and are unable to attain everything. So, since the desire is always greater than the power of acquiring, the result is discontent with what one possesses and a lack of satisfaction with it. From this arises the variability of their fortune; for since some men desire to have more, and some fear to lose what have been acquired, they come to enmities and to war, from which arise the ruin of one province, and the exaltation of another. (D I.37)[20]

18 D II.2. See, on this subject, Baron 1989, pp. 31 sq.; and Gaille 2007.

19 FH, pp. 1140–1141.

20 On the nature of desire, see Del Lucchese 2004, pp. 50 sq.

Machiavelli regarded all men as creatures who were essentially dissatisfied with their fate, regardless of what it may be: they always desired but could not obtain everything. This vision pervades all his major works.[21] Put into perspective with the Christian vision of human desire or the Galenic medical theory of the insatiate desires of the body and soul, it does not appear as an original one.[22] He himself referred to 'ancient writers' to assert it: Horace, Livy, and Thucydides (translated into Latin by Laurentius Valla), but also Lucretius, whose *De rerum natura* we know Machiavelli had copied.[23] However, what makes his approach unique is his focus on the political effects of men's insatiable desire, likely to cause armed conflict and an overflow of the passions of the great and the people.

4 Back to the Description of the Conflicting Sides and of the City

4.1 *The 'People': A Contrasted Vision*

In this complex analysis of the relationship between freedom and civil conflict is embedded a no less complex portrait of the people. We may briefly insist on two points on this matter.

First, the negative side of the conflict we just mentioned does not question in any way the unique role played by the people in the advent and preservation of freedom. It is this group which effectively combats the great's desire for dominion, to assert its own desire. In doing so, it brings about laws favourable to freedom.

This role, described in D I.4, was more explicitly confirmed in D I.5 by a comparison between the ability of the people and of the great, respectively, to maintain freedom. Machiavelli defended the idea that it was harmful to entrust 'the guard of freedom' to the great. In fact, if freedom was entrusted to men who are constantly driven by their desire to 'acquire' more, to the detriment of others, it aroused in them resentment, a desire for revenge, and a thirst for more for themselves. They imperilled freedom in two ways, because their desire for domination constituted in itself a risk for the survival of the *'vivere libero',* and also because they elicited violent clashes. In contrast, the people safeguarded freedom the best because they did not demand a share of

21 See also D III.21 and FH 3, II, 21 and 22, and V, 14.

22 Guicciardini 1994; Gilson 1994, pp. 266–268; Galen 1963.

23 Lucretius 2001, III, vv. 1053–1067, p. 97. Machiavelli's manuscript copy is preserved in the Codex Rossianus 884 at the Vatican Library. It is believed to date from 1495.

the magistracies and because the expression of popular desire set in motion a legislative process that introduced equality into the distribution of magistracies and the private aspects of life.

In addition, the *Discourses* conveyed the suggestion that the people had an ability to govern. This suggestion, which Machiavelli made perfectly clear, was controversial at the time (D I.58). Although Machiavelli was not the last to stigmatise the silliness and naivety of the people, he nevertheless strove to convince the reader that such an ability existed. In fact, the two aspects were not contradictory, because the assertion of an ability that is the same as that of the other groups in the city did not in any way prejudge the effective qualities of the people, once placed at the head of government. In chapter D I.58, taking a position that was unusual for him, he unhesitatingly presented himself as the advocate of the people. Unable to defend themselves alone, the people was presented as a group that was unfairly denigrated. Citing another historical account, Machiavelli protected the people from illegitimate accusations:

> But the opinion against peoples arise because everyone speaks ill of peoples without fear and freely, even while the reign; princes are always spoken with a thousand fears and a thousand hesitations. (D I.58)

At first, the argument outlined in D I.58 might appear insufficient. Machiavelli asserted that the vices of which the commoners were accused – fickleness, lack of wisdom – were indeed true of all men, and of princes, in particular. The effect of this statement was to include the people in the group of human beings, without claiming they were innocent. They simply shared the same flaws as everyone else. Finally, contradicting the statement he developed in D I.53, he went so far as to lend an occult virtue to the people: the ability to discern the truth and to choose properly between two opposing orators (D I.58).

Machiavelli thus constructed in D I.58 an analysis that grounds the people's claim to participation in government. In the *Discourses,* then, the people emerged as a community that is capable of government, and likely to demand a share of power – which certainly granted it a role and a political identity in contrast with the vision offered by *The Prince*. Of course, corruption remained the decisive factor. If the people were corrupt, they would lack constancy and wisdom.

4.2 *The Body Politic: A 'Boiling' and Dynamic Entity Based on the Composition of its 'Humours'*

The malleable quality of the internal and external borders of the Machiavellian city made it impossible for him to engage in a representation of the city as

a body politic, the organic metaphor that dominated throughout the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. The purpose of this metaphor was to emphasise the collective, supra-individual character of the city, and the rigid hierarchy of its internal organisation. Like the organic metaphors employed by the Ancient Greeks, they were based on the idea that the head – the soul – ruled the other parts of the body.[24] These analogies offered a vision of the city as a whole made up of parts, differentiated by their respective nature and function. They were also designed to support the idea of a natural hierarchy among the citizens or to make everyone feel more secure in his position. In the *Discourses* (D II.30), they appeared solely to establish a map of military forces – as they did in *The Prince* (P 26).

However, Machiavelli did conceive of the city as a body. Borrowing his vocabulary from the medical conceptions of his time, combined with Aristotelian natural philosophy, Machiavelli developed another organic metaphor. In his work, the city appeared as a living, mortal body, a complex mixture, like a human being, composed of simple, opposing elements. Each city has its own lifespan. Some cities died before they reached a ripe old age, but if their rulers were wise enough to take the appropriate measures, cities endured. These city-bodies underwent an alteration, in the Aristotelian sense of the term: that is, a modification that affected their properties alone, not their substratum. Growth and imperial expansion were examples of such changes.[25] Cities were also subject to another type of evolution which, by contrast, modified their nature: corruption. Corruption is a central issue for Machiavelli insofar as it requires a change in institutions and procedures. Along with other elements borrowed from medical theory, it indeed allowed for a conception of Machiavelli's *Discourses* as a kind of civil medicine.[26]

Such a conception of the body politic differed significantly from the other organic metaphors dominant in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance due to its fundamental egalitarianism (the simple elements that form the mixed bodies are not ranked hierarchically) and to its insistence on the life cycle of the

24 Prior to the rediscovery of Aristotle's *Politics,* the body-politic metaphor was relatively rare. When it was used, it was derived from the Paulist idea of the mystical body (Archambault 1967). After the rediscovery of Aristotle (the first Latin translation of *Politics* dates from 1260), there is a great deal of evidence of the grip of the organic metaphor on political theory (for example in *On Kingship,* by Thomas Aquinas, in *Defensor Pacis* by Marsilius of Padua). When mentioning the speech made by Menenius Agrippa to the plebs, Livy himself uses an organic metaphor emphasizing the need for cooperation between the various parts of the body (Livy 1919, II.32, p. 325).

25 Aristotle 1984, *On Generation and Corruption* 319b, pp. 1197–1120.

26 See Gaille 2004.

city, from the moment of birth to that of death. Though not original on the latter point,[27] this representation as a whole remains a constitutive feature of Machiavelli's thinking. It is the frame of reference in which he elaborated his conception of the history and institutional dynamics of cities.

5 Conclusion

It is a well-known fact that the focus on civil conflict in *The Discourses* stirred up various types of interests in the scholarly tradition on Machiavelli, as well as multiple interpretations. The influential school of contemporary interpretation that identifies with republicanism – essentially John G.A. Pocock and, with some nuances, Quentin Skinner – paid only limited attention to this relationship. Liberal authors displayed an even more striking lack of interest in the theme, with the notable exception of Italian political theorist Niccoló Matteucci. Certain Marxist and post-Marxist historians and scholars, particularly those who establish a critical relationship with Marxism, showed a greater interest in this theme. Claude Lefort examined this relationship repeatedly within the perspective of totalitarianism conceived as a negation of the sphere 'of politics'. Lefort observes that he does not conceive of freedom independently from civil conflict and states that Machiavelli is closest to the effectual truth when he is considering social division and political freedom. More recently, Antonio Negri also examined Machiavelli's writings on civil conflict, within the context of his reflection on the concept of constituent power.[28] This set of interests and interpretation will most probably continue to expand as the scholarly and political tradition of comment on Machiavelli's thinking develops and the political contexts in which it is read and (re)discovered evolve. However, in regard of these multiple uses of *The Discourses*, what remains the core contribution of this thinking is the conviction that one must concentrate on the dynamics of civil conflict in order to decode the history of free societies and conceptualise the body politic.

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27 See Guicciardini 1998 and1994.

28 See Gaille 2018 about these various interests and interpretations.

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CHAPTER 5

Republic and Constitution in Machiavelli's *Discourses*

Fabio Raimondi

In* Machiavelli's *Discourses*, the term 'republic' does not indicate an abstract concept, an idea or a non-existent but desirable place to reach (utopia). On the contrary, it always refers to a specific place and a historically defined life practice. The comparison between various forms of government (republics and principalities, but also empires or kingdoms) that Machiavelli carries out in his writings always involves concrete historical forms, not ideas or abstractions.

'Republic', for example, refers in the *Discourses* to the ancient Roman republic and the Florentine republic of which Machiavelli was secretary, or to other historical realities such as Sparta, Venice and the Swiss communities. Like any other political form, each republic has a distinctive way of life, which is characterised by its overall organisation, i.e. its 'constitution'. This constitution concerns not only laws but also institutions, customs, habits, moral and religious principles, usages, beliefs and any other concrete practice that defines the way of life proper to a specific historical reality, such as, for example, language, the magistratures, the finances and the army. According to Machiavelli, Florence, for example, practices the 'free and civil way of life' (*vivere libero e civile*),[1] identified with the republican organisation of the city from 1494 to 1512 whose emblem was the Hall of the Great Council inaugurated in 1496. The 'free and civil way of life' is 'a collective order based on the participation of a large part of the population [of the] city', but it is also 'a matter of customs'.[2] That Machiavelli does not consider the 'free and civil way of life' of Florence as an ideal or a perfect way of life is demonstrated by the numerous criticisms he addresses to the republic and its apparatuses, including the gonfalonier Soderini, and also by the reform projects he drafted between 1520 and 1522: the *Discursus on Florentine Matters After the Death of Lorenzo de' Medici the Younger* (1520–21) and the *Minutes of the Provision for the Reform of the Florentine Government* (1522).

* Many thanks to Silvia for her lovely support and patience.

1 Raimondi 2018a.

2 Ménissier 2006, pp. 152–158.

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Having a constitution is not a prerogative of republics. Even principalities and kingdoms, for example, have their constitutions, but republics are characterised by a mixed constitution. Machiavelli begins his analysis of the idea of 'mixed' already in the *Prince* (concerning principalities)[3] and continues in the *Discourses* to pay particular attention to the comparison between the constitutions of ancient republican Rome and other ancient and modern realities, including Florence, Sparta, Venice, Athens, and the Swiss communities.

The *Prince*'s incipit is known: 'All states, all dominions that have held and do hold command (*imperio*) over men have been and are either republics or principalities' (P 1, p. 5).[4] The dichotomy refers to Roman history and the development of its juridical *corpus.*[5] Taken as a reference point by Machiavelli, this dichotomy is analysed from the particular point of view of the mixed forms that recall it and, at the same time, dissolve it. Machiavelli does not outline a rigid dualism but recalls the two matrices because, in his opinion, all political forms, simple and mixed, originate from them.[6] To the classic tripartition proposed by Greek thought – 'principality, aristocrats, and popular' (with their related corrupt forms: tyranny, oligarchy and 'license', i.e. anarchy) (D I.2.11)[7] – Machiavelli counterposes a more straightforward, binary division – republic and principality – derived from the history and law of ancient Rome. In this way, he replaces the one-few-many matrix with the one-many matrix, from which derives the claim that the government of a few is a mixed form.

However, Machiavelli prefers not aristocracy as a mixed form of government (although it includes Venice, which is one of the cases that beset Machiavelli) but the mixed form of the ancient Roman republic, because 'although it passed from the government of kings and of aristocrats to that of the people … nonetheless it never took away all authority from kingly qualities so as to give authority to the aristocrats, nor did it diminish the authority of the aristocrats altogether so as to give it to the people. But, remaining mixed, it made a perfect republic' (D I.2.14). Unlike the classical theoretical matrix, according to which, from Cicero onwards, the *res publica* is not only distinct and even opposite to the *res privatae,* but it is also the place where a precise form of government is in force and which has its beating heart in a practice of freedom,[8] Machiavelli's republic is a mixed constitution that includes the contribution of various

3 Cf. at least P 3.

4 Translation modified. All changes to the translations are henceforth noted (t.m.).

5 Rainer 2006.

6 Raimondi 2005, p. 49.

7 But see also D I.2.13. Citations of the *Discourses on Livy* follow from the Mansfield and Tarcov translation (1996).

8 Audier 2015.

forms of government and other institutions. This idea places him only partially within the centuries-old tradition of mixed government.

The purpose of Machiavelli is to find a form of mixed constitution appropriate for Florence and its historical characteristics. A constitution that does not reproduce existing or previously existent constitutions (not even ancient republican Rome) because it must be appropriate to the political and economic reality of the city. This research led him to identify an unprecedented form of mixing, which he proposed *apertis verbis* only in the *Discursus* and in the *Minutes*, passing through the analyses of the *Prince*, the *Discourses*, and the *Histories*: three stages through which Machiavelli develops a mixed constitution project which differs both from the Polybian theory of *anakýklosis* and from our written constitutions. Compared to Polybius,[9] Machiavelli's purpose is to break the necessary sequence of rotation between good and corrupt forms of government and, therefore, between ascent and decay,[10] by constructing what I have called, borrowing the expression of Emmanuel Terray, a 'conflictual equilibrium'[11] or an unbalanced equilibrium that is asymmetrical, unstable, and always teetering on the brink of chaos, in which freedom is paradoxically guaranteed only by the risky exposure of oneself in tumults or war. Compared to contemporary constitutions,[12] however, which for obvious reasons Machiavelli could not know, the difference lies in the fact that he understands the notion of *constitutio* in the medical sense, such as occurs in the expression 'good or bad constitution of the body', used to indicate the 'state of health' of the body itself.[13] As Cicero wrote: 'not only what is beneficial, but the happy life in its entirety, consists in strength of constitution along with an examiner and hope of its continuance'.[14]

The term 'constitution' appears several times in the *Discourses*.[15] Some examples: 'for such constitutions' (D I.2.13) refers to the mixed constitutions, such as that of Lycurgus, that is, to overall forms of organisation of the city that include many aspects;[16] further on, when he says that 'Solon made many constitutions' (D I.2.13), he is referring to specific institutions, such as, for

9 Polybius 2010, book VI.
10 Raimondi 2005.
11 Raimondi 2018a, p. 50.
12 McIlwain 1947.
13 Mohnhaupt and Grimm 2002, p. 25.
14 Cicero 1991, III.117, p. 145.
15 For a broader analysis, cf. De Vries 1957, pp. 8–22.
16 As also happens when Machiavelli speaks of the 'other good constitutions ordered by Romulus and by the other prudent princes' referring explicitly to religion and justice (D III.1.209-210 t.m.).

example, the division of the city into parts and the abolition of archons; in another context, Machiavelli refers to religious institutions and their ceremonies (D II.2.131). Machiavelli also resorts to the hendiadys 'constitution or law' (D I.6.23 t.m.), because the meaning of both terms can coincide when they indicate the presence of a command (order), as when he writes that 'many Romans ... had gone to inhabit in Veii against the constitution and order of the Senate' (D I.57.114 t.m.), or, in reference to Savonarola, that 'among the other constitutions to secure the citizens, he had had a law made so that one could appeal to the people' (D I.45.93 t.m.).

Another occurrence offers us a broader spectrum of meaning that sometimes resonates even in the more specific uses described above. When mentioning the Romans' reluctance to build fortresses, Machiavelli notes that they were very different from the Florentines 'because they [the Romans] were of another virtue, of another judgement, of other power (*potenza*), they did not build any. While Rome lived freely and followed its orders and its virtuous constitutions, it never built any [fortresses] to hold either cities or provinces' (D II.24.184-185 t.m.). Here the term 'constitution' seems to indicate not only the institutions but a broader and more varied set of qualities (virtue, judgement and power) that characterised the nature of the Romans, their habits, their culture and, in summary, their way of life. These different and correlated practices highlight that a constitution does not boil down to its formal or juridical aspect but requires a coordinated set of institutions, laws, daily behaviours, and knowledge, which form the specific organisation or the overall structure of a city. Their virtuous interaction is necessary for the constitution to work well. The not exclusively juridical centre of gravity of the term 'constitution' also transpires in another passage, in which, regarding the conspiracy of 'Capua', Machiavelli writes: 'among the other constitutions in the convention that was made, they ordered very heavy punishments' (D II.26.192 t.m.). In this passage, the term, indicating the clauses of the pact between the rebel soldiers and the Roman senate at that juncture, shows a marked political sense together with its legal significance.

Principalities can have mixed forms as well, as shown by P 3 and, in its own way, by P 9. Here it is sufficient to underline that a republic is characterised by freedom and equality, that is, by self-government and by the participation of many in the political life of the city and its defence, and that therefore it is different to govern 'a multitude either by way of freedom or by way of principality' (D I.16.45). In truth, republican freedom, as Machiavelli conceives it in relation to the example of ancient Rome, is something more than the self-government that characterises many republican realities (such as Venice or the Swiss communities). The 'political way of life' (*vivere politico*) indicates the general presence of a political organisation; the 'civil way of life' (*vivere*

civile) instead implies the 'political way of life' but requires respect for rules and is connected with expansion (D II.2.129; and II.4), while the former is not (D I.6.23). This makes the 'civil way of life' closer to the 'free way of life' (*vivere libero*), which implies not only self-governance, self-determination, self-sufficiency, and autonomy, but also laws established for purposes other than to suit the ambitions of an individual[17]: equality. The 'civil and free way of life' is thus opposed to the 'absolute and tyrannical' (D I.9.30) way of life because, being connected to the 'common utility' (D I.16.45), it is the enemy of corruption. Tyranny makes it impossible 'to grow more in power (*potenza*) or riches', and thus leads to the 'servile way of life' (*vivere servo*) (D II.2.130 and 132).

The need to expand and defend the republic and, therefore, to be independent, as much as the need for citizens to contribute to determining the political life of the republic, makes collective freedom and individual freedom inseparable. Furthermore, in a thought that shuns all political theology and recognises human and natural forces (including chance) as the only forces acting in history, beyond any illusion about a providential divine intervention, the political and military virtue is paramount. In order not to be annihilated or enslaved, even a republic must fight and prepare to do so by providing appropriate institutions. There is, therefore, no exclusively negative freedom,[18] for, if it is true that since the Greeks 'the condition of the free [man]' was defined 'in opposition to that of the slave', it is equally true that 'the free being of the individual [depended] very concretely on that of the community'.[19] If being free, that is, not enslaved, requires the concrete action of a protective community, then negative freedom is at the same time – and without the possibility of distinction – positive freedom. Not being a slave requires enjoying another condition, obtainable only by acting collectively: the difference between negative and positive freedom is abstract, as much as their opposition – or, better, it is a liberal matrix distinction that is ideologically retroacted on Machiavelli (and not only). In the same way, we cannot speak of freedom merely as non-domination because there is no subtraction if another condition is not built. According to Machiavelli, the political relationship between command and obedience is mutual or does not exist. There is no obedience without protection, and without direct participation in defence of the city – an operation that requires obedience – there is no freedom.[20]

17 Cf. IF III.5.110.

18 Cf. Berlin 1969, who is the basis, for example, of Skinner's and Pettit's interpretations. For a critical evaluation and a new reading proposal of the latter, see Hölzing 2014.

19 Bleicken *et al.* 1975, p. 426. The distinction between freedom and liberty also seems difficult to apply to the Machiavellian discourse.

20 Cf. Guidi 2009 and Barthas 2011.

The health of a republic depends on its constitution or on its ability to act in such a way that, free from external constraints, its health lasts over time, i.e. in a way that reproduces the freedom from which it originated. The republican way of life, its constitution, is the set of practices with which it tries to guarantee its health, protecting itself from ailments and treating them.

According to Machiavelli, the example of the ancient Roman republic provides some indications of the components of a republican constitution that can aspire to reproduce itself, and that knows how to react to its own corruption – even if, precisely Rome, despite its 'perfection', could not avoid degenerating into a principality, that is, transforming itself into an Empire (D I.2.7). Rome, although the most illustrative example of an ancient republic that was able to establish itself in the world, cannot be the model for a modern republic such as Florence, as some of Machiavelli's friends believed, in the Orti Oricellari's circle, for example.

The main problem that Machiavelli meditated on throughout his life is the following. If, on the one hand, principalities become corrupt and transform into tyrannies,[21] and, on the other, republics become corrupt and transform into principalities (D I.2.11-13), all that remains is to be lucky enough to be born in a republic and enjoy its transience. But if *anakýklosis* implies necessity,[22] where lies freedom and 'in what mode a free state, if there is one, can be maintained in corrupt cities; or, if there is not, in what mode to order it' (D I.18.49)?

Before proceeding to outline Machiavelli's answer, it is important to specify that the term 'state' does not relate to the modern state – that is, to sovereignty as theorised by Hobbes – but to the government of the city[23] since it requires neither the devices of authorisation and representation nor the transfer of the *jus in omnia* to the sovereign.[24] I do not wish to reduce Machiavelli's thought to the figure of what certain authors call a 'jurisdictional state'.[25] My intention is to emphasise that the plurality of meanings of the term 'state' in his writings, on the one hand, takes him away from the current of modern political thought inaugurated by Hobbes and, on the other hand, the same plurality, rather than implying his non-modernity or pre-modernity, brings credit to the idea of non-monolithic modernity, not entirely folded up and placed within the Hobbesian device, as Spinoza, for example, understood very well.

21 Raimondi 2018a, pp. 17–21.

22 On 'necessity', which in Machiavelli does not only mean inevitability (fate, destiny or Providence), but also occasion for free action, cf. Raimondi 2009.

23 Raimondi 2018a, pp. 9–10. For the complex semantics of the word, see Descendre 2014.

24 Hobbes 2014, chapters XVI–XVII.

25 Cf., for example, Fioravanti 2002.

Hobbes thinks of freedom as a property of the individual (in the state of nature) and then as the execution of the sovereign will (in the 'commonwealth' or 'civitas'), while for Machiavelli freedom is the outcome of specific relationships (political, economic, juridical, cultural, geographic, etc.) that are established between those who join together to give life to the city in accordance with the Roman idea of *civitas* rather than with the Greek idea of *polis*, for which freedom is rooted in belonging to the place.[26] The question of the origins of the city – free or servant – is therefore decisive, as evinced by the space that Machiavelli dedicates to investigating the birth of Florence.[27] The fact that Rome had a 'free beginning', since its construction was made 'without depending on anyone', is important for the future of the city itself, because 'the virtue of the builder' is manifested in the 'fortune of what is built', which in turn depends on the 'choice of site' and 'in the ordering of laws'. The city preserves the memory of its origins which can be reactivated in times of crisis, as if the freedom of the 'builders' remained forever etched in the place, in the stones and laws; a freedom that is not acting without constraints, but always in relationship to the historical context: 'the builders of cities are free when peoples, either under a prince or by themselves, are constrained by disease, hunger, or war to abandon the ancestral country and to seek for themselves a new seat' (D I.1.8–9).

In this perspective, Machiavelli examines 'of how many species are republics, and which was the Roman republic'.[28] Reasoning on 'cities ... that had their beginning far from all external servitude and were at once governed by their own will, either as a republic or as a principality', Machiavelli distinguishes two types of laws: those given 'by one alone and at stroke', as Lycurgus issued in Sparta, and those given 'by chance and at many different times, and according to accidents, as had Rome'. A republic can be called 'happy' if it is lucky to find 'one man so prudent that he gives it laws ordered so that it can live securely under them without needing to correct them', while it 'has some degree of unhappiness that, by not having fallen upon one prudent orderer, is forced of necessity to reorder itself', as happened in Rome. But, in the latter case, cities which are 'the farthest from order', (such as Florence, for example) are even more unhappy, because 'it is almost impossible for those in this degree to repair themselves by any accident whatever'; on the contrary, cities like Rome, even 'if they do not have perfect order, have taken a beginning that is good and capable of becoming better' and, therefore, they 'can by the occurrence of accidents become perfect'. Machiavelli identifies some degrees ranging from the

26 Cf. Cacciari 2009, pp. 7–19, who insisted on this difference, recalling Benveniste.

27 Raimondi 2018a, pp. 27–39.

28 On this subject, see D I.2 until different indications.

best chance (Lycurgus-Sparta) to the more complicated one (Florence), which, however, is not the worst (which is the case of an entirely servant city), passing through an intermediate and mixed degree (Rome). While Sparta was capable of lasting for a long time without 'corrupting [the laws]' and without 'any dangerous tumult',[29] and Firenze can hardly reorganise itself, Rome was able to use the 'accidents' to become perfect, i.e. to achieve the fullness of its strength: a perfection that is not static or close to completeness nor the embodiment of an infallible idea or model, but the ability to struggle to be free within an always open historical process.

In summary, republics are of two kinds: (1) those that receive laws all at once from a wise and prudent legislator; (2) those that, not having this luck, establish laws gradually in relation to events; these, in turn, can divided into: (2.1) cities that have the 'free beginning'; (2.2) those that are the farthest from order. Finally, a third kind of city is virtually implied (the very bad ones) and includes the totally enslaved ones, which are not (and cannot be) republics.

Rome belongs to categories 2 and 2.1. Recalling the distinction between the 'three states' - i.e. the three forms of government 'called [...] principality, aristocrats and popular', which are the 'good' ones, and their 'worst' or 'bad' correspondents, because 'the principality easily becomes tyrannical; the aristocrats with ease become a state of the few; the popular is without difficulty converted into the licentious' – Machiavelli, after explaining that *anakýklosis* begins when 'the prince began to be made by succession, and not by choice', makes two significant statements that radically upset the picture that he himself had traced. The former is that 'almost no republic can have so long a life as to be able to pass many times through these changes and remain on its feet', with the result that it 'becomes subject to a neighbouring state that is ordered better than it' or that it revolves for 'an infinite time in these governments'. The latter, even more radical, is that 'all the said modes are pestiferous because of the brevity of life in the three good ones and because of the malignity in the three bad'. For Polybius, the problem lies in the transition from good to bad forms, while for Machiavelli it is in all six. No republic, therefore, can last if it enters into the vortex of the *anakýklosis* and, in order to remain in the outside, it must govern in the way developed by 'those who prudently order laws': a way that is 'firmer and more stable; for the one guards the other, since in one and the same city there are the principality, the aristocrats and the popular government'. Lycurgus acted in this way to Sparta – which, therefore, had a mixed government – contrary to Athens, where Solon ordered only 'the popular state' from which the 'tyranny of Pisistratus' was born.

29 For the importance of the tumults and their differences, cf. Raimondi 2015 and 2017.

The 'perfect' republic has a mixed government, which is an indispensable practice, though not the only one, for a mixed constitution. The problem is that, according to Machiavelli, the good cannot come from the balance of the six pestiferous forms of government, but only from something else, which generates their mixture, and which remains alive regardless of the form it takes. It is not the combination or the balance between the six pestiferous forms that makes them good or produces a good mixed form, but the principle that forces them to mix.

If Sparta had a mixed government from the beginning, thanks to the excellence of Lycurgus, Rome, on the other hand, not having a Lycurgus, had the good fortune that 'so many accidents arose in it through the disunion between the plebs and the Senate that what an orderer had not done, chance did'. After the expulsion of the kings, 'the consuls and the Senate' were established in Rome, leading it 'to be mixed only of two qualities out of the three written above – that is, the principality and the aristocrats'. At this point, 'it remained only to give a place to the popular government' or to 'yield to the people its part' – which meant giving it its representatives but, through them, also a political role that previously it did not have[30] – and this happened with the institution of the 'tribunes of the plebs', which were not a concession due to the generosity of the 'Roman nobility', which was 'constrained' to establish them because of the popular uprising against its insolence. Only then "the state of that republic came to be more stabilised since all three kinds of government there had their part'. This is why Machiavelli judges the 'disunion' between the plebs and the senate to be positive and favourable; but the particular case does not make a rule, because not all disunions are advantageous to a republic, as the behaviour of the Gracchi, to offer an example, well demonstrates (D I.6 and I.37).

The mixed form of government depended, at least in ancient Rome, on disunion, synonymous here with tumults (D I.4.16). These are the keystone of a republic, and it is as their consequence that the constitution, not limited to laws or administrative apparatus, must be further articulated to reproduce the conflictual equilibrium without which it would perish. Tumults are not a guarantee, nor do they solve any problem because they are risky, but without them, there will never be a mixed constitution in the Machiavellian sense. Politics is not a gala dinner, but a relationship sometimes violent among forces. This articulation is so complex that, we could say, Machiavelli needs all of the *Discourses* to outline it. Not being possible to summarise or analyse the entire work in question here, I focus only on some features that I believe require stronger emphasis.

30 McCormick 2011.

The ancient Roman republic was characterised by a free beginning and a mixed government (principality-aristocrats-popular, corresponding to the triad consuls-senate-tribunes), which became necessary for the tumults between the plebs and the senate, to the point of stating that 'all the laws that are made in favour of freedom arise from their disunion', because 'good examples arise from good education, good education from good laws, and good laws from those tumults that many inconsiderately damn'. Good examples and good laws, therefore, are another important feature of the constitution of a republic, and are such only if they are established 'in benefit of public freedom' (D I.4.16).

According to Machiavelli, the tumults are not always healthy, even if supported by the popular part or by the plebs, and are always harmful when used by factions fighting for supremacy, i.e. for the exclusive command (*imperium*), as also evidenced by Ciompi's tumults.[31]

The freedom of a republic, which must reproduce it as a condition of its existence, implies that 'the people can vent its ambition, and especially [in] those cities that wish to avail themselves of the people in important things' as Rome did. In fact, 'the desires of free peoples are rarely pernicious to freedom because they arise either from being oppressed or from suspicion that they may be oppressed' (D I.4.17). Contrary to Sparta and Venice, which placed the 'guard of freedom ... in the hands of the nobles', the Romans placed it 'in the hands of the plebs' (D I.5.17). This derives from their intentions or needs to expand. The territorial expansion, in fact, is inseparable from the economic and political expansion (citizenship) and requires the participation of the plebs in the government of the city, with the risks that this entails.[32]

This need has consequences. For the 'guard of freedom' to be effective, the most 'useful and necessary authority [is] that of being able to accuse citizens to the people, or to some magistrate or council, when they sin in anything against the free state' (D I.7.23). The possibility of a turn to justice is another cornerstone of republics as long as they are 'accusations' and not 'calumnies' because these 'have need neither of witness nor of any other specific corroboration to prove them', while those have 'need for true corroboration and of circumstances that show the truth of the accusation'; for this reason, 'an orderer of a republic should order that every citizen in it can accuse without any fear or without any respect; and having done this and observed it well, he should punish calumniators harshly' (D I.8.27).

31 Cf. Raimondi 2017, pp. 6–9 and Raimondi 2018a, pp. 50n.112, 52, 74–80, 112n.110.

32 Cf., for example, D I.5.18 and D I.6.

Free beginning, mixed government, tumults, good laws and good education, expansion, political role of the plebs, vent of the passions and the possibility of turning to justice are the characteristics that up to this point outline the mixed constitution that Machiavelli derives from the analysis of the history of ancient Rome. But the list does not stop there.

Religion is another decisive feature. In fact, the 'heads and orderers of religions' are 'most praised' and exceed in prestige 'those who have founded either republics or kingdoms' (D I.10.31), because religion is 'altogether necessary … to maintain a civilisation', given that it 'served … to command armies, to hold the plebs together, to keep men good, to bring shame to the wicked' (D I.11.34–35 t.m.).[33]

The adoption of a religion is not only due to the political need to generate a bond that unites the people but also to prepare for obedience, which serves both to build order within the city and to keep the army united and give courage to the soldiers: 'where there is religion', in fact, 'arms can easily be introduced, and where there are arms and not religion, the latter can be introduced only with difficulty' (D I.11.35).[34] The clearest formulation of the link between 'one's own arms' and religion lies in the *Art of War*, where Machiavelli states that 'if in every other order of cities or kingdoms the utmost diligence was used to keep men faithful, peaceful, and full of the fear of God, in the military it was redoubled',[35] because 'to persuade or dissuade a few of a thing is very easy. For if words are not enough, you can then use authority or force. But the difficulty is in removing from the multitude a sinister opinion', above all if 'contrary … to the common good'; in this case, 'one can use only words that are heard by all', because with the right words 'the human passions are extinguished or inflamed', and the most useful tools to achieve this effect are 'religion and the oath'. It was the fear of divine punishment that, 'mixed with other religious modes, … many times made every enterprise easy for ancient captains, and it would always do so, where religion is feared and observed' (A IV, p. 98). It should be taken into account that since 'to check armed men, neither fear of the laws nor that of men is enough, the ancients added the authority of God … And they used every industry to fill them with religion' (A VI, p. 129 t.m.).

However, a republic must not only 'esteem the modes and orders of military discipline', but also 'to honour and reward the virtues, not to despise poverty … to constrain the citizens to love one another, to live without sects, to esteem the private less than the public' (A I, p. 11). For this reason, 'well-ordered

33 Cf. also D I.11-15 and Raimondi 2018b for a more analytical discussion.

34 Cf. also D I.21 and I.43.

35 A Preface, p. 4.

republics institute (*constituiscono*) rewards and punishments for their citizens and never counterbalance one with the other' (D I.24.59). Therefore, it is not necessary to 'cancel the demerits with the merits' or to avoid to 'punish' those who have first 'worked well' and then act 'badly'. Rather, to preserve 'the punishment for malevolent works', it is necessary 'to observe the giving of rewards for good'; only in this way 'a city lives free for a long time' (D I.24.59).[36] Avoiding 'ingratitude' is one of the main tasks of a republic which, however, cannot use 'the same remedy [of the] prince', but, following the example of the Roman republic, can achieve the goal through the 'modes of its government'. One of the latter consisted in the fact that, being 'the whole city – both the nobles and the ignobles – [engaged] in the war …, many virtuous men' arose in it, 'in every age', so that 'the people did not have reason to fear any one of them, since they were many and guarded one another' (D I.30.68 t.m.).

Another important feature of the republican and constitutional framework of ancient Rome is the 'dictatorship'[37] (also typical of the modern republic of Venice), which is just one of the many magistratures necessary for the government of the city, together with the consuls, the senate, and the tribunes of the plebs. The dictatorship, however, has a particular weight in the Machiavellian argument because its compatibility with a republican constitution was not at all apparent even in the days of Machiavelli, since it was believed to be 'the cause, in time, of the tyranny' (D I.34.73), which is not a magistrature. In reality, for Machiavelli, tyranny is due to 'the authority taken by citizens because of the length of command', while the office of dictator, although not without dangers (see the case of the Decemvirate) was assigned 'according to public orders, and not by his own authority' (D I.34.74). But the most striking aspect of the Machiavellian treatment of the dictatorship is its usefulness for the preservation and reproduction of freedom. Starting from the assumption that 'the magistrates that are made and authorities that are given through extraordinary ways, not those that come through ordinary ways, hurt republics', Machiavelli maintains that: (1) if a citizen sizes an 'extraordinary authority', this fact sanctions the existence of corruption and the republic is not free; in fact, if laws are duly in force in a republic, a single 'citizen' cannot be 'very rich and to have very many adherents and partisans' who help him to take authority by extraordinary ways; (2) 'the dictator was appointed for a time and not perpetually' by the Senate authority, and he had the specific task of solving a dangerous situation for the city, after which he had to remit the mandate; (3) the dictator's authority 'extended to being able to decide by regarding remedies for that

36 Cf. also D I.29.

37 D I.33.71 and 73. On the subject, see Geuna 2017.

urgent danger ..., but he could not do anything that might diminish the state'; and thus Machiavelli concludes: 'truly, among the other Roman orders, this is one that deserves to be considered and numbered among those that were the cause ... of so great supremacy (*imperio*), for without such an order cities escape from extraordinary accidents with difficulty' (D I.34.74 t.m.).[38]

Moving on to conclude this concise presentation of some constitutional features which, according to the *Discourses*, pertained to the ancient Roman republic, I cannot exempt myself from mentioning: a) the compliance with the laws, especially by those who promulgate them, as well as b) 'equality' and c) the return to the 'beginnings'.

In the first case, Machiavelli is lapidary: 'I do not believe there is a thing that sets a more wicked example in a republic than to make a law and not observe it, and so much the more as it is not observed by [those who] made it' (D I.45.93). The Machiavellian statement implies not only disapproval of tyranny but the need for rulers to be an example for the governed, and not only in view of obtaining 'praise' (D I.10.32), but in order to live 'secure', as shown by the 'kingdom of France' (D I.16.46) and by the 'province of Germany' where 'many republics ... live free, and they observe their laws so that no one from outside or inside dares to seize them' (D I.55.110).

The transgression of the laws generates corruption – that is why there is always a need for 'new laws', which must be accompanied by 'new orders',[39] going beyond the limits of the 'jurisdictional state' but without venturing into the idea of law as a decree of the will of the sovereign, as in Hobbes. And corruption, in one of the meanings used by Machiavelli, is the opposite of the 'equality' that laws and orders have the task of building and guaranteeing. In fact, the 'republics in which a political and incorrupt way of life is maintained, do not endure that any citizens of theirs either be or live in the usage of a gentleman; indeed, they maintain among themselves an even equality', because if 'gentlemen are called those who live idly in abundance from the return of their possessions, without having any care either for cultivation or for other necessary trouble in living', and also those who 'beyond the aforesaid fortunes, command from a castle and have subjects who obey them', then where they reign 'no republic or political way of life has ever emerged' (D I.55.111). The difference between republic and principality could not emerge more clearly in the closing of the chapter, where Machiavelli affirms that it is possible to 'constitute a republic' only 'where a great equality exists or has been made' while,

38 Cf. also the rest of the chapter, and D I.40.89.

39 Cf. D I.18, I.35; III.8.

'on the contrary … a principality' can be 'order[ed]' only 'where there is great inequality' (D I.55.113).

Finally, we must not forget that 'all worldly things have a limit of their life; but generally those go the whole course that is ordered for them by heaven, that do not disorder their body but keep it ordered so that either it does not alter or, if it alters, it is for its safety and not to its harm'; in the case of 'mixed bodies, such as republics and sects … those alterations are for safety that lead them back towards their beginnings'; and the republics or sects 'better ordered … have longer life', because 'by means of their orders can often be renewed … it is a thing clearer than light that these bodies do not last if they do not renew themselves' (D III.1.209). The set of problems that opens up at this point refers to the political and biological roots of the Machiavellian conception of life - the latter drawn in particular from medicine - that is, to the idea that 'all the beginnings of sects, republics, and kingdoms must have some goodness in them, by means of which they may regain their first reputation and their first increase' (D III.1.209). A 'goodness' identified with 'virtue', the 'natural *potentia* of man [which] Machiavelli removes from his fixity' and which he places 'in a central position in history, as an incessant clot of attempts to remedy at fortune'; but, at the same time, this goodness/virtue/*potentia* is 'sustained by the intrinsic *contrariety* of appetites, and it is variable, because it can be improved by education'.[40] An idea of *potentia* (not to be confused with *potestas*) which involves that of equality because it is characterised by contrariety and therefore by struggles, whose non-neutralisation is the hallmark of republics.

In conclusion, a constitution for Machiavelli is the historically defined and dynamic set of all the laws and customs, institutions and practices (administrative and daily) that define the identity of a political organisation. These elements, by relating, even in conflict, to the rhythms of their historical dialectic – never entirely translatable into institutions and law – generate the specific and inimitable way of life of a historically determined human group. While sharing some constitutional features with other political forms, republics are recognised because the main effect of their constitution is the generation, reproduction and expansion of the freedom that lies in their beginnings: an outcome that shows itself in the active participation of a growing number of citizens to the political life of the city, to its defence and territorial expansion, as well as to the modification, if necessary, of its own constitution. In fact, a republic, that is 'a city that lives free has two ends: one to acquire, the other to maintain itself free' (D I.29.66).

40 Zanzi 2013, pp. 58–59.

By means of the *Discourses,* Machiavelli reflects on how the constitutional mixture is generated to find a republican solution to the government of Florence after the return of the Medici in 1512. From here, the study of the history of Florence and the drafting of the *Discursus* and the *Minutes*, where Machiavelli outlines a new form of constitutional mixing that aimed at the fusion between the parts. If in Rome, as in the political tradition of the mixed constitution, mixing is a combination, in which union is the balance between the parts, the mixed Machiavellian constitution is a fusion of the parts that, through the struggles, form a unity, the duration of which depends on its degree of virtue, and from which other parts may arise and so on.[41]

Machiavelli's political innovation is summed up in *Discursus* and *Minutes*. Here, he proposes a republic not modelled on the anthropomorphism of the European tradition of the political body, but on the care of a paradoxical body – impersonal and headless – which does not mean without hierarchy, but with a variable hierarchy, i.e. not ontological, but historical. A body that must govern itself, because 'the health (*salute*) of a republic' does not consist in having a 'prince who governs prudently while he lives, but one who orders it so that it is also maintained when he dies' (D I.11.36 t.m.), that is in 'order[ing] the state in a mode through which it will administer itself'.[42] This body requires specific political medicine because it has to do with men and institutions, uses and abuses, laws and customs.

Machiavelli's mixed constitution, therefore, does not coincide with that of Polybius and of the liberal political tradition, where it illustrates the balance and mutual control between the three good forms of government (mixed government). This difference occurs not only because Machiavelli does not neutralise the tumults, but also because his mixed constitution concerns the forms of government as well as the overall way of life of a political organisation, assigning a political meaning to the entire human life and, finally, because Machiavelli thinks of the mixing as fusion and as transformation of the humours (IF IV.26), i.e. of the human nature.

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41 Cf. Raimondi 2005 and 2018a, pp. 112–129, for a detailed analysis of Machiavelli's proposals.

42 Machiavelli 2019, 'Discursus', p. 223.

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CHAPTER 6

'The Modes Taken by Saint Gregory': Machiavelli and the Violence of Religious Sects

Marco Geuna

1 The Complex Texture of Machiavelli's Discussion of Religion

When you open the *Discourses* and go to chapter ten of the first book, you will come across an unexpected statement: 'Among all men praised, the most praised are those who have been heads and orderers of religions [*ordinatori delle religioni*]. Next, then, are those who have founded either republics or kingdoms' (D I.10.31). By listing five categories of men useful to collective life, Machiavelli puts the founders of religions in the first place, and only after them the founders of political communities, whether republics or kingdoms. It is almost as if the religious dimension is more important than the political one, in the strictest sense. How can we explain Machiavelli's choice? It could perhaps be argued that, faithful to a humanistic rhetorical *topos*, he is simply reporting an ordering of the categories of men widely shared in his time. Even if this were the case, this passage would testify to Machiavelli's awareness of the importance of religion. Indeed, a great deal of attention is devoted in the pages of the *Discourses* to religion in its various forms, to its genesis and to its 'orders'. In fact, Machiavelli returns to the problem of religion in many texts: not only in the pages of *The Prince*[1] or in many chapters of the *Discourses*, but also in the verses of *The Ass*[2] and in several passages of *The Art of War*.[3]

Machiavelli's various statements on this subject, however, have been interpreted, over the decades, from very different perspectives. A great scholar of the Florentine Secretary's thought, John Najemy, sharply noted: 'No aspect of Machiavelli's thought elicits a wider range of interpretations than religion, and one may wonder why his utterances on this subject appear to move in so many different directions and cause his readers to see such different things'.[4]

1 See, for example, P 18.70–71.

2 AS 5, vv. 118–124, p. 764.

3 A Pref.4, II.58–61, IV.98, VII.162.

4 Najemy 1999, p. 659. This essay presents the more accurate discussion of the historiography, up to 1999, on the question of religion in Machiavelli's thought. For a more recent assessment of the historiographical debates on the problem, see Vatter 2017.

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As a first approximation, authoritative interpreters have argued that Machiavelli's discussion of the problem of religion has 'two very different faces'.[5] Or, put in another way, they have maintained that, in the writings of the Florentine Secretary, religion takes on 'a double meaning'.[6] On the one hand, it is seen as a set of practices and beliefs instituted by far-sighted legislators, a means by which they can lead the people to accept the laws they have established and to develop, in the long term, civilised forms of coexistence. On the other hand, religion is presented, almost from an anthropological point of view, as rooted in deep-seated fears of individuals and, in some passages, even 'as the authentic life ... of a people, a genuine factor of self-identification and political cohesion'.[7] Thus religion is conceived, at least in these passages, as a dimension that cannot depend directly on the work of a wise legislator. The first 'face', the first meaning, is the one largely prevalent in the *Discourses*, while the second perspective is present only in a specific chapter,[8] and in a few other passages, of the work.[9]

But even this distinction, this conceptual contrast, is not sufficient to account for the richness of Machiavelli's reflection on the question. Indeed, Machiavelli's treatment of the problem of religion presents a complex texture. His considerations are developed on different levels of discourse, which must be carefully distinguished. His analysis starts, in this field as in many others, with a comparison.[10] By adopting a formula, we could say that Machiavelli repeatedly compares the religion of the ancients and the religion of the moderns. As is well known, the discussion of the religion of the ancients is developed above all in the first book of the *Discourses*, from the eleventh to the fourteenth chapter.[11]

Machiavelli focuses primarily on the religion of the Romans but also examines some aspects of Greek religions. He reaches the conclusion that ancient religions were essentially human artefacts, created and structured by wise 'orderers', such as Numa Pompilio (D I.11.34–35; I.19.52–53). Stressing the

5 Brown 2010, p. 166.

6 Sasso 1993, p. 552. According to Sasso, there is 'a contrast rather than a contradiction' (p. 554) between the two perspectives of analysis of religion.

7 Cutinelli-Rèndina 1998, p. 213. Cutinelli-Rèndina follows the track opened by Sasso and uses the term 'oscillations' to account for the two perspectives on religion found in Machiavelli's works.

8 Cf. D I.55.110-111, concerning the 'province of Germany' and its religious experience.

9 Cutinelli-Rèndina 1998, pp. 213–214.

10 On the importance of the comparison between religions, see Ginzburg 2018, pp. 104–105.

11 Among recent interpretations of Machiavelli's attitude to religion, see Tarkov 2014, Vatter 2017, Raimondi 2018, Cutinelli-Rèndina 2018.

extraordinary importance of practices such as the interpretation of oracles and oaths, Machiavelli makes it clear that religion is 'a thing altogether necessary if [one wishes] to maintain a civilisation' (D I.11.34); moreover, he points out that religion can be a valuable 'tool' in the hands of political actors, a device or a set of 'means' to 'use well'.[12]

The analysis of the religion of the moderns, i.e. the critical discussion of the Christian religion, is proposed in particular in the second book of the *Discourses*. In the well-known second chapter, Machiavelli puts forward a carefully structured argument in which the values and practices of the religion of the ancients and those of the religion of the moderns are sharply contrasted. In his own words: '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' (D II.2.131). The comparison allows Machiavelli to draw a radical conclusion: 'our religion', Christianity, is a radically unpolitical religion that opens the doors to tyranny: 'This mode of life thus seems to have rendered the world weak and given it in prey to criminal men [*gli uomini scelerati*], who can manage it securely, seeing that the collectivity of men [*l'università degli uomini*], so as to go to paradise, think more of enduring their beatings than of avenging them' (D II.2.131).[13] The distinction between Christianity 'according to idleness' and Christianity 'according to virtue' that he introduces just after this radical condemnation can be interpreted as a simple defensive move, as an expression of caution,[14] necessary to avoid incurring serious censure. Indeed, Machiavelli had already made his opinion on Christianity and its founding values clear in the 'Preface' to the first book of the *Discourses*, when he emphasised 'the weakness into which the present religion has led the world' (D I.Pref.6).

These renowned analyses, which have had an extraordinary impact on the modern philosophical tradition, from Rousseau to Nietzsche,[15] represent

12 Machiavelli recurs more than once to the expression 'religion well used' [*la religione bene usata*]; see, for example, D I.13.39 ('So, used well, religion helped both for the capture of that city'), and I.15.44 ('This testifies in full how much confidence can be had through religion well used').

13 On these passages, see Sasso 1993, pp. 598–605. According to Sasso, an 'evident and almost overt anti-Christianity stance' (p. 603) is put forward in the pages of the *Discourses*.

14 Many scholars have pointed out that a Christianity 'according to virtue', a Christianity that would allow 'the exaltation and defence of the fatherland', would no longer have anything specifically Christian about it, but would take the form of a pagan religion. This possible form of Christianity would not embrace the deepest core of Christ's teaching. See, for example, Sasso 1993, pp. 599–600, and Sullivan 1993, p. 264.

15 Among the numerous studies, see Beiner 2011.

only the first level of Machiavelli's discussion of religion, and particularly of Christianity. There is also a deeper level or a deeper dimension of analysis developed by the Florentine Secretary. At this deeper level, Machiavelli no longer stresses the differences between religions, or the diversity of their inspiring values, but tries to identify some common traits in their practices. He concludes that there is a problematic and unsettling relationship with violence at the core of every religion. In the following pages, I would like to focus on this specific thesis advanced by Machiavelli in the dense and challenging fifth chapter of the second book of the *Discourses*.

2 The 'Oblivion of Things' and Its Causes: The Role of Religious Sects

Much has been written about this crucial chapter and, in particular, about the thesis of the eternity of the world that Machiavelli supports, albeit obliquely, in it. I do not want to return to these refined discussions[16] nor dwell on the possible sources of the anti-Christian idea of the eternity of the world. Rather, I prefer to re-examine the problem that Machiavelli proposes to address, the issue that sets his research in motion. The Florentine Secretary is puzzled by the fate of the Etruscans, as he explicitly points out at the conclusion of chapter four. The Etruscans, the 'ancient Tuscans', developed an important civilisation and also acquired considerable power over the Italian territories. And such power 'was secure for a great time, with the highest glory of empire and of arms and special praise for custom and religion' (D II.4.138). But a dramatic change occurred, which led to the almost complete cancellation of their civilisation: 'Although two thousand years ago the power of the Tuscans was great, at present there is almost no memory of it. This thing has made me think whence arises this oblivion of things' (II.4.138). His problem is to identify the causes of the 'oblivion of things', the factors that extinguish 'the memories of things', as he writes in the very title of chapter five.[17]

To provide an answer to this distressing question, a conceptual distinction is introduced: there are natural causes and human or cultural causes for the oblivion of things. Among the natural causes, the causes that come 'from heaven', Machiavelli includes a series of catastrophes, 'inundations, plagues and famines' (D II.5.140), that periodically erase the effects of the civilising process and

16 For a classic discussion, see Sasso 1987; for recent reappraisals, see Connell 2011; Giorgini 2014; Sasso 2015.

17 'That the Variation of Sects and Languages, Together with the Accident of Floods or Plague, Eliminates the Memories of Things' (D II.5.138).

reduce 'the inhabitants of part of the world to a few'. On several occasions, historiography has highlighted that Machiavelli reformulates, in these passages, ideas developed by Plato and Polybius, by Cicero and Augustine, and scholarship has continually gone in search of further classical sources.[18] However, it has not been sufficiently pointed out that Machiavelli immediately focuses on cultural causes, on the causes 'that come from men'. These are by far the most important factors, as the title of the chapter already shows. In fact, the first place is reserved for 'the variation of sects and languages'.

It is precisely in this conceptual context that Machiavelli develops his most disquieting explanation of the religious phenomenon, i.e. he proposes a radical interpretation of all religious practices and experiences. In fact, he presents all religions as being animated by destructive violence, which leads them to suppress the theological constructions, the rituals and artistic expressions of earlier religions. This applies to all religions, including Christianity: 'For when a new sect – that is, a new religion – emerges, its first concern is to extinguish the old to give itself reputation; and when it occurs that the orderers of the new sect are of a different language, they easily eliminate it. This thing is known from considering the modes that the Christian sect took against the Gentile. It suppressed all its orders and all its ceremonies and eliminated every memory of the ancient theology' (D II.5.139). In order to interpret this crucial passage properly, let us focus for a moment on the language used by the Florentine Secretary, both on terms such as 'sects' and 'orderers' and on the verbs used in these passages. First of all, it should be noted that to designate religions and religious traditions, Machiavelli consistently uses the term 'sects'. This happens in different chapters of the *Discourses*. It is enough here to quote, for example, the 'Preface' of the second book, in which he refers to 'that Saracen sect … which did so many great things and seized so much of the world after it destroyed the eastern Roman Empire' (D II.Pref.124), or the important first chapter of the third book, in which he argues very clearly that 'If one wishes a sect or a republic to live long, it is necessary to draw it back often toward its beginning' (D III.1.209). But this use is also present in many of his other works. In the first book of the *Florentine Histories*, for example, he mentions 'the Arian sect, believed in by the Vandals' and he dwells on the conflicts between 'the heretical sects and the Catholics', conflicts that 'in many ways afflicted the world' (IF I.5.15). But what then, is a sect? With the term 'sect', Machiavelli simply designates a specific form or a particular type of collective organisation. But political communities or states are also forms of collective organisation. In

18 See, for example, Biasiori 2018.

a consistent manner, in the first chapter of the third book of the *Discourses*, he presents together the 'sects' and the 'republics' as 'mixed bodies' (D III.1.209). The question immediately arises as to what distinguishes a sect from a political community. The specific element of a 'sect' is that it is created by an 'orderer' and is held together by a structured set of beliefs, which give shape to an original 'fear of God'.

An important observation can be immediately drawn from this annotation concerning the coherent use of the term: Machiavelli proceeds to a radical relativisation of the Christian religion, which is considered a 'sect' like all other religions. I can add that this use of the term 'sect' to designate the Christian religion was considered so unacceptable and impious during Machiavelli's life, and in the years following his death, that one of the two printers of the *Discourses*, the Roman Blado, proceeded in 1531 to amend the text, substituting the word 'sect' with the term 'religion' in the passages in which Machiavelli referred to Christianity.[19]

A second comment, regarding the key terms used in this crucial passage, concerns the 'orderers' and their centrality for the constitution of the 'sects', a centrality on which Machiavelli had already dwelt at length in the first book of the *Discourses*. A concluding remark, finally, concerns the precise choice of verbs made by the Florentine Secretary. What he is taking into consideration is the capacity of each sect to 'extinguish' [*estinguere*], to 'eliminate' [*cancellare*], to 'suppress' [*spegnere*] the previous sect. What is at stake, therefore, is the possible survival of the memory of past religions.

In this chapter, Christianity becomes the hermeneutical tool used to understand other religions: 'It is therefore to be believed that what the Christian sect wished to do against the Gentile, the Gentile would have done against that which was prior to it' (D II.5.139). How then did the Christian sect behave towards the religions and the cultural heritage of the ancient world from which it emerged? Machiavelli is clear: 'Whoever reads of the modes taken by Saint Gregory and by the other heads of the Christian religion will see with how much obstinacy they persecuted all the ancient memories, burning the works of the poets and the historians, ruining images [*ruinando le imagini*], and spoiling every other thing that might convey some sign of antiquity' (II.5.139).[20]

Thus every sect, every religion, tries to extinguish the hegemonic sect that preceded it through some subsequent steps. A) The destruction of 'orders', of

19 Garin 1970.

20 Machiavelli attributes to the term 'image' [in Italian: *imagine/immagine*] two different meanings: 1) a stricter one, in which *imagine* stands for 'statue' (D I.12.37); and 2) a broader meaning, similar to the contemporary one (D III.39.298).

doctrinal assumptions and 'ceremonies'. As Machiavelli pointed out during the discussion of the Romans' religion in the first book, every religion has its 'orders': its beliefs and practices, its doctrinal assumptions and rituals. The new religion tries to dissolve and replace the old beliefs and practices, and this can go so far as to extinguish 'every memory of that ancient theology'. B) The burning of books, that is, the destruction of the means of transmission of doctrines and inherited beliefs. Machiavelli points out that the practice of burning books was aimed not only at works directly linked to religious beliefs but also at other forms of expression central to ancient culture, from poetry to history. C) The destruction of 'images': of all artistic forms linked to religious beliefs and, more generally, expression of previous forms of civilisation. D) The attempt to eliminate even the language of the previous religion and the previous form of civilisation, as happened successfully in the case of the Etruscan language.

Two observations, perhaps, are necessary. Firstly, it can be noted that in attempting to conceptualise the relationship between religion and violence, Machiavelli mentions in these pages two practices that reappear and return periodically in the long duration of our history: the practice of burning books,[21] which some authors prefer to call 'libricide'[22] and others 'biblioclasm',[23] and the practice of iconoclasm, the systematic destruction of artistic artefacts.[24] Secondly, it is necessary to underline the fact that biblioclasm and iconoclasm, although deeply interrelated, have different subjects as their target. Biblioclasm, with its burning of books, aims at the learned, those who can read and who can strengthen their beliefs by using books. On the other hand, iconoclasm targets the non-learned, the illiterates: those who cannot read and who form their beliefs by looking at images, statues, and other artistic artefacts. To argue that Gregory the Great and 'the other heads of the Christian religion' had ordered both types of destruction means to argue that they targeted all the social groups with the goal of a complete cancellation of the ancient heritage and a full affirmation of Christian culture.

Even if Christianity is, in this chapter, the hermeneutical tool necessary to understand other religions, it also appears to Machiavelli as a partially defective religion, unable to fully perform the radical role played, for example, by the Roman religion in relation to the Etruscan one. Christianity, in fact, did not succeed in completely extinguishing the memories of Roman religion and civilisation because it maintained its language, Latin: 'It is true that they did

21 See Ovenden 2019.

22 Knuth 2003.

23 Drogin 1989.

24 For a classic discussion, see Freedberg 1989, chapter XIV: 'Idolatry and Iconoclasm'.

not succeed in eliminating entirely the knowledge of the things done by its excellent men. This arose from having maintained the Latin language, which they were forced to do since they had to write this new law with it. For if they had been able to write with a new language, considering the other persecutions [*le altre persecuzioni*] they made, we would not have any record of things past' (D II.5.139). The thesis is repeated, almost as if to strengthen it: 'So if they [Saint Gregory and the other heads of the Christian religion] had added a new language to this persecution, in a very brief time everything would be seen to be forgotten [*si sarebbe veduto in brevissimo tempo ogni cosa dimenticare*]' (II.5.139).[25] Here it is possible, and perhaps necessary, to make a further remark on language. Note in the last two quotations the use of the noun 'persecution', both in the singular and plural, as well as the use of the verb 'persecute' to the indicative remote past in a passage previously mentioned. In these pages, religions are presented as agents of persecution: they persecute and attempt to destroy all the elements of transmission of the 'memories of things'.

3 Gregory the Great and the Destruction of Ancient Roman Culture: An Attempt at a Genealogy

Machiavelli knew that the destruction of Titus Livy's decades had been attributed to Gregory the Great but, in a way, he extended and generalised the thesis. In the passages just mentioned, Gregory became the conscious promoter of the burning of books not only written by historians, but also by poets. The attempted cancellation of the past, then, is not only achieved through the burning of books but also through the destruction of artistic expressions, of 'images', in the broadest sense, created by ancient culture.

For what reason, then, did he assume that Gregory the Great was an exemplary figure? Machiavelli was somehow entering into a debate that had lasted at least since the middle of the twelfth century. It may be useful to briefly retrace some stages of this discussion, which concerned the more general attitude of Christianity towards ancient Roman culture. But it is important to clarify, from the beginning, that the study of some historical moments of the legend of Saint Gregory that I propose in the following pages is not intended to claim that Machiavelli knew all the individual sources examined. Instead, my intention is 1) to reconstruct some phases of a debate that had been going on for centuries in Machiavelli's time, privileging as much as possible Florentine

25 According to Del Lucchese, in the passages just mentioned one could find the core of what he presents as 'Machiavelli's materialistic critique of religions' (2015, p. 63).

sources or texts important for Florentine culture; 2) to highlight how in this debate there were alternative or opposing positions, either appreciating or criticising the alleged actions of Saint Gregory; 3) to try to clarify the type of intellectual operation carried out by Machiavelli, an operation that, starting from the reversal of apologetic arguments proposed in particular by Dominican thinkers, identifies in Saint Gregory's biblioclasm and iconoclasm the core of a constitutive relationship between religion and violence that would characterise not only Christianity but all other religious 'sects'.

A certain starting point for the legend of Gregory the Great,[26] the destroyer of pagan books and idols, can be identified in the pages of the *Policraticus*, a text completed by John of Salisbury towards the end of 1159. In the course of the second book, in the context of his violent polemic against those who practice astrology, John mentions Gregory the Great. He maintains that, according to an authoritative tradition 'handed down from our forefathers', 'doctor sanctissimus ille Gregorius' set fire to the Palatine library with its heritage of dangerous pagan texts, 'the proscribed works which claimed to reveal to mankind the intention of the heavens and the oracles of the supernal beings'.[27] Further, in the eighth book, John returns to consider the actions of Gregory the Great. He mentions, at first, the possibility that lightning struck the Capitoline hill and that consequently the Capitoline library, with its manuscripts and books, went up in flames to the point of being completely destroyed. But he also reports another explanation of the event, that had been handed down by tradition until his time. It was Gregory the Great, 'beatus Gregorius', who ordered that the pagan library be set on fire 'so that there might be an adequate space for the sacred scriptures, their authority would be strengthened and their study conducted with greater diligence'.[28] In short, in the pages of the *Policraticus*, Gregory the Great is considered responsible for the fire and destruction of two important Roman libraries: the Palatine library and the Capitoline library, the former built by Octavian Augustus, the latter by Trajan. The intention that had moved Gregory was absolutely clear and, one can suppose, also shared by John of Salisbury: he wanted to make more space and give more attention to the 'divine page', the sacred scriptures.

To clarify the other aspect of the legend of St. Gregory, the destroyer of ancient cultural heritage, one must probably remain in England but move forward by a few decades. A writer called Magister Gregorius, probably in the years between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, wrote one of the most

26 For an introduction to the legend, see Buddensieg 1965.

27 John of Salisbury 1909, II.26, vol. 1, p. 142 (my translation).

28 John of Salisbury 1909, VIII.19, vol. 2, pp. 370–371 (my translation).

important *Mirabilia urbis Romae*, a copy of it is still preserved in Cambridge. The text, written by a man of remarkable cultural formation, is an orderly and systematic presentation of 'the wonderful things that had been and still were visible in the city at the time'. Magister Gregorius had probably dedicated a great deal of time to visiting the city, and he could linger, in his work, on each statue, each palace or temple with great attention. In this narrative context, he attributed to Pope Gregory the destruction of bronze and marble statues in three separate passages. The first observation, which is his least severe, falls on what we now consider the equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius: 'This celebratory monument, made with extraordinary art, stood in ancient times in front of the altar of Jupiter on the Capitoline Hill, above four bronze columns, but the Blessed Gregory had the horse and rider pulled down and transported those four columns to the church of Saint John in Lateran'.[29] Less fortunate was the enormous bronze statue 'which some believe to be a statue of the Sun' and which was located near the Colosseum: 'after the destruction and disfigurement of all the statues in Rome, blessed Gregory also destroyed this statue in the following way: not being able to overthrow such a great mass even with enormous efforts and energetic attempts, he ordered that a great fire be placed under the idol'[30] and had it melted. The destructive passion of the pope was not only for the bronze statues but also for the marble 'images' dating back to classical antiquity: 'pene omnes a beato Gregorio aut delete aut deturpate sunt', remarks the author of the *Mirabilia*.[31]

The image of Pope Gregory ordering the destruction of the statues and pagan idols would become canonical due to another text, which in this case enjoyed greater diffusion. The Dominican friar Martinus Polonus, active in Rome in the middle of the thirteenth century as confessor and chaplain to Pope Alexander IV, and then to six of his successors, adopted a version of this story in his *Chronicon pontificum et imperatorum*, one of the most widely read historical works of the late Middle Ages. Martinus Polonus wrote: 'And so that the seed of the ancient error would not multiply in the future, [Gregory] ordered that the statues of demons be systematically amputated of heads and limbs, so that, having thus eradicated the root of heretical evil, the palm of ecclesiastical truth could rise more fully'.[32]

29 Magister Gregorius 1997, p. 147 (my translation).

30 Magister Gregorius 1997, p. 152 (my translation).

31 Magister Gregorius 1997, p. 156.

32 Martinus Polonus 1872, p. 422 (my translation). It may be useful to recall that Martinus Polonus was of considerable importance to Florentine culture. Pietro Buonfante, a Florentine judge, translated Martinus's chronicle into the vernacular in 1279 under the title *Sommario delle Vite de' Papi, e Imperatori sino all'anno 1250*. Both Martinus's *Chronicon*

Since then, this description of Pope Gregory has been repeated many times, particularly by the authors of the chronicles of the lives of the popes. Almost a century after Martinus Polonus, for example, we find the chaplain of Urban V, Amalricus Augerius, in his *Actus pontificum Romanorum usque ad ... annum 1321*, praising the choices of Gregory the Great in almost the same words. He presented Gregory's decision to have the pagan statues destroyed as a necessary step towards the eradication of heresy and as an important moment in the direction of the full triumph of Christian truth: 'He established and ordered that all the statues of the demons, with their heads and limbs, that could be found both in the city of Rome and in its surroundings, should be amputated and completely torn to pieces, so that in this way, having eradicated the root of heretical evil, the palm of ecclesiastical truth could rise more fully'.[33] What must be emphasised is the fact that in the works we have considered so far, from those of John of Salisbury to those of Martinus Polonus and Amalricus Augerius, the actions attributed to Gregory the Great are undoubtedly appreciated and considered as necessary steps in the fight against heresy and its ancient roots.

Let us now focus on Florentine culture, so important to fully understanding the positions taken by Machiavelli. A note of accusation or open denunciation of the acts of the Pope appears in Florence only in Boccaccio's years. We find this position most clearly expressed by Fazio degli Uberti, who died around 1370. In his poem *Dittamondo*, the city of Rome itself is presented in the act of complaining about the sad conclusion of its glorious history: 'Ouch, how much it still pains me to remember / the great and beautiful and subtle carvings / that Gregory then made me undo / And it still pains me that with long travails / more volumes were compiled / by my sons and my admirals / ... that the most part were destroyed and injured / by this Pope; and if his purpose was good / I don't know; but even so much grief I suffered'.[34] The changed interpretation of Pope Gregory's actions gives voice to the profound regret of the humanist for the irreparable loss of the creations of antiquity. In Florence, in the following decades, positions similar in some way to those expressed by Fazio degli Uberti were supported by a succession of authors, from Coluccio Salutati, the Florentine Chancellor, to Lorenzo Ghiberti, the great sculptor and art scholar.

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pontificum et imperatorum and Buonfante's vulgarization were widely circulated; both texts were taken up by later compilers of universal chronicles in the Florentine context, before and after Giovanni Villani. See Zabbia 2012.

33 Amalricus Augerius 1723, t. 2, column 1684 (my translation).

34 Fazio degli Uberti 1952, II.xvi, vv. 91–102, vol. 1, p. 135 (my translation).

However, the critical position adopted by the humanists – the denunciation of the Popes' responsibility for the decline and disappearance of ancient art and culture – did not remain without fierce adversaries. I will mention only three public figures, three Dominican friars, who played an important role on the Florentine scene: at the beginning of the fifteenth century, the Dominican friar Giovanni Dominici, later cardinal; in the middle of the century, the Dominican friar Antonino Pierozzi, first prior of the convent of San Marco and then, from 1446 to 1459, archbishop of Florence, also known as Saint Antoninus of Florence; at the end of the century the Dominican friar Girolamo Savonarola, prior of the convent of San Marco since 1491, such an important figure for Machiavelli himself.

In the pages of *Lucula noctis*, a critical response of 1405 to Coluccio Salutati's thesis in favour of poetry and classical culture, Dominici took a decisive position in favour of Pope Gregory, explaining his choice to order the destruction of all copies of the decades of Titus Livy, which survived until his time.[35] The choice of Gregory, a 'fidei zelator devotus', according to Dominici, was actually aimed at giving more space and strength to the Christian faith. Giovanni Dominici had no doubts: 'utilius est Christianis terram arare quam gentilium intendere libris', i.e. 'it is more useful to Christians to plough the land than to understand pagan books'.[36]

In the fourth part of his *Summa theologica*, which was printed in Venice in 1477, shortly after his death, Antoninus of Florence had not hesitated to refer explicitly to what Giovanni Dominici had stated: 'the aforesaid master Giovanni Dominici says about Gregory the Great that he burned all the books of Titus Livius that he managed to find because they contained extensive narrations of the superstitions of the idols'.[37] Also for Antoninus of Florence, therefore, it was the exposition of the 'superstitions' of the pagans that condemned Titus Livy's books to the flames.

The same apologetic defence of the actions of Pope Gregory returns in Girolamo Savonarola's sermons. In particular, in the sermon *Above Ezekiel*, held in Florence on 9 February 1497, the Dominican friar argued in defence of the Pope: 'Saint Paul made many things and curious books burn, Saint Gregory had those beautiful figures of Rome broken and Livy's *Decades* burned. Do you consider Saint Gregory a madman? I would like to see these madmen

35 Dominici 1940, chapter XIII, p. 122: 'Pastor magnus Gregorius Titulivii libros quoscumque potuit invenire combuxit'; chapter XVII, p. 143: 'Hinc Gregorius, fidei zelator devotus, qui Titulivii, viri maxime eloquentis, quotquot potuit reperire libros combuxit, de sapientia mundi sic in Moralibus dicit'.

36 Dominici 1940, chapter XXXII, p. 252.

37 Antoninus de Florentia 1480, titulus XI, capitulum IV (my translation).

on earth: you would see that Peter's ship would be better'.[38] Unlike Giovanni Dominici and Antoninus of Florence, Savonarola considers both aspects of the legend concerning Gregory, that is, the destruction of the ancient statues and the burning of the texts of Titus Livius and other pagan authors. In his defence of Pope Gregory's actions, he does not hesitate: he makes it clear that he would have liked many more people moved by this kind of Christian 'madness'.

The date of the Savonarolian sermon, in this case, is significant. In fact, on 7 February 1497, two days earlier, what is now called the 'Bonfire of Vanities' had taken place in Florence. Followers of Savonarola had collected and burned in public thousands of objects considered immoral: combs, brushes and clothes; tapestries, carpets and works of art; books on astrology, but also works by Ovid and Propertius, Dante and Boccaccio. Although it is commonly accepted that Sandro Botticelli set on the great bonfire some of his paintings inspired by figures and stories from classical mythology, historical research has not reached unequivocal conclusions in this regard. What is important is that Machiavelli had a direct experience in his own Florence of the Christian religion's destructive force. Friar Girolamo, in his sermons, defended and magnified the faith and wisdom of Gregory the Great. Moreover, friar Girolamo openly followed the path forged by Gregory, recommending the burning of immoral books and the destruction of works of art dedicated to ancient mythological subjects. Machiavelli, a direct witness to some of the friar's sermons[39] and a good connoisseur of his writings,[40] did not need to wonder whether the actions attributed to Pope Gregory were actually a legend, as many humanists, from Guarino Veronese to Bartolomeo Platina, had done before him. He had before his eyes a sort of new Gregory. And this was enough to strengthen his conviction about a constitutive relationship between religion in general and violence.

4 Religion, Idolatry, Violence

According to Machiavelli, at the heart of every religion, there is a tendency to impose itself and destroy the theological assumptions and beliefs, the rituals and ceremonies of other religions, especially those previously prevalent

38 Savonarola 1955, vol. 1, p. 147 (my translation).

39 Cf. Machiavelli's letter to Ricciardo Becchi, dated 9 march 1498. In this letter, Machiavelli provides an account of the sermons given by Savonarola on 2 and 3 March 1498.

40 Even fifteen years after Savonarola's death, Machiavelli continued to mention his writings with extreme respect. For instance: 'Florence, after '94, had been reordered in its state by the aid of Friar Girolamo Savonarola, whose writings show the learning, the prudence, and the virtue of his spirit' (D I.45.93). On Machiavelli's interpretation of Savonarola's historical figure, see Fournel and Zancarini 2014, and the corresponding bibliography.

in the specific territory in which it arises and develops. In this way, the Florentine Secretary approaches the thesis that every religion claims to possess and affirm the truth while considering every other form of religious belief a form of idolatry.

What is extremely interesting is that, at this point in his reasoning, Machiavelli does not introduce a distinction between monotheistic and polytheistic religions. He knew that a reflection on the gods venerated by the 'Gentiles' was certainly not lacking in humanistic culture, such as Giovanni Boccaccio's important and systematic work *Genealogia Deorum Gentilium*, first printed in Venice in 1472, shows. The long experience of reflecting on Roman history and its institutions could not have left Machiavelli in any doubt: he was perfectly aware that the Roman religion was polytheistic and that the Romans had an inclusive attitude towards the gods of other peoples. In a famous passage in the twelfth chapter of the first book of the *Discourses*, he even mentions the Romans' practice of 'importing' to Rome, of carrying the statues of the gods venerated by defeated enemies to the city (D I.12.37). But, in the crucial fifth chapter of the second book, he does not take up this thesis.[41] One can, therefore, put forward the hypothesis that the attitude of Christianity becomes paradigmatic in his eyes and that it is applied to all religions. Or, to put it another way, his acceptance of Christianity's paradigmatic role prevents him from fully understanding and explicating the specificity of polytheistic religions.

As far as the other monotheisms are concerned, from the Florentine Secretary's various observations, it can be deduced that their genesis and affirmation are also marked by violence, like what had occurred with Christianity. As far as Jewish monotheism is concerned, we must first refer to the numerous Machiavellian observations concerning Moses and his work of guiding the Jewish people out of slavery in Egypt towards the promised land. Both in *The Prince* and the *Discourses,* Machiavelli compares Moses to figures such as Romulus, Lycurgus, Solon, Cyrus and Theseus, to 'other founders of kingdoms and republics' (D I.9.30) and to 'those who have become princes by their own virtue and not by fortune' (P 6.22). Moses is therefore a 'founder'. And, like other founders, above of all Romulus, he made extensive use of violence. In the eighth chapter of the second book of the *Discourses*, Machiavelli distinguishes two fundamental types of wars: the wars made to take possession of a territory and to govern it, which 'are dangerous, but do not entirely expel the inhabitants of a province', and the wars that we could call wars of extermination,

41 Perhaps one should conclude that the practice of 'importing' the gods of defeated enemies into the city of Rome was seen by Machiavelli as a technique for destroying the original meaning of the gods themselves.

the wars that take place when 'an entire people, with all its families … goes to seek a new seat and a new province, not to command it like those above but to possess it all particularly, and expel or kill the ancient inhabitants of it'. Machiavelli has no doubts about the character of the war of extermination: 'this war is very cruel and very frightful' (D II.8.143). Now, the Jews who came out of Egypt conducted just such a war against the people living in Palestine and Syria. Machiavelli observes that in these circumstances the peoples 'enter with violence into the countries of others, kill the inhabitants, take possession of their goods, make a new kingdom, and change the province's name, as did Moses and those peoples who seized the Roman Empire' (D II.8.144).

The violence exerted by Moses was not only directed *outwards* towards those belonging to other peoples, but also *inwards* towards those Jews who resisted the new Law or who regretted the 'onions' of Egypt and returned to polytheistic beliefs, making idols such as the 'golden calf': 'And whoever reads the Bible judiciously will see that since he wished his laws and his orders to go forward, Moses was forced to kill infinite men who, moved by nothing other than envy, were opposed to his plans' (D III.30.280). Moses, therefore, is a paradigmatic example of an 'armed prophet', one who knows how to use violence to enforce the norms of a new monotheistic religion and, more generally, the new fundamental laws of the Jewish people: 'Moses, Cyrus, Theseus, and Romulus would not have been able to make their peoples observe their constitutions for long if they had been unarmed' (P 6.24).[42] It is important to remember, at this point, that not only the founder of Jewish monotheism, Moses, was an armed prophet, but so was David, one of the essential figures in Jewish history to which Machiavelli returns several times in the pages of his works. David is presented in *The Prince* as an example of those who, having rejected the arms of others, rely only on their 'own arms' (P 13.56); in the *Discourses*, he is depicted more radically as a 'new prince' who knows how to have recourse to arms and to violence (D I.19.52; I.26.61).[43] And it is well-known that for Machiavelli the new prince has to resort to modes 'very cruel, and enemies of every way of life, not only Christian but human' (D I.26.61); the new prince should be aware that 'if he wishes to maintain himself, he must enter into this evil' (D I.26.62).[44]

As far as Islamic monotheism is concerned, Machiavelli has few observations to offer. It is well known that he does not comment on the figure of

42 Among the numerous studies on Machiavelli's interpretation of the figure of Moses, see at least Brown 1992 and Montag 2015.

43 On Machiavelli's depiction of the figure of David, see Scichilone 2012, pp. 120–122.

44 I slightly changed the translation in order to remain closer to the Italian text: 'quando si voglia mantenere, conviene che entri in questo male'.

Mohammed and his efforts to affirm a new religion.[45] But, in his *Discourses*, he takes notice of the events of the 'Saracen sect'. Reinterpreting in his own way the classical doctrine of the succession of universal empires and declining it as a doctrine of the translation of virtue, he sees in the Saracen sect precisely one of the incarnations of virtue after the end of the Roman Empire. But virtue is, at the same time, religious, political and military. And the question of violence returns to the foreground: 'that Saracen sect ... did so many great things and seized so much of the world, after it destroyed the eastern Roman Empire' (D II.Pref.124). As in the case of Jewish monotheism, the terms 'seized' and 'destroyed' employed here show that Islamic monotheism, keeping together religious and political dimensions, also resorts to violence and war.[46]

How did Machiavelli come to these radical conclusions about the relationship between sects and violence? It is significant that he came to delineate this structural relationship between religion and violence at the beginning of the modern era without being a direct witness to the two experiences of religious violence that marked the origins of our world, namely the religious wars between Catholics and Protestants on the European continent and the so-called Conquest of the New World, by the expeditions sent by the Spanish and Portuguese Catholic kings. In fact, while he was writing the *Discourses*, Machiavelli certainly could not have foreseen all the consequences of the Protestant Reformation and, in the years immediately before his death, he was not a direct witness to the dramatic wars of religion that would upset the *respublica Christiana* for more than a century. Still, if at least one passage of the *Discourses*, the famous passage from the first version of the 'Preface' to the first book concerning the search for 'unknown waters and lands', can lead us to conclude that he was aware of the recent discoveries of new lands beyond the ocean,[47] the detailed accounts of the cruelties committed in the process of the Conquest – that process which Bartolomé de Las Casas would come to call *La destruición de las Indias* – reached Florence and the cities of central Italy too late to be known by him.

5 The 'Variation' of the Sects

As we have seen, the element common to all religions is identified in the resolute will to erase the past, to eliminate the previous sects and their symbolic

45 Only in IF I.19.31 does Machiavelli refer to the followers of Mohammed, calling them 'Maumettisti', i.e. 'Mohammedans'.

46 On the general question of 'Machiavelli and Islam', see Biasiori and Marcocci 2018.

47 Najemy 2009; Landi 2017, pp. 113–128.

and cultural apparatuses. Starting from these considerations, Machiavelli can reformulate the idea of the horoscope of religions, which had been developed from the astrological tradition in Arabic, from Messahalla and Albumasar, and taken up in Latin by a plurality of authors, from Roger Bacon to Pierre d'Ailly, up to Pietro d'Abano.[48] He can thus conclude: 'And because these sects vary two or three times in five or in six thousand years, the memory of the things done prior to that time is lost; and if, however, some sign of them remains, it is considered as something fabulous and is not lent faith to' (D II.5.139). For Machiavelli, there is a cyclical succession of religious sects throughout human history, and this succession leads to the total destruction of distant memories.

What is Machiavelli doing in this passage? He takes up the idea of the horoscope of religions and reformulates it, depriving it of any providential characterisation. It should be remembered that Albumasar, both in the work known in Latin as *De magnis coniunctionibus* and in the one entitled *De revolutionibus annorum mundi*, did not deal so much with the influence of the stars on the life of a single individual, what was called the astrology of the nativity, but with the influence of the stars and their conjunctions on world history. He had related the succession of the conjunctions of Saturn, Jupiter, and the other planets 'with the history of the world in its annual, twenty yearly, secular and millennial vicissitudes, with the rise of kingdoms and empires, with the depopulation of the lands by floods and with the birth of religions'.[49] From the theory of the great conjunctions of Albumasar also derived the doctrine that the sects, or religions, that followed one another in history were six. This idea was then reconciled with the Christian faith by authors such as Roger Bacon and Pierre d'Ailly, who had envisaged the succession of six 'sectae principales' before Christ's return to earth. Machiavelli, however, avoided this type of providential interpretation of the idea of the horoscope of religions. From his perspective, each religion has a determined period of life, a defined historical duration. Religions do not last forever, but after reaching and maintaining a dominant position for a few centuries, they are destined to disappear.

It may be worth remembering, in order to better understand the position of the Florentine Secretary, that in the last decade of the fifteenth century a fierce debate on astrology had taken place in Florence. It is sufficient to mention the names of three protagonists in this debate: Pico della Mirandola, Girolamo Savonarola and Lucio Bellanti. In 1493 and 1494, Pico worked intensively on a text that was to be a refutation of all superstitions; however, before his death, he only managed to complete the part against astrology, in which he

48 On late medieval and early modern astrological debates, and the idea of the horoscope of religions, see Garin 1982, and Federici Vescovini 2015.

49 Federici Vescovini 2015 p. 12.

rejected any kind of astral influence on human life. In that part, published in Bologna, in 1496, by his nephew Gianfrancesco, under the title *Disputationes adversus astrologian divinatricem*, Pico reviewed, with a fierce critical spirit, all the astrological doctrines of the great medieval Arab, Jewish and Latin thinkers. Closely linked by friendship to Pico, Girolamo Savonarola was as adverse to astrology, but he wrote from a different perspective, primarily Christian and no longer strictly philosophical. In 1497, just one year before his tragic death, Friar Girolamo published a *Tractato contra li astrologi* in Florence. If on the first page of the 'Preamble ... against divinatory astrology' he paid homage to Pico's *Disputationes*, already in the second page he declared that he intended to pursue his critique through three successive steps: 'First by declaring this astrological vanity to be damned by Christian doctrine; second by declaring that it is also reprobated by natural philosophy; third by demonstrating how vain & fallacious it is in itself'.[50] Already in the following year, however, astrology found an articulated defence in a book also published in Florence, *De astrologica veritate*, which included the *Responsiones in disputationes Johannis Pici*. The author was a Sienese doctor and astrologer, Giovanni Bellanti, who, on the one hand, argued in favour of a return to Ptolemy's approach, centred on individual predictions, and, on the other, deeply criticised Albumasar's theses and, therefore, rejected the use of the theory of the great conjunctions to explain the events of the world, including the rise of the great religions.

Machiavelli was not unaware of this broad debate, as can be deduced from some of his letters and at least from a chapter of the first book of the *Discourses*, the fifty-sixth.[51] Here, however, it is sufficient to highlight the operation he carried out in the chapter at the centre of our analysis. First of all, he takes up the theory of the horoscope of religions, which had its matrix in Albumasar's reflection; then, he not only strips it of any providential curvature, à la Pierre d'Ailly, but goes so far as to seek out the human, too human, causes of the succession of sects. He asserts that it is not the stars that determine earthly events, including the succession of religions: at most, they can provide signs, but not act as causes. It is the passions of the 'orderers' of the new sects that explain their succession: their will to assert themselves and to 'extinguish' the previous sects, their 'orders' and their 'ceremonies'.

Also in this case, Machiavelli goes in search of great schemes of intelligibility and of patterns to comprehend history. He had done so on other occasions and in other pages of the *Discourses*. Specifically, I am thinking of his recourse to the theory of the succession of empires or his reformulation of the Polybian

50 Savonarola 1982, p. 27 (my translation).

51 D I.56.113: 'Before great accidents occur in a city or in a province, signs come that forecast them, or men who predict them'.

doctrine of *anacyclosis*. He appropriated these great paradigms, or patterns of intelligibility, and reformulated them, altering them when necessary for the purposes of his political reflections.[52]

What is the reason that pushes Machiavelli to propose this astrological doctrine again? In the second chapter of the second book of the *Discourses*, he argued in full that the weakness and relative lack of freedom of the modern world – the fact 'that not as many republics are seen in the [modern] world as were seen in antiquity; nor, as a consequence, is as much love of freedom seen in peoples as was then' (D II.2.132) – was primarily caused[53] by the hegemonic presence of Christianity and its values. Coherently, in the fifth chapter, he tries to thematise the possibility of overcoming Christianity itself. If all sects have a fixed duration in human history – he seems to suggest – why is it impossible to conceive the overcoming of Christianity itself? Why is it impossible to thematise the fact that Christianity too is waning and being supplanted by another religion? The overcoming of Christianity is necessary if we want to have the possibility of successfully imitating the Romans and their political institutions. The Aristotelian and Averroistic theses of the eternity of the world and the astrological perspectives of the horoscope of religions are useful to Machiavelli to fully address the political problem that is at the centre of his speculation: that of the possibility of maintaining freedom and restoring the republic in the modern world.

I cannot dwell further here on the Machiavellian reformulation of the idea of the horoscope of religions. Rather, I prefer to reconsider synthetically the anti-Christian theses that the Florentine Secretary advances obliquely in the pages of this chapter: A) the world is eternal, and therefore we do not need to resort to the Jewish and Christian idea of a creation of the world by God; B) religions are the leading cause of the obliteration of memories and Christianity is simply a sect like the others, animated like the others by a will of destruction of the previous sects; c) all sects have a determined and fixed duration in human history, and therefore it is possible to think of a twilight and overcoming of Christianity itself.

It may be appropriate, perhaps, to introduce some further considerations on this last point. To argue that an author at the beginning of the sixteenth century was contemplating the overcoming and the exit from Christianity may seem a forced interpretation of the contemporary scholar, it may seem like a projection of his own ideas on a thinker like Machiavelli. We must consider,

52 See Najemy 2014.

53 Machiavelli also dwelt on the long-term consequences of the affirmation of the Roman Empire, which had destroyed so many independent political communities that allowed for the experience of virtue and freedom: 'the Roman Empire, with its arms and its greatness, eliminated all republics and all civil ways of life' (D II.2.132).

however, that more than thirty years ago Gennaro Sasso had made it clear that the idea was already present, at least *in nuce*, in the culture of which Machiavelli was fed. Sasso had drawn attention to Luigi Pulci, a poet much loved and much read by the Florentine Secretary. In his *Morgante*, in fact, we find: 'But what rises, at last comes in baseness; / all mortal things go to a sign: / while one grows, another falls: / so perhaps will happen to Christianity'.[54] Leaving aside Florentine culture, we can also mention that in the same years in which Machiavelli was composing the *Discourses*, Pietro Pomponazzi was working in Bologna on *De incantationibus*, a text that he would have substantially concluded in August 1520. In the twelfth chapter of this work, we come across some theses that have a 'family resemblance' to those argued by the Florentine Secretary. Not only 'the world is eternal', not only a 'continuous and eternal cycle' marks history in its developments, but also a continuous change of religions, of what Pomponazzi calls 'Laws', constantly occurs: 'since those who were then called gods had to end, since they had had a beginning, then the dispositions and uses of those gods had to be destroyed by the generation of dispositions and uses of the other gods who came after ... Therefore, since the rites of those previous gods were made up of oracles convenient to those gods, then by the advent of a new Law new dispositions and new customs had to be introduced'.[55] Christianity too is destined to disappear, and perhaps it is approaching its end already in Pomponazzi's time:

> [T]here is evidence that the Laws develop like all entities subjected to generation and corruption: we note that the Laws and the extraordinary events that accompany them are initially rather weak; then they increase; then they reach their peak and then they weaken until they disappear completely. For this reason, even in these times our faith has become weakened in all its manifestations and there are no more miracles, except those invented and simulated: it seems that the end is approaching.[56]

Once we take into consideration Pulci's *Morgante* and Pomponazzi's theses – to which we could, perhaps, add other sixteenth-century texts – Machiavelli's reflections should no longer appear incomprehensible or a *unicum* of difficult deciphering.[57]

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54 Pulci 1955, XXVI.31. vv. 5–8, p. 943 (my translation).

55 Pomponazzi 2011, chap. 12, §61, pp. 149–150 (my translation).

56 Pomponazzi 2011, chap. 12, §63, p. 151 (my translation). For a comparison of Machiavelli's and Pomponazzi's perspectives, see Molinarolo 2018, and Suggi 2019.

57 What is certain is that a possible overcoming of Christianity is, for Machiavelli, a long-term horizon. A horizon, however, that makes the imitation of the ancients thinkable and viable again.

6 Two Points of View from Which to Look at Religious Phenomena

One may wonder whether, and how, the considerations on religious sects proposed in this chapter of the *Discourses* fit into the overall Machiavellian reflection. Two types of questions come to mind. First of all, one may ask how these considerations should be evaluated, whether they have a more general scope and express a coherent point of view on religions, or whether they are only a moment of a reasoning on the destruction of the memories of things and therefore a moment of the oblique defence of the idea of the eternity of the world. If we agree that the theses presented in this chapter represent a coherent theoretical perspective adopted by Machiavelli, we can then ask ourselves how they fit into his overall reflection on religious phenomena.

I can only address the first question briefly. I am convinced that the perspective outlined in the chapter we have just analysed is a coherent theoretical perspective that Machiavelli has adopted and supported also in other pages of the *Discourses*. Two clarifications may be useful to corroborate this conviction. It can be reiterated, first of all, that not only in the fifth chapter of the second book of the *Discourses*, Machiavelli is interested in the 'orderers' of the sects or in those he calls the 'heads of the Christian religion', but also in the chapters ranging from the eleventh to the fifteenth of the first book. In that sort of small treatise on the 'religion of the ancients', paying attention to the constitutive and invariant dimensions of religions, to the 'practices' that lie at its basis, he dwells on the actors involved: the founders of religions and the individuals who administer their rites, sacrifices, ceremonies. Machiavelli uses the expression 'the Gentile religion' to refer to the religious experience of the Greeks and, above all, of the Romans; his interest focuses on the common practices of ancient religions, not on the differences, though relevant, between their different cosmologies and theogonies. He thus maintains that the religion of the ancients was founded, in general, on the responses of the oracles: 'the life of the Gentile religion was founded on the responses of the oracles and on the sect of the diviners and augurs: all their other ceremonies, sacrifices and rites depended on them' (D I.12.37). Machiavelli's underscoring of the importance of the 'sect of the diviners and augurs' should also be noted. As he dwells on the 'orderers' to explain the genesis of religions, so he highlights the role of actors who keep religious beliefs alive in time. The fact that the Florentine Secretary dedicates great attention in his reflections to the hierarchy of the Church of Rome, to the Popes and the bishops, and their respective roles and powers, is something too well-known to dwell on.

The second clarification relates to the fate of Christianity and the possibility of overcoming the Christian religion. I can only refer here to the important first chapter of the third book of the *Discourses*, in which Machiavelli's reflection

starts from the consideration that 'all worldly things have a limit to their life' and points out that this also applies to 'all mixed bodies, such as the republics and sects'. The political bodies and religious formations, however, only come to the 'natural' end of their lives 'ordered for them by heaven', if they are subjected to repeated 'renewals', to repeated draws back towards 'their beginnings' (D III.1.209). In this theoretical context, Machiavelli takes into consideration the figures of Saint Francis and Saint Dominic. He appropriates another *topos* of Christian apologetics and radically overturns it: Dante's treatment of the figures of Saint Francis and Saint Dominic in the canticle of Paradise could be considered as a good term of comparison. For Machiavelli, Saint Francis and Saint Dominic brought the Christian faith 'back into the minds of men', when it 'had been already eliminated there' (D III.1.211–212).[58] But their 'renewal', however important, is ultimately partial and harmful because it does not call into question 'the dishonesty of the prelates and of the heads of the religion', because the orders they founded continue to let us 'understand that it is evil to say evil of evil' (D III.1.212). The organisation and hierarchical structure of the Church has not been touched; the anti-political spirit of Christianity paradoxically also plays a part within the Church and prevents prelates and heads of religion from being called into question. The 'renewal' carried out by Saint Francis and Saint Dominic was therefore partial and incomplete: the time of the Christian sect had not been greatly extended. That in his time the Christian religion had entered an age of 'decline', due to the behaviour of the prelates of the Roman Church, Machiavelli had made it clear already in the first book: 'Whoever might consider its foundations and see how much present usage is different from them might judge, without doubt, that either its ruin or its scourging is near' (D I.12.37–38).

In order to provide an answer to the problem of the placement of the theses developed in the chapter on the 'variation of sects and languages' in the framework of the overall reflection on the religious phenomena, it could be argued that Machiavelli approaches the religious experience from two perspectives: *ex parte populi* and *ex parte principis*. He considers it from the point of view of the governed and from the perspective of those who govern. On the one hand, Machiavelli looks at the people, at the individuals who make religious beliefs their own; on the other, he studies the elites, the small groups that organise, structure and govern religious beliefs: the priests, those responsible for the sects. From the first perspective, religion is a factor of motivation

58 Machiavelli also mentions Saint Francis and Saint Dominic, and the creation of their respective orders, in IF, I.20.32. On Machiavelli's approach to Saint Francis, see Cutinelli-Rèndina 2014, and Connell 2019.

and mobilisation. The 'fear of God' should, therefore, be maintained and used wisely by politicians. In the second perspective, religion is a factor of destructive violence: the religious elites, to assert themselves, and the truths they advocate, tend to destroy the religious beliefs and practices of the sects preceding them. This destructive violence can only be a problem for politicians, even for those who rule the republics in the modern world.

We are dealing, therefore, with two different perspectives or rather, with two different levels of analysis, which are in no way incompatible or irreconcilable because they look at different subjects involved in religious beliefs and practices: on the one hand, those who make them their own, and on the other, those who organise and spread them. Or, to put it another way: religion considered from below and religion looked from above.

Machiavelli was able to study religions, their 'orders' and their ceremonies, from both points of view; he managed, in his texts, to follow both perspectives, to put them side by side and to keep them united. Hence the extraordinary richness of his analyses, but also the difficulty for the contemporary interpreter to reconstruct them in a balanced and faithful way, without resorting to unilateral simplifications.[59]

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CHAPTER 7

Machiavelli's Republican Constituent Power

Camila Vergara

Machiavelli was perhaps the first modern thinker to argue that politics has its own logic and morality, detached from both ancient virtue and Christian precepts. Machiavelli famously argued that political ends justify any necessary means, that sometimes cruelty 'well used' is essential to acquire and maintain power (P 1.8.38).[1] Even though this idea has prompted scholars to interpret Machiavelli as a teacher of evil and his work as justifying naked power in political competition, to the contrary I argue that in the *Discourses* he lays out a normative theory of constituent politics. The crucial discussion for Machiavelli is not about good or bad means employed to preserve political power, but about the means that are necessary to achieve the appropriate goal: the establishment and maintenance of a republic.

As a theorist of extraordinary politics, Machiavelli was concerned primarily with the mutation of the constitutional order.[2] Before the *Discourses* there is no consistent attempt to theorize political foundings beyond a mythical lawgiver.[3] As his preface to book 1 makes clear, Machiavelli seeks to unveil new 'ways and methods' that could serve to guide someone wishing to imitate ancient leaders in the most difficult and glorious task: to remodel a corrupt republic by bringing it back to its beginnings. Despite Machiavelli's novel insights on radical change and constituent renewal – a 'path not yet trodden by anyone' (D I.Pref.190) – his ideas did not have much traction in the history of political thought. His account of refoundings has been mostly omitted or acknowledged without much analysis of its theoretical and practical implications,[4] or pushed beyond its limits,[5] leaving Machiavelli's proposals for remodelling cor-

1 References to *The Prince* and to the *Discourses* derive from Machiavelli 1989. Page numbers are typically the last number in the sequence.

2 See Pedullà 2019 and Torres 2015.

3 Only Plato (2008) undertook this task in *The Republic*, exploring the best organization for the polis. But Plato's focus was on the organization of power and the necessary conditions to keep the structure from decaying, and not on the founding itself.

4 Even if Hans Baron (1961) identifies the founding of a republic by the civic prince as key to Machiavelli's thought, he does not dwell on its analysis.

5 Antonio Negri's interpretation of Machiavelli in *Insurgencies* (Negri 2009) leads him to stretch his theory beyond republicanism, toward absolute democracy. He mistakenly argues

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rupt republics mostly unexamined. This chapter seeks to fill this gap by analyzing the contributions of the *Discourses* to our understanding of constituent politics within the republican tradition of the mixed constitution in which the nobles and the people share in the control of the state.

Machiavelli's political philosophy begins from a realist conception of human nature which presupposes, for the sake of designing a well-ordered state, that 'all men are evil and that they are always going to act according to the wickedness of their spirits whenever they have free scope', and that they 'never do anything good except by necessity' (D I.3.201). Moreover, as a republican thinker, Machiavelli's ideas are situated within an already constituted reality determined by the socio-ontological division between the powerful few and the common people. For him 'in every republic there are two opposed factions, that of the people and that of the rich, and that all laws made in favour of liberty result from their discord' (D I.4.203). Using history as a resource for radical political innovation, he positions Rome as a realist model of political organization in which the conflict between these two unequal parts of society are productive of liberty. The rich desire to dominate the people, the people desire not to be oppressed by the rich, and the perpetual struggle in a republic between these opposing desires, argues Machiavelli, generates liberty. However, liberty is not caused by the institutional *balance* of these two unequal forces,[6] but by the periodical pushback of the people against the inevitable and constant overreach of the powerful few. Only when the Roman plebeians rose up against the insolence of the powerful few, they were able to institutionalize their political power in the Tribunes of the Plebs, an office 'designed for the protection of Roman liberty' (D I.4.204), allowing the Roman republic to become a 'perfect state' (D I.2.200). After the 'nobility was obliged to grant the people their share' (D I.2.200), the conditions for the republic became firmer, and for 'more than three hundred years, the dissensions in Rome rarely caused exile and very rarely bloodshed' (D I.4.203).

Different than in Sparta and Venice, where the guardianship of liberty was in the hands of the nobles – which is also the case in most representative democracies today, in which the power to protect the constitution is placed on judges and high courts – Machiavelli chooses the common people over the elite to provide final judgement on liberty. Since most 'disturbances' in a

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that the aim of the new prince is to establish an absolute democracy. However, because domination arises from the desire to dominate in part of society, a pure regime such as an absolute democracy – which for Machiavelli would mean the absolute rule of the *popolo* – does not have a counterpower, and thus rapidly degenerates into domination.

6 Like in the thought of Polybius, and later Montesquieu.

republic are caused by the powerful few, who fear to lose their position and seek to acquire more to secure it, plebeians are for him better suited to protect liberty because they merely long 'not to be ruled, and as a consequence [have] greater eagerness to live in freedom' (D I.5.204). Their aspirations result 'either from oppression or from fear that there is going to be oppression' and thus are 'seldom harmful to liberty' (D I.4.203). It is Machiavelli's choice of the common people as gatekeepers of freedom that defines him, from a constitutional perspective, as a plebeian political philosopher, setting him apart from elitist republican thinkers, who prefer the wise few to be the final arbiters of what should be allowed or not under the constitution.[7] By giving the people the legitimate power to subvert oppressive rules to protect their liberty, Machiavelli ties the plebeian power to resist oppression to the constituent power to establish and remodel republics.

In what follows I first analyze Machiavelli's description of the founding of Rome by Romulus as a free republic based on limited government, and the kingly power that is necessary to bring a republic back to its beginning, as in the refounding of Sparta by Cleomenes, and then focus on Machiavelli's ideas on the remodelling of republics depending on their degree of existing corruption. I dedicate the third section to Machiavelli's arguments to incorporate instances of extraordinary political action into the basic order so to avoid corruption and the need for revolutionary reformers. I conclude by highlighting Machiavelli's contributions to our understanding of constituent power from a republican perspective.

1 Foundings and Kingly Power

Kingly power is for Machiavelli essential to establish a new, well-ordered republic, as well as to remodel a corrupt one. Different from social contract theorists, who begin from a natural state in which individuals live in liberty, Machiavelli starts from already constituted societies in which the people chose the strongest and bravest for the purpose of common defence. According to the Florentine Secretary, it is from obedience to a good leader that 'came understanding of things honourable and good, as different from what is pernicious and evil' (D I.2.197), while justice developed through the experience of establishing the rule of law with common rules and punishments (D I.2.197). However, following Polybius' theory of regime cycles, Machiavelli argues that

7 See the proposal by his contemporary Francesco Guicciardini (1994).

monarchy – the same as the other pure forms, aristocracy and popular government – is 'pestiferous' because it is inevitably short-lived, quickly becoming corrupt due to abuse of power (D I.2.199). The only way out of the cycle of corruption and regime change is to establish an order in which the *one*, the *few*, and the *many* share power and check their mutual ambitions. While in book I of the *Discourses* Machiavelli analyzes historical examples of the exercise of kingly power to constitute and remodel republics, in book III he proposes to institutionalize extraordinary measures, making the use of constituent power an ordinary mode to keep the republic uncorrupted. Taking as a model Rome, a city that had a 'free beginning' (D I.1.195) but was not a well-ordered republic from its origin, only acquiring liberty 'by chance and at several times and as a result of unforeseen events' (D I.2.196), Machiavelli proposes to establish a republic in which renewal of the basic order is not left to chance but is built into the institutional structure.

The founding of Rome is one of the few myths in which a city-state is created from scratch. Although Romulus did not have to struggle against a corrupt establishment, which would have required force and sometimes even violence, the founding of Rome was not bloodless. Romulus killed his brother Remus because he did not honour the auguries, the rule authorizing the sacred space of the new city in the Palatine Hill. When Remus directly challenged the foundation by stepping outside of the city boundary, he became the first enemy of the city of Rome. The original fratricide was thus a necessary act, justified by the foundation of the free city. Then, after a bloody war with the Sabines over their women, a type of mixed government was introduced: one monarch for each nation, Romulus ruling over the Romans and Tatius ruling over the Sabines, a common Senate, and a set of procedures for selecting leaders and ratifying legislation. Even though Tatius is also killed soon after, the foundation of limited government and power-sharing procedures remained.

Romulus is Machiavelli's model of founder not only because he sets up a mixed government but also because he achieved his task through his own ability. Romulus' founding was entirely immanent; his followers were compelled not by divine powers, but by Romulus' leadership and the institutional framework he set up. The founding of Rome was achieved through *virtù* alone. *Fortuna* only provided Romulus with the opportunity to build the character to become a founder of a free city. In *The Prince*, Machiavelli sees as 'essential that Romulus should not live in Alba and should be exposed at birth, if he was going to be king of Rome and the founder of that city as his home' (P 6.25). Even if from noble linage, Romulus was raised as a shepherd and, like the majority of the people, he was under the authority of the king. So, when he was in a position to inherit the throne, he decided, instead of having absolute ruling power, to create a new city with a limited government that would assure security to

the common people. Following this example, Machiavelli puts forward in the *Discourses* a normative theory of foundings in which only a virtuous leader, who sets up a republic or brings her back to its beginnings, by laying down the institutional basis for a renewed, lasting liberty, is properly a founder; other leaders, deviating from this standard, are not founders, but tyrants.[8]

Because politics has its own morality based on the *effects* of action rather than on revealed or imagined truth,[9] the wise new prince must do whatever he needs to acquire authority and preserve it (P 15–18). This controversial claim – that ends justify the means – has been extensively analyzed, and Machiavelli's detailed descriptions of the wicked means through which tyrants have come to power have been used as examples of Machiavellian politics. However, the figure of the founder, which differs from both prince and tyrant, brings to the fore the question of virtue and good ends. While a good prince is someone who rules for the common good, bringing to the people general happiness (P 26.93), and the tyrant rules for his own advantage, the task of the founder is to constitute a free republic and defend it against those who profit from the corrupt regime. The good founding is for Machiavelli the setting up of a free order, and the glory of the new prince is only reserved for the one capable of establishing republics with 'mighty foundations for future power' (P 7.29).

While in chapter 9 of *The Prince* Machiavelli tells us that it is a 'civil prince' who, coming to power 'not through crime or any other sort of unjust force but with the aid of his fellow citizens', establishes a regime of liberty out of the conflict between the rich and the people (P 9.39), he dedicates chapter 9 of the first book of the *Discourses* to analyzing how a would-be founder could organize a republic from scratch or remodel it anew.

> This we must take as a general rule: seldom or never is any republic or kingdom organized well from the beginning, or totally made over, without respect for its old laws, except when organized by one man. Still more, it is necessary that one man alone give the method [modo] and that from his mind proceed all such organization [*ordinazione*]. Therefore a prudent organizer of a republic and one whose intention is to advance not his own interests but the general good [*bene commune*], not his own posterity but the common fatherland, ought to strive to have authority all to himself. (D I.9.218)

For Machiavelli, the founding of a republic – an order in which the *one*, the *few*, and the *many* share in the control of the state – can only be accomplished

8 See the example of the tyranny of Appius, head of the Decemvirate, in D I.40.

9 For a discussion on necessity and *verità effettuale* in Machiavelli, see Mansfield (2017).

with the concentration of power and authority in one individual. For the foundations to be (re)organized well, they need to be designed based on a top-down 'method' rather than from inputs of the people, who 'on account of their diverse opinions' are not able to discern the best organization for the government (D I.9.218). Consequently, a regime of liberty can only be constituted through a kingly power, a unilateral action of the *one* – even if supported by the *many.* 'Foundational' or 'original' constituent power is in Machiavelli necessarily exercised by a virtuous leader in an authoritarian fashion.

In addition to giving the republic its order, according to Machiavelli the new prince will of necessity engage in extraordinary action [*azione straordinaria*] entailing violence to those who attack its foundations.

> It is in any rate fitting that thought the deed accuses him, the result should excuse him; and when it is good, like that of Romulus, it will always excuse him, because he who is violent to destroy, not he who is violent to repair [*racconciare*],[10] ought to be censured.

Violent means are justified if they are used to establish and protect a free government. The same as Romulus deserved excuse for killing his brother and the Sabine king because 'what he did was for the common good and not for his own ambition', Machiavelli argues founders cannot escape engaging in extraordinary violence to protect the new order (D I.9.218). He gives the example of Cleomenes, king of Sparta. Learning from his predecessor king Agis, who had attempted to bring Sparta back to the laws of Lycurgus but was killed by the Ephors,[11] Cleomenes understood that, because of 'the ambition of men he could not do good to the many against the will of the few'; to successfully bring Sparta back to its beginnings he needed to 'become the only one in authority' and kill 'the Ephors and everyone else who could oppose him' (D I.9.219).

Because they were necessary to 'repair' the foundations, these acts of violence against those who protect the status quo were not only justified but also appear as constitutive to the founding. For Machiavelli, there is no bloodless founding, and the fear caused by extra-legal violence plays a fundamental role in the re-establishment of liberty. Consequently, I propose to understand Machiavelli's constituent power not only as *creative* of a new order[12] but also

10 Gilbert's translation in Machiavelli 1989 renders *racconciare* as 'restore'.

11 The aristocratic office of overseers.

12 For Antonio Negri, the constituent power is in constant movement, and is at the same time creative and destructive, subject and strength, 'a radical subjective foundation of being' (Negri 2009, p. 319) and 'the negative power par excellence' (Negri 2009, p. 21), due to the constructive/destructive force inherent in the process of permanent becoming.

as *subduing*, ruthlessly putting down the powerful few who profit from corruption and subvert liberty. In other words, the kingly power to constitute a new order is exerted necessarily alongside the power to inflict whatever extraordinary violence is necessary to protect the foundations of the nascent free government.

2 Corruption and Remodeling

Since, for Machiavelli, men are wicked and fickle by nature, prone to breaking the rules 'at every chance for their own profit' (P 16), every form of government has a natural tendency towards corruption. Even though a good foundation can counteract egotistic inclinations, it does not eliminate them, so the degeneration of political rule is a constant threat that needs to be averted through extraordinary measures.[13] In chapters 17 and 18 of book I of the *Discourses*, Machiavelli analyzes how a city in which inequality has bred corruption and the ability for 'free life' [*vita libera*] (D I.17.240) can preserve its free form of government or establish one anew.

In his analysis of corruption, Machiavelli distinguishes three interrelated elements: matter, form, and method. In a city, the matter is constituted by the citizens, the form by the laws, and the methods by the rules and procedures for selecting magistrates and making laws (D I.18). The corrupting process of the political structure does not begin in the *matter* (governed in part by the unavoidable egoistic tendencies of individuals) but on the *form* restraining individual interest and the *methods* by which rulers are selected. Individual interest is a force permanently trying to influence government unduly but only succeeding, and thus effectively corrupting the republic, if laws and methods are flawed and liberty's scaffolding is already being slowly dismantled from within. According to Machiavelli, 'an evil-disposed citizen cannot effect any changes for the worse in a republic, unless it be already corrupt' (D III.8). It is this type of republic, a very corrupt city [*città corrottissima*] in which 'there are no laws or rules sufficient to restrain a universal corruption', that Machiavelli wants to bring back to its beginnings.

> Where [the matter] is corrupt, well-planned laws are of no use, unless indeed they are prepared by one who with the utmost power can force their observation, so that the matter will become good. (D I.17.240)

13 For Machiavelli on dictatorship as the ordinary method to deal with extraordinary circumstances, see Geuna (2017).

Corruption is connected to ambition and the inequality of wealth and power that the pursuit of interest engenders in the city. Law must establish necessity and duty to create virtuous citizens and make sure the influence of wealth 'is kept within proper limits' (D I.1.194). Because republics need relative equality to exist,[14] and corruption springs from inequality, if laws allow for the accumulation of wealth in the hands of a few and the destitution of the majority, the gradual transition from good government into a corrupt one is inevitable. When the inequality present in society is pervasive enough to impose interest – in opposition to the common good – as the final cause of the republic, the matter becomes corrupt and the form is useless to reverse the course. The corruption of the matter renders the existing form inadequate because it is unable to contain interest and the pernicious effects of wealth. Through the example of the Roman republic, Machiavelli argues that to properly deal with corruption the order needs to be dynamic, adapting at the changing levels of inequality and corruption. In Rome, because the basis of government 'stood fixed' [*fermi*], changing only little over time, efforts to reform the corrupting regime through legal renewal were ultimately disabled. If the Roman republic had established, in addition to new laws, new orders [*nuovi ordini*] more suitable for a 'bad subject', she could have 'kept herself free' (D I.18.242).

In a republic in which corruption has become systemic, affecting matter, forms, and methods,[15] for Machiavelli the only realistic way for replacing the old order with new basic institutions would be to do it 'all at once' rather than taking a slower path, one revolutionary reform at a time. Moreover, he deems this overhaul as extremely difficult and unlikely because it must be done through extraordinary, extra-legal means.

> As to reforming these basic methods [*questi ordini*] at one stroke, when everybody knows they are not good, I say their injurious quality, then easily recognized, is hard to correct because to accomplish it the use of lawful devices is not enough, since lawful methods are futile, but it is necessary to resort to unlawful ones [*venire allo straordinario*], such as violence and arms, and before anything else to become a prince of that city and have power to manage it in one's own way. (D I.18.243)

Not only is the new prince devoid of legal authority to remodel the republic but the implementation of revolutionary reforms – especially those aimed at

14 D I.55. For further analysis of the relation between inequality and constitutions in Machiavelli see McCormick (2013).

15 For an analysis of systemic corruption and an extended discussion of Machiavelli's conception of corruption, see Vergara (2020).

increasing the power of the people and reducing the clout of the few – are likely to demand some measure of violence. The type of founder Machiavelli has in mind is, therefore, a very rare kind of leader: an individual of extraordinary *virtù*, seeking to reorganize power in favour of the common good, willing to commit wicked deeds, and able to avoid becoming a tyrant in the process. Such a leader 'holds to what is right when he can but knows how to do wrong when he must' (P 18.66). And here lays the most significant obstacle for republican remodelling: the need for such a self-driven, extraordinary virtuous leader, willing to sacrifice everything, even his soul.

> To reorganize a city for living under good government assumes a good man, and to become prince of a state by violence assumes an evil man; therefore a good man will seldom attempt to become prince by evil methods, even though his purpose is good; on the other hand a wicked man, when he has become prince, will seldom try to do what is right, for it never will come into his mind to use rightly the authority he has gained wickedly. (D I.18.243)

Machiavelli sees the revolutionary reformer not only as encountering a 'dirty hands' dilemma[16] but also as facing complete uncertainty of success since attempting to bring a republic that is beholden to 'universal corruption' (D I.18.241) back to its beginnings had not been so far achieved. Neither of his two exemplary founders, Romulus and Cleomenes, had to deal with a republic stained with systemic corruption – in which not only laws (form) and procedures (methods) are used for corrupt ends, but also the people (matter) have acquired corrupt ways. Because the matter was good, and the deviation from the 'good' origin was not so great, they were able to impose a new beginning and even embellish their design [*colorire il disegno loro*] (D I.18.243).[17] While to found Rome and constitute a limited government Romulus had of necessity to kill his brother and the Sabine King, Cleomenes killed the Ephors so to be able to bring Sparta back to its founding laws and in this way regain ancient virtue and strength. Even if Machiavelli does not speculate about the extraordinary measures that would be necessary to remodel corrupt republics successfully, the fact that Cleomenes had to get rid of the aristocratic council to reinvigorate the republic successfully suggests that a virtuous leader seeking not just to revitalize but to *reinstate* liberty would need to use even more drastic measures. The new prince would have to fight not only against the aristocratic gate-

16 For a discussion of this moral dilemma, see Giorgini (2017).

17 Gilbert translates this phrase as 'to justify their design'.

keepers of the decaying republic but also against representatives of the people and any other individual or group benefiting from the corrupt status quo.

After discussing the apparent impossibility of refounding a corrupt republic, requiring such extraordinary leadership and measures, in D I.25 Machiavelli describes the way a revolutionary reformer might minimize the pushback coming from those who are used to operate within the current structure and might oppose change out of habit.

> He who wishes or intends to remodel the government of a city, so that it will be accepted and can maintain itself to everybody's satisfaction, is under the necessity of retaining the shadow at least of the old methods [*modi*], in order that to the people the government [*ordine*] may seem not to have changed, even though in reality the new forms [*ordini*] are altogether unlike [*alieni*] those of the past. (D I.25.252)

By respecting the old methods and institutions like the Romans did when exchanging kings for consuls and retaining customs and rituals, a reformer seeking to bring back political life [*vivere politico*] into the republic must strive to 'have these upsetting changes retain as much of the old as is possible' (D I.25.253). A smart new prince could therefore exercise constituent power to establish new orders – basic institutions, procedures, and rules conducive to liberty – by repurposing old structures instead of tearing them down to create new ones. For Machiavelli, radical change could be achieved without destabilizing too much the current regime if the shell of institutional forms is preserved to house a completely different order that would be conducive to a new and free way of life [*vivere nuovo e libero*] (D I.25.253).

In addition to creatively repurpose old institutions, kingly power is also needed to restrain the powerful few: those 'gentlemen who without working live in luxury on the returns from their landed possessions' and are hostile to all civil life [*inimici d'ogni civilità*] (D I.55.308-309). In D I.55, Machiavelli states that a revolutionary reformer attempting to remodel a republic that has become oligarchic and corrupt must have a 'kingly hand [*mano regia*] that with absolute and surpassing power puts a check on the over-great ambition and corruption of the powerful' (D I.55.309). A new founder cannot succeed unless first using this absolute power to subdue [*spegne*][18] the powerful few. Consequently, the successful exercise of republican constituent power would require not only to establish new orders but also to subjugate those who are

18 Gilbert translates *spegne* in this passage as 'wiping out', which is not a common definition of this word. Twentieth-century definitions related to turning off electrical devices. Common usage in Machiavelli's time would be 'to subdue' (McCormick 2012).

powerful enough to threaten the (re)nascent republic. This duality of the constituent power – creative of new orders and subduing of the few – is further analyzed in book III within the plebeian guardianship of liberty and the need for periodic institutional renewal.

3 Periodic Constituent Power and Extraordinary Politics

In addition to a theorist of extraordinary politics, Machiavelli is the founder of a 'plebeian philosophy'[19] that originates in the material conditions of the common people and strives for their emancipation from the domination of the powerful few. Different from social contract theorists who begin their analysis from natural right and the creation of a community of equals, Machiavelli begins from the fundamental premise of a society that is irremediably split between the powerful few and the people. After the founding of a republic by a civic new prince, Machiavelli argues this regime of liberty should be maintained by the many. While in his ideal mixed order the *one*, the *few*, and the *many* share in the control of the state, the crucial guardianship of liberty – the right to make the last decision on what is deemed oppressive – must always rely on one of the parts. Machiavelli chooses the people over the elites as stewards of liberty because the former merely long not to be ruled, 'and as a consequence [have] greater eagerness to live in freedom, since they can have less hope of taking possession of it than the great can' (D I.5.206). Giving constituent power to the many is perhaps the clearest evidence of Machiavelli's plebeian commitments.

For him, most of the 'very great disturbances' in a republic are caused by the few, who 'fear to lose what they have gained', not by the many, who hope to gain what they do not have. The rich are the ones promoting factionalism because they need to secure their possessions; by acquiring more, they can have greater resources to ignite a rebellion and instil in the many the wish to possess and dominate (D I.5.206). Consequently, the powerful few must not have the final say on the liberty of plebeians; the rich would probably undermine it and effectively enslave the many. The powerful few, given the position of power they hold in society, could never be the bearers of constituent power because the regime that they would impose would not be a republic but an oligarchy.

According to Machiavelli, plebeians, given the position they occupy in the political structure, should not merely be the guardians of the constitution or the basic laws, as it is today the judicial branch deciding on the constitutionality

19 Adams 1851, p. 396. See also Barthas 2010.

of law and policy, but the defenders of liberty itself, which could even run against the established order. Consequently, we should consider the plebs as the bearers of constituent power within the republican order, able to amend the basic institutional and juridical structure of society. While in extraordinary moments the revolutionary reformer exercises constituent power by establishing lasting foundations for liberty that can be maintained after the founder's death (D I.11), the common people are the bearers of the power to resist oppression during ordinary politics, being able to add anti-oligarchic institutions to the constitutional structure in order to deal with inequality and the corruption of older institutions.

> … though one alone is suited for organizing, the government organized is not going to last long if resting on the shoulders of only one; but it is indeed lasting when it is left to the care of many, and when its maintenance rests upon many. (D I.9)

This maintenance of the new order by the many does not refer only to the mere administration of ordinary state power (government) but to the extraordinary actions needed to reset the power structure periodically and, in this way, avoid corruption and the overgrowth of oligarchic power. In Machiavelli's model, constituent power is exercised during the founding by a leader to both *establish* a constitutional framework that liberates plebeians and to *subdue* the powerful few, and during ordinary politics by the many who are to engage in extraordinary actions to preserve the republic periodically. While the *one* exercises constituent power to create new emancipatory, anti-oligarchic orders and restrain the powerful by force, the *many* exercise constituent power to preserve liberty by recreating the founding through amendments to the institutional structure and extraordinary public trials.[20]

The constitutionalization of plebeian ordinary and extraordinary powers is for Machiavelli a necessary condition for keeping a republic free from domination. The common people need not only to participate actively in deciding on motions, initiating and vetoing laws in plebeian assemblies, and selecting their Tribunes, but also by collectively offering fundamental changes to the constitutional structure and inflicting punishment on those who have become too powerful, so to bring the republic back to its beginnings and keep plebeians free from the domination of the great. Machiavelli argues citizens must periodically 'examine themselves' [*si riconoschino*] and go back to the beginning. This

20 For a comparison between Machiavelli and his elitist contemporary Guicciardini on public trails, see McCormick (2011, chapter 5).

self-examination of the people vis-à-vis the legal and institutional order, which allows for the renewal of the republic, would happen either by an external 'accident' or an internal change triggered either by law or the 'striking words' and 'vigorous actions' of a virtuous leader.

At the beginning of book III of the *Discourses*, Machiavelli identifies these two means – law and virtuous action – as the appropriate ones for a republic to be periodically brought back to its beginnings and remain free. Since the birth of republics is marked by creation and punishment – institutionalization of popular power and foundational violence – Machiavelli proposes a periodic renewal of the republic through law and an extraordinary public impeachment of those who have transgressed the egalitarian foundations of the republic.

Based on the Roman example, Machiavelli argues in favour of the reconciliation of law and liberty through the creation of new anti-oligarchic institutions such as the 'Tribunes of the People, the Censors, and all the other laws that opposed the ambition and pride of the citizens' (D I.9). Machiavelli's response to corruption and oppression is thus not to get rid of institutions and procedures that have become corrupt but to add new institutions and legal means of popular censure to restrain the ambition of the few. However, he cautions that the mere establishment of anti-oligarchic institutions does not guarantee liberty since they would be ineffective if they were not 'brought to life by the wisdom of a citizen who courageously strives to enforce them against the power of those who violate them' (D I.9). Consequently, even if laws and institutions against corruption are established, the courage of extraordinary plebeian leaders to enforce them appears for Machiavelli as inescapable.

Similar to the extraordinary measures the founder must take to protect the new republic, during ordinary times the republic needs to protect itself by dealing harshly with those who have schemed against liberty. Among Machiavelli's examples of transgressors are the sons of Brutus, who conspired against the republic to 'profit unlawfully',[21] the Decimviri, who usurped political power and became tyrannical, and Melius the grain dealer, who sought to buy the favour of the masses by feeding the people at his own expense (D III.1). The power to subdue the powerful few during the founding needs to be replicated in extraordinary punishment during ordinary politics. From the experience in Florence under the Medici, Machiavelli identifies fear[22] as a crucial emotion

21 '… there is no more powerful remedy [against the troubles of a new republic], none more effective nor more certain nor more necessary, than to kill the sons of Brutus' (D I.16).

22 This constitutive fear is different from the fear in God that Numa, the second founder of Rome, had to establish in order for the citizens to obey the law. Civil religion and fear of the divine are part of the constituted order.

that must be present both in the founding of liberty and in renewal moments. Going 'back to the beginnings' was not only an attempt at reconciling law and liberty through the creation of new institutions but was meant to instil the same fear of extraordinary punishment as in the founding.

> By revising the government they meant inspiring such terror and such fear in the people as they had inspired on first taking charge, for at that time they punished those who, according to that kind of government, had done wrong. When the memory of such punishment disappears, men take courage to attempt innovations and to speak evil; therefore it is necessary to provide against them by moving the government back towards its beginnings. (D III.1.421)

Thus, Machiavelli conceives of this foundational power as essentially creative *and* avenging, as a constituent power able to create institutions and laws in favour of equality, and ruthlessly punish individuals profiting from the corrupt constituted order. This constituent power as extraordinary enforcement of liberty should be legally and periodically convoked so to avoid giving individuals 'room for growing wicked' (D III.1).

> For this reason, from one such enforcement of the law to the next, there should be a lapse of not more than ten years, because, when that time has gone by, men change their habits and break the laws; and if something does not happen to bring the penalty back to their memories and renew fear in their minds, so many offenders quickly join together that they cannot be punished without danger. (D III.1)

Because Machiavelli wants to constitutionalize Rome's evolutionary political institutions, he argues for normalizing these instances of constituent creation and punishment to avoid the overgrowth of inequality and the extreme violence necessary to check it. Machiavelli proposes to imitate the Romans, who periodically established new institutions and laws in favour of liberty, and were 'accustomed to punish large numbers of those who did wrong' (D III.49). A good republican constitution should therefore codify these instances of constituent power to allow for new methods of *adaptation* and *deterrence* to periodically curb corruption and the overgrowth of oligarchy.

> … nothing is more necessary to a community … than to give back to it such a reputation as it had in the beginning, and to strive that either good regulations or good men may produce this effect and that it will not need to be done by an external force. Because, though sometimes the latter

> may be the best remedy, as it was in Rome, it is so dangerous that it is not in any way to be desired. (D III.1.422–423)

In addition to this periodic reactivation of constituent power as creation and punishment through the law, Machiavelli argues that a periodic refounding is also possible through 'the mere excellence of one man' (D III.1). Citizens can recognize good leaders by their reputation, and nothing gets individuals greatest reputation than extraordinary political action. Machiavelli's new methods thus would work in synergy with elections and free speech, rules and procedures that are crucial for allowing extraordinary, virtuous leadership to arise.

> Men born in a republic should, then, follow this formula, and early in life strive to become prominent through some unusual action … either by proposing a law for the common benefit, or by bringing a charge against some powerful citizen as a transgressor of the laws. (D III.34)

Excellent men are able to accomplish a renewal of the republic based only on their virtue, 'without reliance on any law', by their extraordinary reputation and example that lead other good men 'to imitate them' (D III.1). For Machiavelli, elections – which imply the possibility of attaining glory through virtuous action, allowing for the moralizing authority of kingly power[23] to emerge in defence of liberty – and the equal access to political speech – the equal right to propose a law and speak in favour or against it in the assembly – are *necessary*, but not *sufficient* methods to maintain liberty over time. Adding new methods for adaptation and deterrence through periodic popular creation and punishment would make the republic incorruptible.

> If such instances of enforcement as I mentioned above, together with such individual examples, had appeared at least every ten years in that city, their necessary result would have been that Rome would never have become corrupt. (D III.1)

4 Republican Constituent Power

The political philosophy that originated in the seventeenth century, during and after the crumbling of the dynastic orders, yielded the theory of popular sovereignty which came to justify the modern revolutions and the establishment of

23 From the obedience to the first good chief came 'understanding of things honourable and good, as different from what is pernicious and evil' (D I.2).

representative government. The constituent power within this tradition could not be legitimately exercised by the king and the nobles but belonged to 'the people' understood as the community as a whole. Moreover, since this power was conceived as absolute, it had no limits or final cause other than realizing the will of the popular subject. Machiavelli precedes this voluntarist popular sovereignty tradition by more than one and a half centuries, and therefore his ideas on constituent power need to be conceived as distinct, part of an entirely different republican tradition of thought in which the community is never whole but divided into the few and the many, and the constitution is designed to channel conflict productively instead of achieving harmony or consensus.

The conceptions of constituent power that have developed within democratic theory begin from the absolute sovereignty of the community. The people-as-a-whole is the sovereign subject who exercises constituent power as an absolute, undetermined rapture and creation. Born out of the struggle against the monarchical regime, democratic constituent power was conceived as the power 'to constitute, abolish, alter, reform forms of government',[24] which is separated from the sovereign power exercised to manage the constituted order, the ability to govern, command, and prohibit within the bounds of the constitution. The commonwealth constitutes itself and then submits to the structure that it has itself created, laying in a state of dormancy allowed by the democratic structure, only to be partially reawakened and expressed under the constitution as civil disobedience and social mobilization. The relation between constituent and constituted power under this framework is one of antagonism, and democratic constitutionalism has resolved this struggle in favour of stability by suppressing the constituent power. Since those who occupy positions of power in the constituted order should not intervene in the constitutional structure, constitutions incorporate amendment mechanisms such as legislative supermajorities, which are extremely difficult to achieve. Thus, democratic constitutionalism, founded on pre-commitments aimed at stabilizing the foundation of the modern state,[25] has tended to sacralize the constituted order, making legitimate radical change a near impossibility.

Analyzing Machiavelli's ideas on foundings, remodellings, and extraordinary measures against corruption through the lens of constituent politics allows us not only to understand the *Discourses* under a new light but also to radically reconceptualize the constituent power from a republican perspective. Machiavelli makes at least five contributions to the theory and praxis of constituent power. First, conceiving this foundational power as goal-oriented rather than

24 Lawson 1993, p. 47.
25 Holmes 1988.

subject-centred, allows us to effectively depart from philosophical justifications based on the will of the sovereign. While in democratic theory the constituent power has been conceived as the *autopoietic* power of the community, as the self-constitution of the people, a republican theory of constituent power does not have a determined subject, but it is rather defined by the necessity to establish a well-ordered republic. Republican constituent power is defined functionally, determined by the goal of achieving a free, mixed order conducive to liberty in equality. The constituent power is the power to (re)establish liberty, and thus, as Machiavelli argues, only the civil prince, allied with the people, is able to constitute a republic (P 9).

In addition to a constituent power defined by its effects rather than its subject, Machiavelli conceives of three different temporalities in which this power becomes active: founding, remodelling, and maintenance. The founding moment refers to the original constitution of free government in which a virtuous leader decides to limit his own power by establishing counterbalancing institutions. The need to remodel a republic comes from the corruption of the regime into an oligarchy of consent, in which inequality has allowed for an overgrowth of the power of the few. The new prince as a revolutionary reformer, aided by fellow citizens, needs to both establish new anti-oligarchic institutions and subdue those who threaten the new order. Finally, a well-ordered republic allows for the periodic activation of this power during ordinary politics through which the people protect liberty by establishing new institutions and punishing transgressors. Because in Machiavelli's republic the many are not merely the guardians of the constitution, but the defenders of liberty itself, beyond and even against law and tradition, they are the bearers of the self-emancipatory force of the community against the powers that attempt to enslave it. Machiavelli proposed to harness and channel the spirit of resistance that allows for the republic to renew its foundations periodically. Given the productive role afforded to conflict in the constitutional structure, constituent power is conceived not as a threat to the constituted structure, but as a source of periodic renewal of the constitution to update its anti-oligarchic capabilities, as a necessary means to preserve the original thrust of a constituted order built on the plebeian struggle against oligarchic domination.

Finally, Machiavelli's analysis of extraordinary politics brings to the fore the role of leadership and violence in the constituent process. It is through kingly power that, according to Machiavelli, the system of limited government came first into existence, and it is only through the citizen prince that liberty can be reestablished once it has been lost. Such a plan to overhaul a corrupt order 'in one stroke' by concentrating power in a leader is certainly authoritarian, and today it seems almost unthinkable to even entertain the possibility that

a leader may need to act in an authoritarian manner, transgressing limits and exceeding prerogatives, to protect liberty. Machiavelli forces us to grapple not only with the role of strong leadership in the constituent process but also with the need of subduing the powerful few to allow the new order to take root amidst oligarchic conspiracies and counterrevolution.

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CHAPTER 8

Machiavelli and Thucydides on the Rhetoric of Immoralism

Miguel Vatter

> Thucydides and, perhaps, the *Principe* of Machiavelli are related to me closely by their unconditional will not to deceive themselves and to see reason in reality – not in 'reason' still less in 'morality'
>
> NIETZSCHE, *Twilight of the Idols*, 'What I Owe to the Ancients'

1 Introduction. Machiavelli, Rhetoric and Evil

Thirty years ago, in a magisterial essay entitled 'Hobbes on Rhetoric and the Construction of Morality', Quentin Skinner sought to identify Hobbes' construction of a science of virtue as a response to the threat posed by the rhetorical figure of paradiastole, 'the precise purpose of which was to show that any given action can always be redescribed in such a way as to suggest that its moral character may be open to some measure of doubt'.[1] In reviewing the history of this figure, Skinner indicated in passing 'the most sensational use'[2] that Machiavelli makes of it in his discussion of princely virtues in *The Prince*.[3] As is well known, Machiavelli argues that 'it is necessary for a prince, if he wishes to maintain himself, to learn to be able to be not good, and to use this faculty and not to use it according to necessity'.[4] That a prince needs to *learn* not to

1 Skinner 2002b, p. 89. See also his essay 'Moral ambiguity and the Renaissance Art of Eloquence' in Skinner 2002a, pp. 264–285, which maintains the same hypothesis.

2 Skinner 2002b, pp. 107–8.

3 Skinner elaborates on Machiavelli's use of paradiastole in his essay 'Machiavelli on Misunderstanding Princely *Virtù*', in Skinner 2017 and Skinner 2018. I discuss this reading below.

4 P 15. In what follows I use the Connell translation of *The Prince* (Machiavelli 2005) and the Mansfield/Tarcov translation of the *Discourses on Livy* (Machiavelli 1996). For the Italian edition of *The Prince* I employ Machiavelli 2013, and for the Italian edition of *Discourses on Livy* I employ Machiavelli 1984.

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be good entails that there exists a 'teaching' on how best to do evil.[5] According to such a teaching, it may be legitimate to speak well of evil: '*se del male è licito dire bene*' (P 9). In this chapter, I address the debate of how Machiavelli employs paradiastole in order to 'speak well' (*dire bene*) of evil actions, and suggest the hypothesis that behind his rhetoric of immoralism stands a dialectical approach to moral language that he may have inherited from Thucydides and the 'Sophist culture'.[6]

In his treatments of paradiastole in early modern political thought, Skinner suggests that Machiavelli and Hobbes may both have drawn from Thucydides's description of the *stasis* or civil conflict in Corcyra when 'words had to change their ordinary meaning and to take that which was now given them. Reckless audacity came to be considered the courage of a loyal ally; prudent hesitation, specious cowardice; moderation was held to be a cloak for unmanliness'.[7] Thucydides's description of the threat posed by paradiastolic speech 'seemed to conjure up a world of complete moral arbitrariness' (Skinner 2002b, p. 113).[8] Since Quintillian baptized the Roman rhetorical device of paradiastole, it has been understood as a technique of deliberative rhetoric which allows both to excuse a vicious action by redescribing it as an instance of virtue, *and* to expose 'anyone who attempts to play this rhetorical trick': 'if one of your adversaries in

5 I borrow the expression 'teaching of evil' from Strauss 1995.

6 Nietzsche argues that Thucydides and Machiavelli share a '*Sophist culture*, by which I mean *realist culture*… this invaluable movement in the midst of the morality-and-ideal swindle of the Socratic schools which was then breaking out everywhere' (Nietzsche 1984). See also Nietzsche's famous claim that 'the Sophists verge upon the first critique of morality, the first insight into morality: – they juxtapose the multiplicity (the geographical relativity) of the moral value judgments: – they let it be known that every morality can be dialectically justified; i.e., they divine that all attempts to give reasons for morality are necessarily sophistical…. They postulate the first truth that a "morality-in-itself", a "good-in-itself" does not exist, that it is a swindle to talk "truth" in this field' (Nietzsche 1988, aphorism 428). For a bird's-eye-view of Nietzsche's engagement with Sophist thinking, see Consigny 1994. Leo Strauss may have been the first to present Machiavelli's 'teaching of evil' in the context of the conflict between Sophist and Platonic understandings of (dialectical) philosophy, rhetoric and the 'art of writing' (Strauss 1995).

7 Thucydides 1910, 3.82.4. The correct translation of this famous passage is contested. Nicole Loraux proposes her own translation: 'whenever they made a judgment, seditious men exchanged the customary valuations applied to actions in words' (Loraux 2009, p. 270). Skinner points out that Machiavelli, who in all likelihood did not know Greek, would have had access to Lorenzo Valla's 1452 Latin translation of Thucydides (Pade 2014). Hobbes translated Thucydides himself.

8 I do not intend to engage in the complex discussion of Hobbes' view of the relation between philosophy, science and rhetoric initiated by Skinner. For the latest intervention in this complex debate, see Raylor 2018.

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"'.[9]

Machiavelli may likely have had both the *Rhetorica ad Herrenium* and the *History of the Peloponnesian War* in mind while composing P 15–18.[10] Yet there is a capital difference between the Roman manual of rhetoric and Thucydides' *History*. In the manual, the rhetorical redescription of vice as virtue, or conversely the redescription of virtue as vice, are value-neutral techniques that can be applied indifferently both to virtuous and vicious individuals alike to help them win their day in court.[11] In Thucydides, it is the very fact of such manipulation of moral terms that is considered a sign of corruption with respect to an 'ancient' understanding of virtue. I shall call the first (rhetorical) employment of paradiastole 'relativist', and the second (Thucydidean) employment of paradiastole 'dialectical' and 'anamnestic'. In Thucydides, arguably, there is a second-order, dialectical employment of paradiastole that *subverts* the kind of corruption of moral language that paradiastolic speech indicates. Furthermore, Thucydides's analysis of paradiastole is intended to *bring back to memory* a forgotten or repressed sense of virtue. In this chapter, I argue that Machiavelli follows Thucydides in developing a *dialectical* employment of paradiastole that indicates a path out of corruption through actions that are 'immoralist' in the sense that they conjoin a virtue and a vice.

The Sophists distinguished between dialectics and rhetoric. Rhetoric is a technique that is premised on the belief that 'there will always be two sides to any question, and thus that in moral reasoning it will always be possible to construct a plausible argument *in utramque partem*'.[12] Dialectics, however, is arguably both anterior to and more radical than rhetoric: it refers to a technique of argumentation whereby any proposition bearing on the world as it appears can be shown to be both true and false.[13] Whereas rhetoric, and in particular the technique of paradiastole, is based on the *proximity* of certain virtues and vices that lends moral language its 'ambiguity', dialectics suggests that reality is attained through the figure of a *coincidence* of opposites (*complexio*

9 Skinner 2017, p. 145, citing here a passage from the Roman manual of deliberative rhetoric *Rhetorica ad Herrenium*.

10 For a discussion of Machiavelli's use of this rhetoric manual, see Viroli 1998 and Viroli 2014.

11 This is not the case with Cicero's discussion of rhetoric, especially where the ancient 'virtue' is contraposed with the more 'modern' use of the art of eloquence: Cicero 2001, I, 41–44, pp. 80–95.

12 Skinner 2002a, p. 266.

13 The best introduction to the distinction between dialectics and rhetoric is, in my opinion, Colli 1986. I follow the interpretation of the Sophists put forward by Untersteiner 1954.

oppositorum).[14] Examples of such a coincidence are when Machiavelli speaks of cruelties that are 'well-used' (P 9) or when he identifies political actors who know how to be 'honourably wicked' (*onorevolmente cattivi*) because they engage in 'malice [that] has greatness in itself or is generous in some part (*una malizia* [*che*] *ha in sé grandezza o è in alcuna parte generosa*)' (D I.27).

Like Thucydides and the Sophist culture represented by Thrasymachus and Callicles, Machiavelli takes seriously the possibility that the social condition facilitating paradiastolic speech is the on-going social conflict between the nobles and the people. As Machiavelli says in P 9, if this necessary social division is not managed well, it leads to the 'licence' associated with *stasis*. Still, if it is managed well, it may have two outcomes, either principality or freedom (republic). In the *Discourses on Livy*, Machiavelli's central hypothesis is that this underlying social conflict can only be managed by effecting periodically a 'return to beginnings' (D III.1) that reverses the corruption of orders. What must be recovered in this return is some 'ancient virtue' in which vice is conjoined with virtue. For both Thucydides and Machiavelli, this return to beginnings is also tied up with a religious foundation of the polity. The paradoxical outcome of Machiavelli's 'teaching on evil' may be the idea that the dialectical or immoralist nature of *virtù* is best evidenced in the 'ancient' understanding of religion and its function in political life.

2 Machiavelli's Use of Paradiastole in *The Prince*: Redefining or Reinterpreting Virtue?

Skinner's discussion of paradiastole emphasizes that at issue in this technique is not the redefinition of what counts as a virtue and what counts as a vice, but rather it is a question of what actions can be interpreted as being virtuous and which ones vicious.[15] Machiavelli uses paradiastole in this sense when,

14 According to Skinner 2002b, p. 94, Livy 'points out – in a discussion reminiscent of Aristotle's doctrine of the mean – that the capacity to speak paradiastolically depends on the fact that some of the vices are "neighbours" of the virtues. This in turn gives rise to the perpetual possibility of "exalting" or "disparaging" particular actions by way of redescribing them'. The typical example being the proximity of courage to audacity. Victoria Kahn has come closest to propose the distinction between dialectic and rhetoric in Machiavelli when she argues that 'throughout *The Prince* Machiavelli sets up concepts in polar opposition to each other *and then shows how the opposition is contained within each term* so that the whole notion of opposition must be redefined': Kahn 1986, p. 70.

15 'As a number of earlier writers had pointed out, however, the technique of arguing paradiastolically is not in the least dependent on suggesting a new definition of familiar terms. Rather it takes the form of claiming that a given evaluative term, in virtue of its agreed

in P 17, he says: 'Cesare Borgia was believed cruel; nonetheless, that cruelty of his restored Romagna, unified it, and led it back to peace and to faith. If one considers this well, one will see that he was much more compassionate than the Florentine people, who, to avoid the name of cruelty, allowed the destruction of Pistoia'. At the same time, Skinner, like several other commentators, believes that Machiavelli's apparent distancing from the cruelties employed by the tyrant Agathocles indicates his intention *not* to redefine what counts as a virtue: he is not renaming what used to be considered a vice into a virtue.[16]

However, in her famous interpretation of Machiavelli's rhetorical discussion of Agathocles, Victoria Kahn speaks of the 'intrinsic irony of politics' by which she means that the virtuous political actor 'will actually have to oppose what may appear as good at a given moment'.[17] Machiavelli's apparent denigration of Agathocles is a ruse intended to transition or transpose more easily the reader's mind towards the example of Cesare Borgia and other ancient tyrants like Hiero and Nabis, who employ the same cruelties as Agathocles.[18] More recently, John McCormick has radicalized Kahn's interpretation by arguing that 'Machiavelli, in fact, considers Agathocles fully virtuous'.[19] He claims that, in his treatment of Agathocles, Machiavelli '*redefines* traditional notions of virtues, glory, liberty and justice'.[20] This 'redefinition' of princely virtue entails that the prince must be willing to engage in 'cruelty well-used', that is, cruelties that are intended to make the people feel secure with respect to their prince.[21]

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meaning, can properly be applied as a description of a given action or state of affairs in a case where this may not at first sight seem conceivable': Skinner 2002b, p. 97.

16 See the famous lines: 'one cannot call it virtue to kill one's fellow citizens, to betray one's friend, to be without faith, without compassion, without religion. These modes may be used to acquire rule (*fare acquistare imperio*) but not glory. For if one considers Agathocles' virtue in entering into and escaping dangers, one does not see why he should be judged inferior to any most excellent captain; nonetheless, his bestial cruelty and inhumanity, with infinite wicked deeds, do not allow that he should be celebrated among the most excellent men' (P 9).

17 Kahn 1986, p. 66.

18 While not retracting her previous claim that Machiavelli does not distinguish between Agathocles and Borgia in terms of morality, Kahn's current position in 'Revisiting Agathocles' (2013) claims that Machiavelli does distinguish between military *virtù* and glory – the latter is not accessible to either Agathocles or Borgia, but is a component of princely virtue as reflected in P 14 in relation to Xenophon's treatment of Cyrus. I discuss glory in the last section of this chapter.

19 McCormick 2014, p. 134.

20 McCormick 2017, p. 123; emphasis mine.

21 McCormick 2014, p. 139. In Vatter 2000 and Vatter 2013, I argued that the continuity of P 7-8-9 rests with the underlying logic of security that Machiavelli establishes for a new prince who has to 'maintain *lo stato*' by securing both prince and people against the

For McCormick, what makes Agathocles a virtuous prince, 'a remarkable effective captain and good ruler', is that he is cruel towards the nobles. Princely virtue is not about keeping faith, being compassionate or having religion, but instead 'the exercise of cruelty well used and the guarantee of personal security to most of his subjects or citizens… are more conducive to virtue… than are actions conforming to religion, compassion, faith and friendship'.[22] On this account, well-used cruelty is a component of princely virtue: it is an example of when it is licit to say that evil is good. For McCormick, there is no question that Machiavelli engages in a redefinition of princely virtue, viz., because the new definition includes knowing how and when to be cruel.

But if Machiavelli is redefining virtue through his discussion of Agathocles, then he must be employing irony when he claims that Agathocles was *not an excellent human being* for having murdered his fellow citizens, overthrown a republic in order to attain power, not kept faith with his allies, and showed no compassion or religion. Similarly to Kahn, McCormick believes that Machiavelli engages in irony because of his insight into the 'circumstances' of politics, and these circumstances are defined by social division and conflict. Thus, for McCormick, whether cruelty is a virtue or a vice depends on whether one is speaking about oligarchical or democratic republics, and whether the murdered citizens belong to the nobles (the *grandi*) or the people (the *popolo*). On his view, Machiavelli considers it licit to take over an oligarchic republic through cruel and inhumane methods, but not a democratic one, just as it is legitimate to be cruel towards the nobles, but not towards the people.[23]

But is Machiavelli saying that princely virtue consists in actively harming the nobles and establishing a tyranny that favours the popular faction? Or is he saying that, in order to maintain his state, the prince must have the people

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appetites of the nobles. However, given that actions which bring security to the people are also threatening to their sense of what is 'good', I showed that the prince must necessarily employ 'ideology' in combination with his actions, viz., he must 'seem' to have all the traditional moral virtues. It is not clear to me whether McCormick would claim that the people have also redefined their sense of what is virtue and so would consider it to be 'good' to use cruelty, even against the nobles. I do not think this is what Machiavelli believes.

22 McCormick 2014, p. 143.

23 Thus, 'princes who followed the exemplar Machiavelli makes of Agathocles would care only for their own, ever more widely and heavily armed, popolo; and they would undertake the task of eliminating enemies whom they share in common with the people, that is, aristocratic oppressors at home and potential conquerors abroad. Machiavelli's ultimate lesson is that these concerns and no others meet the demands of virtue, excellence and even justice. Such are the exemplary qualities of a good prince as redefined by Machiavelli': McCormick 2017, p. 136.

on his side, and it is at times necessary to punish the nobles to maintain their desire to dominate the people under control? In the first case, what was previously considered an evil (the arbitrary murder of citizens, noble or otherwise; the tyrannical overthrow of republican government, etc.) is now considered a good. Paradiastole is employed here in a value-relativist sense: when cruelty is used against nobles, it is good, when used against the people, it is evil. In the second case, virtue is *not* redefined as consisting in persecuting the nobility. Machiavelli would not be engaged in a revaluation of values: good remains good and evil, evil, but the prince (not the people or other nobles) is at times excused in employing evil (e.g., cruelty) in the 'right' way. Machiavelli employs the 'proximity' between excellent captains and excellent individuals in order to *diminish or attenuate* Agathocles's virtue as not worthy of glory, while he employs the same 'proximity' to simultaneously *amplify or exalt* the tyrant's virtue in so far as it exemplifies the idea of *well-used* cruelty. I suggest that this use of paradiastole is both dialectical and anamnestic. It does not reveal Machiavelli's adherence to the moral relativism employed by combatants in a civil war.

Skinner argues that Machiavelli employs paradiastole so as to apply *in a different and novel* way the classical concept of virtue to a new class of actions. Skinner proposes that Machiavelli's new approach to the classical princely virtues of liberality, clemency, and keeping faith, in P 15–18, does not entail immoralism. Whereas 'commentators have generally seen in these chapters a complete repudiation of the classical idea of *virtùs*' in the sense that to preserve or maintain the state it is necessary for a prince *not to follow* these virtues, Skinner intends to show that 'this is not how Machiavelli argues.... his chief contention is that rulers must stand ready to depart from what these virtues are generally *held* or *taken* to prescribe'.[24] Given 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 condemned as vicious are instances of virtue',[25] Machiavelli is thought to employ paradiastolic speech to counteract such corruption of moral language, when what is *taken to be* good (e.g., liberality) may not be *actually* good (given the prince's aim of maintaining his state).[26]

Skinner suggests that Machiavelli does *not* employ paradiastole in a 'relativist' sense to reject the virtues of liberality or clemency or keeping promises because '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

24 Skinner 2017, p. 143.
25 Skinner 2017, p. 143.
26 Skinner is referring to P 15.

value in helping you to maintain your state'.[27] But assuming that Machiavelli employs paradiastole to unmask the *false appearance* of princely virtue and shows its 'truth', does this mean that the concept of 'genuine' princely virtue corresponds to a moral fact, viz. to a moral virtue?[28] Or is it the case that to be 'genuinely' liberal, the prince has to incur in the *moral vice* of being mean and avaricious because this meanness serves to maintain the state, whereas by seeking to be morally liberal the prince will end up expropriating his subjects and incurring their hatred? If '*virtù* is the name of the attributes that enable a ruler to maintain his state',[29] in this case, the *virtù* of the prince requires adopting what is customarily considered a moral vice.

Indeed, Machiavelli goes further: 'I shall dare to say the following: that when these [moral] qualities are possessed and always observed they are harmful. And when they seem to be possessed, they are useful. So that it is useful to seem compassionate, faithful, human, honest, religious – and to be so, but to stay so constructed in your spirit that if it is necessary not to be these things, you are able and know how to become the contrary' (P 18). Machiavelli is not only employing here paradiastole to unmask a seeming virtue as a vice, such that 'it is not the observance of these virtues that may cause you to lose your state, but only the observance of what they [the moral virtues/MV] are corruptly and mistakenly taken to prescribe',[30] but he is also advocating that part of the *virtù* of the prudent prince is to engage in a moral vice to secure the state while knowing how to manipulate the *appearance* of moral virtue for the benefit of its subjects.[31]

In short, taking the interests of the state (of what is needed to maintain the state) into consideration requires the prince to adopt not only actions that are *taken to be* immoral, but that *are* immoral, such as cruelty and meanness, yet to adopt them in such a way (e.g., through prudent calculation) that they compose the prince's *virtù*. Lacking such dimension of prudent calculation, however, these immoral actions compose the prince's vice and they will lead to his downfall. 'Prudent calculation' is not itself a moral virtue: it is a supramoral calculation about how best to mix good and evil. In the *Discourses on*

27 Skinner 2017, p. 148; emphasis mine.

28 Skinner's language sometimes lends itself to this reading as when he speaks of 'the genuine virtue of liberality' as a 'kind of liberality that forms part of the virtù of a prince': Skinner 2017, p. 149.

29 Skinner 2017, p. 150.

30 Skinner 2017, p. 152.

31 Kahn (1986, p. 76; 2013, p. 569) speaks of the necessity for political power to adopt 'representation' or 'theatricality'. I prefer to speak of Machiavelli's discovery of the 'ideological' component of political power.

Livy, Machiavelli indicates clearly that it was the Roman Empire, and then Christianity, that caused the corruption of moral language because it led to the oblivion of 'ancient virtue' that contained such a 'teaching of evil'. If this is so, then one needs to *retrace the steps back* from the Roman culture of rhetoric to the Greek culture of the Sophists – in the spirit of Nietzsche – and examine more carefully possible borrowings of Thucydides in Machiavelli.

3 Paradiastolic Speech in Thucydides

Nicole Loraux has shown that when Thucydides claimed the combatants in the *stasis* of Corcyra 'made changes even in the usual meaning of words',[32] he did not mean that boldness was renamed as courage, as one might rename a conquered city. Rather, what Thucydides meant is that the 'habitual valuation' or 'traditional value-judgment' was reversed: 'Thucydides doesn't say that men changed the meaning of words, but rather their evaluative force in relation to actions'.[33] The seditious participants in *stasis* 'wish to praise what is blameable and blame everything deserving of praise' and to that end they employ the 'tricks of epideictic discourse' that were later illustrated in Aristotle's *Rhetoric*.[34] According to Loraux, Thucydides's description of paradiastole was intended to carry his readers 'toward the highly aristocratic past where there began, in epic poetry, a tradition of poetic language marking praise very positively and its opposite, strife, decidedly negatively'.[35] In other words, Thucydides's counter to paradiastolic speech was anamnestic, oriented towards the memory of a past of virtue.

Here it is useful to consider how Nietzsche understood Thucydides' apparent adherence to traditionalism. For Nietzsche, Thucydides does not counter paradiastolic speech by seeking to distinguish 'true' virtue, presumably found in the 'aristocratic' past, from what falsely, rhetorically clothes itself as virtue in the 'democratic' present. Rather, Thucydides is calling for a return to the 'realistic' perspective on value-judgments found in the 'older Hellenes': 'Thucydides as the grand summation, the last manifestation of that strong, stern, hard matter-of-factness instinctive to the older Hellenes'.[36] As David Polansky argues,

32 Thucydides 1910, 3.82.4.

33 Loraux 2009, p. 270.

34 See Loraux 2009, p. 272. On Thucydides as source for the moral valuation of paradiastole, see Müri 1969.

35 Loraux 2009, p. 273.

36 Nietzsche 1984, 'What I Owe to the Ancients', 2.

Nietzsche considers that Thucydides' 'strong, stern, hard matter-of-factness' is 'indistinguishable from his status as a sophist' because it does *not* oppose power to justice, as called for by the Socratic school of moral thought.[37] Nietzsche identifies in Thucydides a Sophist conception of justice that is given one of its highest expressions in the Melian dialogue. 'Thus, justice has its origins in expediency. Where it is expedient to be "just", one is just'.[38] Otherwise, it is part of the 'law of nature' that the stronger rule over the weaker.

However, Nietzsche identifies in Thucydides' conception of justice also the idea of 'The Right of the Weaker', especially in aphorism 93 of *Human All Too Human*. As Polansky claims, 'if the survival of the weaker is judged to be of value to the stronger, there arises the basis for (unequal and limited) negotiation. It is notable how this logic parallels Diodotus's insight during the Mytilenian debate'.[39]

This debate has always been particularly revealing of Thucydides's own views on justice and power. Cleon's speech in favor of cruel punishment towards the Mytilenians is based on considerations of justice: the Mytilenians, including its *demos*, committed an injustice towards Athens and must be duly punished, as a matter of justice, but also to deter other allies from doing the same, as a matter of Athens's self-interest. Cleon believes that it is possible to unite justice with expediency or self-interest. Diodotus argues for clemency with regard to the Mytilenians but, unlike Cleon, he argues not from justice but from expediency: 'Though I prove them ever so guilty, I shall not, therefore, advise their death, unless it be expedient; nor though they should have claims to indulgence, shall I recommend it, unless it be clearly for the good of the country'.[40] As Bernd Manuwald puts it, 'Diodotus turns a question of justice into one of mere utility, and formulates a basic principle of pure raison d'état'.[41]

In section 3.43.2 of the *History of the Peloponnesian War*, Diodotus refers to the problem of corruption of moral language in which 'it is equally necessary for a man urging the most evil of policies to use deceit to win over the populace and for one giving excellent advice to tell lies to make himself credible'. Corruption needs to be addressed dialectically through an affirmative use of deception. Commentators differ as to where lies Diodotus's deceit. Diodotus argues that by punishing the Mytilenian *demos* despite their not participating

37 Polansky 2015, p. 428.
38 Polansky 2015, p. 429. On Nietzsche's conception of justice in relation to Thucydides and the Sophists, see also Petersen 2008.
39 Polansky 2015, p. 430.
40 Thucydides 1910, 3.44.2.
41 Manuwald 2009, p. 245.

in the oligarchic rebellion against Athens 'you will commit the crime of killing your benefactors'. Additionally, 'you will play directly into the hands of the higher classes, who when they induce their cities to rise, will immediately have the people on their side, through you having announced in advance the same punishment for those who are guilty and for those who are not. On the contrary, even if they are guilty you ought to seem not to notice it, in order to avoid alienating the only class still friendly to us. In short, I consider it far more useful for the preservation of our empire voluntarily to put up with injustice, than to put to death, however justly, those whom it is our interest to keep alive'.[42] Bernd Manuwald argues that it is in this part of the speech where Diodotus imports the point of view of justice surreptitiously and in this consists his 'deceit'. 'Diodotus's actual point of view would be that both self-interest and justice need to be taken into account, and his deceit of his audience would be to claim, for tactical reasons, that in deciding the fate of Mytilene it was only a question of raison d'état'.[43] However, this is not what Diodotus seems to argue. Instead, he maintains that the legal innocence or guilt of the *demos* is inconsequential: the only thing that counts is winning them over to Athens' side. The logic is very much the Nietzschean one of the 'right of the weakest'. Diodotus argues that committing an injustice is not 'bad' as such, as a matter of moral principle, but only because it hands over to the enemy of Athens (viz., the oligarchical factions sympathetic to the Spartan cause) a further argument for successful revolt (since they would now count also on the help of the terrorized *demos*). Diodotus's deceit would consist in asking his audience to choose to lie about the guilt of the people (viz., to choose to ignore this guilt, pretend as if it were not true), rather than to punish them according to what the law demands. This is what Diodotus might be getting at in the start when he claims that he will lie, or induce to lie, to his audience in order to get them to choose the prudent policy.

Diodotus 'exhonerates' the Mytilenians by saying that both poverty and plenty are sources of rebellion: 'as long as poverty gives the men the courage

42 Thucydides 1910, 3.47.4–5.

43 Manuwald 2009, p. 257. According to Paula Debnar's (2000, p. 174) modification of Manuwald's hypothesis, Diodotus's deceit is overdetermined: to those 'traditionalists' who believe in justice and moderation as virtues, the deceit consists in Diodotus adopting reason of state as rhetoric; to the 'realists', his deceit is to pretend that he could be just as cruel as Cleon if the situation called for it, knowing full well that the situation requires not to engage in considerations of justice (viz. meting cruel punishment). It seems to me there is also a third possibility, namely, that pure considerations of power or expediency contain within them their own moderation, and even of justice, in the form of an immoralist calculation that gives room for rights both of the stronger and of the weaker parties.

of necessity or plenty fills them with the ambition which belongs to insolence and pride… so long will the impulse never be wanting to drive men into danger.… It is impossible to prevent … human nature doing what it has once set its mind upon, by force of law or by any other deterrent force whatsoever'.[44] At no point does Diodotus suggest that considerations of legal justice could prevent the effects that come about due to the social divisions and inequalities within the city.[45] On the contrary, his standpoint is based on a thorough-going scepticism of the power of laws to contain the hopes and ambitions of individuals and states, the passions of 'human nature', coupled with the belief that 'by moderate chastisements we may be enabled to benefit in the future by the revenue-producing powers of our dependencies; and we must make up our minds to look for our protection not to legal terrors but to careful administration'.[46]

Diodotus's speech is remarkably 'republican' in recognizing the natural desire for freedom of all peoples, and the need to take this into calculation when desiring to dominate them, especially when such domination is based on establishing democratic governments in allied cities. Diodotus's speech seems to be better explained along the lines of a Nietzschean rather than a Platonic reading: the former argues that just as there is a reason of state 'for the stronger' so there is one 'for the weak' that recognizes a right to the weak on condition that laws be broken (the guilty go unpunished for instance) and that the reality of class conflict be taken into consideration (the need to maintain the *demos* as support of Athenian power). This text of Thucydides may offer a possible source for Machiavelli's well-known conception of the inevitability of social division and of the ultimate inability of laws to undo the corrupting effects of this division. If this is the case, then this would explain why Machiavelli's response to moral corruption would not be a 'law and order' one, as I shall detail in the last section. In so doing, Machiavelli would be following Diodotus's advice to lay aside moral considerations turning on a legal conception of justice and instead to adopt the calculations that come from a 'good administration' of the inevitable social conflicts.

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44 Thucydides 1910, 3.45.

45 Strauss identifies Diodotus's 'deception' in his use of the idea of nature to argue against the death penalty – for Strauss, the claim that laws and punishments are ineffective would be the 'lie' that Diodotus employs to convince his audience of a more moderate and possibly just outcome.

46 Thucydides 1910, 3.46.4. This scepticism with regard to the identity of the legal with the just is precisely the content of the Sophist employment of the opposition between *nomos* and *phusis*. See the discussion of this point in relation to Thucydides in Untersteiner 1954, pp. 321–351.

4 The Immoralism of the Extraordinary in the *Discourses on Livy*

My hypothesis is that Machiavelli's immoralist response to paradiastole and moral corruption in the *Discourses on Livy* takes up the scepticism voiced by Thucydides/Diodotus with regard to the efficacity of laws and orders to contain and manage the original social division between oligarchy and people. Machiavelli clearly expresses this scepticism in D I.18: 'orders and laws made in a republic at its birth, when men are good, are no longer to the purpose later, when they have become wicked. If laws vary according to the accidents in a city, its orders never vary or rarely; this makes new laws insufficient *because the orders, which remain fixed, corrupt them* (*perché gli ordini che stanno saldi le corrompono*)' (D I.18, emphasis mine). For this reason, one cannot simply say that 'self-imposed laws and orders, *leggi e ordini*, are the most adequate expression of human and civil virtù'.[47] This claim does not capture Machiavelli's central distinction between laws that are made for freedom and those that are not (D I.2 and D I.35). Additionally, the claim erases Machiavelli's insight that the permanence of order and law is also at the root of the corruption of a free political life (D III.8.18; D III.18. 18; D III.11.3).[48]

Machiavelli's central teaching in Book III of the *Discourses* is that political bodies 'have longer life that by means of their orders can often be renewed or indeed that through some accident outside the said order come to the said renewal. And it is a thing clearer than light that these bodies do not last if they do not renew themselves'. Renewal entails a process whereby political bodies are led 'back toward their beginnings' (D III.1) so that they may be 'reborn and, by being reborn, regain new life and new virtue, and regain observance of religion and justice, which were beginning to be tainted in it' (D III.1). The 'return to beginnings' brings into evidence the anamnestic character of Machiavelli's response to paradiastolic speech, but it also explains the dialectical insight that in the events where orders are renewed, good and evil necessarily coincide because laws are both negated and affirmed.

The return to beginnings can be effected either by 'orders that drew the Roman republic back toward its beginning', like the tribunate of the plebs, or 'from a good man who arises among them, who with his examples and his virtuous works produces the same effect as the order' (D III.1). Book III of the *Discourses* is dedicated to 'demonstrate to anyone how much the actions of particular men made Rome great… and I shall begin from Brutus, father of

47 Benner 2009, p. 161.

48 On the corruption of orders, see Vatter 2000, pp. 121–127, 208–215; Vatter 2012; and the 'Afterword to the Paperback Edition' of Vatter 2014.

Roman liberty' (D III.1). It soon turns out that actions like those of Brutus have an immoral quality to them: 'whoever makes a free state and does not kill the sons of Brutus, maintains himself for a little time' (D III.3). They will be actions that are both good and evil, where virtue and vice are conjoined in a dialectical unity.

By way of contrast, Erica Benner claims that Machiavelli teaches 'the necessity for anyone who wishes to maintain his *stato* to observe "ordinary" constraints'.[49] Conversely, every time Machiavelli uses the word 'extraordinary', his intention is ironical: this usage is a code for a non-virtuous reliance on superstitious conceptions of religion and God.[50] According to Benner, Machiavelli adopts a Socratic employment of irony as a sort of antidote to the rhetorical technique of paradiastole: this irony is not intended to produce 'good appearances through rhetoric, as the so-called sophists taught, but skills in seeing through spurious appearances and resisting their appeal'.[51] Benner's thesis is that Machiavelli is only in appearance teaching evil as an ironical ploy to convince his readers to be virtuous princes in the classical style, that is, by upholding the Socratic list of virtues such as wisdom, justice, courage and temperance, as well as the particular 'princely virtues' of kindness or liberality and mercy or compassion identified by Roman philosophers like Seneca. Benner's general hypothesis is that Machiavelli follows the Socratic dictum that 'justice is the legal' and he employs double-writing in order to 'persuade men in power to restore the rule of law'.[52] Machiavelli's new prince, to maintain his state, not

49 Benner 2009, p. 368. Benner refers to D III.37, D III.6 and P 19.

50 This judgment follows from one of Benner's few rules to decode Machiavelli's 'double-writing'. Whenever he employs an opposition, such as between virtue and fortune, he means to say 'that one is deficient and the other adequate to the standards of human beings should strive to meet': Benner 2009, p. 367.

51 Benner 2009, p. 66. Benner's account of Socratic irony is surprisingly un-ironical and transparent, based as it is on the hermeneutic principle that 'if a text seems to put forward an opinion that readers find shocking, they should consider whether the author writes something "to the opposite effect" elsewhere that "nullifies the effect" of the first statement': Benner 2009, p. 68. It is unclear why the opposite could also not be the case, namely, that the author says exactly what they mean in the shocking passages and pretends not to believe in it by saying something opposite in some other passage. This is how Strauss interprets philosophical irony in the case of Alfarabi, for instance, in Strauss 1988.

52 Benner 2009, p. 79. Benner seems to take the Socratic identity of justice with legality in the literal sense, that is, as if it referred to customary laws. However, it seems more likely that the identification of justice to the legal refers to the Platonic idea that a just government is based on knowledge of the natural law accessible to the philosopher. Thus, when Benner (2009, p. 80) says that 'Xenophon's *Hiero* is a well-known example of a dialogue through which the tyrant recognizes the need to convert himself into a law-abiding prince', she misunderstands that the point of the dialogue is to show the tyrant that it is

only needs to show 'an old-fashioned concern for justice' but actually needs to be just.[53]

Yet, in D I.18, Machiavelli explicitly says that 'it is not enough to use ordinary terms *since the ordinary modes are bad*, but it is necessary to go to the extraordinary' (emphasis mine). For Machiavelli, not all *ordini* are 'good', and the stability of order is not the highest value. As his much-debated discussion of the productivity of social conflict in D I.4 shows, Machiavelli establishes a mutual relation between freedom and social conflict, the correlate of which is that the stability of order is itself the cause of corruption. From here the need to innovate or revolutionize order for the sake of freedom.[54] In reality, Machiavelli employs paradiastolic speech in a dialectical sense every time that he discusses the possibility that, when orders are themselves corrupt, there is a need for 'good' citizens to return to the beginnings and engage in actions that may contain 'evil'. Benner believes that Machiavelli is being ironical: he is actually trying to dissuade citizens from these actions by telling them they are very difficult and suggesting that it is better to stick to 'the ordinary mode of renovating that relies on laws ordered and maintained by responsible citizens'.[55] Machiavelli does not appear to be ironical, though, when he criticizes in D III.3 the republican Gonfalonier Piero Soderini for not 'knowing how to be like Brutus', that is, for not assuming 'extraordinary authority and break up civil equality together with the laws' for the sake of 'the safety of the fatherland and not for his own ambition'. The result is that Soderini 'lost not only his fatherland but his state and his reputation'.

The possibility of a good man doing evil in order to renew the orders of the republic was already proposed in D I.26 and I.27, elaborating on D I.18. The first of these chapters discusses the 'new prince' who must 'renew everything in the state'. Crucially, the exemplar of this radical renewal is the Hebrew king David who, according to Machiavelli, made 'the rich poor and the poor rich'.[56] It is

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the philosopher who is the 'living law' on which they should model themselves if they want to maintain their state, as shown in Vatter 2010.

53 Benner 2009, p. 84.

54 There is a great amount of literature on the productivity of social conflict in Machiavelli. I shall here refer only to the recent discussions in Pedullà 2011, Lucchese 2015 and Winter 2018. This is not to deny the obvious point, more or less universally recognized, that Machiavelli connects closely constitutional rule and free political life. For a recent discussion of this question and related literature, see Geuna 2015.

55 Benner 2009, p. 372.

56 It is notorious that Machiavelli here refers to a verse in Luke 1,53 "He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty." The verse is proclaimed by Mary and refers to the actions of God. The prior verse says: "He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble." Strauss claims that Machiavelli engages in

well-known that during Machiavelli's active political life, David was used by Florence's republican government as a symbol of self-reliance.[57] Machiavelli duly warns his readers that it is usually better to remain a private citizen rather than incur in actions that are 'enemies of every form of life, not just Christian but also human' because they do not belong to a *vivere civile*.[58] Revolutions that radically alter relations of property go against the axiom defended in *The Prince* according to which it is important not to touch the property of subjects if one is to maintain a state. However, on P 13 Machiavelli resorts to the figure of David once more to praise reliance on one's own arms rather than mercenary armies.[59] Despite his warning to his readers, Machiavelli gets to his real point, which picks up the doctrine advanced in *The Prince*: 'nonetheless he who does not want to take the path of goodness, and wants to maintain himself, must enter into this evil (*conviene che entri in questo male*)' (D I.26). The path to be avoided is a middle way. Still, most politicians adopt this path because 'they do not know how to be either wholly bad or wholly good (*non sanno essere ne tutti cattivi ne tutti buoni*)'.

In the next chapter (D I.27), Machiavelli explains in what sense it may be necessary to be 'wholly bad' in the public sphere, and how difficult this is, even if one is a morally vicious person. To illustrate this point, he discusses the example of the tyrant of Perugia, Giovampagolo Baglioni, who, albeit being a morally depraved person in his private life, nonetheless could not bring himself to kill Pope Julius II when he had the opportunity, and in turn lost power. According to Machiavelli, such an immoral action would qualify the actor as someone who was 'honourably bad' (*onorevolmente cattivi*) because they would have accomplished an action that 'must leave of itself an eternal memory… and would have done *something whose greatness* would

"blasphemy" by using Biblical verses to justify social revolutions (Strauss 1995: 48–9). On Machiavelli's reading of David, I refer to the unpublished study by Ely Orrego Torres, 'Modélico y penitente: El Rey David en la obra de Nicolás Maquiavelo', MA Thesis, Universidad Diego Portales, 2018. https://bit.ly/33Y3YC7

57 Michelangelo's statue of David was located outside the seat of the republican government in the Piazza della Signoria, so Machiavelli would have crossed it when going to work: Barolsky 2004. On the controversial question of Machiavelli's involvement with Leonardo's and Michelangelo's bids to decorate the halls of the Palazzo Vecchio, see Cecchi 1996.

58 The adjective of 'human' here is to be understood in contraposition to Machiavelli's claim that the political actor should follow Achilles's example and adopt Chiron the centaur as their teacher. In short, it refers to his teaching on how the political actor must learn how to use the human and the animal, as stated in P 18.

59 See the discussion in McClure 2016, who, however, does not query further Machiavelli's understanding of ancient religion.

have *surpassed any infamy*, any danger that could have arisen from it' (D I.27, emphasis mine).[60]

As recounted in P 7, Pope Julius II was not only the cause of the downfall of Cesare Borgia, but he also exemplified the kind of Vatican politics that invited foreign occupation of Italy (P 11) and stood opposed to the project of national unification on which Machiavelli concludes *The Prince* (P 26).[61] The discussion of Baglioni leads beyond Agathocles's example: for whereas in the case of Agathocles, cruelty was not enough to garner him greatness, here Machiavelli seems to point to David as the exemplar of a political actor whose actions are both evil *and* great, indeed worthy of 'eternal memory'. Machiavelli speaks of 'a malice that has in it greatness or is in any part generous'. In D I.30, he returns to the same question: what is it that prevents most individuals from being entirely good or entirely bad? To be good means to 'behave modestly' (*portarsi modestamente*), while being entirely bad means using 'violent measures that have something honourable in them (*termini violenti e che abbiano in sé l'onorevole*)'. Similarly, in D III.27, Machiavelli speaks of executions that 'have something great and generous' in them. These excerpts show that Machiavelli considers that certain immoral actions not only can maintain someone's state but also do not preclude them from attaining the highest level of worldly glory and honour.

These considerations suggest that there is no necessary and mutual exclusion between immoralism and glory, as some interpreters maintain.[62] Conversely, Machiavelli's conception of 'a malice that has in it greatness or is in any part generous' problematizes McCormick's defence of Agathocles, which requires dismissing the horizon of 'glory' entirely as a component of princely virtue.[63]

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60 For two different approaches to the episode, see Coby 1999, p. 231, who takes the moral of the story to be that 'the world is full of petty criminals but big criminals are rare'; and Leslie Walker, in Machiavelli 1950 II.55, who comments that 'the remark about gaining immortal fame is doubtless not meant to be taken seriously'.

61 McCormick explains that 'Machiavelli's Duke Valentino shows how far one can ride papal authority toward becoming arbiter of Italy, but he simultaneously serves as a cautionary tale for how much further one must go than did the duke to actually realize such a goal': McCormick 2014, p. 157. McCormick does not discuss on this occasion Machiavelli's text on Baglioni.

62 See Pedullà 2013, p. xlix. In her revised interpretation of Agathocles, Kahn (2013, p. 570) argues that 'the distinction Machiavelli is making is not between military and political glory, but between military virtù and glory. This is important because it signals that virtù is not the same as glory: the skills one needs to achieve military or political success have an asymptotic relation to the greatness that is Machiavelli's chief concern in the *Discourses* and that he holds as his lure to the Medici in chapter 26 of *The Prince*'.

63 McCormick 2014, p. 160: 'I argue that Machiavelli's treatment of glory in *The Prince* suggests that Scipio is glorious but not virtuous while Agathocles is virtuous but not glorious'.

In making this distinction between glory and true princely virtue, McCormick claims that 'via the invocation of Hiero in chapter 6 of *The Prince*, Machiavelli invites comparisons of his Greek tyrants, including Agathocles, with the great founders who he so famously exalts in this chapter – Moses, Romulus, Theseus, Cyrus'.[64] At the same time, the glory that is attributed to these founders 'served to whitewash the full extent of their criminality'.[65] But if all foundations entail some crime, it does not follow that great criminals deserve the praise given to founders. I contend that Machiavelli's view is that the foundation of certain things, like religions and republics (and often one and the same, as in the case of Moses), are great actions in themselves and thus grant glory to the founders and excuse whatever crimes were necessary to bring them into actuality.[66] Whereas McCormick is denigrating founders in order to elevate Agathocles to the same rank as a Moses or a Cyrus, Machiavelli, arguably, is doing something else: he is widening the reach of virtue in order to capture the necessary cruelties required by a certain category of action which is itself worthy of glory.

Machiavelli's longest discussion of the need for 'extraordinary virtue' is found in D III.21–22. His background assumption in this discussion remains that of the necessity of a return to beginnings in which new orders 'need to be made alive by the virtù of the citizen who will execute them with animosity (*animosamente*) against the power of those that transgress them' by actions that are *eccessive e notabili* (D III.1). The discussion of D III.21–22 is framed by citations drawn from Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* (D III.20 and D III.22 respectively). This discussion also tests the hypothesis of the sense in which Cyrus stands as an example of glory that elevates him above Agathocles. According to Benner, Xenophon's text is one of those examples of 'double-writing' in which Xenophon is secretly critical of Cyrus's actions in so far as they do not exemplify the Socratic identity of the just with the legal. But, in this case, Machiavelli is quite explicit about wanting to contest Xenophon's claim that humanity in a captain is the virtue that leads them to glory and obtains the obedience of the soldiers.

Machiavelli discusses Xenophon's claim by adopting Plutarch's device of comparing 'parallel lives'. He compares Scipio as an exemplar of a humane commander with Hannibal as the exemplar of the inhumane captain. Machiavelli's first thesis is that both too much inhumanity and too much humanity cause serious problems for the respective leaders: in the case of Hannibal, it

64 McCormick 2014, p. 134.

65 McCormick 2014, p. 134.

66 On the glory of founding religions and republics, see D I.10. I discuss below the problem of crimes incurred in these foundings.

causes the captain to be hated by his troops; in the case of Scipio, it makes the captain contemptible before them. It is here that Machiavelli adds that *virtù istraordinaria* and *eccessiva virtù* are necessary in order to balance out the inconveniences caused by these contrary ways of acting. If there is an irony here, then it seems to be directed against the Aristotelian belief that virtue is a mean between extremes. Machiavelli seems to say that such a mean is not given, and as a consequence virtue can be attained only by correcting any way of acting by introducing some element that is 'excessive' and 'extraordinary' (thus, an action that breaks with the legal norm). The reason is that the customary or normal ways of proceeding (whether they be humane or inhumane, merciful or cruel) may have to be transgressed in order to attain a virtuous match (*riscontro*) with the times.[67]

Machiavelli clarifies his point that the virtue of a way of proceeding is not intrinsic to the action by comparing the severity of Manlius Torquatus with the humanity of Valerius Corvinus. How is it possible that such contrary ways both gained the captains the same glory? Machiavelli's thesis is that everything depends on what one is commanding: if what is commanded is legal ('*ordinario*') then the commander can afford to be humane. But if what is commanded is extra- or supra-legal, viz. 'extraordinary', then it must be enforced through the strength of *animo* precisely because it lacks institutional support. Manlius had an *animo suo forte* and commanded *straordinari suoi imperi*.[68] An extraordinary command is required in those actions that seek to renew the orders of a corrupt polity and make it return to its beginnings:

> One must believe then that Manlius was constrained to proceed so rigidly by the extraordinary nature of his commands, to which he was inclined by his own nature; *and these commands are useful to a republic because they return its orders to their beginning* (*principio*) *and to their ancient virtù*. And if a republic were to be so fortunate that it often had, as we said above, those people who through their example renew its laws, and not only kept it back from running to its ruin but actually brought it back (*la ritirasse indietro*) the republic would be perpetual. (D III.22, emphasis mine)

The passage suggests that Machiavelli may be making use of Diodotus's sophist notion that nature is the *source of a strength* that is not only counter to laws

67 See the discussion of Fabius Maximus in D III.8, and compare it with Plutarch's life of Fabius.

68 D III.22. Machiavelli uses the expression *imperi istraordinari* twice.

and customs, but that can be employed to *renew* these orders and in this way counteract the corruption of the free way of life.[69]

Machiavelli insists on the immoralism of his thesis by criticizing the contrary view adopted by both Xenophon and Livy, according to whom the virtuous prince or captain is always the humane and law-observing actor. Again employing paradiastole in a dialectical sense, Machiavelli defends the cruelty of Manlius's commands because they are 'wholly in favour of the public, and take no consideration of private ambition' (D III.22). Manlian commands are not intended to generate partisans, and they employ cruel means for the sake of the common good. The extraordinary nature of the Manlian commands is thus intended to counter the possibility of *stasis*. Conversely, 'if we have to consider a prince, as Xenophon does.... [T]he way of proceeding of Valerius is useful in a prince but pernicious in a citizen, not only for country but for oneself: for country because those ways prepare for tyranny; for oneself, because his own city will suspect his way of proceeding and is forced to assure itself at his expense. And so contrariwise I assert that the way of proceeding of Manlius is harmful in a prince, but useful in a citizen, and most useful to country' (D III.22). Machiavelli's irony seems aimed here at Xenophon's 'tyrannical teaching'. If this teaching is designed to persuade a tyrant to govern in ways that legitimate their rule, Machiavelli's point is that such a teaching paradoxically undermines a free way of life because the latter requires that citizens be able to act like princes – in the return to beginnings – in order to maintain the common good.[70]

I conclude by drawing attention to the fact that Machiavelli's dialectical conception of *virtù* that conjoins virtue with vice is nearly always articulated in relation to an idea of religion as *religare* in 'its original Roman sense [of]... binding themselves back to a beginning, as Roman *pietas* consisted in being bound to the beginning of Roman history, the foundation of the eternal city'.[71] This understanding of religion, however, was not unique to the Romans. Thucydides' condemnation of paradiastolic speech is not only joined to an appeal to archaic values, but also to archaic religion: 'Thus religion was in honour with neither party; but the use of fair phrases to arrive at guilty ends was in high

69 See also D III.9: 'we are unable to oppose that which nature inclines us (*non ci possiamo opporre a quello che c'inclina la natura*)'.

70 More generally, Machiavelli defines a free political life as one in which 'everyone realizes not only that their children are born free and not slaves, but also that *they can become princes through their virtù*' (D II.2 emphasis mine).

71 Arendt 1990, p. 198.

reputation.... The ancient simplicity into which honour so largely entered was laughed down and disappeared'.[72]

Machiavelli is clear that the resistance that his contemporaries have to immoralism, that is, to the idea that an actor can be 'honourably bad' and their actions be characterized by 'a malice that has in it greatness or is in any part generous', is due to their Christian education that has made the 'ancient virtù' seem in part inhuman and in part unattainable (D II.2). As Machiavelli sees it, the problem is that Christian religion 'makes us care less about the honour of the world (*l'onore del mondo*); whereas the Gentiles, caring much about it and having placed in it the highest good (*sommo bene*) were in their actions more ferocious' (D II.2). Christianity has 'contempt of human things', that is, of 'greatness of spirit, in the strength of the body, and in all other things that tend to make men exceedingly strong'. This proto-Nietzschean critique of Christianity indicates that Machiavelli both accepts that glory is the highest goal of political action *and* that such goal, viz. the pursuit of *gloria mondana*, requires at times immoral or 'ferocious' actions. In D II.2, Machiavelli links this ferocity to the love of freedom, not to ambition (*pleonexia*) or the desire for domination.

As the Biblical exemplar of David shows, Machiavelli does not think that only pagan religions can educate towards the pursuit of worldly glory. This is the reason he includes Moses together with Romulus, Thesesus and Cyrus in P 6. For 'whoever reads the Bible judiciously will see that since he wished his laws and his orders to go forward, Moses was forced to kill infinite men who, moved by nothing other than envy, were opposed to his plans' (D III.30). The inclusion of Moses among the great Gentile founders seems to call into question Benner's claim that 'orderers who deem it necessary to have recourse to God are probably under exercising their own self-legislating virtù'.[73] Instead, Moses is the paradigmatic case of why all founders need to act like 'armed prophets' because 'the nature of peoples is variable; and it is easy to persuade them of something, but difficult to keep them in that persuasion. And thus things must be ordered in such a mode that when they no longer believe, one can make them believe by force. Moses, Cyrus, Theseus and Romulus would not have been able to make their peoples observe their constitutions for long if they had been unarmed' (P 6). Here the device of paradiastole serves Machiavelli to highlight the vicinity of Moses to Romulus and is intended to shield the immoralism of great actions from moral judgment, in this case Romulus's crimes of fratricide and regicide because 'it is necessary that one alone give the

72 Thucydides 1910, 3.82–83.

73 Benner 2009, p. 387.

mode and that any such ordering depend on his mind' (D I.9). 'It is very suitable that when the deed accuses him, the effect excuses him' (D I.9).[74]

At the same time, Machiavelli follows ancient tradition in placing the figure of Moses in proximity to Numa.[75] Compared with Romulus, 'Numa would obtain first rank' because 'he wished to put *new and unaccustomed orders* in the city' (D I.11, emphasis mine) that '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' (D I.11).[76] Numa's 'extraordinary laws', in this similar to the Mosaic legislation, represents the religious character of the foundation of free life to which citizens must always be willing to return in their innovations of social orders. The paradiastolic employment of David and Moses to discuss Romulus and Numa indicates that the dialectical coincidence of virtue and vice in extraordinary actions worthy of everlasting glory finds its roots in an 'ancient' conception of religion. It is here that one must find that 'teleological suspension of ethical' that characterizes Machiavellian *virtù*.

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74 For a recent discussion of Machiavelli's republican reading of Moses, see Villegas 2020.

75 I refer here to my discussion in Vatter 2017.

76 It is difficult to follow Benner's claim according to which Numa's 'use of religion represents a corruption of Romulus's more prudent "first orders"': Benner 2009, p. 391. For Benner, the Roman cult of *fides* corresponds to a 'religion with ethical principles and obligations that are necessary foundation of human orders': Benner 2009, p. 398. But Numa is at the origin of the Roman *fides*: Dumézil 1988.

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CHAPTER 9

The 'Discovery of the Masses' and the Paradox of the Fatherland

Diogo Pires Aurélio

The notion of the people is the axis around which the plot of the *Discourses on Livy*, namely its Book I, unfolds. The people undoubtedly plays a crucial role in other works by Machiavelli, beginning with *The Prince*, but its importance is different in the *Discourses*. According to Sheldon S. Wolin, it consists 'in a greater appreciation on Machiavelli's part of the political capabilities of the masses and correspondingly greater doubts about the utility of political heroes'.[1] In *The Prince,* Machiavelli had already sketched two theses that run counter to tradition: first, all political unity is fraught with division, placing those who command on one side and those who obey or resist them on the other (P 9); second, the most consistent base for power is the people (P 9 and 19). In that book, however, the people is mostly seen as an element that power should try to keep on its own side, due to its higher dependability. It is not, as some interpreters, including Wolin, make out, just a malleable element, 'suitable material for the art of the prince'.[2] In fact, the people is moulded by the leader to the same extent as the leader is by the people, since the leader must take on a succession of characters, according to the circumstances, in order to govern. This reciprocity, however, is laid out clearly only in the *Discourses*.[3] Here, the people is eventually presented as capable of determining the nature of institutions. Wolin calls this change of perspective 'the discovery of the mass', adding that, before the nineteenth century, nobody had understood the role of the masses with the acuity shown by Machiavelli in this work.[4]

The meaning of this 'discovery of the mass' goes well beyond eclipsing the 'new prince', the hero capable of founding, or 'refounding', the city. Although not entirely proscribed, this figure will lose a good deal of the relevance it enjoyed in *The Prince*, even going so far as to have the extent of its influence

1 Wolin 2016, p. 205.

2 Wolin 2016, p. 206

3 On the differences between P and D, a recurring theme in literature on Machiavelli, see Strauss 1958, pp. 21–35, Skinner 1978, pp. 175–176, Najemy 2010, pp. 98–102.

4 Wolin 2016, p. 205.

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questioned.[5] In the *Discourses*, according to John M. Najemy, 'Machiavelli finally buries the fantasy of good princes capable of redeeming states'.[6] It is certainly no coincidence that the examples of heroic founders – Moses, Cyrus, Romulus, Theseus, Lycurgus – evoked by the Florentine all belong to a mythical past. Even if the collective memory can attribute the orders and laws that structure a city to a single hero (the founding father), a true founding or refounding is never limited to a single lifetime since it is always a work in progress.[7] Although Machiavelli reserves an important role for the leader, 'the relationship between him and his people cannot be reduced to a mono-directional action of the first over the latter, because the desires of the people possess a relative autonomy, which cannot be moulded as wax'.[8] Moreover, it is very difficult to find someone, as extraordinary times require, who is sufficiently generous to sacrifice himself for the greater good, but at the same time sufficiently perverse 'to act like a beast' (P 18.99). In fact, 'it very rarely happens that someone good wishes to become prince by bad ways, even though his end be good, and that someone wicked, having become prince, wishes to work well and that it will never occur to his mind to use well the authority that he has acquired badly' (D I.18.51). In short, the good man is incapable of the means, and the bad man is incapable of the end. Neither one nor the other have the conditions to truly impose 'new orders' or refound 'a political way of life'.[9] However, cities last for centuries, and people think of them often as if they were a unity of which they are all part. How to understand such a unity, taking into account that any city, according to Machiavelli, is necessarily a divided city due to disputes among its inhabitants?

1 The King's Place after the King

The new role attributed to the masses manifested itself, first and foremost, as an aversion to monarchy, which had come to seem like tyranny to the free cities or those which once were free. In ancient Rome, the people had been 'hostile for four hundred years to the kingly name' (D I.58.117). In Florence, as

5 Gramsci 1966, p. 14, interprets *The Prince* as 'an historical example of the Sorelian "myth", that is, of a political ideology that presents itself not as a cold utopia, nor a doctrinal rationale, but as the creation of a concrete fantasy that operates on a diverse and splintered people, to rally and organize its collective will'.

6 Najemy 2010, p.101.

7 See D. I. 17. 48, and D. I. 49. 101.

8 Visentin 2015, p. 379.

9 See Najemy 2010, p. 101; Lefort 1972, p. 498.

in other Italian Renaissance cities, the communal organization continued to be venerated,[10] even when it had already started to be an anomaly in a Europe where the state had begun to take root. 'As the foreign travellers of the time noticed', according to Maurizio Viroli, 'most of the towns of Liguria, Lombardy, Emilia, Romagna and Tuscany had adopted a form of government that was not to be found elsewhere in Europe'. One of those travellers remarks, in reference to Genoa, that 'the citizens are brave men who do not obey princes or kings, but only the senators that they have appointed'.[11] Such an anomaly persisted in Florence, including under the Medici, between 1434 and 1494, through the multiple councils and corporations – the well-known guilds – that remained active until extremely late. Paradoxically, it was from this network of organizations, more specifically by exploiting the disagreements among their members, that Cosimo de' Medici managed to secure the main support for his family. As Felix Gilbert stresses, 'the Medici had ruled behind a republican façade. That the citizens of Florence were the rulers of their city was a fiction that the Medici had carefully preserved. The magistrates of the city had to submit their proposals to a number of councils which were supposed to comprise the various groups of the citizenry'.[12] And it was this 'republican façade' that allowed for the survival of the city's communal institutions, to such an extent that, in 1494, when the monarchical government fell, many believed that those institutions would return to the mythical purity of the model that the Medici had corrupted while pretending to perpetuate it.

The republicanism that prevails among the humanists during the Renaissance continues to feed off the memory of the guilds, bolstered by the influence of Roman law and authors such as Polibius, Sallustius and Cicero, for whom the primacy of the law constitutes the watermark of the *vivere civico*. Above all, one can find in them the influence of Aristotle's *Politics*, a work in which, despite some ambiguity in the text, it is possible to detect a preference for moderation and a 'mixed government', which reflects the multiplicity of citizens but protects the common interest.[13] Aristotle justifies this preference

10 See Raimondi 2013, p. 78.

11 Viroli 1994, p. 4.

12 Gilbert 1965, pp. 7–8. Sasso 1993, p. 484, points out the meaning of this ambiguity: 'By identifying his cause and that of his family with liberty, Lorenzo led his speech to the highest perfection' [my translation]. On this period of the history of Florence, see also Fubini 1994, chap. III, and chiefly Rubinstein 1997.

13 'The theory of the polis … was cardinal to the constitutional theory of Italian cities and Italian humanists. It offered a paradigm of how a body politic might be held together when it was conceived, as in Italian commune must be, as a city composed of interacting persons rather than universal norms and traditional institutions': Pocock 1975, p. 74.

by arguing that 'if … virtue is a mean, then the middling sort of life is best - the mean that is capable of being attainable by each sort of individual. The same defining principles must also define virtue and vice in the case of a city and a regime … Now, in all cities there are three parts of the city, the very well off, the very poor, and third, those in the middle between these'.[14] Nonetheless, there is a problem: such an inductor of moderation is hard to come by: 'most regimes are either democratic or oligarchical … For as a result of the fact that the middling element is often few in them, whichever is preeminent, whether those owning property or the people, oversteps the middle [path] and conducts the regime to suit itself, so that either rule of the people comes into being or an oligarchy'.[15]

The notion of a 'mixed government' is, therefore, nothing but a hypothesis without an actual expression, a myth in which the idea of moderation and justice would incarnate. Theoretically, that government is placed in the mean of society, the 'fair mean', equally far from all the interests, in an idealized point where discord would be diluted, leaving room for harmony and collective force. In Savonarola's words, 'where there is greater unity, there is greater strength'.[16] However, any kind of government will tend to lean towards one side. The virtue allegedly located in the mean hides the vertical axis of inequality (between the rulers and the ruled) behind a fictitious horizontal axis in which all parts would be equal, thereby preserving the essence of monarchical topology. This is precisely the fiction that Machiavelli detects in the transition from the monarchy to the Roman republic: 'Even though its kings lost their empire … nonetheless those who expelled them expelled from Rome the name, and not the kingly power, having at once ordered two consuls there who stood in the place of the kings' (D I.2.14). As noted by Esposito, the place of the king remains, even when it does not possess 'a political, but a metapolitical function, in the sense that it constitutes the logico-symbolic pre-condition for the functioning and, above all, the stability of the system, regardless of its constitutional form'.[17]

So-called civic humanism notwithstanding, Machiavelli rejects the idea of the dilution of antagonisms as a foundation for good government, which he regards as utopic. First, because the centre from which the elixir of harmony

14 Aristotle 2013, Book IV, 11.1295a35-1295b5, p. 114

15 Aristotle 2013, Book IV, 11.1296a22-27. For a comparison between Aristotle and Machiavelli on mixed government, although from a somewhat different perspective than the one used here, see Borrelli 2009, pp. 49–55.

16 Quoted in Esposito 1984, p. 121.

17 Esposito 1984, p. 128.

allegedly springs is an imaginary place, evoked solely to legitimize the power of the powerful. Second, because the disturbances that took place in Rome between the end of the monarchy and the beginning of the empire, far from prejudicial, were in fact the source of laws favourable to freedom. And third, because conflict is inherent in any politically structured group. Rome's government was, beyond doubt, mixed. The republic even perfected that status by adding plebeian tribunes to the pre-existing magistrates. However, the foundation of its laws, far from pointing to an abstract idea of justice, resides in the tension that opposes the 'humour' of the ruled to the 'humour' of the rulers. None of them knows limits: neither the natural law of the Ancient World nor the Christian-inspired morals suspend the aspirations for freedom that are at the root of both. Harmony, should it ever exist, is always ephemeral. To 'do politics', as Esposito says, means to 'contain this tension in "civil terms". However, the end of the tension would signify the end of politics itself'.[18] In politics, to paraphrase Claude Lefort, the centre remains an empty place.

Such a firmly acentric notion of politics raises certain problems. The first is the nature of each of those forces, whose confrontation generates politics without ever disappearing, contrary to what takes place in Hobbes' social contract theory. If there is conflict – and politics – it is because one of them tends to dominate the other, that is, to occupy the centre – the place of the just, which was, in the monarchy, the 'place of the king' – and to impose its order unilaterally. The purpose of politics is to neutralize this threat without neutralizing the antagonism provoked by it. Up to what point does the balance thus generated, no matter how unstable, differ from the 'fair mean'? Secondly, the virtue attributed to a state of conflict by Machiavelli is no less problematic. If indeed disunity was the guarantee of freedom in the Roman Republic, it was also at the root of its fall (D I.37). Is there a difference between good conflict and bad conflict? Finally, there is the question of the people, understood as a totality, as a fatherland that Machiavelli claims to love 'more than his own soul'[19] and to which both 'humours' refer, such that the term 'people' will often refer not to a part but to the city in its entirety. What exactly is the meaning of this whole, whose survival and fortune, according to the author, depend on the disunity of its parts?

18 Esposito 1984, p. 142.

19 'Amo la patria mia più del anima', Letter to Francesco Vettori, 16/04/1527, in Machiavelli 1998, p. 977. This resonates Cicero, who said 'fatherland, which is dearer to me than my own life' (*patria, quae mihi vita mea multo est carior*): Cicero 1989, p. 40.

2 The Few

Florence is the source of inspiration to most theses in the *Discourses*.[20] Livy's text could, from this perspective, be read as an allegory through which Machiavelli explains what happened in the city on the Arno river between 1494 and 1512: the same divisions, the same resistance by the people to the ambition of the powerful.[21] In both cases, individuals and groups tend to expand their freedom to act. And if the ambition to command is unlikely among the many, given the poor conditions in which they have always lived, among the few it is constant, due to the privileges into which they are born and the fact that their families have been able to keep themselves in power for centuries. 'For so great is the ambition of the great that it soon brings that city to its ruin if it is not beaten down in a city by various ways and various modes' (D I.36.80).

Who are the so-called great who rule Florence? In practice, it is a group of bankers, big traders and textile mill owners who supply not only Italy but many European markets. Their control over the city became even stronger from 1293 onwards, when a law was passed that prohibited descendants of feudal aristocrats, those who owned land and castles, to take part in public affairs. Located socially between the plebs and the blood nobles, these new aristocrats attributed to themselves the middle ground, i.e. the mythical place of power. Although not completely airtight, they represent a relatively closed group. According to figures quoted by Gilbert, at the end of the fifteenth century, 'in one district of the city there were 660 taxpayers, of which 30 people (less than 5 per cent) paid more than 50 per cent of the taxes imposed on that district'.[22] The same applied in the political sphere: 'In the times of Lorenzo Magnifico, positions on the government's policy-making boards had rotated among a few hundred men, all of whom were loyal to the Medici regime'. Machiavelli's own estimate is lower still and does not apply only to Florence: 'In all republics, ordered in whatever mode, never do even forty or fifty citizens reach the ranks of command' (D I.16.46).

What distinguishes this group is mainly their reputation, education and wealth. Reputation places them within the network of influence that

20 Guarini 1990, p. 39, among others, claims that 'Machiavelli's vision was profoundly influenced by communal tradition'. However, he knows that it would be impossible 'to attribute to his ideal Roman model characteristics so radically different from those of the city-states within whose horizons he remains, held back by his experience and by his *forma mentis*'.

21 In this point I subscribe the view held by Zuckert 2017, p. 126: 'he is recommending Rome not as its history was depicted by Livy, but as a model he has derived from that history on the basis of his own knowledge of the things, both ancient and modern'.

22 Gilbert 1965, p. 22.

dominates the city. Education initiates them, from an early age, in rhetoric and politics, giving them easier access to positions of magistracy, especially diplomacy. Wealth makes the republic dependent on them since it is to them that the republic turns to for loans in case of war. These privileges, however, are cloaked behind a moral narrative claiming that societies should depend on the centre just as the stars revolve around the Earth. It is unsurprising, therefore, that reputation, education and wealth, three effective advantages, should be transformed, as if by alchemy, into virtues that legitimize the exercise of power: honour, knowledge and greatness. Plato had already exemplified this phenomenon by placing the following words in the mouth of Thrasymachus: 'In each case, then, the ruling body lays down the laws with a view to its own interests … Legislation is thus the ruling body's way of proclaiming that what is just is what is in its interests; …. This, my friend, is what I say is just, and it's the same in all cities'.[23]

The names this group is known by – the few, the great, the mighty, the nobles, the *gentiluomini,* the *ottimati,* etc. – all converge on their being identified as the best – the *aristoi.* Again, it is Machiavelli who shows the artificial and ideological nature of this metabolism when he comments on the reaction of the patricians to land reform: 'one never spoke of these laws in Rome, without turning the city upside down. … Since these offences came to bear against powerful men who, as it appeared to them, were defending the public in opposing it, whenever one was reminded of it, as was said, the whole city was turned upside down' (D I.37.79). The strategy of the powerful is to identify their point of view with objective reality and their own interests with the common interest. Claiming for themselves the only place from which a just law may be dictated, the great exclude the other groups from power and put aside, out of 'order', those who oppose them. The mystification carried out in this exercise is shown with particular irony by Machiavelli: 'For the Roman nobility always yielded honours to the plebs without extraordinary scandals, but when it came to property, so great was its obstinacy in defending it that the plebs had recourse to the extraordinary' (D I.37.80).

The prevailing sentiment among the great, their 'humour', is the desire to dominate and oppress. Although they share the desire for freedom, as does any human, the minority 'desires to be free so as to command', whereas the 'others, who are infinite, desire freedom to live secure' (D I.16.46).[24] It is not a question of natural impulse, but an attitude brought on by the group's situation in the balance of powers which is society. When accompanied by wealth, positions

23 Plato 2012, Book 1, 338e, p. 19.

24 The dichotomy of 'humours', already present in *The Prince*, is based on a quote by Sallust: 'dominari illi volunt, vos liberi esse; facere illi injurias, vos prohibere'. See Sallust 1845, p. 23.

and status, the desire for freedom becomes the desire to preserve these goods, which, in turn, becomes the political desire to dominate those who do not have possessions, or who have them in moderation, so as to prevent them from exercising a desire to acquire what the former possess. It becomes an endless spiral of ambition. When they face resistance, the great retreat but, immediately afterwards, 'with patience and industry' (D I.37.79), they resort to strategies, conspire and ally themselves with outsiders so as to return to what they consider the normal order of things. In Florence, for as long as the republic lasted, all means were employed to reduce the participation of the people in the exercise of power, from denying government loans to boycotting assemblies and abandoning positions.[25] Machiavelli, who as secretary of the Chancery knew the situation well, projected it onto the history of Rome: 'as soon as the Tarquins were dead and fear fled from the nobles, they began to spit out that poison against the plebs that they had held in their breasts, and they offended it in all the modes they could' (D I.2.15).

Nevertheless, Machiavelli's assessment of the nobles is not limited to the negative aspects. As observed by J. Patrick Coby, he also 'defends patricians because patricians have a role to play in a mixed regime and because successful politics depends more on the counterbalance of vice than on the empowerment of virtue'.[26] Indeed, in the first chapters of the *Discourses,* we see several references to this type of 'mixed government', as cultivated by the *Quattrocento* humanists. For instance, referring to Rome, Machiavelli claims that 'it never took away all authority from kingly qualities so as to give authority to the aristocrats, nor did it diminish the authority of the aristocrats altogether so as to give it to the people. But, remaining mixed, it made a perfect republic' (D I.2.14). For a good part of the Florentine elite, only this 'mixture' of the three forms of government would ensure stability by slowing the breakdown process that the Polybian law of *anacyclosis* ascribes to all regimes. Proof of this could allegedly be seen in the apparent immutability of the institutions of Venice, where power was formally distributed among the *dogi* (the monarchical element), the assembly, or *Consiglio Maggiore* (the popular element), and the senate (the aristocratic element).[27] However, the city was in fact governed by the latter, in line with the tradition according to which good government, besides

25 See Gilbert 1965, chapter II.

26 Coby 1999, p. 86. On this issue, see also Bonadeo 1969.

27 Right after the Medici were overthrown in 1494, Savonorola defended in several sermons that Florence needed a Council such as that of Venice. A building even larger than the Venetian one was then erected and decorated with paintings by Leonardo and Michelangelo. As soon as the Medici returned to power, in 1512, their first decision was to have the building levelled. See Gilbert 1965, pp. 9–10.

being mixed, should be 'tempered', that is, to have its powers adequately distributed and to be led by a group that would stop both the concentration of power in the hands of one man and the disturbances of the plebs. Cicero had already said that, in Rome, 'considering that the people were free, a few things were to be done through the people, but more by the authority of the senate and by custom and precedent'.[28]

This paradigm does not coincide with what Machiavelli holds. As J.G.A. Pocock remarks, Machiavelli 'was prevented by birth and belief from sharing its aristocratic idealism, and his *Discorsi* … are best interpreted as a systematic dissent from the Venetian paradigm'.[29] In fact, although the patricians claimed to hold the middle ground in terms of justice and moderation, their 'humour' moved them to occupy the entire political space, which, should they have been successful, would lead to the elimination of *stasis*, the division upon which the city is founded. However, to achieve such a crushing of the ruled group, it would first be necessary to disarm it and, therefore, cease to count on it for the wars of expansion. The patricians wanted both to conquer abroad and to dominate at home, which inevitably led to excess. And 'when the Roman nobility became insolent … the people rose up against it; so as not to lose the whole, it was constrained to yield to the people its part' (D I.2.14).[30] The greatness of Rome did not come about from the balance represented by the patricians, the descendants of the primitive clan chieftains, but from their ambition and the uprisings they provoked among the plebs. It is disunity rather than harmony that, by throwing politics into the realm of contingency, stabilizes it in instability. Claude Lefort writes in this regard that 'at the root of a republic there is not a founding – the act of a founder – as we like to imagine in relation to Sparta, but a conflict in which one can see the division that leads to social body'.[31]

Division cannot be removed in the name of a rational or reasonable demand, as held by contractarian theories, since the 'humour' of the plebs and of the few are asymmetric. The first is undetermined energy that cannot be translated into the 'law and order' of a constituted power; the second is characterized by having not only the means but also the desire to rule. 'For Machiavelli', as underlined by Harvey Mansfield, 'contrary to Aristotle, only one side wants to rule'.[32] That is what makes nobility both dangerous and indispensable to the

28 '[…] in populo libero pauca per populum, pleraque senatus auctoritate et instituto ac more gererentur'. Cicero 1999, II.56, p. 51.

29 Pocock 1975, p. 186.

30 Compare these words with the way Machiavelli describes almost *ipsis verbis*, in *FH*. II. 12, the beginning of the struggles between the Ghibellines and the Guelphs in Florence.

31 Lefort 1972, p. 304.

32 Mansfield 1998, p. xxviii.

greatness of a city. Whereas the 'humour' of the plebs is reactive and focused on the present, that of the powerful is active and set on the future. If, on the one hand, the desire to possess (servants, properties, reputation, power) sets them against the many, on the other, it sharpens their wit and prudence and makes them apt to lead. Such an aptness, though necessary,[33] becomes nonetheless a threat to the *vivere politico,* should that reputation be acquired 'by private ways', that is, by the distribution of benefits with which the citizens are bought, rather than actions in favour of the public good. Were it not for the uprisings of the plebs, Rome would be in the hands of the patricians, for though the Tarquins had been expelled, 'those who expelled them expelled from Rome the name and not the kingly power, having at once ordered two consuls there who stood in the place of the kings'. Only following the creation of plebeian tribunes did the republic become stable, 'since all three kinds of government there had their part' (D I.2.14).

The magistracies conquered by the plebs did not, therefore, eliminate the role of the few. The monarchical element also prevailed, both in the figure of the mythical founder, the lawgiver, in whom the unified force of the people was incarnated, and in the figure of the 'commissarial dictator', in whom that same force materialized at exceptional times. However, 'the highest command was brought to the consuls, who came to that command not by inheritance … but by free votes' (D I.20.54). It was indeed the patricians who led the expansion, using religion (D I.11–15) and simulation (D I.47.97) to manipulate the people, sometimes even preventing it from wishing 'its own ruin', 'deceived by a false image of good'. And though some power was shared with the plebs, as we have seen, 'the Senate and the consuls remained with so much authority that they could keep their rank in that republic' (D I.53.106).

3 The *Many*

At the opposite end of the spectrum from the mighty people, we find 'the many' – a variable category that, much like the former, is strictly political. 'Strip all of us naked', as one anonymous speaker allegedly said during the Ciompi rebellion, 'you will see that we are alike; dress us in their clothes and them in ours, and without a doubt, we shall appear noble and they ignoble' (FH III.13.122–123). The terms used by Machiavelli to refer to this group – the people, the *popolani*, the multitude, the plebs, the *universale,* the *popolo minuto*, etc. – can at the same time be mere synonyms or point out important nuances

33 'I say that a republic without reputed citizens cannot stand, nor can it be governed well in any mode' (D III.28.276).

and are used in different ways from book to book. In *The Prince*, for instance, he refers mostly to the 'people', although 'plebs' also appears twice in chapter 10 and once in chapter 12, with the same meaning. In the same vein, in the *Discourses,* 'plebs' and 'people' refer both to a multitude of those who oppose the patricians,[34] even though the 'people' can sometimes also be taken to mean the citizens as a whole or the fatherland.[35] By contrast, in the *Florentine Histories,* which focus on the Italian experience, plebs means a clearly distinct, and sometimes antagonistic, part of the people, the part that has neither the right to vote nor access to seats of power.[36]

Underlying this semantic polyhedron is the way the different social groups were structured in Italian cities. Until quite late, the guilds, whether of lawyers, traders, doctors or artisans, preserved their spirit of professional association aimed at granting benefits for their respective members. Over time, some of them went on to become large companies or international banks. However, their hierarchical structure remained unchanged, deepening the abyss between masters – some of whom had meanwhile become bankers, major traders or owners of successful factories – and the simple artisans, apprentices and unskilled workers. Given the splintering of powers within the Holy Empire, as well as the absence of a real state and the wars between noble families, the guilds take on an essential role in some cities, such as Florence, where the institutions and the political power adapt to their organizational structure. Thus, under the guise of a popular government, what exists in fact is an oligarchy led by masters whose position can be equated to nobility, into which some rose through marriage. When the authors of that time speak of *popolo*, they are referring in general to small artisans and traders, owners of workshops and stores, who pay taxes and have a seat on the Council. That leaves out the multitude of all those who neither are considered citizens nor subsist autonomously, being at the mercy of those for whom they work and against whom, at times, they revolt, as happened with the Ciompi uprising.[37]

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34 For instance: 'when the Roman nobility became insolent … the people rose up against it … Thus arose the creation of the tribunes of the plebs' (D I.2.14).

35 This is the term's main meaning in D I.16: *un popolo*. However, half-way through the chapter it is said that the people 'desires two things: one to be avenged against those who are the cause that it is servile; the other, to recover its freedom' (D I.16.46), thereby taking up again the polysemy of the term, which either means the whole, or part thereof.

36 On the evolution of the concept of 'plebs' in Machiavelli, see Borrelli 2013, pp. 41–49. Machiavelli's vocabulary and semantic oscillations on this notion are also stressed by Visentin 2015 and Zancarini 2001, the latter mainly focused on *Florentine Histories* and *The Prince*.

37 See Gilbert 1965, p. 17, n. 14: 'It is a question of definition whom one ought to call a "citizen" of Florence. After 1494, full rights of citizenship (including the right of having office) were possessed only by those whose fathers' or grandfathers' names had been drawn for

It is unsurprising, therefore, that the re-establishment of the republic in 1512 should have exposed the political division underlying this social network. On the one hand, there are 'the few', convinced that the removal of the Medici had eventually ended the injustice with which the latter had, over decades, usurped the power of its legitimate holders, that is, themselves, the *nobili*. On the other hand, there are 'the many', the *ignobili,* who see the change as a return to the purity of communal organization and their effective participation in city affairs. None of these 'humours' makes up a cohesive entity. Between the great, the *nouveaux riches* compete with the rural nobility, which has been pushed out of positions of power, bit by bit; the *popolani*, in turn, either ally themselves with the plebs or with the great, as was the case of Michele Lando, who was firstly the leader of the Ciompi and later became the leader of those who crushed their revolt. Each of these groups risks internal disaggregation that acts as a kind of self-destructive energy, as described impressively by Machiavelli: 'most other republics about which we have any information have been content with one division … but Florence, not content with one, made many. … In Florence, there first of all grew divisions among the nobles themselves, then between the nobles and the people, and lastly between the people and the plebs' (FH Pref.6–7).

Division and corruption of the body politic, as of all 'mixed bodies', is inevitable. At best, it can be delayed by institutions – *ordini* and *leggi*. In Florence, however, the social-political structure fosters discord and the forming of rival factions (D I.7.24), as had happened previously in Rome, where the struggles between military chiefs led to the creation of private armies (D III.24.270) and the agony of the republic. There is, as stated by Fabio Raimondi, 'a deep asymmetry between the *tumults* (of the people) and the *discords* (between the great). The tumults express the will not to be dominated and, therefore, to keep the space of freedom empty … [T]he discords, on their hand, express a will to command, the intention to close the space of freedom'.[38] Corruption stems mainly from the discords insofar as they foster the purchase of fidelity and the formation of private militias, thereby weakening the people and corrupting the *vivere civile*. The tumults, on the contrary, by counteracting the domination of the people by the elite, preserve the freedom of everybody, and freedom is the first condition for greatness or *virtù*, which is the strength of a city: 'cities have

the three highest magistrates … Then there were Florentines who paid taxes, and whose family members had in earlier times held some office … Then there were inhabitants of Florence who paid taxes but could never hold office … Finally, there were who paid no taxes and had no rights whatsoever'.

38 Raimondi 2013, p. 56.

never expanded in dominion or in riches if they have not been in freedom' (D II.2.129). Against the utopia of unity and harmony as a civic ideal, Machiavelli identifies potency as a public virtue. Potency, however, lives off conflict.

It is true that Rome integrated the plebs, first as a question of survival against neighbouring nations, then in order to continue to expand. But the nobles never ceased to want to command freely, in the same way as the plebs never ceased to wish to remain free from domination. The problem is that an excessive desire for freedom is a liability for the republic. If the nobles manage to subdue the plebs, they start fighting among themselves until one manages to monopolize power; if the people takes the wish for freedom so far as to want to govern itself, it will break down into factions. In essence, the wish of the people is pure negativity, incompatible with order and incapable of translation into common law. The people wish not to be commanded. However, to not be commanded is to be the master of oneself and one's possessions. Hence the question posed by Machiavelli: which is the more ambitious, he who wishes to maintain, or he who wishes to acquire? Most disturbances are caused by those who have possessions, 'for it does not appear to men that they possess securely what a man has unless he acquires something else new' (D I.5.19). Furthermore, in the case of those who possess much, 'their incorrect and ambitious behaviour inflames in the breasts of whoever does not possess the wish to possess' (D I.5.19). In this way, the refusal to be commanded becomes a wish to command. As Stefano Visentin states, 'when the people occupies the place of the nobles in ruling the city, its desire changes from negative (to be neither commanded nor oppressed) to positive (to command and oppress)'.[39] Generally, tyranny derives for Machiavelli 'from too great a desire of the people to be free, and from too great a desire of the nobles to command' (D I.40.88).

Of course, if contained by good orders and laws, 'a people is wiser and more stable and of better judgement than a prince' (D I.58.117),[40] not to mention the advantages inherent in the multiplicity of which it is composed: a republic 'can accommodate itself better than one prince can to the diversity of times through the diversity of citizens that are in it' (D III.9.240). That is the reason why 'cities in which peoples are princes make exceeding increases in a very brief time' (D I.58.118). However, the people also has the aforementioned limitations. When it comes to electing magistrates, for example, it looks around, takes note of the lack of governing skills of its own and turns to the nobles (D I.47.97-98). Its strength lies in number, making it fearful to the few, but that is also its weakness: 'a multitude without a head is useless' (D I.44.92) since

39 Visentin 2015, pp. 382–383.

40 The same idea reappears in D III.34.290.

'there is nothing more formidable … and there is nothing weaker' (D I.57.115). It comes as little surprise, therefore, that the commoners who rise to the magistracy often change their opinions when they understand the complexity of public matters, to such an extent that the plebs, on seeing them change, call them corrupt. In Florence, it is said that 'they have one mind in the *piazza* and another in the *palazzo*' (D I.47.98). Machiavelli sees this as proof of the honesty of the people and concludes that 'a prudent man should never flee the popular judgement concerning distributions of ranks and dignities' (D I.47.98–99). However, the people, according to its very nature of multitude, requires a 'wise man', such as the author calls a prince, even when the regime is a republic. 'Princes are superior to peoples in ordering laws, forming civil lives and ordering new statutes and orders' (D I.58.118). To the people, the author reserves the role of preserving these laws and orders, constantly at risk from the ambition of the great: 'peoples are so much superior in maintaining things ordered that without doubt they attain the glory of those who ordered them' (D I.58.118).[41]

4 The People as *Fatherland*

How can the cohabitation of these two parallel 'humours' in Rome, for so long, be explained? The first reason pointed out by Machiavelli is religion, the institutions and systems of beliefs, values and customs that permeate the life of a community.[42] Religion projects the community into the realm of the transcendent and the timeless: Romulus, the founder, who was the son of Mars and of a vestal, murdered his brother, the last bloodline that could have bound him to a clan; his descendants, the kings, also bore the title of the supreme pontiff. Everything led the Romans to believe that they belonged to a reality in which gods and men interacted. Without religion, it would not have been possible to command armies, conquer, calm disturbances, convince the people of the righteousness of the laws (See D I.11–15).

It is true that, under the inspiration of Greek *isonomy*, the republic will progressively change the power of the pontifical college, made up only of patricians, having laws submitted to the previous deliberation of the citizens or,

41 Machiavelli repeats this idea several times in the *Discourses*, which casts doubt on the thesis, backed mainly by McCormick (2011), who terms Machiavelli as 'a populist'. For a critical review of McCormick's book, see Balot and Trochimchuk 2012.

42 On the treatment of religion in the *Discourses,* see Cutinelli-Rendina 2006, pp. 202–225, Geuna 2013, and chapter 5 of the present volume. On the way in which 'Machiavelli uses biblical, pagan and Christian forms of religious symbols and metaphors in order to revaluate the concepts of *patria* and *amore*', see Fontana 1999.

at least, having them read out publicly.[43] But the republic will never reach the Athenian model of democracy by assembly. Following the removal of the kings, the separation of the law from the sacred falls to the aristocracy, whence will emerge the new 'priesthood' of the jurisconsults. Besides, the authority of the *ordini* will always hold sway over the discretionary decision both of the princes and the citizens: 'a prince who can do what he wishes is crazy; a people that can do what it wishes is not wise' (D I.58.118). The wisdom of a decision is conditioned by the institutional fabric, the experience, crystalized in laws and customs, that subjugates the political game to the common interest. It is obviously not about incorporating transcendent values, as the humanists suppose. Institutions, according to Machiavelli, are the lasting result of the confrontation between the parties into which this body is politically divided. At the heart of the city, there remains *stasis*, the conflict, symbolized by Romulus, the fratricidal founder of Rome, and which takes shape in the tumults of the plebs. Far from incarnating the moderation and righteousness of a utopic 'just mean', this order incarnates the supremacy of one party over the other, like a subterranean and occult reverberation of the 'extra-ordinary', the disorder that is at the root of the current order. Politics is always inscribed into the very heart of law. The former, however, falls prey to corruption, as happened when the plebs, contaminated by the 'humour' of the great, placed the desire for wealth above that of freedom and handed power to Julius Caesar, who 'could so blind the multitude that it did not recognize the yoke that it was putting on its own neck' (D I.17.48).

The second reason for cohabitation between these two different and opposing humours, more pragmatic in nature, relates to conquest, which springs from the need for protection from neighbours, albeit increased by ambition. The ambition to conquer unites against the outside what is disunited on the inside, creates bonds of interdependence between patricians (commanders) and the plebs (soldiers), and institutes the right to citizenship as a privilege that will gradually be expanded to the conquered nations. Rome needs to integrate in order to expand, which means granting more rights to an increasing number of people. This implies keeping the flame of freedom alive and, thereby, intensifying the potential for internal conflict.[44] According to Machiavelli, conflict was 'an inconvenience necessary to arrive at Roman greatness' (D I.6.23). And if the plebs gained some power, it was because they were needed as conscripts in the

43 See Schiavone 2005, p. 81.

44 'Machiavelli defends "tumultuous" Rome because its conflicts ensured both liberty and territorial expansion by giving the people a decisive role in government (trough the tribunes) and the army': Najemy 2010, p. 104.

army: the same weapons used for expansion ended up persuading the senate to make tribunes of the plebs and, later, to increase the number of consuls, to the extent that 'the Roman plebs had equal command in Rome with the nobility' (D III.19.260).

The existence of an 'equal command' does not mean harmony. As Lefort says, 'a political action founded on justice is such that takes into account class difference – not one that pretends to be exercised far from adversaries –, because as long as such action is hidden under that fiction it remains in the realm of the dominating interest'.[45] Disharmony is immune to any constitution or pact insofar as the two 'humours' are mutually dependent in the exact same measure as they are mutually exclusive. In abstract terms, despite the differences that make them antagonists, both express a wish for freedom. However, freedom to dominate is opposed to freedom to be safe from having one's life, spouse or goods taken away. The first is, by definition, restrictive. Following the end of the monarchy, the children of Brutus rebelled against the republican order because 'the freedom of that people appeared to have become their servitude' (D I.16.45). The second, on the other hand, insofar as it is 'only desire not to be dominated', expresses 'a greater will to live free, being less able to hope to usurp it than are the great' (D I.5.18). What Machiavelli calls *vivere libero* is the perpetuation of this struggle, which takes place while the great and the people, despite disagreements on what constitutes the 'common good' is and what laws should be, 'are able', according to Miguel Vatter, 'to unite in order to preserve their discord'.[46]

Such harmony in disharmony requires, on the one hand, that the ambition to rule should override the struggles between members of the nobility and, on the other hand, that the resistance to domination should override the will to acquire. This is the only way to guarantee the institution of freedom and ward off corruption, as happens in the case narrated by Machiavelli in which 'the tribunes of the plebs … united with the nobles so as to crush a common plague. … For love of the fatherland was able to do more in all of them than any other respect' (D III.8.237-8).[47] At first, one could say that love for the fatherland, which is common to both 'humours', would override disunity. However, the

45 Lefort 1972, p. 522.

46 Vatter 2014, p. 209.

47 The relevance of the fatherland is emphatically underscored in D III.41.301: '…fatherland is well defended in whatever mode one defends it, whether with ignominy or with glory … [I]ndeed every other concern put aside, one ought to follow entirely the policy that saves its life and maintains its liberty'. On the notion of 'patria' in Machiavelli, see Fournel & Zancarini 2014; Chabod 2000, pp. 183–190; Parel 1986, chap. III. On the medieval background of this issue, see the classical Kantorowicz 1951.

only thing in common between the people and the great is the fear of tyranny, that is, the desire for freedom, the object of which is different to both, and therefore is expressed in disunity. The people as a whole, the fatherland, does not possess an identity, an essence that expresses a set of values above history, let alone some sort of Hobbesian pact. However, it is through it that the people reflexively configures itself as a 'we', previous to all division and which cannot be reduced to any empirical or legal entity. The fatherland neither belongs to the realm of shapes or substances nor to the realm of the Heraclitean becoming, of the pure 'event', in the words of Vatter. The fatherland is the imaginary operator through which the duality of humours acquires political existence, taking on the hallucinatory identity of a collective person to whom one can attribute intentionality and impute acts. It is within the scope of such a configuration, which is by nature open and changeable, that the clash of 'humours', i. e. politics, takes place – unless, of course, corruption permeates institutions to the extent that an individual or a group might impose itself as if it were the totality, crushing through tyranny any political configuration of the collective.

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CHAPTER 10

The Poison and the Sword: Conspiracies and Struggle for Power in Machiavelli's *Discourses on Livy*

*Alessandro Campi**

1 A Bibliographical Survey

Machiavelli's writings, especially his diplomatic-administrative correspondence and the *Florentine Histories*, contain frequent accounts and descriptions of conspiracies, plots, intrigues and secret machinations. But it is in the *Discourses on Livy*, in the famous chapter 6 of Book III, that Machiavelli addresses the conspiracy theme in a *systematic* manner.

Right from its title (*On Conspiracies*), this chapter presents itself, not least because of its unusual length compared to the other chapters composing the work, as an independent treatise (evidently rather forcibly inserted into the body of the *Discourses*) on a theme that held for its author a significance that was at once political-practical, theoretical and also biographical.[1] A treatise in which the Florentine offers not only an ample number of conspiracies case studies (taken from ancient history as well as Italian history, closer to his own

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1 The canonical biographies of Machiavelli present him, if not as the protagonist, then as a co-author or participant in at least two conspiratorial episodes. Both were failures and both were destined to produce negative consequences in his public life and to influence his political reflections on the theme. The episodes in question, as well known and as often recounted as they are, still appear today to be wrapped in mystery, their contours vague and ambiguous, presenting aspects that are controversial, to say the least, particularly with regard to Machiavelli's effective involvement in them. The first of these episodes – the conspiracy against Giuliano di Lorenzo de' Medici and his brother Cardinal Giovanni, that came to light in rather strange circumstances on 18 February 1513 – is certainly the most cited in the biographies, not least because of the peculiar context, political and personal, in which it took place: 7 November 1512, just over two months after Piero Soderini's flight from Florence and the return of the Medici, Machiavelli has been removed from his office at the *Signoria*. The second conspiratorial episode that may have personally involved Machiavelli dates to June 1522 and his objecticve was to murder Cardinal Giulio de' Medici.

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time), but above all a broad classification, a conceptual elaboration and a detailed technical analysis of this particular form of political struggle.

This part of the book, it should come as no surprise, has always had independent circulation and diffusion, already certified in the manuscript tradition. Of the four codices on which are based the modern critical editions of the *Discourses* – the most important, and the only one that contains the *complete* text of the work, is manuscript Harley 3533 of the British Library in London, dating back to the first half of the 16th century (conventionally called *L* by scholars) – two, also dating back to the first half of the 16th century, are constituted by autonomous transcriptions, probably deriving from a common ancestor, of the chapter on conspiracies. They are the Palatine Codice 1104, cc. 45*r*–56*v*, of the Biblioteca Nazionale of Florence (acronym *P*) and Manuscript Dieci di Balía, Correspondence, Responsive 119, cc. 290*r*–319*v*, of the Archivio di Stato of Florence (acronym *A*).[2] These two transcriptions allow us to imagine that the treatise on conspiracies was read as a work on its own starting from the very first years following its writing.

But it was in France, just a few decades after Machiavelli's death, that a tradition was launched that tends to consider his reflections on conspiracies as an *independent* text. In 1575, in Paris, printed by the typographer Abel l'Angelier, there appeared a version of the *Bellum Catilinae* by Sallust, edited by Jérôme de Chomedey, which has in its appendix also a French translation of the *Traicté des coniurations, extraict du troisiesme livre des discours de Machiavelli*, an extrapolation of the conspiracies chapter of the *Discourses*.

Jumping ahead to two and a half centuries later, there appeared in 1818 – from the Parisian publisher Chasseriau – an anonymous translation of *Le Prince*, marked with this date in the bibliographic note accompanying the edition of the booklet published in 1884 by the Parisian bookstore De Garnier Fréres da L. Derome, which represents, as stated on page 226, a 'nouvelle traduction, augmentée de note historiques et politiques et suivie d'un traité sur le conspiration du même auteur'.

In 1842, the *Traité des conspirations et du régicide* (which includes, along with chapter 6, also the French translation of D III.7–8) appeared as the last section (after the *Traité de la République* and the *Traité du Prince, ou de la Monarchie*) of the *Oeuvres politiques de Machiavelli* printed in Paris by Lavigne Libraire-Éditeur and edited by P. Christian (pseudonym of Christian Pitois), which includes, as a guide to the reading, an *Essai sur l'esprit révolutionnaire*. The translation used is the classic one done by Charles-Philippe-Toussaint Guiraudet in 1799 for his edition of the *Oeuvres de Machiavelli* (Libraire Potey,

2 Both manuscripts also include transcriptions of chapters 1, 4, and 6 of Book 1 of the *Discourses*.

Paris), which would be used again during the middle of the 20th century, in France in 1935 and in Belgium in 1944, in two (profusely illustrated) editions of *Le Prince*, which in their appendix propose again the *Traité des conspirations et du régicide* in the same version already published in 1842: the first one printed with the editorial signature A l'Enseigne du Pot Cassé, the second one published by the Éditions Terres Latines.

This choice to consider the chapter on conspiracies of the *Discourses* as independent has also been adopted, more occasionally, in other linguistic contexts (from Italy to Portugal, from Spain to Great Britain). And it continued until our days.

For example, in Risorgimento Italy, an excerpt of the chapter appeared in a small volume titled *Elettuario contro le sette segrete apprestato massimamente per la gioventù*, published in Modena in 1853 by the Tipografia Vincenti, with an introduction by Fortunato Cavazzoni Pederzini. The book contains a denunciation of the conspiratorial practices of the Freemasons and the Carbonari written in a catholic counter-revolutionary tone. The editor used Machiavelli to demonstrate the dangers and risk of failure awaiting those who conspire against the established order.

The chapter was later published in its integral version in a Portuguese edition of the most famous Machiavellian booklet, appearing in 1945 in Lisbon from the publisher Cosmos, translated by Berta Mendes, and with a preface and notes by Manuel Mendes. The title of this appendix (*O Principe – Tratado des Conspirações e do Regicídio*, the same used in French in 1842) and a quick reading of the text clearly indicate the dependence of this Portuguese version on the above-mentioned French version by Guiraudet.

A separate edition of Machiavelli's text, in the classic translation done by Leslie J. Walker in 1950, has most recently been published in English with the title *On Conspiracies*, but without any critical-documentary annotations (2010). This same version has been published in a Spanish translation with the title *De las conjuras* (2012). Finally, in 2014, a volume entitled *Sulle congiure* appeared in Italy in which, together with the chapter of the *Discourses*, has been collected and commented by the editor of all Machiavellian texts on secret plots and conspiracies against power.

All things considered, it seems clear that the idea of presenting Machiavelli's reflections on conspiracies in an autonomous format – in practice since 1575, in France – can hardly be classified as an arbitrary extrapolation or a forced interpretation from the historical-philological point of view. On the contrary, this bibliographical history reflects Machiavelli's own conviction that the phenomenon of conspiracy had its own peculiarity from the historical and theoretical point of view, and, as such, deserved an autonomous and specific treatise.

2 A Dangerous Political Practice, a Theoretical Challenge, an Innovative Approach

Machiavelli's original opinion on this extreme mode of power struggle can already be found, in a severe and apparently definitive form, at the opening of the chapter *On Conspiracies* of the *Discourses*, where it is said about conspiracies that there is no 'more dangerous or more foolhardy enterprise [than] this one, because it is difficult and extremely dangerous at every one of its stages, which results in the fact that many conspiracies are attempted but very few reach their desired goal' (D III.6.4).

Similar words of admonition appear in *The Prince*: 'the difficulties on the side of the conspirators are infinite. And one sees from experience that there have been many conspiracies, but few have had a good end' (P 19.11), and, with slightly minimal (but meaningful) variations, in the *Florentine Histories*: 'such undertakings [conspiracies], if there is some shadow of glory in thinking of them, have almost always very certain loss in their execution' (IF VI.29.14).

Based on these passages, many scholars and readers of the Florentine have tended to exaggerate Machiavelli's distaste for conspiracy as an instrument of political struggle and a means of gaining access to power.[3] Machiavelli was wary of conspiracies, advising against them on practical grounds and blaming the conspirators even when animated by noble ideals. There were many reasons for this negative view of conspiracies:

a. their frequently baneful outcomes, ruinous for their promoters – as certified by a multitude of historical examples;
b. their inability to achieve stable, and not merely new, political alignments;
c. the risk of the new institutional order being overthrown in turn, in a similarly dramatic manner;
d. the difficulty of building any sort of popular support or consensus around a violent practice, whose conception and realization were always an affair of socially restricted groups and exclusionary oligarchies detached from the larger body politic and operating inside the closed circle of princely power (and it is well known that Machiavelli considered popular good will towards the prince to be crucial to maintaining a solid government in any political community);
e. and, finally, his own personal experience, on at least one occasion, of the risks to which one can be exposed (starting from the supreme risk of

3 On this topic, critics are mostly unanimous, from Oreste Tommasini to Gennaro Sasso. As to the former, 'Conspiracies as a matter of principle repel him; his experience had shown them as useless and detrimental' (Tommasini 1999, p. 68). As to the latter, equally blunt, the conspiracy is 'an endeavour that he explicitly abhorred' (Sasso 1993, p. 467).

losing one's life) when one allows oneself to become directly or indirectly involved in such endeavours as vile as they are reckless.

One might reasonably assume that such pronounced adversity towards conspiracies, a tactic to be shunned personally and politically, should have pushed Machiavelli to dismiss them as a pathology alien to his way of conceiving the dynamics of power and politics, to ignore them or relegate them to a subordinate role. Quite to the contrary, however, his adversity to conspiracies did not prevent him from devoting to them a profound historical examination distinguished by its analytical and conceptual rigour. Indeed, Machiavelli's reflection on the theme cannot be reduced to a generalized warning to guard against conspiracies or to a well-argued condemnation of an inauspicious practice, for either of which a few lines would have been sufficient. Instead, it is an attempt, and an ambitious one at that, to construct a sort of *general theory of conspiracy*, that is, to conduct a systematic exposition of the topic – a practice or form of political struggle with its own intrinsic specificity – not only from a theoretical or historical-political point of view but also from a practical-technical standpoint. This attempt was solicited, clearly, by the importance that conspiracies had assumed in Florence and Italy during the period immediately prior to Machiavelli's time (not surprisingly re-baptized in much of twentieth-century historiography as 'the age of conspiracies').[4] In his own time, moreover, conspiracies continued to enjoy an ongoing currency (albeit in a phase of transformation for the civil systems then governing the peninsula) when the institutional arrangements that would later characterize the modern state were just then coming into their own.

Several other factors could have induced Machiavelli to undertake such an extensive and thoroughly articulated treatment of conspiracy. First of all, there is the 'classical nature' of the topic. In Greek and Roman historical literature, which Machiavelli so assiduously frequented (though not always through primary sources), conspiracy was, to say the least, recurrent and represented an explanatory key in many pages of ancient history.[5] Another consideration is that conspiracy constitutes, as it were, the dark and shadowy side of politics, its imponderable aspect, not easily reducible to a calculus of interests and advantages, something that an author so inclined to rationalism, but also aware of the role played in history by good fortune, contingency, and human passion, inevitably found intriguing. Furthermore, and especially if we take

4 Many useful considerations on fifteenth-century conspiracies, part of the deep institutional transformations of a political-jurisdictional and political-diplomatic nature, which swept through the regimes, monarchies, and principalities present in Italy during the fifteenth century, can be found in Fubini 1994.

5 Pagán 2004 and Roisman 2006.

as valid the myth of Machiavelli the fervent republican,[6] he may have drawn inspiration from many ancient and modern conspiracies that were arguably motivated or inspired by a desire for freedom and an aversion to tyranny, occasionally carried to the point of self-immolation. This was certainly a theme to which Machiavelli, despite the doubts he might have harboured concerning the positive outcomes of conspiratorial intrigues, could not remain indifferent (unless, of course, 'the myth' of Machiavelli the fervent republican is genuinely a myth). Finally, we must not forget that conspiracy, because of the dynamics set in motion from its ideation to its execution, still represents a technique of *power* (that is to say a means, albeit a violent one, of attaining it). Conspiracy is a course of action that must be planned, fine-tuned, and executed in a timely fashion and in accordance with a rigorously prepared logical procedure. Machiavelli was sensitive – if only by virtue of his long professional experience in the ranks of Florentine bureaucracy – to the practical-operational factors, the executive and pragmatic aspects of political struggle.

There were, therefore, from Machiavelli's point of view, many well-founded reasons to put himself to work on a more than occasional reflection on the topic of conspiracy. His reflection turns out to be not only deep and articulated, despite being presented in a scattered and fragmentary fashion throughout his works, but also original and quite innovative compared to the historical-intellectual tradition in which he was trained. Two aspects, in particular, strike the attentive reader as especially original compared to what was at the time the usual way of reasoning about conspiracies, whether classical or ancient or contemporary.

The first concerns his approach to the phenomenon, which departs from the canon, at once dramatizing, introspective, and moralistic, defined and established by Sallust.[7] For centuries, this approach was the rule in the narration of such events: the study of the personality and psychology of the conspirators. One paradigmatic example is the interpretation of the Pazzi conspiracy by Poliziano, his almost exclusive focus on the criminal mind and moral abjection of the perpetrators, his moralistic slant and his complaints about the decay of *mores* [habits], and his theatrical narration of the events. Machiavelli replaces all this with an interpretation that aims to insert each conspiracy within its historical context and to provide as far as possible a *political* interpretation of the conspiracy. He is not satisfied with using, as a measure of explanation, the spirit of revenge, mere self-interest, personal resentment or individual cruelty.

6 Pocock 1975 and Skinner 1981.

7 Osmond 1995.

To be sure, these are all elements associated with the carrying out of a conspiracy, but for Machiavelli, they do not explain its actual underlying causes.

The second element of Machiavelli's originality concerns his refusal to limit himself, as was the case with previous historical literature, to providing a chronicle – more or less cut and dry, more or less adorned with colourful and horrifying details, more or less biased by hagiographic objectives or defamatory intentions – of single criminal episodes. On the contrary, he elaborates a reflection *on conspiracies* with the idea of distilling the sum total of all of them into a uniform vision or representation. He aims to develop a model to deduce rules of conduct and criteria for action that are as far as possible uniform and universal, valid alike for past and present, and observable in the most diverse historical contexts. All of this amounts to an undeniable innovation with respect to the tradition of political thought before Machiavelli. Conspiracy in the general sense is not only distinct from tyrannicide or the simple (and occasional) power-hungry assassination but becomes a political category or concept, of which it is possible to trace, on the basis of the various historical cases or examples, a sort of *phenomenology*.

3 The Conspiracies in the *Discourses:* An Empirical-Phenomenological Interpretation

The most striking feature of the frequently mentioned chapter *On Conspiracies* is that it opens with a glaring contradiction, left unresolved by Machiavelli and indicative of his style of argument, often marked by logical incongruities and by forced or manipulative reconstructions of events at the service of his political analysis. In this case, it is a contradiction that has not always been noted or adequately assessed by the critical literature.[8] While he submits, on the one hand, 'that many more princes have lost their lives and their states through conspiracies than through open warfare' (D III.6.3), which would seem to vouch for their efficacy in light of both ancient and contemporary historical experience, he also argues, on the other hand, that a conspiracy is an enterprise that is 'difficult and extremely dangerous at every one of its stages, which results in the fact that many conspiracies are attempted but very few reach their desired goal' (D III.6.4).

8 Among the rare contributions on this matter, see Elena Fasano Guarini 1996, Martel 2009, Bento 2013, Campi 2015 and Geuna 2015.

This scepticism about the practical-political utility of such an instrument is expressed in similar terms in *The Prince*[9] and can be explained – considering the date of composition of both texts, notoriously begun after his removal from the office of Chancellor in November 1512 and completed by the end of 1517 – by recalling his traumatic experience of February 1513, when he was involved in the ephemeral intrigue planned by Pietro Paolo Boscoli and Agostino Capponi against Giuliano (and Giovanni) de' Medici. Machiavelli's memories of these grim personal experiences lie behind his invitations to prudence and the nearly fatalistic attitude with which the chapter seems to open.

While princes are advised, in order to escape the ever-present threat of conspiracies, to adopt every available means to cultivate and maintain the favour of the people – 'being hated by the people' (D III.6.10) for offences 'against property, lifeblood, or honour' (D III.6.14) of his subjects and for threats directed at them is, as a matter of fact, the main motive for conspiracies[10] – private citizens are advised, on the other hand, 'to live content under whatever dominion has been imposed on them by fate' (D III.6.5).[11]

But his disapproval, if not a downright aversion, for this type of enterprise did not prevent Machiavelli from proposing an analytical treatment, a collection of case histories and even an indicative typology of the phenomenon. From making them, that is, an object of technical and scientific investigation, without any moralism whatsoever. Historical experience, in fact, also seems

9 '[T]he difficulties on the side of the conspirators are infinite. And one sees from experience that there have been many conspiracies, but few have had a good end' (P 19.11).

10 This tripartition is one of the most famous parts of the chapter: 'Injuries must either be against property, lifeblood, or honor. To threaten someone's lifeblood is more dangerous than to execute him; or rather, making threats is extremely dangerous, while ordering executions involves no danger whatsoever, because a dead man cannot think about a vendetta, while those who remain alive most often leave the thinking to the dead. But anyone who is threatened and forced by necessity either to act or to suffer will become a very dangerous man to the prince . . . Besides this kind of necessity, injuries to property and honor are the two things that offend men more than any other kind of attack, and the prince must protect himself against them, because he can never strip a man of so much that he will not have a knife left which to take his revenge; nor can he ever dishonor a man so much that he does not retain a heart and mind stubbornly intent to revenge. Of the honors that may be taken away from men, those relating to women are most important; after that comes an outrage committed against one's person' (D III.6.14–18).

11 This admonition recalls another contained in P 3.1: 'men willingly change their lord in the belief that they will fare better: this belief makes them take up arms against him, in which they are deceived because they see later by experience that they have done worse'. In politics, therefore, desiring the best and trying to obtain it through violence invites the risk of finding oneself worse off after than before: with less freedom and faced with a new power even more robust and oppressive.

to suggest to him another truth: the violence and secrecy that characterize conspiracies are also the characteristics from which, very often, power and its political order originate. Although they tend to hide and repress these founding traits of theirs, the traits persist and represent the structurally opaque and dark side of power and its established order. Violence and secrecy, in other words, though unspeakable and threatening, tend to show themselves again, unaltered, every time the established order faces a crisis or becomes the object of protest and contention. If the ruling order originates from a conspiratorial matrix, it is destined to maintain and perpetuate that matrix. From the point of view of historical-political analysis, this makes it impossible to repress or underestimate the phenomenon of conspiracy.

First of all, Machiavelli proposes a distinction among conspiracies 'against the prince', implying a mere change in the leadership of the power structure (to which he devotes most of his reflections), those 'against one's fatherland' (which pursue instead constitutional change, the desire to move from a republic or a corrupt monarchy to a principate, as in the historically paradigmatic example, despite its failure, of Catiline, treated briefly only at the end of the chapter) and 'those that are formed to give a city over to the enemies who are besieging it' (D III.6.8). These last, already analyzed in D II.32.16–24, concern instead a form of betrayal or an understanding with an external enemy, to whom support is offered, or by whom the conspirator is corrupted, or with whom the conspirator collaborates in the illusion of being able to win power from the city's dominant faction of the moment. In this last case, however, power comes at the price of losing autonomy and owing vassalage to the allied foreign power.[12]

Machiavelli then goes on to explain the proper understanding of what we mean by a conspiracy. Lending faith to its Latin etymology (*cum-iurare*): a collective act based on a binding vow, a secretly subscribed (or solely verbal) agreement between at least two parties,[13] he distinguishes a conspiracy from an individual action such as a classic tyrannicide.[14] This last – political homicide or tyrannicide – can be a gesture born of rage or desperation, of the desire to avenge a personal offence or to commit – even for noble reasons, as for example the punishment of a usurper – a sensational act. But Machiavelli,

12 The example adduced by Machiavelli in this part of the *Discourses* is referred to the manner in which the Romans, thanks to internal complicities, were able to conquer in 327-326 BCE the town of Paleopolis. As he writes 'Romans occupied [Paleopolis] by agreement with those inside the city' (D II.32.16).

13 Cf. Campi 2012.

14 'A single individual cannot be said to form a conspiracy but, rather, this represents the firm determination aroused in a single man to kill the prince' (D III.6.27).

precisely because it is a gesture conceived in the mind of a single individual, does not seem to see in it a political intention or purpose aimed at a change of leadership, which is what instead characterizes and distinguishes a conspiracy from the mere assassination of a king or a prince.

Lastly, Machiavelli underlines that conspiracies – those of the first type, 'against a prince', executed 'with poison (or) with the sword' (D III.6.182) – are based on one presupposition that is, so to speak, *sociological*, and another that is instead *psychological*.

The first is represented by the physical proximity of the conspirators to the prince, by their belonging to his circle or by the possibility of their having 'easy access to the prince' (D III.6.38): 'I must say that all conspiracies are found in the histories to have been organized by great men or by those closest to the prince' (D III.6.36); 'It is evident, therefore, that those who have organized conspiracies have all been great men or close to the prince' (D III.6.41).

The psychological motive instead is to be found mainly in ingratitude and the 'lust for power' (D III.6.46). Very often, those who have obtained all kinds of privileges and advantages from the prince are not content with what they have obtained and end up aspiring to his position at the cost of his physical elimination. This is the case of ancient Rome, of those who conspired against their emperors and protectors after having obtained from them every possible benefit and advantage. Indeed, there is no material or pecuniary benefit that can satisfy the desire for power and the will to command. As Machiavelli writes, these conspirators 'were accustomed to so much wealth, honour, and rank by their emperors that they felt nothing was lacking in the perfection of their power except the empire itself' (D III.6.42).

With these annotations, we enter into what we could define as the *psycho-sociology of conspiracies*. From a geometrical point of view, power, even the most absolute power, is not a dot, but a circle, on the inside of which are, besides him who is the formal holder, all those who share it with him in various ways: family and relatives, counsellors and collaborators, courtiers and adulators, *clientes* (clients). The relationship between the power holder and his circle is always an inextricable tangle of contradictory feelings that go from loyalty to envy, from gratitude to resentment, from respect to fear. The more they are in the good graces and vicinity of the chief, by being one of his confidants or one of his trusted advisors, the more – Machiavelli seems to assert – the belief takes root in his subordinates that they themselves can aspire to the supreme command. They aspire to have no fewer titles or virtues than the one who holds power at that moment. The glory of power, what makes it sacred and intangible, works only by way of *physical* distance from it; distance accentuated by symbolism and rituals that adorn it in the eyes of those who are

subject to it or observe it from afar. Seen from up close – touched by hand or in a certain measure shared – power loses its aura. It becomes something that anybody in its vicinity can aspire to in an absolute and exclusive way, assuming he has the nerve to grasp it, if necessary through violence, which for the one committing it – having seen the real face of power – is never profane or unmotivated. Cupidity and ingratitude, feelings rooted in human nature, nourish the will for dominion, which is, in turn – among those who are inside the power circle – the spring that sets the conspiracy in motion. Obviously, only someone who is close to the prince or has access to his person can materially attack the prince. But Machiavelli appears to mean more than mere physical vicinity to the one who is to be eliminated. He also has in mind their spiritual or symbolic vicinity, meaning that the conspirators share with the victim the same codes of conduct, the same desires, and perhaps also the same vices. Above all, however, both operate and act inside the same space, namely the *space of power*, which has its own anatomy and separateness with respect to the rest of the social world. If it is true, as Machiavelli seems to have intuited based on his own experience, 'that power is an independent greatness, even with respect to the consensus that created it',[15] it is also sustained by its own peculiar internal dialectic.

Having stated these premises, Machiavelli goes on to treat the technical-operative aspects of conspiracies. He thus confirms the often pragmatic and instrumental orientation of his thinking and the fact that conspiracies, though potentially dangerous, may also, if successful, be a necessary and useful if not legitimate means of effecting political change and a re-balancing of power. This observation gives rise to practical suggestions, rules and recipes, on how to avoid the risks and the unforeseen difficulties inherent in conspiracies and on the precautions to be taken to neutralize them or to make them turn out well. Machiavelli's advice seems to be addressed indifferently to princes as well as to 'private citizens', and, over the centuries, this apparent neutrality has led these celebrated pages to be considered as a sort of manual for use by men of power and aspirant conspirators. He writes with an almost didactic intent (considered perverse or edifying depending on the reader's point of view). It hardly needs pointing out that these very pages, viewed as an incitement to

15 This is a quotation from Schmitt 1990, p. 21, an essay by Carl Schmitt originally published in 1954. The essay, written in the form of a dialogue, contains interesting pages on the theme of access to power, such as, for example: those who hold power undergo indirect and determinate influences from those around him; the antechamber is more important than the chamber in which the power is nominally exercised; real power consists in controlling the hallways that lead to the powerful person.

revolt against the established order, inspired much of the anti-Machiavellianism of the seventeenth century.[16] But appeals were made to these same pages – for example, in the nineteenth century – by more than a few aspiring revolutionaries. We know, especially from the historical-political experience of the twentieth century, that revolution, once deprived of its mythic-palingenetic character, is nothing more than a violent form of access to power pursued by minorities of ideologically motivated professionals of armed struggle. Revolutions, we could say, are successful conspiracies, which achieve their double objective: to eliminate the old holders of power and win popular consensus.

Machiavelli concentrates particularly on the difficulties that conspiracies encounter in the various technical phases of their execution, which are, in his judgment, essentially three: the conceptual-planning phase, the execution phase, and the post-execution phase. As he writes, the dangers of conspiratorial plots 'incurred . . . in planning them, in executing them, and even after they have been executed' (D III.6.25), the subversive plots present complications 'before, during, and after the fact' (D III.6.51).

In the initial conception and planning phase, the main problem is maintaining secrecy, a danger that becomes even greater if the secret is shared by a large number of people: 'It is possible to find one or two trusted friends, but when you try to extend this number to many, it is impossible to find them' (D III.6.57). The risk, the more the network of participants in the conspiracy is extended, is that of the tip-off or betrayal: 'the conspiracy is discovered before the plot is carried out . . . because of the infidelity of the people with whom you are conspiring' (D II.32.18); or because of imprudence: 'when a conspirator speaks carelessly' (D III.6.62). Hence the necessity, for the architect or creator, to reveal his subversive plan only to really trusted people or even better to no one, and in any case only when it is time to act. Proper timing also reduces the chances of being discovered and denounced and of leaving evidence of one's intentions that could turn out to be compromising.

Concerning the execution phase, the difficulties arise instead 'either from changing the plan; or from a lack of courage on the part of the man who carries it out; or from an error that the executor commits out of a lack of prudence; or from failing to execute the conspiracy perfectly, with part of those who were supposed to be killed remaining alive' (D III.6.100). The implementation of a conspiracy, assuming it is not discovered in advance, must, therefore, take the following into account: chance and the unforeseeable; the inexpertness or lack of determination of the attackers; the insufficient prudence with which

16 Anglo 2005.

targets are sometimes chosen (as when one aspires to eliminate two targets at the same time); and, finally, the furious reaction of those who are fortunate enough to survive the ambush.

Coherently with his vision of politics as being subject to the arbitrariness of fortune and the irrationality of history, Machiavelli insists strongly on the irruption of chance or the accidental into the conspiratorial plot. As he wrote in a previous section of the *Discourses*: 'But if the conspiracy is not discovered during the planning, a thousand problems then arise in putting it into action, because either you arrive before the appointed time or you arrive afterwards, which spoils everything, or if an accidental noise is raised, as with the geese on the Capitol, or if normal routine is broken, the slightest error and the smallest mistake ruin the whole enterprise' (D II.32.19–20).

The most perfect and careful plan can misfire and go haywire owing to an event – even minimal – which could not be foreseen. In order to be successful, a conspiracy requires rational planning, but the rationality of every human construction must always deal with fatality, with sudden changes of scenario. Similarly, one must take into account the possibility of human error or momentary weakness, an attacker who lacks intestinal fortitude or familiarity with weapons or whose cockiness translates into fear and cowardice when it's time to strike.

As for the risks inherent in the third phase, namely once the conspiracy has been brought to an end, they are reduced substantially to one, but it is politically decisive: 'when someone remains alive to avenge the dead prince' (D III.6.153). This danger is even more serious 'when the people are the friend of the prince that you have murdered' (D III.6.160). Here Machiavelli comes to what is perhaps the central point of his argument, the point that provides theoretical coherence to his entire reflection and that justifies on a general political level his personal reservations for this form of struggle. It is *popular hatred* of the prince that creates the collective mood (therefore the conditions and the justification) that leads 'great men' to conspire. Conversely, it is *popular favour* that is the best antidote to subversive plots since – as is also written in *The Prince* – against a prince who is 'reputed', 'excellent' and 'revered by his own subjects' 'it is difficult to conspire' (P 19.5). Conspiracies are, by definition, from the operative point of view, an elitist and socially restricted phenomenon, consumed for the most part within the sphere of power, among the few that hold it and the few that aspire to it, and from which, therefore, the people are substantially excluded. The people are, however, the arbiter that decrees, beyond the achievement of the immediate objective of every single conspiracy, its effective success or its concrete failure from the political point of view. The plotters who, after killing the prince, are unable to bring the people over

to their side, despite instrumentally brandishing the flag of freedom from the tyrant, are destined to failure and are exposed to brutal revenge: 'But of all the dangers that can be incurred after the execution of such a plan, there is none more certain or more to be feared than when the people are the friend of the prince that you have murdered, because conspirators have no remedy against this danger and can never secure themselves against it' (D III.6.160). In other words, the people's falling out of love with the prince is what favours a conspiracy; popular approval in his regard is what can decree its failure.

The fact remains, concludes Machiavelli, that conspiracies are dangerous for the prince in any case, even in the case that the intention to kill him should fail. Just as they always cast a shadow of infamy on those who organize them, conspiracies also leave a shadow of suspicion on the intended victim. The shadow of suspicion grows even darker should the prince, after escaping his assassins or having discovered and neutralized their criminal plan, succeeds in killing them and prosecuting them along with their accomplices. The people, in fact, will end up believing 'that the conspiracy was an invention of the prince to give vent to his avarice and cruelty against the lives and property of those whom he has killed' (D III.6.186). But perhaps – Machiavelli seems to sense – rather than a mere shadow of suspicion there may be the real possibility that the conspiracy against the prince was actually solicited or artfully constructed by the prince himself. With the idea of casting himself in the role of the victim and attracting the favour of the people, a crafty prince under siege may resort to a repressive action against his enemies. Such are the conspiracies, in other words, on the part of the power holder, aimed at consolidating his hold on it.

4 A Look at *The Prince*

Machiavelli's analysis of conspiracies, from the *theoretical-analytical* point of view, cannot stop at his *Discourses*. Some of the arguments developed in it are expounded synthetically[17] also in the initial section of P 19 entitled *Of Avoiding Contempt and Hatred*.[18] Among the most discussed by the critics, owing to its

17 Anticipated or recalled? It obviously depends on which hypothesis on the dating of his works is accepted.

18 The historical *exempla* which support Machiavelli's position on conspiracies – closely related to his direct political experience and his knowledge of fifteenth-century Italian princely courts – are instead contained in the IF*:* from the Prato sedition against Florence in 1470 promoted by Bernardo Nardi to the plot that in 1476 took the life of Galeazzo Maria Sforza in Milan, from the conspiracy against Annibale Bentivoglio (tyrant of Bologna) in 1445 to the famous florentine Pazzi conspiracy in 1478. It is useful to remember

disharmonic and barely coherent structure, this chapter is the fruit of evident reworkings and conspicuous integrations. The resonances and consonances between the two works concern various aspects, and that shows how Machiavelli's reflection on the theme was organic, unitary, continuous over time and coherent.

For example, the vacuity or inadequacy of conspiracies as a means for overthrowing the established order so as to create a more stable and durable one appears in both works (although, as we have seen, this critical reservation should not be interpreted as *absolute* disapproval of the phenomenon). The two works also resonate with regard to the difficulty for the conspirators of finding allies who are loyal, motivated and not disposed to betray for their convenience:

> For whoever conspires cannot alone, but he cannot find company except from those he believes to be malcontents; and as soon as you disclose your intent to a malcontent, you give him the matter with which to become content, because manifestly he can hope for every advantage from it. So, seeing sure again on this side, and on the other, dubious gain full of danger, he must indeed either be a rare friend, or an altogether obstinate enemy of the prince, to observe his faith with you. (P 19.12)

Likewise, the theme of 'popular good will' (*benivolenzia populare*: P 19.14), of the favour, that is, which the people reserve for the prince when in his actions he lets himself be guided by 'greatness, spiritedness, gravity, and strength' (P 19.4), which allows him to be sheltered from the hostile intentions of the ambitious few who aim to overthrow him. In this case, the conspirator, 'having the people as enemies' (P 19.14), is doomed to almost certain failure, even where his criminal plan should succeed. This theme is connected to the utilitarian recommendation to the prince to neutralize the wicked feelings that the community may have towards him, in order to limit the ambitions of the 'great men' and discourage them from conspiring against him. '[T]he prince may secure himself sufficiently if he avoids being hated or despised and keeps the people satisfied with him' (P 19.9). Machiavelli submits this last point to historical verification through recourse to numerous case studies, drawn in large part from the work of the Greek historian Herodian and by referring to the lives of the Roman emperors in the age of the Severi. From Commodus to Maximinus

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that the IF devote greater attention than the *Discourses* to the motivations behind conspiracies: glory, honour, the defence of republican freedom, the fight against tyranny or religious obscurantism all have a role in his accounts of these different plots.

Thrax, passing through Caracalla and Severus Alexander, each was architect and victim of conspiracies caused by the impossibility of satisfying the greed of the soldiers who supported them and the thirst for power of the aristocrats, generals, and courtiers who surrounded them. The conspiring emperors were doomed to fail because they had never cultivated the support of the people.

This famous chapter of *The Prince* also contains, however, original ideas and arguments beyond the specifications of themes already contained in the *Discourses*. It is argued, for example, not only that the support of the citizens works in favour of the prince and against the intentions of the conspirators – 'whoever conspires always believes he will satisfy the people with the death of the prince, but when he believes he will offend them, he does not get the spirit to adopt such a course' (P 19.10) – but that other factors do so as well, 'the majesty of the principality, the laws, the protection of friends and the state which defend him' (P 19.13). Even when it has arbitrary and violent origins, power tends to present itself – once it has achieved a minimum of consolidation – as legitimate and endowed with formal recognition, which ends up rendering unacceptable any form of contestation. This is true of a brutal *seignory* and even more true of a civil principate which adds to its authority to command the support of the people. Against the constituted power, protected by the laws and by the 'majesty' which envelops any political institution by the mere fact of its existence, the choice of a violent conspiracy – even when motivated by noble ideals – always runs the risk of appearing to be an abuse dictated by the most biased self-interest. This explains why, according to Machiavelli, on the side of the conspirator, who moves in the shadows using devious arms and deceits, 'there is nothing but fear, jealousy, and the anticipation of terrifying punishment' (P 19.13). The conspirator moves in a material and psychological condition that dooms him to damnation, renders all of his choices and motivations ambiguous and suspect, and inevitably casts an air of preventive condemnation on the political aim he had planned to reach through such means. This does not deny the reality of the political sphere but rather reduces it to a dimension that is at the same time opaque and barbaric.

5 *On Conspiracy*: A New Subject for Political Science

It is true that Machiavelli was *personally* opposed to conspiracies. In his professional role as Secretary of the Chancery he was, it could be said, a man of order. He observed political things from the viewpoint of power that was growing more and more centralized in its institutional articulations and command structures and that before too long would become sovereign and exclusive,

the single legitimate power of the modern state. Conspiracies, on the contrary, both products and producers of chaos, are the fruit of internecine civil struggles, which they tend to perpetuate rather than resolve. Even when they aim to create or restore a more law-abiding and harmonic system, they usually end up, whether they succeed or fail, producing a more unfair and absolutist system. As a man of government, could Machiavelli have been attracted by practices of this nature?

As a writer of political texts, moreover, Machiavelli worked in the unhappy condition of exile; and exile, being sent away from the city and from public life was the destiny, as he well knew, that awaited those who had survived the failure of a conspiracy. His proscription in 1512 had different causes: the political defeat of the republican regime of which he was the ideologue and the most eminent functionary, and the return to power of the Medici with their princely ambitions. But this psychological condition alone, his condition as an exiled and banished citizen, comparable to that of a fugitive conspirator or an outlaw, would be enough to explain his aversion to conspiratorial actions.

All of this notwithstanding, and despite all the distaste and hostility he might have felt toward them on an intellectual and practical level, Machiavelli applied to conspiracies his talents as a theorist and analyst in the conviction, matured through both study and experience (as shown in *The Prince*'s dedicatory letter), that they constitute one of the principal ways through which, in all times, the struggle for power has been conducted. He believed, therefore, that they deserve, with all due respect for their diversity and singularity, to be given an overarching framework, to be granted consideration as a whole, an approach which highlights their common traits and similarities. It is not only that the psychology of the conspirator, as Sallust had already sketched it, would always be the same: that is to say, a mixture of ferocious ambition and blind determination, of inclination to violence and a taste for secrecy, of passion for power and disposition to personal risk. There are also recurrences and similarities in the way of operating and acting of all conspirators. In all such machinations there exist rules to be observed and difficulties and dangers that present themselves in the same way on every occasion. There are recurring peculiarities and modalities to be observed. Finally, they have their own general historical-political significance that the analyst of power cannot disregard and that goes beyond the outcome, successful or not, of the individual plot.

Conspiracy, in sum, is a dangerous practice,[19] difficult to manage, perhaps better avoided. However, it is also, as Machiavelli would write in his most

19 It should be clear, in reference to Machiavelli and his era, that the 'perilousness' of conspiracies does not affect only plotters and their potential victims, but also, evidently, those

important historical work,[20] 'something that requires much consideration' (IF VIII.1.2) and not a 'matter that could be passed over with brevity' (IF VIII.1.1). Conspiracy, in other words, is an entirely political phenomenon which must be addressed, must be known in its intrinsic dynamics, contextualized historically, and interpreted conceptually in all its various aspects. And for those reasons, he elaborated, for the first time in the history of political thought and political science, a genuine phenomenology and anatomy of the conspiracy, even today original, fascinating, profound, and useful for all those who study the dynamics of politics and power.

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who write and talk about them. Especially if one, like Machiavelli, discusses them not just in terms of technique, showing moreover how they can be an instrument to destroy or consolidate power. A conspiracy has to deal with secrets, and any discourse or reasoning on a conspiracy is unavoidably based on the presence or lack of secrecy.

20 According to some scholars, *La Mandragola* and *La Clizia* (two of Machiavelli's best known plays) hide behind their frivolous surface an esoteric level that expresses his political interpretation of conspiracies: Sumberg 1970; Palmer 2001.

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CHAPTER 11

The Political Economy of Machiavelli's *Discourses*

*Jérémie Barthas**

> The fallacy of presentism is a complex anachronism, in which the antecedent in a narrative series is falsified by being defined or interpreted in terms of the consequent. Sometimes called the fallacy of *nunc pro tunc*, it is the mistaken idea that the proper way to do history is to prune away the dead branches of the past, and to preserve the green buds and twigs which have grown into the dark forest of our contemporary world.[1]

1

With the advent of political science as an academic discipline, presentism, in relation to Machiavelli, has often been a substitute for moralism. Whether or not Machiavelli had a vision of politics confined to the arts of getting and keeping power, whether or not he threw the seeds of a scientific approach to political phenomena, or even of a ruling class theory, it is fashionable, in the name of the historical method, to emphasize that the Florentine belonged to a pre-industrial society with few similarities with ours and to consider as doubtful, purely instrumental, superficial or vain, any attempt to draw inspiration from him with the view of understanding the present. In short, Machiavelli's thought is thus neutralized under the pretext that it would have been cancelled and superseded by the later development of political economy at first, and of the ruling class theory then.[2] The present chapter's main goal is to get Machiavelli out of one of his major cantonments by studying the political economy of his *Discourses on Livy*, not so much by analyzing a special aspect of the text, rather by considering it from a special point of view.

* Translation from the French by Victor Lu.

1 Fischer 1970, p. 135.

2 See Mosca 1939, pp. 1–3, 41–43, 202–204, 267, 329, and 435.

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There is indeed a form of anachronism in wanting to speak of a 'political economy' of the *Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Tito Livio*. Only in the second half of the eighteenth century, in fact, did political economy emerge as a discipline claiming itself to be a science, by making the production, distribution and consumption of goods and services its object, and by professing to be independent of the other normative disciplines from which it emanated, such as law and ethics.[3] It is generally accepted that the birth certificate of this new branch of knowledge was established in 1776 with the publication of Adam Smith's *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*. According to the Scottish philosopher, 'the great object of the political economy of every country' was to 'increase the riches and power of that country'.[4] Starting from the hypothesis that the power of a country depends essentially on its wealth – a hypothesis already illustrated in antiquity by Thucydides,[5] a historian whom Smith admired for his ability to explain 'the causes of events'[6] – the author of *The Wealth of Nations* set out to consider as a whole a country's productive system and its fiscal and financial policy.[7] In this, he attributed the founder's place to his French contemporary fellow François Quesnay, who had succeeded before him in considering a series of so-called 'economic' phenomena as a systematic whole based on simple principles.[8]

The intellectual project developed by Machiavelli in the *Discourses on Livy* is of a different kind. The work unfolds as a free commentary around one of the most important documents on the political and military history of the Roman Republic: the *Historiae Romanae Decades* by Livy. As the original title announces, the *Discourses* are centred on its first decade. Machiavelli affirms it within the work (D III.1.41, and D *Dedic*.11),[9] and the establishing of a concordance table, during the twentieth century, made it possible to

3 On the emergence of political economy, see Perrot 1992, chapter 2.

4 Smith 1976, p. 372 (bk. 2, ch. 4).

5 See Thucydides 2.13.3-6, which summarizes Pericles' public account of Athens' resources before the outbreak of the Peloponnesian war. Thucydides' attention to surplus financial resources (*periousia chrematon*) for attaining naval power is analyzed in Kallet-Marx 1993. For Greek and Roman texts, the abbreviation system follows *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* (4th ed. 2012) and the identifying numbers conform to the *Loeb Classical Library*.

6 Smith 1983, p. 95.

7 'The riches, and so far as power depends upon riches, the power of every country, must always be in proportion to the value of its annual produce, the fund from which all taxes must ultimately be paid' (Smith 1976, p. 372).

8 See Smith 1976, pp. 672–679 (bk. 4, ch. 9).

9 Identifying numbers (by book, chapter and segment) follow Machiavelli 1984.

test this affirmation.[10] Of course, Machiavelli does not limit himself to this single source,[11] and he bases his observations on all the *Decades* that survived the Christian cultural revolution (D II.5.8). Nevertheless, the indication that Livy's first decade is at the centre of Machiavelli's attention in the *Discourses* makes sense from the point of view of the relation between wealth and power. In that part of his monumental work, Livy moves quickly from the legendary origins of Rome to the foundation of the republic at the end of the sixth century BCE (bk. 1), and runs up until the beginnings of the third century BCE. Book 10 thus contains a detailed account of the first phase of the Third Samnite War (298–293 BCE), while its final phase (292–290 BCE) was narrated in the following book, which was lost together with the entire second decade.

As a contemporary specialist points out, the first years of the third century BCE already represents for ancient authors a turning point in the history of Rome's development.[12] Livy seems to have grasped the extraordinary importance of the booty snatched from the Samnites in 293 BCE,[13] a people of the greatest opulence according to Florus.[14] Fabius Pictor, before them, dates from the victory against the Sabines (290 BCE), which took place in the wake of the victory against the Samnites, a change in the economic mentality of the Romans.[15] In Polybius' historical interpretation, this assertion of Rome's dominant position in central Italy plus the analysis of the landing of Pyrrhus a few years later led the Senate to plan the conquest of the entire peninsula and to theorize that Italy's lands were a property belonging by right to Rome.[16] Between 298 BCE and the beginning of the first Punic war, thirty-five years later, Rome thus managed to extend its authority from an area smaller than Corsica to the greater part of peninsular Italy.

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10 See the additional tables (by Cecil H. Clough) to the 1975 reprint of Walker 1950, vol. 2, pp. 323–327. Translations are adapted from this edition (vol. 1), without further acknowledgment. For a criticism of Walker's work, see Whitfield 1969, pp. 231–237. Note that, for reason of space, translated quotations do not include the original language quotation.

11 For a preliminary survey on Machiavelli's (literary) sources, see Walker 1950, vol. 2, pp. 271–305. Remember that Machiavelli read Greek authors in Latin translation.

12 Schiavone 2000, p. 58.

13 Livy 10.46.5.

14 Florus 1.16.7.

15 See Strabo 5.3.1: 'Rerum scriptor Fabius auctor est: Romanos tum primum divitiarum sensum accepisse, cum huius potiti sunt gentis', reads Guarino's translation, which was probably known to Machiavelli.

16 See Polybius 1.6.6: 'tunc primum in reliquas Italiae partes facere impetum cœperunt, veluti iam non de alienis, sed de propriis, et ad se pertinentibus rebus contendentes', reads Perroti's translation, which was certainly used by Machiavelli.

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For Machiavelli, the Third Samnite War was also to mark the beginning of the normalization and the extension of the practice of prorogating the military command of the consuls, which was until then extremely rare.[17] This practice seemed initially very singular to the republic;[18] it will instead appear well installed during the second Punic war, the object of Livy's third decade.[19] According to the Florentine, the *prorogatio imperii,* by favouring a disproportionate increase in power and wealth among some individuals, would be the oldest and deepest cause of the corruption of power and the fall of the republic.[20] The opposition to the agrarian policy of the Gracchi brothers comes right after it, but more as a trigger. However, Machiavelli does not develop this interpretation of the *prorogatio imperii,* which alone would justify his stated intention to write 'on all those books of Livy which have not been taken away from us by the malignity of time' (D I.*Pref*.7).

On the contrary, the agrarian question, inseparable from Rome's colonial policy, is much more prominent in the *Discourses on Livy*. In the *longue durée* of the Roman republican experience, the agrarian question directly challenges Machiavelli's theory on the essentially positive function of the tribunes of the plebs that is central to his *Discourses*.[21] Machiavelli sees agrarian law as one of the most fundamental institutions of the republic: its objective was to regulate the distribution of lands – private lands, to ensure domestic production and subsistence agriculture, and public lands, so that pastures and woods would remain common[22] – within a dualist economic system, based on the agricultural sector and a military sector that first responded to an immediate need for security (D I.1.16), but which would prove to be increasingly aggressive in a general condition of potential or actual violence between nations.[23] This law reflected the Romans' early awareness of the importance of the relationship

17 Livy 10.16.1-2, and 10.22.9.

18 Livy 8.26.7.

19 Livy 22.22.1, 22.34.1, 23.25.11, 24.10.3, 24.12.8, etc.

20 'The prolonging of military commands ... led to the downfall of the Republic ... Though, in doing this, the Senate was looking to the public utility, it was this that eventually made Rome servile' (D III.24.7-9). See also D I.34.4.

21 See Pedullà 2018, p. 39.

22 'It was not, they held, having plenty of land but its good cultivation that would tell. But all colonies necessarily had also public land on which anyone's cattle might graze and wood might be gathered for fires' (D II.7.4-5).

23 See D II.6, entitled 'How the Romans proceeded in making war'. For a 'realist' interpretation of Roman aggressiveness, see Eckstein 2006.

between demography and the productive capacity of a region, which is a significant cause of migratory movement when it becomes negative (D II.8.10–11). Machiavelli suspects, however, that this regulating norms had an original design flaw, since it did not prevent the monopolization of public lands, which the Romans never managed to remedy (D I.37.8).[24] Livy made it clear that by the end of the third century BCE, Rome did not have anymore the characteristic of what Machiavelli would consider as proper to 'well-ordered republics' insofar that the public sector was poor, while huge amount of resources was on the private sector's hands.[25] The pedagogical force of an individualistic myth exalting the stirring figure of the noble Lucius Quinctius Cincinnatus cultivating his small rural property perhaps contributed to lulling themselves into illusions, at least until the time of L. Aemilius Paullus (D III.25.15), in front of the reality of a nobility which, taken as a whole, was no longer sober or austere, but had come to attach more and more importance to the unbridled growth of its wealth rather than to the honours of the republic (D I.37.24–25).[26] According to Machiavelli, the institution of the tribune of the plebs, at least, made it possible to limit durably the consequences of these tendencies which, on the other hand, the practice of the *prorogatio imperii* insidiously reinforced.

But another remark is needed about the turning point that the beginning of the third century BCE meant for Machiavelli. On the two elementary indicators of the power of a pre-industrial society, i.e. the size of the territory and that of the population, even with only an impressionistic representation, an analogy of comparison was still possible between what was Rome before the submission of the Samnites and what was Florence at the beginning of the Italian Wars.[27] And, in fact, the *Discourses on Livy* have as a secondary line a comparative analysis of the contemporary period, from the point of view of a Tuscan writing in 1517–1518 and having been involved in the experience of the Great Council (1494–1512). Most notably, Machiavelli devoted himself to

24 For a vivid description of the process of the monopolization of public lands, see Appian *BCiv*. 1.1.7-8. Appian's history was available to Machiavelli in Decembrio's Latin translation. For a social and economic history of *Ager publicus*, see Roselaar 2010.

25 Livy. 28.46.4-6. On Rome and its economy at the time of the second Punic War, see Kay 2016, ch. 1.

26 On economic inequality and political corruption in the *Discourses*, see McCormick 2018, ch. 2.

27 The most reliable figures are provided by the study of the Florentine *catasto* of 1427. See Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber 1978. In 1427, Florentine Tuscany covered about 11,000km², with 260,000 for the population. After that date, there was only a marginal territorial expansion and a low rate of population growth. An estimate of the population of Florentine Tuscany in 1494 as about 300,000 (including 50,000 for the city of Florence) seems reasonable.

revolutionizing the military system, taking as an inspiration the Roman model. In 1506, his mass conscription program, which was initially directed to the most loyal parts of the rural populations of the Florentine territory, included the registration of all men between 15 and 60 years of age fit for service.[28] The lists that Machiavelli had at his disposal have not reached us,[29] but it is significant that among the figures provided by Livy, the author of the *Discourses* judged it opportune to register that of 80,000 for adult males capable of bearing arms (D II.3.6). The Latin historian proposes it for the time of King Servius Tullius.[30] Whatever its authenticity and the weight it should be given to interpreting other figures given for later periods of Roman history,[31] the 80,000 figure is not unreasonable for the population concerned by the Florentine law instituting mass conscription passed on 6 December 1506. Indeed, this law provided for the incorporation of at least 10,000 of them, or about 13% of the supposed total number, which makes it perfectly comparable to the proportion of adult male citizens serving in the Roman army.[32] This represented an already considerable effort that could be even further increased if necessary. In any case, the Ancient Rome that Machiavelli retained as an ideal type, and as a point of reference on which the Florentine Republic should have settled more, is that of Livy's first decade, that is to say, the Roman Republic before the great economic, political and cultural transformation of the third century BCE. There is nothing to indicate that Machiavelli saw this great transformation in a particularly favourable light.

4

The three main pillars of Machiavelli's *Discourses on Livy* are thus an illustration and defence of the principle of mass conscription, a critique of the tendencies of the ruling classes to monopolize political power and transmit it by inheritance, and finally a critique of the Catholic anthropology. In the preface to the first book, Machiavelli presents his work as an instrument of political education through the reading of a classical text, designed to give to the historical understanding of governmental, jurisdictional, military and even religious systems, and to the actions that shape them and that they shape back, in

28 See *Militie Florentine Ordinatio*, in Marchand 1975, pp. 456–457.

29 Guidi 2016, p. 278.

30 Livy 1.44.2.

31 For a commentary on Livy's figures, see Oakley 2005, pp. 243–246.

32 For an estimate of the median size of the Roman army (between 225 and 23 BCE), see Hopkins 1978, pp. 33–34.

turn, an aim that is both theoretical and practical: 'a true cognition of histories', according to Machiavelli, must allow us to identify tendencies and constants in political life similar to those that jurisprudence and medicine have managed to identify in their fields (D I.*Pref.*3–7). By the chronological and geographical scope envisaged,[33] the *Discourses* thus offer an original example of a universal history. But nowhere in this work is there any expression of an intention to set out the general laws of a science that would treat wealth as a distinct or separate object, even if it were based on a study of the greatest Mediterranean power of antiquity. Nor is it an attempt to give an account of Rome's greatness and decline through a methodical research on the purely 'economic' aspects of its history.

Incidentally, the earliest attempt to explain the decline of Rome from the point of view of its economic history is also a product of the last quarter of the eighteenth century: it results from a prize of the *Académie des inscriptions et Belles Lettres* on the Romans and trade, granted ten years after the publication of Smith's *Wealth of Nations*.[34] Unsurprisingly, the methodical collection of literary, documentary and epigraphic sources useful to the economic history of ancient Rome is even more recent. Four hundred years after the first edition of Machiavelli's *Discourses*, the reduced number of data available for the period covered by Livy's first decade is striking.[35] But this collection also leads to qualify the common view that Livy was himself not very curious about economic information and to refine the perception of the difficulties he encountered in acquiring this type of information.[36] It is nevertheless true that 'economic' factors are never at the centre of this Latin author's analyses and that psychological or moral motives dominate his historical interpretations.[37] More generally, the place that ancient historians give to 'economic' factors and the absence of a strictly 'economic' Latin literature have been questioning specialists of the Greco-Roman world ever since Karl Polanyi raised the problem of 'the anonymity of the economy in early society'.[38]

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33 See the chronological tables in Walker 1950, vol. 2, pp. 221–264.

34 See Gabba 1995, p. 66, in relation to Francesco Mengotti's 1787 book *Le commerce des Romains*.

35 See Frank 1933, pp. 1–55 (from the early Republic to the outbreak of the first Punic war). It is perhaps significant that the series of *Oxford Studies on the Roman Economy* directed by Alan Bowman and Andrew Wilson (2009-) covers the period 100 BCE to CE 350, excluding thereby, with limited exceptions, the early and mid-republican Rome.

36 Harris 1992, p. 6 and 59.

37 See, for instance, Walsh 1963, p. 34.

38 Polanyi and Arensberg 1957, p. 67. On Roman economic thought, see Nicolet 1988, ch. 2, and Scheidel 2012, ch. 2 (by Gloria Vivenza).

Similar questions arise with regard to the Florentine Renaissance, where the phenomenon of the emergence of capitalism in its pre-industrial form is better documented than anywhere else. When the economic historian examines the 'economic culture' of the time, he still has difficulties finding texts in which economic reasoning may focus, for example, on the investment of wealth in productive activities.[39] A century after the work of Werner Sombart and Max Weber on the origins of capitalism, the evaluation of the justifications for commercial activities offered in the *Libri della famiglia* by the Florentine humanist Leon Battista Alberti remains emblematic from this point of view: it is probably difficult to identify in a text like this the elements of a republican debate on the political and social consequences of the 'commercial revolution' that can be compared, for example, to those found in England in the second half of the seventeenth century, where proponents of some sort of 'free market' opposed those defending political intervention in economic matters.[40] However, traces of a related debate may well be found in Florentine sources. Francesco Guicciardini, for example, devoted a famous text to the arguments that were exchanged during the preparatory works for the law of 21 January 1500, introducing, on a temporary basis, a progressive taxation on income from property. At the time, the legislator was reflecting on a short-term response to the financing needs of current military operations, by including a reflection on the economic consequences of the concentration of land ownership and on the impact of a tax that would hit more particularly the rent associated with it.[41]

Adam Smith was probably therefore justified in considering political economy 'as a branch of the science of a statesman or legislator'.[42] Thus, the intellectual history of political economy – which is a form of meta-discourse on this branch – must consider the activity of the legislator and the statesman, in that it falls within this branch, as a substantial part of the cultural productions associated with it. For the periods that preceded the emergence of political economy as a discipline, the reconstruction of the reasoning and theories from which legislative acts in economic, fiscal and financial matters are formed, or the examination of the internal and external policies' economic aims and consequences should therefore constitute an essential chapter of its protohistory.

39 Goldthwaite 2009, pp. 583–594.

40 See Pesante 2000, using as benchmark the conflicting paradigms analyzed in Pocock 1975, ch. 13 on 'Neo-Machiavellian Political Economy'.

41 On Guicciardini's writing on the *Decima scalata* (trans. in Celli 2019, pp. 72–88), see Marks 1954, pp. 52–60, and Barthas 2006, pp. 71–82. Cf. Regent 2014.

42 Smith 1976, p. 428 (bk. 4, introd.).

In the case of Florence, despite the wealth of sources available, it has not yet been written from this point of view, and there is no justification for hastening the judgment.[43]

5

Thus, none of the difficulties emitted until now allows excluding that Machiavelli was conscious of the 'economic' realities, causes and consequences. At the time of writing the *Discourses on Livy*, Machiavelli had acquired an intimate knowledge of the Tuscan rural world, he had spent years observing and evaluating the strength of partner and rival powers, and he had developed the greatest familiarity with all aspects of military life. In sum, his vast experience as Second Chancellor – in years when the republic was experiencing serious financial difficulties combined with external threats and the disintegration of part of its territory[44] – would make it possible to doubt the assertion, so strongly represented in the literature, that Machiavelli would lack the understanding of 'economic matters.'[45] Above all, as far as the limits of a reading of the *Discourses* between which this contribution is inscribed, these difficulties do not imply that Machiavelli has actually remained silent, in his treatise-commentary, on problems concerning specifically the relationship between economy and politics.

From the first chapter of the book, Machiavelli highlights the importance of considering the fundamental factors of production that are land and human labour. In particular, he underlines the advantages of an urban settlement that takes into account environmental amenity, the accessibility of natural resources (land, sea and river) and, in particular, the fertility of the surrounding soils. These are the preconditions that make it easier to reach a level of production that can satisfy the needs of a subsistence economy, which was the basis for future developments. But the expressions of an environmental determinism are in Machiavelli always largely balanced by the valorization of human factors. He indicates elsewhere that peoples have been able to improve hostile lands so that they live well on them (D II.8.28). More generally, it is the

43 Goldthwaite considers instead that 'whatever reasoning lay behind these [protomercantilist] policies and whatever thoughts Florentine had about their economy, none of these men ever crossed the intellectual barrier of analysis' (2009, p. 591). For the elaboration of a different view, Armstrong 2003 offers a most valuable starting point.

44 See Barthas 2017.

45 There is no study yet available on the economic elements in Machiavelli's 'government writings' (i.e. *Legazioni*, *Commissarie*, *Scritti di Governo*, and most *Primi scritti politici*).

legislation and the institutions that a people endows itself with that prevail over any other determination. In the case of Ancient Rome, environmental amenity certainly facilitated the initial cantonment of the agricultural sector to a production centred on family self-consumption and small rural property so that the surplus time necessary for mass military training could be freed from work time (D I.1.16). From then on, the political economy of the *Discourses on Livy*, which is based on this representation of the 'economic constitution' of republican Rome, is a function of the author's objectives in this book: they lead him to privilege, in his analysis, the war sector, which constitutes the main cause that the Romans 'became ever richer and more powerful' (D II.6.19).

In a passage of the second book, Machiavelli even highlights, in a very synthetic way, the points of this analysis which had appeared to him as the most important. His studies of comparative history even lead him to formulate a certain number of simple normative principles. This passage comes after Machiavelli has drawn a parallel between the battle of Tigranocerta (69 BCE) and that of Novara in 1513, both of which illustrate the superiority of a well-organized infantry over a much larger cavalry assisted by other troops:

> And since what the histories tell about infantry is thus seen to be true, in the same way one should believe to be true and useful all the other ancient orders. Were this believed, republics and princes would make fewer mistakes; they would be stronger in repelling an attack which could come against them; they would not set their hopes on flight; and those who have a civil way of life in their hands would know better how to direct it, whether with a view to its expanding or to holding its own. And they would believe that the true way to make a republic great and for it to acquire empire is to increase the inhabitants of their city, to get associates and not subjects, to send out colonies to guard acquired countries, to make capital of the spoils of war, to subdue the enemy by raids and battles and not with sieges, to keep the public rich and the private individual poor, and to maintain with the utmost care military training. And should this method for expanding not please them, they should think that acquisitions made in any other way are the ruin of republics, and so should bridle all ambition, regulating their city well inside with laws and customs, forbidding it to make acquisitions, and thinking only to its defence, for which good order should be kept. (D II.19-6-8)

These seven points – which concern: 1) demography, 2) cooperation, 3) colonization, 4) capital accumulation, 5) military expenditure, 6) distribution of

lands, and 7) division of labour time – are the subject of more specific analyses in different chapters of the *Discourses*.[46] Putting them together in this way, Machiavelli gives the representation of a coherent and integrated system, drawing the contours of a political economy of war that considers as a whole the production of the resources necessary for war, the expenses and income it induces, and the political orientations of its goals. This is in itself a trait of great originality, since none of the sources that Machiavelli had at his disposal, to our knowledge, went so far in proposing such a scientific representation of a central social phenomenon. But Machiavelli managed to go a step further by formulating, against the common opinion, the general theory that 'money is not the sinews of war'.

6

That money is not the sinews of war is undoubtedly Machiavelli's most radical theory in terms of political economy. I have shown elsewhere that this theory, more often than not the object of summary rejection, has also been taken up, with or without explicit reference to Machiavelli, by major thinkers. For example, the English philosopher Francis Bacon, at the beginning of the seventeenth century, and then the Italian economist Ferdinando Galiani, in the mid-eighteenth century, developed a critique of the 'idolatry of money' on its basis. In the context of an analysis of the scandal of the South Sea Company in 1720, the Irish philosopher George Berkeley made a particularly striking use of it, showing how experiencing the social consequences of a financial crisis might help to understand Machiavelli's sentence. A few decades later, in his constitutional draft for reforming Poland, Jean-Jacques Rousseau integrated Machiavelli's sentence into a reflection on the principles that should guide the choice of one economic system over another. Through these authors, a red thread links a central proposal of the *Discourses on Livy* to a founding chapter of the critique of political economy.[47] I have also presented elsewhere my analyses on the context of the financial crisis in which Machiavelli proposed and

46 Respectively, but not exclusively: 1) 'accrescere la città sua di abitatori' (D II.3 and D I.1.6); 2) 'farsi compagni e non sudditi' (D II.4.2.30); 3) 'mandare colonie a guardare i paesi acquistati' (D II.6.2 and D I.37); 4) 'fare capitale della prede' (D II.6); 5) 'domare il nimico con le scorrerie e con le giornate e non con le ossidioni' (D II.6, II.32); 6) 'tenere ricco il pubblico, povero il privato' (D II.6, II.7, and D I.37); 7) 'mantenere con sommo studio gli esercizi militari' (D II.10, II.16, II.17, II.18, and I.1.16).

47 See Barthas 2015, with further references.

developed his program of mass conscription under the republic of the Great Council.[48] But I have only indicated in passing my interpretative hypothesis that, in writing that money is not the sinews of war, the former Chancellor wanted to record somewhere that his program included a *de facto* questioning of the financial system in force, even though he did not present a complete analysis of it.[49] The following pages focus on the textual and internal foundations of this hypothesis.[50]

The title of the tenth chapter of the second book of the *Discourses* immediately states a paradox: 'Money is not the sinews of war, as is according to the commonly held opinion'. Machiavelli argues head-on that a sentence, that is, the expression of a judgement that is absolute, universal and definitive, is in fact erroneous. He, therefore, intends to refute false evidence. In the introductory part of the chapter (D II.10.2–8), he specifies the general framework of the problem that this sentence is supposed to lead the answer. This is the fundamental and classic problem of the evaluation of power, which all strategists and heads of State have to analyze before engaging in military operations, whether offensive or defensive. In many places in the history of the Peloponnesian War, Thucydides – whom Machiavelli quotes towards the end of the chapter[51] – gives various examples,[52] and the main aspects that the Florentine considers are financial resources, geographical position, the loyalty of the populations to power and the quality of the armed forces. Without denying that each of these aspects must be taken into account, Machiavelli will insist on the absolute priority of the fourth – the quality of the armed forces – and demonstrate the seriousness of the error for considering that it is the financial resources that essentially make the difference: on the contrary, too much confidence in them leads to a dangerous neglect of political reflection on the nature of the defence system and its articulation to society as a whole. The loyalty of the people to the power in place essentially depends on the defence system, by the manner it involves them and by the guarantees of protection it offers them. For his demonstration, Machiavelli will argue in turn that money

48 See Barthas 2009 and Barthas 2017.

49 Barthas 2017, p. 262 and 270.

50 I therefore make available in English the essential elements of a reading at length developed in a book published in French: Barthas 2011, pp. 219–417.

51 See D II.10.28, confronting Pericles' trust on Athenian financial resources with the final result of the Peloponnesian War. As illustrated at length by Kallet, the 'presentation of financial material as a fundamentally negative flavor' in the last part of Thucydides' book (2001, p. 2).

52 For instance, Thucydides 1.80–86 (Archidamos' and Sthenelaidas' speeches), 1.120–124 (the Korinthians' speech), and 1.140–144 (Pericles' speech).

does not make it possible to ensure defence and, moreover, that it is a motive for hostility, i.e. that it is a cause and a goal of war for opposing powers. Machiavelli's point of view in this chapter is, therefore, primarily defensive.[53]

7

Machiavelli thus first attacks the paralogism from which results the sentence *pecunia nervus belli* and which consists in drawing a simple and unrestricted conclusion from what may be true by accident. In some cases, it can be observed that financial unavailability led to a decisive military defeat,[54] but this does not mean that money is, in an absolute sense, the decisive element. It is, therefore, the idea of financial fatality, which characterizes the interpretation of the sentence as it is conveyed by common opinion, that Machiavelli first targets. To refute a fallacy of accident, it is enough to show that it is based on an incomplete inventory and on ignorance of contrary cases. If money is the sinews of war, then financial superiority must ensure victory; yet striking examples – two ancient and two modern (plus one very recent)[55] – show that financial superiority does not always ensure victory; therefore, money is not the sinews of war. But Machiavelli does not stop at pointing out this fundamental financial illusion. No less striking historical examples reveal that wealth makes those who possess it a prey. Not only does money give an illusion of power, which leads to inadequate preparation, but it is also the cause of the attraction of the opposing powers. Thus, it is not and it is the sinews of war, but in a different and more trivial sense: it is not so as an essential inner quality, but it is so as an outer quality, the bait and aim of war. In both cases, therefore, it represents a danger. Machiavelli plays on the threat to make people understand the need for mass conscription to be instituted.[56]

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53 'Nor will the loyalty and good will of men last, since they cannot be loyal to you unless you are able to defend them' (D II.10.5).

54 As a paradigmatic case, Machiavelli mentions the Battle of Megalopolis (331 BCE), but he apparently confused it with the Battle of Sellasia (222 BCE), both opposing the Macedonians and the Spartans. This was already noted in Ammirato 1594, p. 442.

55 'If treasure were enough to win, Darius would have won against Alexander; the Greeks would have won against the Romans; in our times [1476] Duke Charles [the Bold] would have won against the Swiss; and a few days ago the pope and the Florentines together would not have had any difficulty in winning against Francesco Maria [della Rovere], the nephew of Julius II, in the war of Urbino [Feb.-Sept. 1517]' (D II.10.12).

56 On riches as a cause of war, see D II.6 and II.19, amongst others.

Awareness of this double threat thus leads, in the second part of the chapter (D II.10.18–29), not to deny the importance of money or that war needs to mobilize important financial resources – Machiavelli is well aware that 'money is indeed necessary in the second place' (D II.10.26) – but to define what is the true foundation of power: the 'good soldiers'. By this term, Machiavelli means a military system that is not essentially dependent on the financial system, such as a defence and security system based on mercenary companies or on monetary agreements with a superior power or minor neighbouring powers that are supposed to serve as a bulwark against foreign powers. He thus advances here a new argument in favour of a system of mass conscription inspired mainly by that of the Romans. Adequate preparation can even offer guarantees of protection to partner powers and bring new financial resources to the power that implements a sound military system.

This last point is further clarified in a later chapter which is closely related to the tenth: 'among other signs of the power of a strong State one looks to the terms on which it lives with its neighbours: when it is so governed that, to obtain its friendship, its neighbours become its tributaries, it is a sure sign that this State is powerful; but when the said neighbours, though inferior to it, extract money from it, it is a great sign of its weakness' (D II.30.4–5).[57] This was particularly the case with Florence, even 'when its reputation stood higher' (i.e. in the second half of the fifteenth century): so, 'there was no petty lord in the Romagna who did not receive a subsidy from it; it also gave a subsidy to the Perugians, to the Castellans, and to all its other neighbours. Had this city been armed and strong, everything would just have gone to the contrary, for to secure its protection many would have given money to it, and would have sought to purchase its friendship, not to sell their own' (D II.30.8–9).

8

As a matter of fact, since the success of the war against Milan (1423–1433), the Florentine ruling class had kept the self-serving myth that victories belong to those who can win through their finances, and it had steadily strengthened during the fifteenth century a financing system based on the principles of cash advances and public indebtedness that specialized studies have described as facilitating the constitution of large fortunes and as encouraging a highly

57 'Friendship' translates here from the Italian 'amicizia' (itself a translation from the Latin 'amicitia') and denotes a relationship of mutual duties and obligations, or a kind of partnership.

asymmetrical distribution of wealth throughout Tuscany.[58] Though it is true that the Florentine financial system contributed in that way to the domination of the class that ensured its development and operations, the intrinsic weakness of Florentine power was revealed, however, with the beginning of the Italian Wars.

In a classic article published in 1957, the historian Felix Gilbert analyzed a documentary source of great interest in order to study the period of the republic of the Great Council and the context in which Machiavelli formed his ideas: the minutes of a rather special body that the Florentine authorities consulted to elaborate their decisions. In particular, Gilbert pointed out that the weakness of Florence was at the centre of debates on foreign policy and he also remarked the fact that the scribe rubricated his transcription of the sessions dedicated to fiscal and financial matters – generally related to emergencies in military operations — noting the maxim *pecunia nervus belli,* itself of recurrent use during the debates that he recorded.[59] It appeared later that, during the same period, the same maxim could be sometimes included in the preamble of legislation having financial emergencies or the servicing of the public debt as their object.[60] Considering these facts, it could become clearer that when Machiavelli formed his concept of conscription, the sentence had a specialized meaning conveyed by 'experts' and 'wise men'.

The obviousness of the maxim *pecunia nervus belli* having been admitted, its invocation was meant to contribute to form the agreement around the law and to persuade of the necessity of the technical and political decisions that the law, in matters of financial advances, stipulated. But, precisely because it was inscribed in the preamble of the law, this maxim itself received a special meaning. Invoked by one of the wise citizens expressing himself in terms of the fatality within any governmental consultation, the meaning of the sentence *pecunia nervus belli* was also linked to the binding device of the law, which is itself bounded by the institution from which it emanates. It aimed at ensuring that the financial advances made by the richest were guaranteed by new taxes on the people and returned with high interest. Thus, the language of fatality appears to be closely linked to determined institutional arrangements, whose movement it presents as natural and necessary.[61] After 1494, the Florentine ruling class was well aware of the weakness of their city, but its most

58 See Molho 1971, and Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber 1978.

59 Gilbert 1957, p. 203. The *Consulte e pratiche della Repubblica fiorentina*, for the years 1494–1512, have been edited by Denis Fachard (4 vols. Geneva: Droz, 1988, 1993 and 2001).

60 Molho 1995, p. 97 note 2.

61 On 'necessity' as a justification for interest bearing capital, see Kirshner 1982.

influential wing was not ready to negotiate a different way of operating public finances with the popular forces now active in the councils. Thus, this language of financial fatality must be understood as a eulogy of the established order, aiming at strengthening the position of those who benefit from it and at discrediting any prospect for transformation. At the moment when the sentence *pecunia nervus belli* becomes the mode of appearance of the essence of the law, it still reveals the institutional background that has predetermined its specialized meaning.

By condemning this sentence, Machiavelli was thus attacking the way in which a certain articulation between a financial system and a defence system – consisting of paying mercenaries, buying the protection of a superior power and the support of inferior powers – had been conceived and supported by the elites. In the thirtieth chapter of the *Discourses'* book two, already cited above, Machiavelli clearly pointed out the violence and destructive nature of a choice made by certain ruling elites for reasons of internal politics. Florence's weakness, but this was also true for other nations, 'comes from having disarmed their people and from ... having chosen rather to enjoy the present advantage of being able to ransack their people and of being able to escape an imaginary rather than a real danger, instead of so acting as to secure them and to make their State happy for ever'. Machiavelli pursues: 'a disorder such as this, though it may bring a little temporary quiet, is in time of necessity a cause of disaster and irremediable ruin' (D II.30.11-12). In denying that money is the sinews of war, the Florentine engages in a critique of the institutions by which the ruling class reinforces its position: it can more easily dominate an unarmed population and impose a predatory system of taxation and public credit on it. This denial also amounted to refute the idea of the absolute and necessary dependence of the Florentines on such an unhealthy system that only responds to the determined demands of a specific social group. Therefore, in chapter ten of the second book of the *Discourses*, Machiavelli indicated that he also conceived the institution of conscription with the idea of freeing the republic from a revenue system based on extraordinary finances and from its dependence on a social group interested in maintaining it in a condition of inner weakness.

9

Specialists in military history have generally given a negative assessment of the Machiavellian project of mass conscription, which they have judged anachronistic, perhaps from an anachronistic point of view. After them, it has often

seemed fashionable to limit the meaning and scope of this project in that it would have been based on a simplistic rejection of mercenarism. Within this framework, it has also seemed good tone to hold the refutation of the sentence *pecunia nervus belli* as a rhetorical, unnecessarily polemical and summary expression of this historical misjudgment.[62] It should even be seen – it is said – as a tangible proof of Machiavelli's indifference, if not incomprehension, towards economic phenomena. According to my analyses, it rather testifies to the exact opposite. Machiavelli expresses synthetically the vision he had that the development of his project of socialization of the means of defence would correct the profound political inequalities and enduring economic disequilibrium that affected Florentine Tuscany. From the point of view of political economy, to affirm that money is not the sinews of war has an even more general significance, namely that if the question of income and that of expenditure are intimately linked, they must nevertheless be considered differently. The order of spending is essentially governed by simple economic laws, which are relatively easy to picture. But the order of income obeys more complex political choices: those that determine the distribution of taxation over the different social classes.[63] Moreover, just as the constraints exerted by the legislator on the population are not limited to the extraction of income through taxation, a nation's wealth is not limited to the amount of cash produced and available to ensure its spending. Analytically, however, the sentence *pecunia nervus belli* confuses the order of income with that of expenditure. It is the synthetic expression of a paradigm in which the order of expenditure subordinates the order of income, wherein the economic sphere subordinates the political sphere. But, that in itself is, of course, already a matter of political choice and of power relations in society. Having experienced its destructive character, Machiavelli, committed to a certain idea of the republic as he was, tried to find remedies for it.

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62 See Chabod 1958, pp. 87–90, on Machiavelli's 'fallacies on mercenarism', with further references. On Chabod's interpretation, see Barthas 2010, pp. 264–265.

63 In the discipline of political economy, a theory based on this distinction can be found in Conigliani 1894.

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CHAPTER 12

Politics of Porosity: War and Freedom in Machiavelli's *Discourses*

Thomas Berns

In order to understand the specificity of Machiavelli's thoughts on war, particularly the idea that for him, war was the expression of a political porosity between the inside and the outside of the city, it is essential to show Machiavelli as radically questioning the ancient reading of war as defined by Augustine, followed by Aquinas, while avoiding an opening towards what will be considered a modern reading of war.

Machiavelli is usually read as an exception, an anomaly, a 'moment' resisting the traditional partition between the ancients and moderns. However, the diversity of readings going in that direction deserves to be mentioned, whether they come from Claude Lefort's reading (and its use by Abensour), from a 'republican' critique of modernity, in J.G.A. Pocock or Quentin Skinner's line, or from a more materialist gesture placing Machiavelli among Lucretius, Spinoza and Marx, as occurs with Louis Althusser, Antonio Negri or Étienne Balibar. In that vein, I will show that Machiavelli's 'response' to the Augustinian conception of war not only resists but subverts the opposition between the ancient and modern readings of war.

Before going deeper into Machiavelli's considerations on war and the resulting displacements in reference to the Augustinian reading, I will briefly outline how the difference between the ancients and moderns on the topic of war is usually structured. More precisely, it is the opposition between the medieval theory of the just war – which has effectively been sketched by Augustine – and the modern theory of war, as it has been structured in modern *jus gentium*. This opposition has been pointed out in the most radical way by Carl Schmitt. Whatever reserves one might have towards the historical aspects[1] and, more generally, towards the aspects of his political philosophy,[2] one needs to agree that this opposition structures the history of thought in the field of international relations, whilst still offering effective possibilities, not only in defining

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1 This critique of Carl Schmitt initiated in Berns and Lafosse 2017.

2 See Berns 2019.

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what is war but in terms of normative positions on the topic of war itself, even nowadays.

Let us briefly summarize this opposition between ancient and modern conceptions of war. On the one hand would be what we ordinarily reduce to the idea of a just war, as it was essentially developed during the medieval period, which would consist in seeing the reality of war as bringing face to face beings that are fundamentally framed as morally unequal, the first party carrying injustice, the other being animated by the project of responding to this injustice and restoring justice. On the other hand, opposed to this idea, lies a second strategy, typically modern, which allows the philosophical representation of war as the relation between fundamentally equal beings – this equality of rights forbidding discrimination as to the morality of justifications for one party or the other being precisely what defines the war situation, but also allows its limitation (against the supposed danger of infinite war or an extermination war induced by the idea of inequality of the belligerents).

Carl Schmitt has extensively analyzed this opposition between two 'concepts' of war, one discriminatory, the other non-discriminatory, the first founded morally, even theologically, while the other is organized legally, and the idea that this opposition is undoubtedly structuring. These two fundamental possibilities are still used today as two ways of representing and/or assessing a war conflict. At this stage, I only want to show that in both these cases, the conceptual elaboration of war consists in a distancing from the dynamics of war itself as shown in the first case of the Augustinian ideal of a pacific war, of a war for the purpose of peace and animated by peace, and in the second case, the project of civilizing war, of grasping it in legal terms, disconnected from people and lands, hoping to solve the exception, or at least to express it in the general terms of legal speech, with the pretence of rooting out its heinous part as well as its viral texture, rather framing it as a relation of mutual acknowledgement. Minimally, these two philosophical gestures converge in their way to envision war as an activity or as a relationship external to the beings that lead them, who always preexist it: the connection between the inside and the outside of the city would not as such be experienced in the relations that the cities themselves would tie; only their separation would prevail.

Machiavelli avoids this separation of the inside and the outside of the city as a condition to think the political as well as war, in making war the opposite: the expression of a fundamental porosity between the inside and the outside, a porosity that definitely characterizes Machiavelli's notion of the political. This is what will be analyzed here, essentially basing the argument on the famous first chapters of the *Discourses on Livy*, in which appears in the clearest and most central way the idea of the expansive character of the city's heart towards

its outside. It would be possible to work out this general idea of porosity taking other means, which I will only outline here in broad strokes as the background of my analysis, working up from a few materialist foundations at play in Machiavellian thought, and then down towards more specific problems that are recurrent in Machiavelli's work.

First, the fact that Machiavelli consistently limits the possibility of affirming the priority, or even any exteriority, of form over matter, or even further, to conclude on the passivity of matter. Second, the ontology of relations that seems to move through Machiavellian thought, that is, the idea that a relation would first and foremost consist in prioritizing variation systems connecting and constituting different phenomena, nevertheless avoiding to articulate these relations through causation or a means to ends connection. Thirdly, the notion that there is a necessary connection between good and evil, that is, that there is a good in evil, or an evil in good, an order in disorder, or a form of violence in the heart of all politics – these opposites only subsisting in an extremely conventional way.

The driving force of Machiavellian thought can be found hidden in a discrete parenthesis of chapter 8 of the *Prince*: questioning the possible good uses of violence, Machiavelli asks '*se del male è lecito dire bene*' (P 8.270), that is 'if it is suitable to use the word "good" of things that are evil' (P 8.187),[3] which corresponds in fact to his project of not concealing what the necessary evils in the accomplishment of the good are, and the relevance of confronting these; and this irony-filled passage needs to be read in parallel with another passage, from D III.1, where Machiavelli voices his opposition to the religious movements of his time, for which it is evil to say evil of evil (*è male dire male del male*). The dynamics of Machiavelli's writings are captured in these two propositions. Fourthly, we find Machiavelli's distrust of any attempt or hope of reaching equilibrium, the just measure, the middle way, *via del mezzo*, in particular in the use one would make of evil, a situation which regularly brings Machiavelli to praise excess when facing the possibility of the mean, in a posture one could broadly construe as anti-Aristotelian.[4] Fifthly, no common measure subsists between an armed man and an unarmed man (P 14), and, to the contrary, the right arms are a no lesser question than that of right laws, one and the other

3 All references to Machiavelli's Italian texts derive from Machiavelli 1971. English translations of *The Prince* derive from Machiavelli 2008, and of the *Discourses on Livy* from Machiavelli 1996.

4 As examples among others of Machiavelli's anti-Aristotelianism, see D I.26-27 or D II.23, in addition of subsequent remarks on D I.6. For further analysis, I suggest referring to the chapter dedicated to Machiavelli in Berns *et al.* 2010.

mutually suppose each other (P 12); hence the *Art of War* and the space Machiavelli gives to the institution of a militia, which he shows as a necessity, both from a political and military perspective.[5]

The porosity between the inside and the outside of the city, or the fact that conquest is tied to order and internal liberty, which will be the objects of the upcoming analyses, are inevitably situated in the movement of Machiavellian thought that can be summarized through the five proposals sketched above: the immanence of form to matter and the active character of the latter; the relational dynamics of Machiavellian thought; its care in revealing order amidst disorder, and reciprocally; its refusal of any position of equilibrium or of a middle way; and finally the dependence of laws and arms.

Let us now enter in D I.2-6, which will be the measure allowing us to appreciate the idea of a policy marked by a porosity towards the exterior of the city, this resulting from the expansive character of the freedom of the many. What is the central idea of these chapters, essentially justifying why we still read Machiavelli? It is the well-known idea of the connection between order and disorder, the idea that the genesis of any order necessarily brings us to consider conflict, or, to say it in even simpler terms, that any law is born and inscribed in the conflict opposing the desires of those who want to dominate to the desires of those who do not wish to be dominated (D I.5).

On these grounds, Machiavelli reads Roman history as showing how conflicts between the Plebeian and the Senate's aristocracy, between their respective desires, have been fundamental to this history and in bringing Rome to an order approximating perfection. Every order is hence thought by Machiavelli as fundamentally written in disorder. As previously outlined, there is no good without evil, no order without disorder, no law without conflict. In order to account for this intricacy of good and evil, of order and disorder, one only needs to think of it as a relationship, with no priority of any nature (moral, ontological, etc.) given to any of the related terms, not even a priority expressed in terms of means to ends, or cause and effect, rather privileging much more circular relationships. It is not sufficient to think of law as being caused by conflict. One also needs to think that a good order is an order that allows conflict, giving it space to express itself,[6] maintaining it and thus always

5 This being the exact opposite of the platonic gesture which, at the beginning of *The Laws*, seeks to highlight military virtue as non-primordial in order to think political order.

6 Letting the people's moods express themselves is an idea reflected by Machiavelli in the most political and dynamic way under the term *sfogare*. This is a difficult word to translate, which conveys the idea of letting something express itself, free itself, and thus satisfying a desire. For example, one could use it to say one is pouring one's heart out, or to vent one's anger. This word comes from the prefix *s*, or *ex*, and *foga*, fire, impetuousity,

holding the possibility of losing itself in unrestrained conflictuality. Therefore, order and disorder maintain a truly circular relationship.

Claude Lefort has superbly highlighted this in his great work on Machiavelli, affirming, about this inscription of order within disorder, that one should never dissolve this relationship between the terms, that is, law should never be seen as a 'solution' to disorder, the good republic becoming, on the contrary, one which accepts 'a tacit abandonment of the idea of solution',[7] to the extent that, on this topic, one should refuse to replace a 'positivism of essence' with a 'positivism of facts'.[8] In other words, the relationship between law and conflict resists any understanding limited to simple dialectics: law does not move beyond conflict, it is not its dissolution or overcoming; on the contrary, it requires a preservation of conflict that casts away any possibility of purity. This is precisely what Francesco Guicciardini does not succeed in grasping when, in his otherwise very accurate commentary of Machiavelli's *Discorsi,* he attempts to restore the precedence of concord by affirming that 'to praise dissent is like praising an infirm's infirmity, for the quality of the cure that has been applied to it [*laudare le disunione è come laudare in un infermo la infermità, per la bontà del rimedio che gli è stato applicato*]'.[9] Not only has dis-union been treated here in terms of disease and law in terms of healing (allowing a definitive account of the good), but as a consequence, they are seen in a purely external relation.

We now move a step beyond this relationship between order and disorder, or law and conflicts, acknowledging how this is also a way to connect power and conflict. In this perspective, we need to draw from D I.4. What we will see here is more precisely how Machiavelli opposes Augustine or at least political Augustinianism.[10] Chapter IV's thesis is given to us by its title: 'How the conflict between the Plebeians and the Roman Senate made that Republic free and powerful' [*Che la disunione della Plebe e del Senato romano fece libera e potente quella republica*]. Conflict appears here not only as the grounds from which Roman institutions can be understood but also in its connection to the city's freedom and power. Machiavelli begins this chapter by affirming

feisty, and is particularly used on the spectrum of desire, of nature, or even instinct; we can find it in sexual langage: 'every city ought to have its modes with which the people can vent its ambition, and especially those cities that wish to avail themselves of the people in important things (*ogni città debbe avere i suoi modi con i quali il popolo possa sfogare l'ambizione sua, e massime quelle città che nelle cose importanti si vogliono valere del popolo*)' (D I.4.16).

7 Lefort 1992, p. 175.

8 Lefort 1972, p. 367.

9 Guicciardini 1922, p. 10.

10 See Sasso 1987, pp. 401–536.

his opposition to the 'opinion of the many' [*la opinione di molti*] who consider that, given Rome's inner disturbances, present since its origins, it should have been inferior to any other republic had this intrinsic weakness not been somehow uniquely compensated by its extraordinary military virtue, and with the support of good fortune. In this controversial passage, Machiavelli opposes those who consider Rome as having been so conflictual that it could not have become powerful unless something external had complemented, replaced, compensated this disorder. This *compensation* can first be insured, according to such a reading, by sole military force: such an approach would then mean, for Machiavelli, that the Romans' warrior quality is not itself seen as political, that it is reduced to a means to an end, an instrumental level, extrinsic to the order of the city; in other words, the connection between good arms and good laws is not perceived. This *compensation* could also be insured by good fortune, and it seems undeniable here, given how it is shown as an extrinsic character in Machiavelli's criticism, that it should be understood as divine providence in the sense it has been given, from Origen and Eusebius of Caesarea to Augustine, as that which allows understanding the power of Rome as what anticipated the development of the ecclesial community to come. In fact, Augustine keeps showing how Rome was made only of confusion, murder, aggression and violence: Romulus killing Remus, opening the door to thieves[11] and kidnapping the neighbouring women (the Sabines) in order to populate the city, a city whose history is an uninterrupted string of conflicts, whether they be civil war or conquest.[12]

Nevertheless, contemporary to Machiavelli, Galateo publishes a number of texts in honour of Venice, a city that apparently surpassed the Roman example as 'its beginnings were as unclear as they were dishonest, and that it had experimented Kings and Tyrants and frequent changes of regimes and civil wars, and the Barbarian armies and arson'.[13] Here, as in many other examples, Rome is defined as an 'absence' (absence of order, absence even of *civitas*).[14] This absence could not have given birth to power, were it not for a divine hand compensating it. This is precisely the reading Machiavelli completely inverts, and which, in doing so, he reveals. What is typically negative, the mark

11 An accusation typically found in Augustine's well-known passage in *The City of God Against the Pagans* where he compares kingdoms and bands of thiefs or pirates, considering they can only be distinguished throught the importance given to justice: as we often forget, it is of course Rome which is at stake in this comparison.

12 On this Augustinian approach of Roman history, see Berns 2000, pp. 49–61 and 100–104.

13 This passage of Galateo's *De laudibus Venetiarum*, from 1501, can be found in Sasso 1987, p. 507.

14 As shown by the accusation from Georges de Trébizonde, see Berns 2005.

of absence, what is characteristically conflictual and understood as a lack of unity, becomes in itself the element of power. In this way, Machiavelli appears as the anti-Augustine *par excellence*. It is precisely what was negatively articulated, as a lack, in the whole of Augustinian texts (the continuation of Abel's murder by Cain as a mark of the earthly city, undermined by conflict and hunger for power) and what found its signification through God, even at the historical level of explanation for Rome's power, that becomes a positive aspect in Machiavelli's reading, as soon as conflicts are seen as connected to Roman power and liberty.

This is how 'good arms' can then find meaning as immanent and intrinsic in the equations laid out by Machiavelli: 'where the military is good, there must be good order; and too, it rarely occurs that good fortune will not be there' (D I.4.16). Fortune, having become perfectly immanent, as soon as it was expressed in an equation whose terms are similar to those posed by Augustine, but without their negative content and as such their need of a transcendent intervention, is from this point on understood in its historical positivity:

> Nor can one in any mode, with reason, call a republic disordered where there are so many examples of virtue; for good examples arise from good education, good education from good laws, and good laws from those tumults that many inconsiderably damn. (D I.4.16)

Order and disorder, virtue and arms are thus thought within the matrix of a single equation, whose circularity one can only appreciate, a circularity preventing any of the terms from being given precedence over the other. At the cost of a strange turn, the Machiavellian materialist reading functions on the basis of the same series of elements as the Augustinian theological reading, their difference resulting not from the terms connected, but from the meaning one gives to the connection itself between the elements. In the Augustinian reading, these elements are related as the signs of an absence, of a lack inherent in the earthly city, hence in need of compensation from a transcendent divine intervention.

In the Machiavellian reading, this same relation is thought of as purely immanent, as enacted potential. However, the ultimate expression of this immanent positivity, as we will see, is the freedom of the many's expansive character. This expansivity is what allows Machiavelli to cancel the whole movement in Augustinian thought very precisely. This movement required us to examine the connection between arms and laws, as Machiavelli invites us to do in a most rhetorical and humoristic way when he confirms the considerations of those who claim it was 'our sins' [*peccati nostri*] that justified the easy

win of the French army of Charles X in its conquest of Italy. Machiavelli specifies immediately after how the sins were not those the author was thinking about, but those of the princes who underestimated the importance of arms. In P 12, where he characterizes arms as a political question, Machiavelli mocks those who, like Savonarola in his time, more generally like Augustine, or Luther later on, understand war from a providentialist perspective – in other words, as a divine punishment for sin – while he himself makes it an entirely immanent response inherent in human errors in the appreciation of the connection between arms and institutions.

Let us now turn to D I.5-6, where Machiavelli highlights the political conception drawn from the example of Roman history, opposing it to another model, and underlining this opposition with two issues at stake, that of the guardianship of liberty, and that of war. Chapter 5, as its title indicates, seeks to define to whom the role of guarding liberty ought to be given: to the people or to the upper classes? To answer this question, he presents two models: cities such as Sparta or Venice have given nobility the guardianship of liberty, and some, such as Rome, have trusted the plebeians, nobility being driven by a desire to dominate, while plebeians are driven by a desire not to be dominated. Machiavelli admits at this stage his ambivalence regarding which option would be best, considering one does not know which of these desires is potentially the most harmful. These drives or 'humours' [*umori*] he also sees as, on the one hand, a desire to preserve the already acquired honour, or, on the other hand, the desire to acquire the honour one lacks. This way of enriching the debate, in opposing a form of conservatism to a tendency towards expansivity, will slowly take shape and bring to question the connection to the outside of the city lying at the heart of the political. Indeed, Machiavelli attempts to overcome his hesitation between two forms of government and the protection of freedom by rephrasing his question in the following terms: 'you [reason] either about a republic that wishes to make an empire, such as Rome, or about one for whom it is enough to maintain itself' (D I.5.18) In this last case, we ought to take Venice and Sparta as a model.

D I.6 enriches this overview, albeit displacing the issue once more, since what is now explored is the possibility of a middle ground between the two models presented, the Spartan or Venitian model, and the Roman one. The question is to know, as the title indicates, 'whether a state could have been ordered in Rome that would have taken away the enmities between the people and the senate'. This question can be interpreted more generally as attempting to confront the possibility of combining the power of the Roman city with internal peace and unity, to have power without disorder, or to benefit from advantages both from Rome and from the aristocratic or limited city. What

is tested here is the perspective of a middle path. Such a debate was then extremely concrete and was taking place in Machiavelli's immediate surroundings – more precisely in the famous *Orti Oricellari*, the gardens of the Rucellai family who hosted, in the first decades of the sixteenth century, many Florentine humanists who were discussing, among other things, the best model for reforming the city's institutions.

If we are to understand the overview of political possibilities raised by Machiavelli, we need to recall the significant elements in each of the two models, based on chapters 2 through to 6. Let us start by the model outlined from a city like Sparta (and, later on, Venice). This city received its laws from its beginnings and in a single moment [*ad un tratto*] from a single legislator (the example being, of course, Lycurgus) (D I.2); one sees here the shadow of the good legislator who *knows* what is good and ought to be done. It is a very coherent figure whose inspiration comes from Polybius, who attributed the order of the Spartan city to the *logos* and prudence of Lycurgus. In this model, it is a knowledge, or an idea, that serves in building a political order by preexisting it: a definitive direction is then given to the city *a priori*. In D I.2-6, this city is described as inherently limited in terms of population size, and we need to remember here the Platonic and Aristotelian considerations on the restricted and measured character of the city, with the policy on birth control that came with it. This city is conceived as fundamentally aristocratic: its institutions, even military, are aristocratic, in the case of Sparta, and closed to new arrivals, in the case of Venice. This closed and limited city can then be peaceful, writes Machiavelli, to the extent that it is a city that maintains and conserves itself, in the strongest meaning of the term, since it has an *a priori* order and limits.

The second type of city, the popular and populous city exemplified by Rome, has all the opposite characteristics. From chapter 2 onwards, Machiavelli explains that Rome could not be determined, even in its constitution, from its origin, but rather 'at many different times, and according to accidents [*in più volte, e secondo li accidenti*]' (D I.2.10), to its own history's rhythm, and, as Machiavelli specifies, that of its internal conflicts. We can add that it is a city that defines itself collectively, where the first city, the aristocratic city, the closed city, the city that maintains itself, is ideally ordered thanks to the wisdom of a single legislator who knows what ought to be done. Regarding this unfolding defined by its collective character, Machiavelli is in line with the Roman republican literature as written not only by Romanized Greek Polybius, but also by his contemporary Cato, and later by Cicero who reports the latter's remarks, signalling that, in his now lost history of Rome (the *Origins*), he allegedly refused to connect military and political success to individuals, being convinced that it results from the anonymous service of all citizens. Cicero

builds on Cato's legacy in highlighting that it is the collective and progressive character of Rome's institutional history that ensured its superiority over other cities whose constitution and organization depended on a single individual's intelligence.[15] It is indeed to this collective and anonymous movement, which he underlines highly conflictual, that Machiavelli attributes the greatness of the Roman city, in opposition to the model of the good legislator.

D I.6 adds to these characteristics the fact that Rome's army was open to plebeians, and that the city was open to foreigners, 'which gave the plebs strength and increase and infinite opportunities for tumult' (D I.6.21). Overall, this series of characteristics – the absence of original order to the benefit of a collective and progressive institutional production, popular institutions, openness to foreigners, demographic increase, conflicts – thereupon appears as intimately connected to Roman power: 'But if the Roman state had come to be quieter, this inconvenience would have followed: that it would also have been weaker because it cut off the way by which it could come to the greatness it achieved, so that if Rome wished to remove the causes of tumults, it removed too the causes of expansion' (D I.6.21).

This connection between liberty's resulting disturbances and power is the immediate expression, according to Machiavelli, of this general rule of *cose umane*, according to which 'one inconvenience can never be suppressed without another's cropping up' (D I.6.21). This connection is particularly visible for the city that cannot conserve itself, since it does not have an initial order. It is history itself, with its disorders, that brings order. Nothing can maintain itself; everything is built, meaning everything expands.

We can see how far we are here from the grotesque simplification of the Greek representation according to which the city could be thought of as an order, a form, or an idea to be conserved. This open and popular city, which is necessarily conflictual and disordered, and simultaneously powerful, conquering, and expansive, similarily cancels the Augustinian reading: where Augustine presents a long equation starting from the fratricide of Rome's foundation, and its settlement by thieves welcomed by Romulus, followed by the violent kidnapping of women, seeing the city as constantly shaken by turmoil, and thus concluding that it could only get its power from divine providence (or by a military power conceived in a non-political way), Machiavelli unfolds an equation composed of the exact same elements, but giving each of them a positive historical content, even considering this precisely as the driving force of its power.

After affirming what connects the absence of a good legislator, the production of an order from disturbances and turmoil, and the power of the Roman

15 Cicero 1999, *On the Commonwealth* I.i.1, II.i.2, and II.xxi.37.

city, populous and popular, Machiavelli is able, in D I.9, to come back on the fratricide and the acts of violence inaugural to Roman history as fully justified within this framework. Once more, Machiavelli takes the counterpoint of all the historiography before him, which either accused Romulus (eventually compensating this accusation with a providentialist reading) or attempted to justify him in displacing the fault.[16] This rupture in Machiavelli's work can nevertheless be understood if we see Romulus's violence as taking its meaning only *after* we recognize, throughout the previous chapters, that Rome is not determined by its origin, like Sparta, but by its tumultuous and collective history. Properly speaking, the original and necessary violence of which Romulus is the expression (in whose name the leap could be made from Machiavelli to Machiavellianism) does not determine anything, is not endowed with any inherent content; it only opens to a history whose meaning is always deferred, on a straight road that only echoes to itself, in conflict, the emptiness of its determination. Hence, on the basis of D III.1, we can, of course, pursue this echoing connection between the Romulan origin and conflicts, considering that conflicts repeat the original violence of Romulus and take their undetermined content, thus conserving the republic's vitality by constantly bringing it back to its origins. Once more, there is a complete rupture from the Augustinian reading according to which the Romulan violence put Rome on the path of wars and civil wars, something only divine providence could compensate. As we have shown, a philosophical system truly unfolds in Machiavelli's work, particularly through the proposal of a double genesis of institutions, approached either from the acts of their founders or else explained through the persistence of conflicts in the city.

What remains to be shown is up to what extent the expansive power imposes itself, fully and exclusively, as a quality inherent in the Roman model as cast in this series of equations. To do this, we need to pick up the thread of interrogations from Machiavelli, who specifically shows, in chapter 6, that it is not possible to combine internal peace and power, it is not possible to combine a quality inherent in the aristocratic model and a quality inherent in the popular model. Furthermore, it is impossible to draw an equilibrium point, a middle ground, between these two models. What we have presented as the radically anti-Aristotelian character of Machiavelli is clearly shown here.

We have two possible cities, and all the interest of Machiavellian thought lies in maintaining these models' incompatible character in an extremely rigorous way, in showing that there is fundamentally no half-measure, no possible combination of the two. Machiavelli keeps this demanding line precisely

16 See Berns 2000, pp. 138ff.

when he is testing the eventuality of combining power and internal order, to the extent of making this the question of chapter 6, responding at length by the negative. In doing so, a kind of absolute alternative, a dichotomy, is established, eliciting an idea such that, if one wants the republic to be powerful and that it 'expands' [*ampliasse*], one needs to choose the Roman model 'and make a place for tumults and universal dissensions' (D I.6.22); and if we want it to be peaceful, we need to choose the Spartan or Venetian model. The alternative at this stage still seems tenable. In order to adhere to the aristocratic model, which conserves itself in the strictest sense, in a sustainable way, it would suffice a prohibition of acquiring [*lo acquistare*], of expanding – and 'if the thing could be held balanced in this mode, it would be the true political way of life and the true quiet of the city' (D I.6.23).

But, immediately after, Machiavelli annuls this alternative, considering that, in reality, the Roman model represents the only viable choice: 'But since all things of men are in motion and cannot stay steady, they must either rise or fall; and so many things that reason does not bring you, necessity brings you' (D I.6.23). We can see here the central opposition between reason and the necessities of history. The first – the idea that the genuine political life could be what is given through the *logos* and maintains itself on the mode of nativism and enclosure – is precisely what the second forces us to abandon. Through this process, the rational choice itself between the two models, and furthermore the hope one could have to combine them, appear to crumble. Not only Machiavelli tells us that the outside (the need to expand, or at least to face the danger of another's expansion) can always impose itself upon those only wanting to maintain themselves yet unable to face another's expansion, but ruin from the inside will also arise from the idleness resulting from tranquillity. In short, 'one cannot … balance this thing, nor maintain this middle way exactly' (D I.6.23). What appears as untenable is just as much the possibility to maintain itself on the aristocratic mode, as the definition of a model combining the advantages of external power and that of internal tranquillity. Any attempt at finding an equilibrium remains too theoretical, or else too aristocratic. In Machiavelli's words, 'I believe that it is necessary to follow the Roman order and not that of the other republics – for I do not believe one can find a mode between the one and the other' (D I.6.23) To summarize: do not aristocratize the expansiveness of the people!

One should therefore accept the hostilities or divisions lying at the heart of the republic itself (and thus the freedom of the many), considering that they are necessarily connected to power. The absence of any half-measure ought to be considered as the confirmation of the impossibility of overcoming the relational approach defined at the beginning of this chapter. This relational approach truly accomplishes itself when Machiavelli finally affirms the better

viability of a series of relations (inherent in the Roman model) over another (inherent in the Spartan model), thereby affirming the Roman political model's superiority, whose quality resides in its more relational and process-based character, that is, lying further from an understanding of the political in terms of preserving order. The model (which is really a non-model) of Rome is the most adequate and the most powerful because it is the most radically relational, without any need of an extrinsic input, of a providential gesture, without the need of the *logos* from a good legislator, without even the need to balance extremes, to maintain the measure, in an Aristotelian perspective. The equation revealed as intrinsically Roman is more deeply relational in its composition; its necessity is perfectly intrinsic, this being the reason its meaning is necessarily deferred.

Being radically relational and without any dependence to an extrinsic input, the Roman equation is necessarily expansive – this being its deferred sense – in opposition to the Lacedaemonian example, which needs the input of a theoretical extrinsic virtue, demanding extrinsic morals whose failure ceaselessly needs compensation from divine providence. The Roman example, established as purely intrinsic, functions without question through variation and hence through overflowing: it is the overflowing of the freedom of the many, which are always *more than.*

The relational consistency of Machiavelli's reflection on Roman history is fundamental because it invites us to think politics, against any exteriority of form over matter, not only as connecting order and disorder but also in refusing the classical divide between the inside and the outside of the city as the condition in itself for politics. To the contrary, Machiavellian politics unfolds from the (expansive) connection between the inside and the outside: the outside expresses the internal political texture, and inversely. In doing this, Machiavelli offers a counterpoint to the medieval just war theory much more radically than the one defined as the modern model seen by Carl Schmitt. Moreover, this opposition between the medieval just war and the modern regular war is avoided by Machiavelli through showing that both rely, as the Greek representation of war, on the establishment of a clear separation of the inside and the outside of the city or the State, a separation which would be constitutive of all politics.

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CHAPTER 13

Guicciardini's *Considerations on the Discourses of Machiavelli*

Mark Jurdjevic

Of all of Machiavelli's critics, none were as close to him as Francesco Guicciardini and no one's criticisms were as densely embedded in common causes, convictions, and political circumstances. Both thinkers formally advocated for the mixed regime championed by classical writers such as Aristotle and Polybius and both justified their arguments with a ruthless and unprecedented political realism. In their careers, and in spite of a shared desire to see a republican government in Florence, both faithfully served the Medici family, the gravest internal threat to a republican future. Guicciardini held numerous positions under the Medici, first as governor of Modena and Reggio under Leo X and then as president of the Romagna and lieutenant-general of the papal army under Clement VII. In 1520, after almost a decade of ostracisation, the Medici commissioned Machiavelli to write a history of Florence and a constitutional proposal for the city, and in 1526 Machiavelli became chancellor to the magistracy responsible for strengthening Florentine fortifications and informal adviser to Clement VII, tasks that brought him into regular contact with Guicciardini. And they promoted each other's interests: Guicciardini was instrumental in the first staging of Machiavelli's play, *Mandragola*, before a papal audience, while Machiavelli was Guicciardini's agent and advocate in the marriage negotiations for Guicciardini's daughter.[1]

The two differed, however, in family status, reputation, and power, a distinction that in the early modern context counted for far more than their common ground. Machiavelli's family had been persecuted by the Medici in the fifteenth century, and as a result he grew up in a politically alienated family of modest means. Machiavelli did not share his father's political resignation and held several influential posts in the republican government led by Piero Soderini, but he nevertheless had to navigate sustained *ottimati* resentment that he enjoyed a political role better reserved to his social betters.[2] In the end, he relived the fate of his persecuted ancestor Girolamo after the Medici restoration of 1512.

1 On these details, see their correspondence in Machiavelli 1996.

2 Najemy 1990, pp. 101–118.

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Machiavelli was imprisoned, tortured, and spent the remainder of the decade in impoverished political isolation. Guicciardini's family, by contrast, were high-ranking members of the Medici party, as Guicciardini proudly related in his *History of Florence*. With only a few exceptions, Guicciardini operated at the centre of Florentine politics throughout his adult life and, as president of the Romagna and a prince in his own right, dramatically exceeded his ancestors in the acquisition and display of power and wealth.

Their republicanism, for all its common roots in the Florentine experience, reflected two fundamentally different points of view. Convinced of the corruption of the present, Machiavelli dismissed the relevance of the political and intellectual traditions that he viewed as complicit in that corruption. He fantasised about a new virtuous political order that was a composite of his own experience as de facto ambassador and militia organiser, his wide reading of ancient sources, and his unfettered imagination. His republican vision, particularly its violent populism and condemnation of elite culture as the gravest threat to political stability, was in equal parts admiration of ancient Rome and a scathing indictment of Florentine political culture.[3] As a privileged insider who justifiably viewed the histories of his family and city as inextricably intertwined, Guicciardini's political imagination was always limited to the Florentine context, with which he only modestly quarrelled.[4] Guicciardini championed an aristocratic republicanism, widely shared by his *ottimati* contemporaries, in which an elite senate—balanced by a standard bearer for life on one end and a popular council on the other—controlled key aspects of political life.[5] Even though the Florentine elite had yet to devise a system to protect their pre-eminence from Medici domination from above and popular challenges from below (and never would), Guicciardini's solutions to that problem always consisted of minor modifications to various iterations of Florentine precedent.

Guicciardini's *Considerations on the Discourses of Machiavelli* – a polemical rejection of Machiavelli's republican political theory superficially camouflaged as discursive commentary – reflects these contrasts on every page. Written shortly after the collapse of the third Florentine republic of 1527–1530, Guicciardini composed his reflections on the *Discourses* in a particularly charged and violent context. As one of the most favoured of all Medici clients, Guicciardini was viewed by the populist republican regime with a suspicion that culminated in his exile and confiscation of his property in 1530. After an imperial

3 On Machiavelli's populism, see McCormick 2011.

4 See Guicciardini 2019 for a recent collection of his political writings.

5 Cadoni 1999.

army restored the Medici following a protracted siege, Guicciardini returned to Florence as the chief architect of Medici retribution. Of all the Medici lieutenants, according to the historian Benedetto Varchi, Guicciardini 'showed himself the cruellest and most enraged of all', a position that Guicciardini justified as necessary because 'we [*ottimati*] have as our enemy an entire people'.[6] This context of extreme conflict between the Florentine *ottimati* and people and Guicciardini's bloody hands certainly must have informed this late text's strident rejection of Machiavelli's *Discourses*.

As Gennaro Sasso has demonstrated, the arc of Guicciardini's writings showed early elements of sympathy with Machiavellian themes that ultimately gave way to sustained rejection in Guicciardini's *Dialogue on the Government of Florence*, which Sasso characterised as a 'sustained anti-Machiavellian polemic'.[7] I argue, however, that Guicciardini's *Considerations* contain his most substantial objections to Machiavelli's worldview. Even the *Dialogue*, written in 1524, expressed Machiavellian themes, such as the text's sharp critique of regimes of the few, whereas the *Considerations* gave no intellectual quarter.[8] Guicciardini devoted the bulk of his *Considerations* to three quarrels with significant aspects of Machiavelli's radicalism.

First, as an important actor in peninsular politics and patriarch of a family that had been equally important actors in Florentine history, Guicciardini could not accept Machiavelli's dismissal of the present as the corrupted result of a flawed peninsular political culture. Second, he rejected Machiavelli's arguments about the rationality of the people and their capacity for wisdom, implicitly turning one of Machiavelli's claims against him. To know the nature of princes, Machiavelli declared in the opening to *The Prince*, one must be of the people, just as 'to discern clearly the people's nature, one must be a prince'.[9] The Guicciardini of the *Considerations* wrote from the perspective of an injured prince whose subjects' unjustified animosity compelled the harsh methods towards them that Machiavelli decried. Third and finally, Guicciardini refused even to engage with Machiavelli's rejection of the intellectual tradition as an elite conspiracy to disempower the people, insisting instead on the near perfect overlap between his convictions and the unanimous verdict of philosophers and historians (though, as we will see, Machiavelli seems to have provoked a few subtle cracks in the confidence of Guicciardini's convictions).

6 Quoted in Najemy 2006, p. 462.

7 Sasso 1984, p. 91.

8 On the *Dialogue*, see Focher 1996 and 2000.

9 Machiavelli 1989, pp. 10–11.

1 Guicciardini's Defence of the Present

Machiavelli begins the *Discourses* with the first of many contrasts between the exemplary Roman past and the servile Florentine and Italian present. In D I.1, Machiavelli considers the origins of cities and the implications of their founding by either natives or foreigners. He sub-divides the latter between free founders and those under the power of others, whether republics or princes, who build cities for a variety of self-serving reasons that inhibit their growth and independence. In his transition from analysis of cities with servile origins to free cities, he pauses to elaborate on Florence's defective origins: 'And because these cities are by origin not free, it rarely happens that they make great progress and can be numbered among the chief cities of kingdoms. Such was the building of Florence, because ... she was built under the Roman empire, and could not at first make other advances than the kindness of the sovereign allowed her'.[10]

Guicciardini's reply mirrors Machiavelli's topical structure but changes the main category of analysis in ways that privilege Florence's significance. Machiavelli identified good laws as the foundation of a state's power, elaborated on via a discussion of the importance of rigorous laws to constrain the potential decadence encouraged by fertile sites. Guicciardini agrees on the propitious circumstances of Rome's foundation but disputes the role of Roman laws in its success, which signals – given book one's focus on Roman laws – Guicciardini's early opposition to Machiavelli's larger argument. Guicciardini disputes Machiavelli's identification of Rome as a fertile site, stressing instead as vital the degree to which its location was fertile enough to collect a large population but not enough to provide for all its inhabitants: 'If it were possible to collect a large population in a place, not of course absolutely infertile, but not very rich, there is no doubt that the need to obtain supplies would contribute more to its strength than wise laws could, for laws may be changed by men's will, while necessity is an ever-present law and stimulus'. Whereas Machiavelli posited laws as the foundation of strength, Guicciardini instead asserts that the 'principal basis of the power and riches of cities is a large population'. By shifting the category from laws to power as a function of wealth and population, Guicciardini defends Florence and other Italian city-states with unfree origins from Machiavelli's condemnation: 'In the second type [unfree origin] it is true that they cannot make great strides from the beginning, but as time goes on, many events may occur to free them from their subjection, and then it may

10 Machiavelli 1989, p. 195.

happen that their power increases remarkably. Florence was of this nature… if… through the advantages of their site, a good constitution, or for some other reason, they have been able to expand in wealth and population, later on they have found it easy to become powerful'.[11]

Guicciardini resumes his quarrel with Machiavelli over the status of present-day Florence and Italy in his response to Machiavelli's condemnation of the papacy. In D I.12, Machiavelli contrasted Roman discipline in maintaining respect for religious rituals with the Church's role in the religious hypocrisy of his contemporaries. He concluded with a condemnation of the Church's political role in Italy. Machiavelli contrasts the superior strength and security of united regions, such as France and Spain, with the fragmented Italian peninsula, for which he blames the Church. The Church lacked the strength to 'grasp sole authority in Italy and make herself ruler of the country' yet possessed enough influence with foreign powers to summon their aid to prevent anyone within from unifying the peninsula. When Machiavelli lamented the slavery of Florentines, he generally condemned its corrupt political institutions and the Medici family. When he lamented the slavery of Italy, he condemned the Roman Church: 'Italy has been under many princes and lords, who have brought about the great disunion and the great weakness that have made her the prey not merely of powerful barbarians but of whoever assails her. For this we Italians are indebted to the Church and not to any other'.[12]

Although Guicciardini agreed that the Church was an obstacle to unification, he praised rather than condemned that reality. Guicciardini's reply challenged Machiavelli's notion of Italian servitude and recast Rome as an oppressor of liberty rather than a model for its preservation. Where Machiavelli viewed Italy as a corrupt community of feeble states, Guicciardini instead stressed its preponderance of prosperous cities, an admirable state of affairs that depended on regional independence: 'But I really do not know whether its not becoming united under one rule has been this country's luck or misfortune. For, if as a republic, unity could have brought glory to the name of Italy and happiness to the ruling city, it would have meant disaster for all the others, for under the shadow of that city they could not attain any greatness, as it is the custom of republics not to share the fruits of their liberty and rule with any other than their own citizens… And although Italy, divided into many states, has at various times suffered many calamities which under a single rule it might have avoided… nevertheless in all these periods she has had so many more flourishing cities than she could have had under a single republic, that I

11 Guicciardini 1965, pp. 62–63.

12 Machiavelli 1989, p. 229.

think unification would have been more unfortunate than fortunate for her'.[13] In stressing the dire consequences of an Italy united under a single republic, Guicciardini was drawing on Machiavelli's contrast in D II.2 between subjection to a prince and republic: 'Of all hard slaveries, the hardest is that subjecting you to a republic: first because it is more lasting and there is less hope of escape from it; second, because the purpose of a republic is to enfeeble and weaken, in order to increase its own body, all other bodies. This is not done by a prince'.[14]

Guicciardini concludes by implying that Machiavelli has not confronted a contradiction in his thinking about the historical relationship between the Roman republic and Florentine self-rule. What Machiavelli saw as disunity was in fact the peninsula's natural inclination to freedom, a common positive trait that manifested itself most intensely in Tuscany. Guicciardini implies that Machiavelli, who esteemed Florence's republican tradition, nevertheless championed a predatory state that was historically Florence's tyrant. In Guicciardini's analysis, the Church's obstruction of peninsular unification assisted the Florentines in maintaining their free way of life, whereas Rome's violent regime was the only power ever to have destroyed it: 'Yet it may be due to some destiny of Italy or the temperament of its people, strong and intelligent, that it has never been easy to subject this province to any rule, even before the Church was here. Rather it has always naturally desired freedom, and I do not believe there is any record of another power possessing it entirely, except the Romans who subjugated it with great violence and military prowess'.[15]

2 Guicciardini's Condemnation of the People

In terms of political theory, Guicciardini's most substantial quarrel was with Machiavelli's inversion of the value of unity and social conflict. Machiavelli broke with tradition in asserting that conflict was an inevitable aspect of political life. All states, irrespective of constitutional structure, were made up of two groups, the nobles and the people, whose humoral natures – the former's instinct to oppress and the latter's desire for freedom from oppression – ensured a permanent state of conflict. Rather than deploring humanity's irrepressible capacity for conflict, as all his contemporaries did, Machiavelli praised it: 'In every republic there are two opposed factions, that of the people

13 Guicciardini 1965, p. 81.
14 Machiavelli 1989, p. 333.
15 Guicciardini 1965, p. 82.

and that of the rich, and … all the laws made in favour of liberty result from their discord'.[16]

Guicciardini shared Machiavelli's instinct to interpret politics in binary terms of nobles and people but disputed the inevitability of their conflict and rejected the notion that conflict could ever have beneficial consequences. Guicciardini – along with virtually all ancient and Renaissance political thought – instead championed unity as the highest political ideal. For Guicciardini, Rome's chronic internal conflict was an argument against adopting their methods in the present. Much of Guicciardini's quarrel unfolds in his rebuttal to D I.4, in which Machiavelli argues that the struggles between the people and the Roman senate were the cause of the republic's power. Guicciardini shifts the focus by considering the historical circumstances that caused Rome's internal dissensions. The conflict between senators and plebeians was not the product of universal humoral tendencies but rather the result of avoidable errors in political judgment, first in the formal division of classes into plebeian and patrician and second in the allocation of office-holding rights exclusively to the latter: 'The cause of the disunity of Rome between patricians and plebs was that the classes of the city were divided, that is, on the one hand all the patricians, on the other all the plebs, and that all the officers of state were patricians, the plebs being totally excluded and without any hope of ever attaining office. If there had not been from the beginning this distinction between patricians and plebs, or if at least they had given half the honours to the plebs as was done later, those divisions would not have arisen'.[17]

He implies that in its early history, the Roman republic was not a mixed constitution because it excluded the people. It eventually did and therefore ultimately achieved the balance that Guicciardini saw as the chief attribute of the mixed regime, but because of its initial political imbalance, the route involved frequent 'seditious movements' that would have destroyed the republic were it not for Rome's exceptional martial virtue. Guicciardini thus implicitly agrees with Machiavelli that Rome arrived at the ideal mixed constitution as a result of dissension. His larger quarrel is with Machiavelli's extrapolation from the Roman example that dissension is a necessary – indeed salutary – method to sustain a mixed constitution.

The two both championed the superiority of the mixed regime, but they used the term in radically different ways. For Machiavelli, the mixed constitution balanced a permanent state of conflict between nobles and people via class-specific institutions for each group, hence his conclusion that 'those

16 Machiavelli 1989, p. 203.
17 Guicciardini 1965, p. 68.

enmities rising between the people and Senate must be borne, being taken as an evil necessary to the attainment of Roman greatness'.[18] For Guicciardini, the mixed constitution resolved the problem of conflict by harmoniously incorporating the one, the few, and the many. Since the purpose of the mixed regime was the sublimation of conflict, Guicciardini reasons, any regime plagued by conflict cannot provide an exemplary method, hence his dismissal of Rome as a model: 'I do not therefore see that the Romans could not have organised the state so that plots and disorders need not arise between the senate and the plebs. I rather judge it to have been quite easy".[19] His version of the mixed regime diminished, rather than formalised, political distinctions between social groups: 'I would like the protection of liberty against any seeking to oppress the republic, to belong to all, always avoiding as far as possible the distinction between nobles and plebeians'.[20]

In his reply to D I.2, he outlines his vision of how to construct a harmonious mixed regime that avoids Rome's artificial divisions. Guicciardini anchors his ideal regime in an aristocratic senatorial order whose composition, crucially, must be a porous meritocracy.[21] He dismisses regimes with circumscribed aristocracies as inherently prone to corruption: 'If they are optimates by birth and not by election, from prudent and good men at first, affairs soon fall into the hands of imprudent and wicked ones'.[22] Guicciardini possessed the traditionally aristocratic conviction that talented people are always the rare few upon whom all regimes vitally depend. But as a proud citizen of a republican city-state with a relatively high degree of social mobility and no legally defined noble class, he recognised that such people could be found among all social ranks. He advocated for an optimate elite who 'must not be drawn always from the same lines and families, but from the whole body of the city, from all who according to the law are qualified to take part in the magistrature'. From this group he appoints a senate whose members are 'very numerous so as to be more easily accepted by the others who will be able to hope that they or their house may succeed when vacancies occur. And also with a large number there is hope that all those who deserve to may enter'.[23] Because optimate status is open to all and the optimate senate has many seats, and therefore many opportunities for people to serve, Guicciardini expects his system to distribute rewards sufficiently broadly to achieve unity, a point he defends by historical

18 Machiavelli 1989, p. 209.
19 Guicciardini 1965, p. 72.
20 Guicciardini 1965, p. 71.
21 He reiterates arguments made more substantially in his *Discorso di Logroño* and *Dialogue on the Government of Florence*.
22 Guicciardini 1965, p. 65.
23 Guicciardini 1965, p. 65.

precedent: 'The Spartans had optimates of this kind, drawn not from a special class of men but from the whole body of the city; the Romans had them, but differently, for with them the patricians were from the first the optimates and the rest formed the plebs, which was the origin of all their seditious movements'.[24]

Their contrasting conceptions of the ideal mixed regime result in large part from their incompatible conceptions of nobles and people. Machiavelli built much of his political thought on axiomatic assumptions about the two groups' permanent dispositions, placing them in a state of oppositional conflict. He defined them in terms of instinctive collective psychological tendencies that implicated the elite as a political problem to which the people were the solution. As a group, they oppressed the people, behaved violently, and did not recognise authority above their own, while as individuals they each thought themselves as princes in their own right and therefore always fought each other for pre-eminence and in princely contexts against their own rulers. The people by contrast wished merely to live unmolested and secure in the enjoyment of their possessions. These observations underpin numerous chapters in the *Discourses* that attribute a critical role to the people in preserving Rome's freedom and power, such as the tribunes' protection of Rome's liberty, the people's superior capacity for judgment, their popular tribunals, and of course their military role. For Machiavelli, it followed that all regimes benefitted by using the people to contain the potential for discord caused by elite ambition.

Expressing the far more conventional establishment view, Guicciardini conceived of these two groups as each possessing their own distinct desirable and problematic qualities that the mixed constitution was uniquely effective at managing. In some respects, the *Considerations*' recognition that each social group has its strengths and weaknesses was a consistent feature of Guicciardini's political and historical thought, evident in his *History of Florence, Discorso di Logroño*, and *Dialogue on the Government of Florence*, and also consistent with his general intellectual style of cautious, contextual weighing of pros and cons. But it is also true that he displayed his elitism more aggressively in the *Considerations* than any other text. Whereas the *History of Florence* praised the popular Great Council for the quality of people it elected and the *Dialogue* subjected government of the few to searching scrutiny, the *Considerations* provided the briefest of acknowledgments of noble vice amidst great appreciation of noble prudence and the briefest concession of the people's virtue amidst scathing condemnation of popular tyranny.[25]

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24 Guicciardini 1965, p. 65.

25 For Guicciardini's estimation of the Great Council's competence in making appointments, see Guicciardini 1970, pp. 127–128; for his critique of governments of the few, see Guicciardini 1994, pp. 19, 22–23, 134–135.

For Guicciardini, nobles should be the fulcrum of the state because of their capacity for prudence, constancy, intelligence, and boldness. He elaborates his view in his responses to three of Machiavelli's *Discorsi*. In his reply to D II.2, on the mixed constitution, Guicciardini considers the advantages of governments of the few over the one and the many: 'In government by the optimates there is this advantage, that being many they can less easily set up a tyranny than one man could. As they are the best qualified men in the city they rule it with more intelligence and prudence than a multitude might'.[26] He reiterates this view in his reply to D I.5: 'But if it were necessary to give a city a government either of nobles or of plebs, I believe it would be better to choose the nobles, for … they have greater prudence and good qualities'.[27] And finally, in his reply to D I.40, Guicciardini declares that tyrants 'who have with them the nobility, enjoy support more vigorous, efficacious, and bold, for the nobility does not change its mind as often or as easily for trifling reasons as do the people'. Because of these positive qualities, Guicciardini assigned them exclusive jurisdiction over all aspects of weighty political deliberation: 'Their function must be to discuss and decide those matters where human prudence is most needed, that is, wars, peace, negotiations with princes, and all matters essential for the preservation and expansion of the state'.[28]

Guicciardini conceded some minimal common ground with Machiavelli, however, in his recognition that noble culture had potentially tyrannical tendencies that the people could help obstruct. His concession was a logical consequence of the psychological implications of their ambition since by its nature it opposed contentment with the status quo: 'The trouble is that as their authority is great they favour those measures useful to themselves and oppressive to the rest of the population, and as there are no bounds to men's ambition to increase their estate, they come into conflict with others like themselves, and commit acts of sedition. From this ensues the city's ruin, either through tyranny or some other means'.[29] Guicciardini's mixed constitution provided the brake to potential excesses caused by noble ambition via the role granted the people in approving laws – no initiative of the optimate senate can become a law without popular approval. In the *Considerations'* single passage acknowledging the advantages of popular rule, Guicciardini acknowledges why all senatorial measures require popular approval: 'One good thing about government of the people is that while it lasts there can be no tyranny. Laws are more

26 Guicciardini 1965, p. 64.
27 Guicciardini 1965, p. 71.
28 Guicciardini 1965, p. 65.
29 Guicciardini 1965, pp. 64–65.

powerful than men, and the proper end of all decisions is the safeguarding of universal well-being', a conclusion not dissimilar from Machiavelli's argument that the people make the best guardians of liberty.[30]

Outside of that one concession, however, Guicciardini's *Considerations* identify the people as inconstant, irrational, and incapable of seeing beyond superficial appearances, hence his exclusion of them from participation in important deliberations. For example, in his reply to D I.2, Guicciardini declares that 'the people, on account of their ignorance, are not capable of deciding matters of great importance … [they are] easily deceived and misled by ambitious men and traitors'.[31] He offers another variation in his counter to D I.7: the people 'are not able to understand or examine well, and are easily moved by rumour and false calumny'.[32] In his response to D I.47, even while agreeing with Machiavelli that the people capably distribute offices, Guicciardini still avers that the people 'does not examine or distinguish with subtlety, so that it is often wrong … It believes false rumours, it acts from frivolous motives, and in fact its ignorance is much more dangerous than the decisions of a few may be'.[33]

Within the reservations above, however, Guicciardini introduced a new and yet more pointed challenge to Machiavelli's view of noble culture. The *Considerations* implicitly portrayed the people as vindictive aggressors who instigate the noble conduct that Machiavelli deplores. In his response to D I.29, in which Machiavelli argues that princes are more prone to ingratitude than a people, Guicciardini attributes to the people an inherently destructive resentment of excellence, the chief etymological characteristic of aristocracy: 'As for envy it arises much more easily in men of the people for whom every kind of eminence of birth, riches, valour, or reputation, is usually unwelcome. There is nothing they dislike as much as seeing other citizens higher than themselves and they always want to pull them down'.[34] He put the same accusation in different terms in his response to D I.2: '[The people] are fond of persecuting well qualified citizens for they need novelty and disturbances'.[35]

In his reply to D I.7, in which Machiavelli argues for the necessity of popular tribunals through which to bring charges against prominent citizens, Guicciardini suggests that such tribunals will become a method by which the people will unjustly 'pull down' those eminent in birth, riches, and reputation.

30 Guicciardini 1965, pp. 65–66.
31 Guicciardini 1965, p. 66.
32 Guicciardini 1965, p. 73.
33 Guicciardini 1965, p. 103.
34 Guicciardini 1965, p. 96.
35 Guicciardini 1965, p. 66.

Although he agrees in principle with the tribunals' necessity, he alters their composition to ensure they do not become vehicles through which the people might persecute their betters, causing them to retaliate in ways injurious to the city: 'One must also be careful that these should be so arranged that innocent people may not be easily vexed or punished. For besides injustice it is also harmful to the city, for where this danger threatens the nobility and upper classes, and they live with this perpetual fear, they naturally become discontented, and the discontent of the powerful becomes dangerous in many ways to the republic'.[36]

In his rebuttal to Machiavelli's criticism of fortresses as an inferior source of security than the people's approval, Guicciardini again portrays the people as malicious aggressors who compel violent treatment by their rulers: 'If [the people] loved their prince when they were well treated, I agree that fortresses would be useless for any prince who ruled well … But considering how often peoples even when well treated behave unreasonably, how much they like change, how powerful the memory of a former prince may be once they are under a new power, how great their appetite for freedom if they have been used to it, and how often for this or other reasons a prince or tyrant is obliged to rule his citizens or subjects with some offence to them … [and] must base themselves to some extent on force, and holding their people in some fear. Otherwise they would too often be in the grip of malice'.[37] What Machiavelli viewed as the nobles inherent desire to dominate, Guicciardini re-interprets as justified self-defence in the face of popular aggression.

3 Guicciardini Invokes Tradition

Embedded within these quarrels, however, was an even larger dispute, equally informed by the contrasting social status of Machiavelli and Guicciardini, about the role of history and the written tradition itself as a source of legitimating authority in political life. Machiavelli interpreted tradition as a self-serving elite conspiracy while Guicciardini interpreted it as proof of the natural and timeless superiority of the few over the many. While the two appeared to share a similar approach to history – particularly its cyclical nature and the notion of recurrence that framed historical knowledge as a form of political experience in the present – Guicciardini interpreted history in a conservative mode while Machiavelli read his sources from a more radically subversive position.

36 Guicciardini 1965, p. 73.

37 Guicciardini 1965, pp. 117–118.

Guicciardini generally defended his political preferences by reiterating the normative declarations of ancient authors, whereas Machiavelli invoked the ancients but used the substance of their texts to argue against their conclusions. Much as his contemporary Martin Luther rejected the authority of tradition as a corrupt extension of papal tyranny, Machiavelli's *Discourses* implied that political and historical writers throughout history, eager for princely praise and the material benefits that accompany it, tended to deny the rationality of the multitude for self-serving reasons (an accusation that the *Considerations* tacitly – perhaps even unintentionally – acknowledged).

Three of Machiavelli's *discorsi* that Guicciardini engaged address the complicity of history and the intellectual tradition in supporting corrupt regimes. In D I.10, Machiavelli laments the self-destructive tyrannical tendencies of most princes. Such princes are not inherently corrupt or viciously inclined by nature but are rather 'deceived by a false good and a false glory'.[38] As he reads it, Greek and Roman history demonstrates that all princely figures will acquire greater security, strength, and glory by living within the laws and with the love of their people, yet few recognise that lesson. To explain why he considers Julius Caesar, whose reign found many apologists both in antiquity and amongst the humanists of Renaissance: 'Nor should anyone be deceived by the glory of Caesar, on seeing him especially celebrated by the historians, for those who praise him are bribed by his fortune and awed by the long duration of the Empire, which, being ruled under his name, did not allow writers to speak freely of him'.[39] Power exerts a form of psychological slavery on the imaginations of the historians who write about it, and their corrupted narratives hence lead future readers down similarly corrupted paths. As he put it in the preface to book two, 'Most writers are … subservient to the fortune of conquerors'.[40] History does offer instructive truths, but it must be read against the grain, with prudent and political inferences: 'Let a reader observe too with what great praises [historians] laud Brutus, as though, unable to blame Caesar because of his power, they laud his enemy'.[41] Machiavelli would use the same method in his *Florentine Histories*.

38 Machiavelli 1989, p. 220.

39 Machiavelli 1989, p. 221.

40 Machiavelli 1989, p. 321. He makes a similar point in the preface explaining his choice of citizens as dedicatees, rather than a prince: 'I have got away from the common custom of those who write, who always address their works to some prince and, blinded by ambition and avarice, praise him for all the worthy traits, when they ought to blame him for every quality that can be censured' (Machiavelli 1989, p. 188).

41 Machiavelli 1989, p. 221.

In D I.58, Machiavelli elaborates further on the written record's legitimation of political culture that excludes the people and a specific example of reading his source against the grain. The *discorso* opens with two episodes from Livy's history that Livy uses to demonstrate the multitude's inherently mercurial character: 'Nothing can be more unreliable and more inconstant than the multitude, as, like all other historians, our Titus Livius affirms'.[42] Machiavelli proceeds to demonstrate that Livy's own narrative confirms the opposite, that when in power, the Roman people demonstrated moderation and prudence. Because Livy's anti-populism is shared by 'all other historians', Machiavelli acknowledges that he is at odds with the intellectual tradition itself: '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'.[43]

Machiavelli's explication of his method advances a universal explanation for why tradition has always maligned the multitude: 'I do not judge and I shall never judge it a sin to defend any opinion with arguments, without trying to use either authority or force'.[44] Machiavelli here condemns the invocation of authority as a form of coercive power. This was a provocative method, given cherished Renaissance assumptions about the superior wisdom of the ancients. In doing so, he dismissed a mode of argumentation embraced by all his contemporaries, and particularly Guicciardini, who frequently justified his arguments by their consistency with tradition. By disregarding historians' summative verdicts about the nature of people and princes and instead focusing on their actions, Machiavelli reaches the opposite conclusion as 'the writers': 'I say, then, about that fault of which writers accuse the multitude, that all men can individually be accused of it, and chiefly princes'. He justifies his conclusion with the observation that 'there are and have been many princes, and the good and wise ones have been few'.[45] His explanation for why the historical record has inverted the inherent qualities of princes – inconstant and vicious – and people – moderate and wise – indicts literary authority itself is a product of political intimidation and coercion: 'A bad opinion about the people arises because everybody says bad things of them without fear and freely, even while they are in power. Of princes everybody speaks with a thousand fears and a thousand cautions'.[46]

42 Machiavelli 1989, p. 313.
43 Machiavelli 1989, p. 313.
44 Machiavelli 1989, p. 313–314.
45 Machiavelli 1989, p. 314.
46 Machiavelli 1989, p. 318.

Guicciardini must have recognised Machiavelli's pre-emptive methodological challenge to sceptical readers to refute him with arguments rather than recourse to 'authority or force'. Nevertheless, with one exception, discussed below, Guicciardini's *Considerations* refused to engage with Machiavelli's provocative assertion that to extract truth from the intellectual tradition one must first acknowledge its accommodation of power and consequent elitist agenda. At a methodological level, therefore, the two were talking at cross purposes. Where Machiavelli critiqued the objectivity of tradition, Guicciardini simply invoked it: 'For when princes are controlled by law no one who has written on political subjects ever doubted that their rule is better than that of a mob'. Guicciardini reiterated the general literary consensus: 'Not without reason, the multitude is compared to the waves of the sea which, according to the winds that blow, move now here, now there, without any rule, without any firmness'. Machiavelli offers one method – consider the implications of each specific case in a text and navigate independently of the path provided by its author – and Guicciardini the opposite – in the presence of a universal verdict there is no need to consider specifics: 'Examples [of the weakness of popular governments] are so many and so well known that there is no point in giving details, they are such that they deservedly give rise to that universal and most ancient belief of all writers that in the multitude there is neither prudence nor constancy'.[47]

As an establishment intellectual, republican citizen, and former prince having recently faced what he perceived as unjust persecution from a popular regime, Guicciardini insisted on the compatibility of his aristocratic position with the entire western tradition of political thought. And yet, intentionally or not, there is evidence in the *Considerations* that Machiavelli did affect Guicciardini's thinking about the putatively unanimous consensus of the 'writers' about the flaws of popular regimes. In the fifth chapter of the *Considerations*, Guicciardini responds to Machiavelli's argument that the people make better guardians of liberty than the nobles. Machiavelli's position involves a survey of Roman, Spartan, and Venetian practices, a valid comparison in his view because 'in every republic there are rich men and men of the people'.[48] Guicciardini declares Machiavelli's method flawed because he compares incompatible regimes: in Rome, the people and the nobles shared power while in Venice the people were entirely excluded. He then disputes Machiavelli's interpretation of the Roman case. Machiavelli had identified the guardianship of liberty in Rome to the tribunes of the people, but Guicciardini observes that the

47 Guicciardini 1965, p. 105.
48 Machiavelli 1989, p. 204.

tribunes were responsible not for the protection of the city's liberty overall but only for the liberty of the people. The city's liberty was a collective effort that included patricians and plebs, both of whom had the power to arraign, and that was located in the offices of consuls, dictators, and tribunes. He agrees that the Roman example is indeed the correct one to follow, but not because it demonstrates the virtues of empowering the people to protect liberty, as Machiavelli mistakenly believes, but because it demonstrates the superiority of the mixed regime.

Without any overt signal, Guicciardini has made one notable alteration to his own political thought: he no longer considers Venice an example of a mixed regime. Chapter five specifically rejects Venice as a mixed regime because power is exclusively in the hands of the nobles: 'it is one thing to say who is have power, the nobles or the plebs, and of this Venice is an example, for there it is so far in the hands of the nobles that all the plebs are excluded – and it is quite another thing, where all take a share in government, to say who should have special responsibility or care for the defence of liberty'. In all of his prior constitutional treatises, he held up Venice as one of the best realisations of the classical mixed ideals.[49] Only a few years earlier, in his *Dialogue on the Government of Florence*, Guicciardini defended his ideal Florentine constitution on the degree to which it emulated Venice's mixed regime: 'It seems to me that the government [outlined in book two] is good in general and has the main features one requires in a free republic. It bears very close resemblance to the Venetian government, which, if I'm not mistaken, is the finest and best government ever enjoyed by a city, not only in our times, but also perhaps in ancient times. This is because it borrows from all the different types of government, of the one, the few and the many, and is moderated by all of them, so that it has gathered most of the good features of each and escaped most of their worst ones'.[50]

Nor is Venice invoked anywhere else in the *Considerations* as a mixed regime. Guicciardini continues to advocate for the mixed ideal, but he now does so only on the basis of the Roman example: 'I shall always praise above all others a mixed government, as described above [with respect to Roman institutions and customs]'.[51] However much he may have disagreed with Machiavelli's populist reading of the Roman example, he nevertheless engaged sufficiently densely with Machiavelli's interpretation of the historical nature and contribution of the Roman plebs that he now recognises Venice has no such popular counterpart and cannot therefore be a mixed regime.

49 As did most of his *ottimati* peers. On this, see Gilbert 1968.

50 Guicciardini 1994, p. 134.

51 Guicciardini 1965, p. 71.

He concludes his analysis of this *discorso* by considering a new question not previously considered either by him or Machiavelli: if a mixed regime in which all social groups contribute to the preservation of liberty is not possible, which is superior – a government that is entirely noble or entirely plebeian? Strictly speaking, Machiavelli does not raise this question in the *Discourses* because that text also advocates for a mixed regime. It seems, however, that Guicciardini interpreted that text's muscular and strident populism as an argument for the superiority of popular regimes. Guicciardini may also have raised this question as a way to critique the republican regime of 1527–1530 that came to power as a result of the circumstances of his own personal downfall, and that viewed him as a traitor.[52] In any case, his answer reiterates the superiority of a mixed regime but stresses that in its absence, government of the nobles is far superior to popular government. His rationale reverts to his standard contrast between the two social groups: the nobles' natural capacity for prudence makes it probable that they will construct a stable regime, 'whereas a people full of ignorance and confusion, and possessing many bad qualities, can only be expected to overthrow and destroy everything'.[53]

To justify his preference, he aligns himself with tradition but – without formal declaration and perhaps even unintentionally – he now acknowledges that the historical record does not in fact speak with one voice in condemning popular governments. 'This conclusion is the one reached by all those who have written about the republics, *and who prefer the government of the optimates to that of the mob*'.[54] In no prior text does Guicciardini concede a plurality of opinion in the tradition of political thought. This new tautological qualifying clause substantially diminishes the rhetorical impact of his argument, since the tradition is no longer a monolithic ally. Guicciardini now marshals the authority of writers who shared Guicciardini's optimate preferences.

Further, the clause raises the question of the identity of the writers about republics who have preferred governments of the people. As we saw above, the elitism of tradition was one point on which the two agreed: Machiavelli had already conceded that 'all the writers' had condemned, on the surface of their texts at least, the fickleness of the multitude in favour of prudence and rationality of princes. What text, other than Machiavelli's *Discourses*, made sustained arguments in favour of the people's prudence, stability, and judgment? In his confrontation with Machiavelli's ideas and in spite of his

52 On the republic, see Najemy 2006, pp. 446–467; for Guicciardini's view of his potential guilt, see Guicciardini 2019, pp. 124–191.

53 Guicciardini 1965, p. 71.

54 Guicciardini 1965, p. 71 (emphasis mine).

disagreement on many issues, the Guicciardini of the *Considerations* appears to have accepted the magnitude of Machiavelli's achievement: the *Discourses on Livy* belonged to the very canon that was its target. The fact of its existence, whether one approved or disagreed, now denied the 'writers' a single voice.

4 Conclusion

The intellectual sparring evident in the interplay between these two texts, Machiavelli's *Discourses* and Guiccardini's *Considerations*, provides a sense of the magnitude of the challenge that Machiavelli faced in his advocacy of muscular populism. One would expect some common intellectual ground between two thinkers who were good friends, at least during Machiavelli's last years in the 1520s, and who shared a social circle that included other *ottimati* such as Francesco Vettori. They worked together on common political projects, such as protecting Florence from potential attack by Charles V and composing constitutional treatises for the Medici. In earlier texts, Guicciardini had even agreed with Machiavelli on some issues, such as the value of a citizen militia and the necessity of the Great Council.[55] Guicciardini clearly trusted Machiavelli, since Machiavelli was his informal agent in real estate dealings and counsellor in the marriage negotiations for Guicciardini's daughter and strategies for extracting payment from Clement VII. Guicciardini promoted Machiavelli's literary career, arranging for the first performance of *Mandragola* before a papal audience.

And yet when Guicciardini composed his formal thoughts on Machiavelli's most substantial work of political philosophy, he drew sharp lines of division on almost every page. The context of 1530–1531 surely explains at least part of Guicciardini's adversarial stance, since the collapse of papal power, and therefore his own, triggered by the sack of Rome in 1527 also led to a popular republican regime that condemned him as a leading agent of Medici tyranny and punished him with exile and confiscation of property. He wrote the *Considerations* after that persecution and after he had bloodied his hands enforcing Medici retribution following the republic's collapse. This was hardly an environment conducive to sympathy for Machiavelli's argument about an armed people, popular tribunals, and the people's superiority capacity for wisdom and judgment than princes.

55 See Guicciardini 1997.

Irrespective of context, however, as the most distinguished member of a singularly distinguished house, the value of tradition also must have elicited a respect from Guicciardini that prevented him from conceding the fundamental legitimacy of Machiavelli's worldview. Given the degree to which the history of Florence was inextricable from the history of his family, Guicciardini could not dismiss, as Machiavelli did, the evolution of their city as a flawed political experiment, could not view the people as solutions to a problem posed by the very existence of elites, and could not accept that the written tradition was itself the product of elite power and the fear it caused in those less powerful, particularly historians and philosophers seeking princely patronage. For Guicciardini and anyone else with a vested interest in the legitimacy of Renaissance politics, Machiavelli's political philosophy asked too many sacrifices.

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