The Radical Machiavelli

Politics, Philosophy, and Language

Edited by

Filippo Del Lucchese,

Fabio Frosini, and Vittorio Morfino

BRILL

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Thinking in Extremes

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Introduction

1 'A question that will never close'

Machiavelli's *The Prince* is probably the work that has produced the largest number of diverging interpretations in the history of the Western literary tradition. Such a diversity of interpretations has produced a *history of effects* from apology to damnation, with *The Prince* being reduced to a mere handbook for tyrants on one hand or glorified as the bible of republicans on the other. Strikingly, such a radical diversity of judgements did not fade during the twentieth century when historical knowledge, profiting from more rigorous criteria than in the past, diverged from interpretations mainly driven by political and ideological concerns.

The first works written according to this approach are Pasquale Villari's biography (three volumes published between 1877 and 1882), Oreste Tommasini's biographical and theoretical interpretation (two volumes published between 1883 and 1911), and Adolf Garber's inquiry (1912–13) into the manuscripts and early editions of the Florentine secretary's works. All are grounded on the positivistic principle of the primacy of source knowledge.[1] Yet, as indicated earlier, the emergence of this 'scientific' approach did not prevent the further multiplication of interpretations based on political and ideological concerns. 'The debate on Machiavelli,' as Benedetto Croce declared famously in 1949, 'may be a question that will never close': Croce's statement has yet to be disproved.[2]

Croce claims that Machiavelli founded the autonomy of politics that is not in itself moral or immoral. At the same time, Machiavelli appealed to the mere determinism of facts in order to justify immoral actions, with the intent of recovering some form of connection between morality and politics. For this reason, Machiavelli could be accused of praising evil, whereas, according to Croce, he had merely considered it *sub specie politica*, in its political form. However, once extrapolated from its rhetorical appeal and from the philosophical authority that Croce conferred on it, this explanation appears as nothing more than a 'speculative re-translation of the most important outcomes in De Sanctis's interpretation'.[3]

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1 Villari's interpretation, however, is still imbued with a strong sense of moralism, which is close to the older anti-Machiavellian sensibility.
2 Croce 1952, pp. 164–76, 176.
3 Paggi 1984, p. 391.

In his *History of Italian Literature* (1870), Francesco De Sanctis described the peculiarity of the position occupied by Machiavelli in late Renaissance Italy.[4] It is the position of a man whose main objective is the State's internal freedom and its external independence from foreign powers. Around this objective, which potentially implies some contradiction, Machiavelli develops a new conception of the world, a conception that is at the same time a political science (i.e. it teaches the means adequate to reach certain ends) and a wider idea of the autonomy of the human world, the earthly world, vis-à-vis any transcendental reference or presupposed value. De Sanctis has thus pointed to the origin of Machiavelli's thought in its entirety, and he places this origin in the author's political intention, which becomes the clue for deciphering his ideas.

The explanation for Machiavelli's position should not be searched, thus, in the philosophical link between ethics and politics, but rather in the fact that the position assumed by the author vis-à-vis *both* ethics and politics is not reducible to any philosophical speculation. Broadly speaking, Machiavelli cannot be reduced to any specific intellectual profile existing in his own time, whether the humanist, the philosopher, the practitioner, or the literary author. But scholars have only recently been able to pay attention to this conclusion. In reality, Machiavelli embodied all these profiles while radically changing their meaning, by using, for example, different languages in order to effectively speak in different domains with an original philosophical awareness applied to concrete situations. Seen from this perspective, he is a politician in the modern and innovative sense of the term.

The dimension of practical and active intervention dominates Machiavelli's personality. Thus only by knowing the circumstances of his time and its political reality can one understand his thought. Machiavelli's thought exists in relation to the situations and scenarios within which he intends to produce effects. *The Prince*, intended both as a political project and a specific book, must be contextualised in this theoretical perspective, which is one explanation for not only the difficulty of interpretation, but also the diverse, ambivalent, and sometimes even contradictory nature of his own style and conclusions.

2   'The Prince as a Battlefield'

This last point becomes clearer if one is able to imagine Machiavelli *without The Prince*. The *Discourses* are an extremely original book, breaking with every

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4 On De Sanctis's interpretation of Machiavelli see Procacci 1995, pp. 414–19.

tradition and completely redefining republican ideology.[5] Yet, without *The Prince*, Machiavelli's thought would have not been shocking and appalling in the way it was. He would have been considered a republican author, certainly original and radical but still within the classical scheme of the defence of freedom in the period of the shift, in von Albertini's words, from the republic to the principality.

With his 'opuscule *De Principatibus*', on the contrary, Machiavelli bewilders his interpreters. One can think of Hans Baron's interpretation in 'Machiavelli: The Republican Citizen and the Author of "The Prince"', which begins by saying: 'Few subjects exist which humble and caution the historical student so much as does the history of the interpretation of Machiavelli's works. [...] To Florentines still near to Machiavelli personally, his life and work had seemed to have two faces. [...] How could the faithful secretary of the Florentine republic, the author of the *Discourses on the First Ten Books of Titus Livy*, also be the author of the *Prince*?'[6]

Baron correctly illustrates the different theses on Machiavelli, and criticises all of them for their unilateral character, that is to say their incapacity to grasp Machiavelli's real identity and concrete personality, the personality of someone who is *at the same time* a republican citizen and the author of *The Prince*. His conclusion is, however, also unsatisfactory: 'Machiavelli', Baron argues, 'always remained wavering between his awareness of the need, under the Tuscan conditions of civic equality, for a republic and his lingering hope that some new *principatus* in the provinces of the Papal State might create a power nucleus strong enough to make possible successful Italian resistance to the foreign invaders of the peninsula'.[7]

According to Baron, Machiavelli is caught in a psychological hesitation or indecision concerning the fate of Italy. We think, on the contrary, that the question should not be developed on the psychological level, but rather on the theoretical and political one. *The Prince* was written, as Machiavelli clearly says, to 'note' what he had learned in 'the ancient courts of ancient men', in an on-going conversation with the ancients, forgetting 'every trouble', without feeling 'boredom' or dreading 'poverty' and 'death'. *The Prince* is the outcome of an individual development, as confirmed by Machiavelli's avowal: 'I feed on that which only is mine and which I was born for'.[8]

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5   See Dionisotti 1980, pp. 258–59.

6   Baron 1961, p. 217.

7   Baron 1961, p. 249.

8   Machiavelli 1961, p. 142 (Machiavelli to Vettori, 10 December 1513).

The Prince reflects the will to know the 'effectual truth' of politics, and the need to rediscover a concrete link with the political life that Machiavelli had been forced to abandon the year before. The dedication to a member of the Medici family is a subsidiary element, not a foundational one. The ideal encounter between Machiavelli and Giuliano (and later on Lorenzo) depends on the necessity of going back to public political life, and cannot be considered the ultimate reason for *The Prince*.

However, this ultimate reason is also not, as in Gennaro Sasso's interpretation, to be found in the necessity of Machiavelli's need to clarify for himself the laws of politics. *The Prince*, Sasso argues, is solely a '"rationalistic" experiment, conducted on the body of something that is changing and diverse by definition, namely "fortuna"'.[9] Sasso develops Croce's classic interpretation here, combining it with Federico Chabod's reading. Thus Sasso argues that Machiavelli opposes to *fortuna* not so much a concrete force, objectively operating within the society in crisis, but rather an abstract instrument, namely *virtù*: aware of the impossibility of any concrete solution, he assumed the abstract as if it was concrete.[10] Reduced to a speculative game made of rules and exceptions, of abstract and concrete, *The Prince* becomes for Sasso the opposite of what it has been taken as for centuries: a charming although ineffectual utopia rather than the ultimate handbook of political realism verging on cynicism.

The interpretations briefly sketched here show the way in which Machiavelli's book is still a battlefield for theoretical and ideological confrontations. A few more names should suffice to indicate the breadth and depth of what is at stake: Berlin, Strauss, Meinecke, Ritter, Arendt, Lefort, and Althusser. From the roots of totalitarianism to the nature of democracy, from the essence of politics to its relationship to ethics, religion, etc.; these are only a few of the questions Machiavelli and *The Prince* still provoke today.

3   The Text, the Practice and the Truth

The international conference organised at Brunel University on 29 and 30 May 2013 was intended as a collective reflection on the impossibility of reaching an overarching consensus on the interpretation of Machiavelli. Such an impossibility was programmatically assumed, and is not, for we organisers, an embarrassment. It testifies, on the contrary, to Machiavelli's peculiar position vis-à-vis the practice of writing and thinking about politics. Antonio Gramsci has

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9   Sasso 1993, p. 383.

10   See Sasso 1993, p. 373.

grasped this peculiarity better than most. *The Prince*, Gramsci argues, must be read starting from its final exhortation. The book's real nature is that of a 'political manifesto', or rather a 'party manifesto',[11] that is to say a text that does not contain the present state of things, but rather a possible and realistic modification of it, a modification determined by the emergence of a 'collective will':

> Throughout the book, Machiavelli discusses what the prince must be like if he has to lead a people to found a new State; the argument is developed with rigorous logic and scientific detachment. In the conclusion, Machiavelli merges with the people, becomes the people; not, however, some 'generic' people, but the people which he, Machiavelli, has convinced by the preceding argument – the people whose consciousness and expression he becomes and feels himself to be, with whom he feels identified. The entire *logical* argument now appears as nothing other than auto-reflection on the part of the people – an inner reasoning worked out in the popular consciousness, whose conclusion is a cry of passionate urgency. The passion, from the discussion of itself, becomes once again 'emotion', fever, and fanatical desire for action. This is why the epilogue of *The Prince* is not extrinsic, tacked on, rhetorical, but rather must be understood as a crucial element of the work – the element that gives the entire work its true colour, and makes it a kind of 'political manifesto'.[12]

This is also the approach taken by Louis Althusser who, after having quoted Gramsci's definition of *The Prince* as a 'political manifesto', argues that

> In effect, through the examination of a political problem Machiavelli offers us something quite different from the examination of a theoretical problem. By that I mean that his relationship [to the political problem in question is not theoretical, but *political*. And by political relationship I mean not a relationship of political theory, but one of political *practice*. For Machiavelli it is a necessity of political practice itself that this relationship involves elements of political theory. But it is the viewpoint of *political practice* alone that fixes the modality of the relationship to the elements of political theory, and the modality and dispositive of the elements of political theory itself].

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11   Gramsci 1971, p. 134.
12   Gramsci 1971, pp. 126–7.

We must therefore bring to light a new determination, hitherto passed over in silence – political practice – and say that the theoretical elements are focused on Machiavelli's concrete political problem *only because this political problem is itself focused on political practice.* As a result, political practice makes its sudden appearance in the theoretical universe where initially the science of politics in general, and then a particular political problem, were at issue. Obviously, it is a question of sudden appearance *in a text.* To be more precise, a theoretical text is affected in its modality and dispositive by political practice. What, concretely, does this mean?[13]

Focusing on the peculiar relationship between politics and practice, insofar as the latter is defined within a determined *conjuncture*, leads to a straightforward question: 'what, concretely, does this mean?' But this question does not have a straightforward and simple answer. Recognising that such an answer does not exist is for us the starting point of a meaningful interpretation of *The Prince.* The irruption of *political practice* within a 'theoretical text,' which is at the same time a political manifesto, deeply modifies its status, that is to say its relationship with truth.

We think that this approach should be extended from *The Prince* to the whole of Machiavelli's oeuvre. One of the main conclusions of the texts collected in this book, is that Machiavelli's attitude vis-à-vis the practice is decisive not only in his 'political manifesto', but also in the *Florentine Histories*, in the *Discourses on Livy*, in the *Art of War* and even in the *Discourse or Dialogue Concerning our Language.* In all these works, language and thought are conceived of as rooted in the practice, as "tools" which are functional to the accomplishment of a task that emerges as a possible outcome of an ongoing struggle. This relationship between the real world and its theoretical or linguistic expression is decisive in determining Machiavelli's approach as a rupture of every possible "form", if this is considered as something stable, whose centre of gravity lies outside the conflictuality that crosses the real world. Breaking the form of the classic political aristotelianism, Machiavelli pushes forward also the crisis of Republicanism, understood as the temporary balance the social forces had reached in Renaissance Italy.

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13   Althusser 1999, p. 17 (original brackets).

4   Language, Text and Context of 'The Prince'

Once this point has been made, a wide horizon of research perspectives opens up, reflecting the multiplicity of political approaches that *practically* interact with and make visible the text's theoretical framework. These perspectives roughly correspond to the five sections into which this book is divided, devoted respectively to war and its language, to philosophy, to politics and prophecy, to democracy and, finally, to Marxist interpretations of Machiavelli's thought.

The first section (*Language, Text and Context of 'The Prince'*) gathers contributions mainly devoted to *The Prince* and the historical context of late Renaissance Italy. The political dimension of *The Prince* emerges from its language, which is dense with the experience of warfare, particularly the new kind of war inaugurated by the 1494 French invasion of Italy.

Jean-Louis Fournel claims that the extension of war to the whole society, the more and more violent development of the fighting conditions and the involvement of larger populations in warfare affects language and manifests the presence of war in every aspect of daily life, visibly modifying the Italian vocabulary itself. Machiavelli's intervention, in this sense, can be interpreted as the attempt to establish a new link between *words* and *things*, a link that had been broken along with the destruction of the fifteenth century's political balance. According to Fournel, this link only becomes consistent when words acquire meaning based on their efficacy, i.e. on the determinate effect that they produce within a lexicon and a context. On this ground, the notion of truth itself is completely redefined.

Jean-Claude Zancarini and Romain Descendre take a similar approach. Working on sixteenth century French translations of *The Prince*, Zancarini elucidates the results obtained by using a new digital tool to study the lexicon: Machiavelli tries to say new things, which imposes on him the necessity of giving new meaning to old words. The result is the creation of a halo of meanings around the key terms of politics, as well as a tension around these same terms, which is shown by a consideration of the ambiguities and inevitable inaccuracies of early translations. Focusing on chapter 9 of *The Prince*, Descendre sheds light on the evolution of the concept of 'civil prince'. This evolution shows that from the initial specific kind of civil principality, Machiavelli moves on to the general relationship between the prince and the people that either support or abandon him. This also shows a characteristic of Machiavelli's thought, namely that he 'chases' the reality of things and the logical coherence of his thought is always defective vis-à-vis the complexity of reality.

Giorgio Inglese's paper also focuses on Machiavelli's need to confront his reality. Inglese maintains that the 'idea' and the 'ideology' of Italy in Machia-

velli's time are not shared opinions, but inventions, creations on a battlefield, along with 'a desperate, albeit intellectually strong, political initiative, whose theoretical contradictions depend on its practical contradictions'. Using *The Prince* and the *Discourses*, Book I, chapter 12, Inglese recognises a new notion of Italy as political space: not a mere plurality of balanced forces, nor the merely abstract or rhetorical idea of a (missing) political virtue, but rather a precise idea of the 'political unity of the country'.

A similar emphasis emerges in Gabriele Pedullà's article. Pedullà highlights Machiavelli's awareness of the extremely urgent character of the Italian political situation and his effort to find a solution that was both new and realistic. Pedullà advocates considering *The Art of War* along with Machiavelli's major books, all under the umbrella of what he names 'tactical' works. This term should be intended both in the literal sense (i.e. all these works deal with war and its relationship with politics) and as the main characteristic of a response to 'the necessity of always establishing a connection between the general plan (the movement of the whole army) and the actions of the single component (the platoon or even the man)'. From this perspective, in Pedullà's view, Machiavelli opts for a military approach, paying attention to the 'microphysics' of war and a political approach characterised by the 'primacy accorded to the problem of bonds and links'.

5   Machiavelli and Philosophy

The second section (*Machiavelli and Philosophy*) collects interventions focusing on the question of Machiavelli's philosophy, that is to say both the philosophical consistency of Machiavelli's thought, and its relationship with a tradition that can tentatively be defined as 'philosophy'[14]. The first article is Alison Brown's 'Lucretian naturalism and the evolution of Machiavelli's ethics'. Brown argues that Lucretius's presence in Machiavelli's thought emerges from aspects such as the conception of freedom, 'hard primitivism', the function of Eros, and the idea of a continuity between humanity and animality. And it emerges too from aspects that are less apparent, such as the *living* nature of language, which evolves together with the things it speaks about, a conception that Machiavelli develops in his *Discourse or Dialogue Concerning our Language.*

Vittorio Morfino also develops the connection between language and Lucretius. Morfino argues that 'In analysing the life of a language, Machiavelli notes that natural exchange does not appear only as an agent of disintegration, but

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14   On Machiavelli's philosophy, see now Del Lucchese, 2015.

as something that enters constitutively into its essence, so that the power of a language does not consist in maintaining its identity by rejecting otherness, but in its capacity to change by including otherness'. Just like a mixed and composed organism, whether organic or political, language is constantly connected with the external reality, namely a changing system of relations and of relations of relations that both nurtures and destroys it.

The five theses of Machiavelli's philosophy identified by Morfino, namely the thesis of invariance, the thesis of universal variability, the thesis of the primacy of the encounter over the form, the thesis of the primacy of the interweaving of times over linear time, and finally the thesis of the disarticulation of history and memory, are all connected to Lucretius. The last thesis in particular is, according to Morfino, the ground for 'a theory of history in which memory, far from being the most powerful instrument of knowledge, is at stake in the struggles between different sects'. Seen in this light, Machiavelli's work is a contribution to this polemical and conflictual dynamic.

Both Jacques Lezra and Sebastian Torres investigate the *contingent* character of power's foundation and the nature of the State. Lezra suggests a textual link between the image of Fortune as a raging river in chapter 25 of *The Prince* and a passage from the first book of Lucretius's *De rerum natura*, in which the existence of atoms, 'corpora caeca', is illustrated with images of a raging river and of wind. Taking fortune and not virtue as a starting point for the interpretation of *The Prince*, Lezra sees power as a-logical and non-unitary rather than 'sovereign'. He also develops Gramsci's intuition that the State or the party implied by *The Prince* are always dependent on the same radical contingency of the Epicurean atoms: 'such sovereignty *can* be located decidedly in an element, we *can* employ the grand arsenal of defective concepts that *Il Principe* set before modernity, but modern sovereignty after *Il Principe* can only be decidedly located ephemerally, retrospectively'. Like the Lucretian poem, *The Prince* is thus an example of discontinuity also in its literary form, a conclusion that comes close to Descendre's textual approach.

Torres's aim is to highlight Machiavelli's conception of a 'complex' or 'plural' temporality. Within such a temporality, the opposed moments of institution (foundation) and constitution (duration), as well as the two elements of individual and multitude, do not relate to each other via a transcendental contingency existing before and outside historical time. They connect to each other, on the contrary, by virtue of an irreducible conflict and a division that manifests a materialistic or non-speculative contingency that cannot be conceived outside of the concrete circumstances by which it is defined.

This idea of temporality is mainly developed in the *Discourses on Livy* and the *Florentine Histories*. Already in *The Prince*, however, Machiavelli outlines its structure, in particular through the idea of 'occasion'. In chapter 6 of *The Prince*,

time appears as a kind of 'matter', a matter that is non-homogeneous but rather internally structured. For this reason, virtue is just one of the factors that determine the new social and political relationships. Virtue is neither will nor decision; it needs the encounter with occasion and is always necessarily determined by a complex intertwining of relations, characterised by a non-teleological necessity. For this reason the prince's virtue-power depends on the encounter with the people and is not his own invention.

Tania Rispoli analyses the image of the centaur Chiron in chapter 8 of 'The Prince', 'half-beast, half-man', used by Machiavelli as an allegory of the necessity of using force and astuteness. Rispoli considers the question of why one must imitate a beast and how such a project fits into Machiavelli's wider philosophical framework. Machiavelli implicitly shares an anthropological model that, according to Rispoli, is connected with Lucretius rather than with Cicero, who is usually referenced as Machiavelli's main source of the image of the centaur. In pointing to Chiron, Machiavelli does not suggest subjugating the animal part to the human part, but rather combining them according to the circumstances. Rispoli observes that the man/beast pair corresponds, in Machiavelli's thought, to the law/weapons pair. However, subverting Cicero's position, Machiavelli transforms the relationship between law and force. Political order cannot be seen as overcoming 'disorder', while law cannot be disjoined from the forces that produce it, the idea of conflict that becomes as necessary as the idea of order itself.

6   Politics, Religion, and Prophecy

The articles collected in the third section, on *Politics, Religion, and Prophecy*, focus on the question of 'innovation', that is to say on how it is possible to produce a radical novelty within history. Machiavelli's suggestion in the *Discourses* is that whoever wanted to introduce 'new and unaccustomed orders' and 'extraordinary laws' in a city needed to appeal 'to God, because otherwise they would not have been accepted'.[15] However, in chapter 6 of *The Prince*, he maintains that whoever wants 'to introduce new political orders' must be able to 'use force' (*forzare*), to make the subjects 'believe by force' what they would not believe otherwise. The famous contrast between armed and unarmed prophets emerges from this.[16]

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15   Machiavelli 1996, p. 35.
16   Machiavelli 1985, p. 24.

Machiavelli illustrates the contrast through the deep difference between Moses and Savonarola. The question of innovation also implies that of 'duration' highlighted by Torres's essay. However, this dichotomy is now developed not so much through the multiplicity of times that converge in the occasion, somehow *determining* the occasion, but rather through the spaces of strategic intervention and the concrete possibilities of virtue itself. Time becomes now the *future*, which is known insofar as it is actively determined, along with the idea of prophecy as an essential element of such determination.

Thomas Berns focuses on the *deep grammar* of such a generative structure of future times. His starting point is that Machiavelli's thought is 'entirely shaped by a series of "pure" or "raw" relations which are less than links of cause to effect, or of a means to an end, but rather simply relations that Machiavelli endows with necessity and that are as undoable as strictly raw relations. But the counterpart of this raw materiality of relations is that their sense or meaning 'is always postponed, differed. The consequence of this chronological shift between the materiality of relations and their meaning is that not every systematisation of 'disorder' in an 'order' can be immediately understood by everyone. Such a shift is illustrated, according to Berns, in chapter 6 of *The Prince*, in which the ability of 'Moses, Cyrus, Romulus, Theseus and the like', that is to say men endowed with an outstanding virtue enabling them to recognise opportunity,[17] is contrasted with 'the incredulity of men, who do not truly believe in new things unless they come to have a firm experience of them'.[18]

Berns claims that the 'recognition' of 'opportunity', ascribed by Machiavelli to few men, is 'a genuine issue of knowledge, understood as the experience allowing a representation of reality'. The problem of the new prince rises when it becomes necessary to give continuity to the initial occasion. The capacity to induce men 'to believe by force' is what connects the initial individual knowledge to the eventual collective experience. It is not a matter of obedience imposed by force, nor of a pure question of 'faith' (as in the case of Savonarola), but rather something new and original: a modality of production of the future able to match the challenge of a necessary disjunction between the meaning of relationships and their material reality.

Fabio Frosini also focuses on the relationship between Machiavelli and Savonarola. His starting point is the deep novelty produced by the friar's moral hegemony in Florence and the fact that its main outcome is the involvement of large sections of the populace, including women and children, in the city's

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17   Machiavelli 1985, p. 23

18   Machiavelli 1985, p. 24.

political life at the end of the fifteenth century. Machiavelli's interest in Savonarola is grounded on this novelty, as well as on the role religion played in politics. The unprecedented political participation of new subjects calls for a likewise unprecedented use of language able to engage with the people's most elementary passions, which, in turn, opens up a new space for religion.

Frosini claims that Machiavelli's political thought has to be interpreted as the attempt to answer to the question represented by Savonarola, but with this key difference: Where the friar begins from the people as a mass movement manoeuvred by a chief, Machiavelli sees the people as an autonomous active force. Nevertheless, Machiavelli's starting point is the same as Savonarola's. Through the transformation of politics in Florence after 1494, 'religion, and prophecy in particular, had played a decisive role. It was only due to religion that the masses could be mobilised, and it was this aspect above all that most struck the traditional mentality. In effect [...] Savonarola appeared to Machiavelli as something "monstrous" but, at the same time, as a revolutionary break in the tradition of Florentine politics. Such novelty consisted precisely in the prophetic-nationalistic structure of Savonarola's message: this was the decisive element in his mobilisation of the masses'.

Miguel Vatter also deals extensively with Savonarola and his contrast with Moses, while Warren Montag focuses on the image of Moses in chapter 6 of *The Prince* as well as in *Discourses* Book III, chapter 30. Both authors consider the theologico-political perspective of Machiavelli's thought, with Montag developing it on ontological ground, in order to define the originality of Machiavelli's idea of necessity as it relates to occasion, while Vatter mainly deals with the strategic-political ground, exploring the peculiar 'messianic moment in Machiavelli's Republicanism'.

Vatter's interpretation begins with the notion of 'armed prophet' that alludes, he claims, to the Hebrew notion of divine providence and thus to the structural intertwinement of theology and politics, as well as of military command and republican order. Vatter thus reads the expression of an 'almost kingly power' (D I.18) through a reference to the 'nearly regal' quality of Moses's theocratic regime 'according to which Moses cannot become king because God is already in command of an armed people and, for the same reason, Moses cannot permit any monarch to have absolute power over his people'.

In *The Prince*'s *Exhortatio*, thus, the providence evoked by Machiavelli cannot be a Christian one, inscrutable and alien to human intervention. It must be, on the contrary, the Hebrew one, which not only includes the armed people's action, but can also be 'forced', according to some schools of thought, to bring on the Messiah's advent. If the main character in chapter 6 is thus Moses, *The Prince*'s last chapter focuses on a *redeemer*: 'Machiavelli's exhortation in chapter 26 [...] is a prayer that will be fulfilled only on condition that the time

is right, and the criterion of rightness is whether the new prince will have enough *virtù* to arm his own people. Machiavelli suggests that only by becoming commander of an armed and free people will the Medici prince have made himself in the image of God (as commander of his people) and be deserving of God's favour'.

Montag's interpretation concentrates on the use of the Hebrew religious lexicon, and Moses's in particular, to highlight Machiavelli's intention 'not only to lay siege to Medieval Christian theology, but to exploit its internal divisions and thereby diminish its power'. Montag points to Machiavelli's 'philosophical trajectory' and 'the project of conceiving a necessity without finality, a necessity of the infinite that arises from contingent encounters, the only necessity that matters for politics, the necessity that determines whether a prince by being good will increase or decrease his power'.

This philosophical perspective is also grounded on Louis Althusser's meditation on the possibility, 'instead of thinking contingency as a modality of necessity, or an exception to it', to 'think necessity as the becoming-necessary of the encounter of contingencies'. With this in mind, Montag works on the Machiavellian concept of 'occasion', *occasio*, καιρός. Seen in this light, the occasion is completely alien to the idea of a mediation between virtue and fortune, and becomes instead 'precisely the always only temporary absence of mediation, an opening or breach, what Althusser called "a certain empty place, empty so that it may be filled, empty so that there may be inserted there the action of an individual or group of men who will take up a position in it and on this basis collect the forces capable, to constitute the forces capable of accomplishing the political task history has assigned them – empty for the future"'. The 'encounter' is precisely what takes the place of God: 'out of this encounter, if it does take place, something new emerges, a new prince executing decrees that do not exist before or outside of their execution, an armed prophet whose weapon is the power of the armed multitude and whose fortress is their support'.

7   Radical Democracy beyond Republicanism

Section four of the book (*Radical Democracy Beyond Republicanism*) collects a series of articles dealing, directly or indirectly, with the question of Machiavelli's democratic thought vis-à-vis the more common and widespread interpretation of Machiavelli's republicanism. Beginning with Machiavelli's crucial critique in the *Discourses* Book II, chapter 10, of the common opinion that money is the sinew of war, Jérémie Barthas reconstructs the modern genealogy

of this statement and connects it to the different interpretations of the nature of the modern State (namely the Weberian interpretation of the function of bureaucracy). Barthas also puts Machiavelli's conclusion in the Florentine context of the end of the fifteenth and the beginning of sixteenth century, which allows him to highlight what is at stake in the discussions concerning money, taxation, and public finance, namely a political alternative between the forces of the 'grandees' winning over the interest of the 'people'.

Barthas suggests that *The Prince* is a manifesto of Democratic character: 'the only political project that Machiavelli presents to a prince is that of liberating an oppressed population. He clearly states it in Chapter 6: the princes, the excellent ones, those who deserve to be imitated, are the liberators. It is not a question of how to govern, because even the most excellent princes do not act differently from the villains, as is stressed in Chapter 8; it is a matter of political vision, of project, and conception. Now, this is defined at the beginning of Chapter 9: what is at stake is the liberation of the people from the oppression of the greats'.

Yves Winter's piece is devoted to the discourse that Machiavelli attributes to the anonymous leader of the Ciompi in Book III of the *Florentine Histories*. Winter sees this as the trace of 'a deeply radical and egalitarian line of thought' that extends to *The Prince* and the *Discourses*. Winter, however, also recognises that the Ciompo's ideas cannot be considered those of Machiavelli and his political programme. He thus claims that 'summoning a revolutionary political subject that is historically absent, the speech has a utopian and phantasmatic character and functions as a mode of political representation that is not reducible to the immediacy of a political present'. In fact, the Ciompo's speech insists most of all on violence as a means of government, which could be associated to some of *The Prince*'s arguments. However, unlike in *The Prince*, violence is here explicitly unveiled as a means of domination, and thus the Ciompo's appeal is intended not to exalt violence, but rather to criticise it.

The Ciompo develops a kind of criticism of an ideological prejudice (the noble's superiority over the plebeians) with a criticism of power and the idea of a democratic revolution in mind: 'the first step in the plebeians' emancipatory struggle is to decolonise their minds, to shed their fears and to liberate themselves from the pangs of conscience that impede their action and that render them complicit in their own subjection. The speaker, then, is significantly more concerned with addressing the fears and apprehensions of his fellow labourers and with elucidating their condition than with ruling over the elites'.

John McCormick's essay deals with Machiavelli's provocative mention of Agathocles in chapter 8 of *The Prince*, as an example, together with Oliverotto

da Fermo, of a wicked prince. McCormick's polemical target is the historiography interpreting Machiavelli within the tradition of republicanism and civic Humanism. Machiavelli, he claims, should realistically be considered a democratic thinker. In fact, 'Machiavelli is the only "republican" who offers the ancient Greek tyrant as a model reformer of corrupt civic orders: figures like Hiero of Syracuse; Agathocles the Sicilian; the Spartans, Cleomenes and Nabis; and Clearchus of Heraclea'.

'If one were to draw an ideal type based on historical accounts of such individuals, and on Machiavelli's own description of them, the perfect republican reformer would do all of the following: crush the nobility and distribute its wealth to the common people; eliminate all reliance on mercenary arms; greatly expand the ranks of citizen soldiers – especially by freeing slaves to do so; and, finally, manipulate diplomatic alliances so as to reduce external threats posed by more powerful foreign empires'. Such a model of a prince, grounding his power on the people, crushing the greats' resistance, and restoring the conditions of egalitarian society, corresponds to what Machiavelli had in mind writing *The Prince*, and implementing his concrete reform of the army.

Balibar and Visentin, at the end of this section, deal specifically with the role played by conflict in Machiavelli's writings, as well as with its implications for the democratic nature of his thought.

Balibar begins by analysing the metaphor of perspective in the *Dedicatory letter* of *The Prince* and developing its multiple meanings, pointing to what he defines as 'Machiavelli's conflictual epistemology'. Machiavelli claims, in the *Dedicatory letter*, that to know the nature of the people well one must be a prince, and to know the nature of princes well one must belong to the people. Machiavelli introduces this argument in order to justify the fact that 'a man of lower and inferior social condition dares to examine and lay down rules for the governance of princes'. For him this means that the knowledge of princes has both a concrete reality and an ideological dimension. Both are marked by a fundamental inequality, and any process of knowledge in this field can only attain truth by acknowledging this inequality.

Balibar's conclusion is that the people's knowledge of the prince and the prince's knowledge of the people are highlighted 'in order to "teach" the Prince (but also the people) how to incorporate the consideration of their "other" into their own political strategy'. The conflictual epistemology regulating *The Prince* is at the same time a theory of otherness and unilaterality of the political actors, and a theory of the inclusion of the opponent within one's own unilateral field, in order to increase one's own political power.

The grounding role of conflict is also underlined by Stefano Visentin, who shows how Machiavelli's main aim is to focus on the conditions of political

affirmation of people in specific conjunctures and the people's attempt to build a political order that is, paradoxically, 'permanently unstable'. This instability, Visentin says, is due to the impossibility of overcoming political conflict born from the unbalance between the greats and the people as well as from the structure of the 'people'. The people, like the prince, only exist in the dimension of appearance and the effects produced in the political space.

Visentin highlights three figures of the people: the plebs, the multitude, and the prince's 'friend'. He shows how each of these figures goes through a crisis due to the lack of an internal principle that regulates its own passions. Such a principle can only be found in a prince, who then becomes an essential function of the people, on which the people's political existence depends, precisely the way that the prince's political existence depends on the people. The people are affected by the same passions and desires that affect any other political actor. By virtue of their 'place' in the political topography, however, they play an essential function in resisting and neutralising conflict: 'the only possible union', Visentin claims, 'is the paradoxical cohabitation – deeply rooted in the institutions of non-dominion – of two opposite desires, through which the division becomes productive'.

8   Machiavelli and Marxism

The book's fifth section (*Machiavelli and Marxism*) collects a series of articles on and around Marxist interpretations of Machiavelli, one of the most interesting and fruitful areas in the historiography of recent decades. Mikko Lahtinen's interpretation underlines the continuity between Gramsci's and Althusser's readings of Machiavelli vis-à-vis the republican interpretation. Whereas this interpretation highlights Machiavelli's ideal as a form of government or a State where the law(s) would have a higher standing than individual persons in positions of power, for Gramsci and Althusser a different priority emerges: the priority of what the Italian philosopher calls the 'military-dictatorial' and the French philosopher calls an 'absolute beginning' or 'foundation'. The collective moment, Lahtinen argues, cannot be preceded by a truly founding moment. The role of the foundation is thus the main object of *The Prince*.

The political question, through Gramsci and Althusser, becomes not so much how to govern a people, but rather how to *produce* it, in a constant movement that Althusser calls the 'devenir-peuple'. 'The prince and his new principality are a "tool" or instrument by means of which the people as a *multitude* (*molti*) can be taken hold of as a durable "people" – and ultimately a "nation", in the formation of nation-States in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries'.

The primacy of such a grounding function also becomes the primacy of conflict over peace within politics. In Gramscian terms, this aspect takes the form of the passage from the military-dictatorial moment to the hegemonic moment that does not obliterate the constitutive conflictuality of politics.

Mohamed Moulfi's essay is specifically devoted to the Althusserian reading of Machiavelli, focusing on the question of the foundation. According to Althusser, Machiavelli is the philosopher of the *absolute beginning* whose attempt is to build the space for the theoretically impossible. Moulfi argues that Althusser's reading has to be considered alongside Marx's, as if the French philosopher was looking at Machiavelli's thought to address the concepts that are problematic in Marx's thought. According to Moulfi, Althusser was looking for the conceptual tools to develop a new interpretation of the transition, inadequately developed by the Marxist tradition, which is unable to conceive the specificity of politics within the social structure. Politics cannot be addressed in a teleological way, but has to be conceived as an intervention within 'the conjuncture'. Moulfi recognises a pivotal role to the idea of emptiness in the Althusserian reading of Machiavelli. Beginning with an ontology of the void, Machiavelli becomes, in Althusser's view, the political thinker of the newness *par excellence*.

Banu Bargu also analyses the Althusserian reading of Machiavelli and interprets it as a strategic moment of redefinition of historical materialism. Bargu begins with Althusser's statement that Machiavelli's political thought unfolds an absolutely original philosophical position in the form of a radical materialism. In this sense, Althusser's parallel treatment of Baruch Spinoza's philosophy and Machiavelli's thought becomes crucial. Between the Spinozist philosophical system that obliterates dialectic, and the Hegelian philosophical system that considers dialectic as the development of an inner principle, a third way must be found: this way is highlighted, Bargu claims, by Machiavelli. The famous Althusserian criticism of Hegel's dialectic makes it impossible to conceive of the breaks in history, as well as 'any radical beginning'. Bargu thus underlines the importance of Machiavelli for Althusser in a double sense: as a theorist of the newness and as a founder of a new theory. Bargu suggests extending Althusser's interpretation to the *Florentine Histories*, which Althusser did not consider: the opening toward the future becomes, in this sense, the key to a comprehensive interpretation of Machiavelli, *with* and *beyond* Althusser.

The volume's last essay, by Peter Thomas, once again takes up Gramsci's interpretation, beginning with his 1932 statement on the 'Modern Prince'. Thomas underlines the theoretical novelty of the Gramscian position vis-à-vis the political party: 'Gramsci [...] identifies the specific nature of the type of leadership of the Modern Prince, which tends to puts itself out of business,

progressively reducing the distance between leaders and the led, in a relation of "dialectical pedagogy". It is in this dynamic that we find the distinctiveness of Gramsci's theory of hegemony (that is, of leadership) translated into the terms of a theory of political organisation'.

Gramsci sees *The Prince* as a new literary style as well as a new style of thought; not a system, but rather a living book whereby ideology becomes myth: according to Thomas, 'Gramsci's Machiavellian metaphor of the Modern Prince needs to be understood in a similar sense [...] the Modern Prince should be understood in the first instance as a dramatic development that unfolds throughout the discourse itself of the *Prison Notebooks*, alchemically transforming the dispersed and pulverised lives of the subaltern social groups'. In other words, Thomas claims that the Modern Prince is not a mere repetition of the Machiavellian new prince, but rather the repetition of a strategic move in a completely different political contingency, a move that transforms not only the concept of political party, but also the concept of politics itself.

The conference at Brunel University has shown the richness of the current Machiavellian historiography. It has also shown the impossibility of a comprehensive approach that, in the name of scientific neutrality, reveals all the different faces of Machiavelli. We are aware that this book offers a partial portrait of the Florentine Secretary. It is partial, because Machiavelli's theoretical and political discourse is also partial. Not only in the sense of being partisan, that is to say that it takes the side of one part, that of the people, against another part, that of the nobles, in the context of the late Florentine Renaissance. It is also partial in the sense that the relevance of the issues raised by Machiavelli does not allow for a neutral and pacifying approach. His thought continues to divide, and his relevance and that of *The Prince* means that the historians must confront their responsibilities as contemporary thinkers as well. In our global society, within which inequalities and conflicts continually grow, such responsibilities are both scientific and political. With Machiavelli, as the papers here clearly show, the history of political thought immediately becomes political theory, against all claims of neutrality, and within the major conflicts of the current era.

9 Note on the citation of Machiavelli's works

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*;
- D = *Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Tito Livio/Discourses on Livy*;
- IF = *Istorie fiorentine/Florentine Histories*;
- P = *Il Principe/The Prince*.

The abbreviations are followed by the indication of the book (if existing), in Roman numerals and of the chapter, in Arabic numerals.

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PART 1

Language, Text and Context of The Prince

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Il genere e il tempo delle parole: dire la guerra nei testi machiavelliani

Jean-Louis Fournel

1 Preambolo: la lingua dello stato di guerra[1]

La scrittura della guerra non è una scrittura come le altre nella misura in cui supera le logiche strettamente cognitive o narrative, giacché coinvolge spesso un'intera visione del mondo, con un tentativo di razionalizzare uno spazio/tempo già scombussolato dal conflitto. Soprattutto, essa è animata per lo più da una necessità che porta a confondere analisi e azione: parlare di guerra significa toccare una forma di radicalità perché si tratta sempre di parlare di morte, morte di uomini e morte di Stati. La cosa si complica poi per il fatto che, non senza contraddizione, il racconto della guerra è sempre *lo stesso* e sempre *lacunoso*. È sempre uguale perché il racconto di guerra è la base di tutti i racconti epici e storici e, in quanto tali, tornano frequentemente gli stessi codici, gli stessi moduli, gli stessi riferimenti: in questo modo, ogni guerra narrata è spesso una ripetizione di tutte le guerre note nel passato, le quali servono da modelli e da fonti per capire e dire. È sempre lacunoso, perché risulta sempre molto complicato mettere insieme tutte le informazioni necessarie ad un simile racconto e molte cose si possono solamente ipotizzare: si pensi per esempio a quanto è detto sul numero dei morti nelle battaglie a proposito dello scontro di Ravenna nella *Storia d'Italia* di Francesco Guicciardini (X, 13). Ma quei racconti sono anche *unici*, perché ogni guerra, per certi versi, non assomiglia a nessun'altra: la guerra sorprende, distrugge, cancella, trasforma e ha sempre una sua componente inaudita e difficile da descrivere.

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[1] Il presente contributo si inserisce in uno studio sviluppatosi da tempo e per lo più a quattro mani con Jean-Claude Zancarini nell'ambito dei nostri lavori di traduzione e di commento di alcune delle opere maggiori della Firenze delle guerre d'Italia. Per questa Firenze ho coniato l'espressione 'repubblica di guerra' (cfr. Fournel 2009). Quanto al nostro lavoro di traduzione, si vedano Guicciardini 1988, e 1996, e 1997, nonché Machiavelli 2000 (nuova edizione rivista: Machiavelli 2015). Questo lavoro è anche illustrato ultimamente dalle voci 'militari' ('Armi', 'Artiglieria', 'Cavalleria', 'Fanteria', 'Fortezze', 'Pace/guerra', 'Nemico', 'Odio/amore', 'Tirannide') redatte da noi due per Sasso 2014. Si veda anche Fontaine e Fournel 2014.

La scrittura della guerra si presta quindi ad un processo di modellizzazione sistematico ma variegato, a seconda degli strumenti e delle forme retoriche predilette, siano esse monumentali o testuali, poetiche o storiografiche, funzionali oppure ritualizzate e celebrative. Di fronte al pericolo della semplice *ripetizione*, una delle soluzioni è quindi di ricorrere all'*analogia*, la quale consente di dire il nuovo senza staccarlo del tutto dal passato. Moduli interpretativi legati ad una *doxa* sovrabbondante si mescolano quindi con la richiesta di una precisione del lessico e della descrizione: la guerra ha a che fare con un sapere costituito per capitani e principi. E quando Machiavelli insiste sul fatto che essa non è un'arte, l'enunciato si iscrive nell'ambito della sua – strutturante – critica dei mercenari: i soldati non devono avere la guerra per arte in nome di motivi quindi spesso più ideologici e politici – l'elogio del cittadino-soldato e delle armi proprie – che gnoseologici.[2] E ciò non toglie che, per il Fiorentino, chi dirige l'esercito, ossia il principe, 'debbe […] non avere altro obietto né altro pensiero, né prendere cosa alcuna per sua arte, fuora della guerra et ordini e disciplina di essa; perché quella è sola arte che si espetta a chi comanda', come richiede il capitolo 14 del *Principe*.

Il racconto di guerra si complica poi ulteriormente per il fatto che accade che spunti in esso l'ammissione del carattere parzialmente *indicibile* del conflitto armato: quando il 28 maggio 1527, tre settimane dopo il sacco di Roma, Francesco Guicciardini scrive al datario Matteo Giberti '*non ho parole pari ai concetti miei*', sottolinea appunto che di fronte ad eventi sconvolgenti mancano le parole e il processo di comprensione e di restituzione di una forma di razionalità scritta impone un'interrogazione complessa sulle parole e le frasi per

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2   Come si sa, è tesi fondamentale di Machiavelli che nessuno prenda la guerra per mestiere ('usare la guerra per arte'), al di fuori di chi comanda, principe o repubblica. Per Fabrizio Colonna nell'*Arte della guerra*, 'essendo questa una arte mediante la quale gli uomini d'ogni tempo non possono vivere onestamente, non la può usare per arte se non una republica o uno regno; e l'uno e l'altro di questi, quando sia bene ordinato, mai non consentì ad alcuno suo cittadino o suddito usarla per arte, né mai alcuno uomo buono l'esercitò per sua particolare arte' (A I). Si vede che Machiavelli precisa subito che non c'è contraddizione nel suo pensiero tra la tesi ricordata prima e la necessità di prepararsi alla guerra e di essere capace di farla per difendersi o per acquistare, cosa che si potrebbe pensare avendo in mente il capitolo 14 del *Principe*. La precisazione di Fabrizio 'non la può usare per arte se non una republica o uno regno' viene ribadita: 'Debbe adunque una città bene ordinata volere che questo studio di guerra si usi ne' tempi di pace per esercizio e ne' tempi di guerra per necessità e per gloria, e al publico solo lasciarla usare per arte, come fece Roma' (A I). Ma i popoli, siano essi cittadini di 'una republica' o sudditi di 'uno regno', devono avere un mestiere che 'gli nutrisce nella pace' in modo che 'venuta la pace, [i] principi tornino a governare i loro popoli, i gentili uomini al culto delle loro possessioni, e i fanti alla loro particolare arte: e ciascuno d'essi faccia volentieri la guerra per avere pace, e non cerchi turbare la pace per avere guerra' (A I).

dire gli esiti del conflitto armato. E la comprensione di quanto succede presuppone allora l'individuazione dei motivi per cui tutto è cominciato: la guerra va spiegata anche tramite ciò che la precede e che l'accompagna, ossia la ricostituzione dei piani, degli scopi, delle proiezioni e degli obiettivi. Parlare di guerra diventa quindi parlare di politica, perché non si tratta solo di fare la storia delle battaglie, ma di vedere se essa rimetta in forse l'esistenza della compagine statale, e perché questo discorso della guerra è una richiesta permanente della riflessione sul vivere insieme. Machiavelli dice proprio questo nel suo battibecco con il cardinale di Roano alla fine del capitolo 3 del *Principe*, ma anche nel prologo dell'*Arte della guerra*. Nel primo caso, dire a Roano che i Francesi s'intendono forse meglio della guerra ma sicuramente meno bene dello stato significa ricordare loro che i linguaggi della guerra non sono solo quelli della zuffa armata. Nel secondo caso propone una frase che spiega meglio di qualsiasi enunciato la centralità dei capitoli 12 e 13 sulle armi nel *Principe*, e la richiesta fatta al principe nel capitolo 14 di pensare sempre alla guerra:

> tutte l'arti che si ordinano in una civiltà per cagione del bene comune degli uomini, tutti gli ordini fatti in quella per vivere con timore delle leggi e d'Iddio, sarebbono vani, se non fussono preparate le difese loro; le quali, bene ordinate mantengono quegli, ancora che non bene ordinati. E così, per il contrario, i buoni ordini, sanza il militare aiuto, non altrimenti si disordinano che l'abitazioni d'uno superbo e regale palazzo, ancora che ornate di gemme e d'oro, quando, sanza essere coperte, non avessono cosa che dalla pioggia le difendesse. E se in qualunque altro ordine delle cittadi e de' regni si usava ogni diligenza per mantenere gli uomini fedeli, pacifici e pieni del timore d'Iddio nella milizia si raddoppiava, perché in quale uomo debbe ricercare la patria maggiore fede, che in colui che le ha a promettere di morire per lei?[3]

L'ordine della guerra diventa lo zoccolo dell'ordine della repubblica, le armi il puntello delle leggi. Per di più, le nuove forme della guerra, emerse con la campagna di Carlo VIII nell'autunno del 1494 nutrono e danno forma più radicale a questa logica in atto nel pensiero del Machiavelli: tali guerre sono più violente e più rapide, con effetti più dirompenti, che a loro volta condizionano i governi. Gli eserciti vi sono poi provvisti di armi nuove e s'ordinano in modo inedito sul campo. In tale prospettiva, la posta in gioco è diventata infatti la sopravvivenza stessa dello stato. I modi e le parole ricevute in eredità per pensare questi nuovi conflitti sono in gran parte obsoleti e bisogna proporre nuove

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3 Machiavelli 2012, p. 27 (*Proemio*)

modalità per dire la novità di questi tempi 'strani' (secondo le parole usate dal Guicciardini nella sua *Consolatoria* per qualificare la congiuntura bellica), delle guerre 'insolite' (secondo le parole del Savonarola nelle sue *Prediche sopra Aggeo*, per parlare della calata di Carlo VIII).

La situazione induce nei linguaggi della guerra una duplice porosità, linguistica e socio-politica. Una porosità *linguistica* nella misura in cui non si possono né trascurare gli effetti della varietà degli idiomi usati in eserciti che sono tutti transnazionali, né l'influenza del latino sulla lingua volgare prediletta ormai nella lingua della guerra, giacché i testi di riferimento per dire la guerra sono scritti in greco e in latino (sono i *veteres scriptores de re militari*, i quali sono pochi ma stampati e ristampati decine di volte in tutto il Cinquecento). Ma la porosità è anche *socio-politica*: per via dello sconfinamento della lingua dello scontro armato in quella della politica, le parole del racconto della guerra esterna sono suscettibili di passare nella descrizione dei conflitti interni. Il primo assunto ricorda che la lingua della guerra è sempre una lingua parzialmente ibrida; il secondo, che la lingua della guerra non è solo la lingua militare. Non bastano quindi i dizionari e i glossari per studiare questa lingua della guerra (anche se risultano ovviamente di grande utilità!).[4]

2   La lingua di Machiavelli come lingua di guerra

La lingua di Machiavelli (e chiedo scusa per questa evidenza) è una lingua della guerra prima di tutto, una lingua che impone come asse maggiore della comprensione del mondo un sistema guerra/pace.[5] Ed è d'altronde, nei fatti, una lingua che si è costruita durante gli anni della cancelleria, quando, tra il 1498 e il 1512, Niccolò lavorava per il consiglio dei Dieci, incaricato appunto delle cose della guerra, e scrisse quindi di guerra in decine di lettere redatte quotidianamente per comunicare ordini e dare avvisi, pareri o informazioni.[6] Ora, la critica ha assunto chiaramente il fatto che questo carteggio è la fucina della lingua del *Principe*.[7] Tale lingua deve adattarsi alle caratteristiche delle guerre nuove: l'enunciato non deve perdersi in circonlocuzioni, non può ammettere la poca

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4   Siano essi dizionari antichi o glossari contemporanei, come quello di Michaux 2008. Si veda anche Busetto 2004.

5   Per una descrizione di questo sistema rimando alla nostra voce 'Pace/guerra' in Sasso 2014.

6   Per un'analisi di quel modello di scrittura si veda Fournel 2006.

7   Sono stati capitali in questa prospettiva i lavori di Fredi Chiappelli (1952 e 1969) non a caso fondati sulla prima edizione di una parte delle commissarie e legazioni presso l'editore Laterza. Tale studio può oggi essere ripreso ed approfondito grazie ai sette volumi di *Legazioni, commissarie e scritti di governo* recentemente pubblicati nell'ambito dell'edizione nazionale

chiarezza, le ambiguità e le ambivalenze, deve cancellare ogni tentazione di sottigliezze e di mediazioni eccessive, per puntare direttamente al bersaglio. Frasi brevi, bilanciate, che ritagliano la realtà con distinzioni rigide e senza sfumature apparenti (si pensi al famoso procedere dilemmatico).[8] Sintesi di questa convinzione è il rifiuto di una retorica asiana, illustrata da quella famosa frase della lettera dedicatoria nella quale l'autore dichiara: 'non ho ornata né ripiena di clausule ample, o di parole ampullose e magnifiche, o di qualunque altro lenocinio o ornamento estrinseco con li quali molti sogliono le loro cose descrivere et ornare'. L'unica lingua che valga deve rispettare la *gravità* della materia, una gravità che non è puramente astratta e non si ricollega al semplice *tópos* retorico classico della *gravitas*, ma che ha la concretezza dello scontro armato permanente. La misura di tale lingua è la sua efficacia. Si deve sempre provare a scartare le esitazioni e le approssimazioni. Si scrive e si parla per agire, e si scrive e si parla molto con modalità variegate. Machiavelli ricorre d'altronde, per narrare i tempi di guerra, alle forme di scrittura più diverse, come se fosse sempre in cerca della forma meglio adatta a dire una *verità effettuale* difficile da afferrare. Trattato, discorso, lettera, storiografia, commedia, poesia didascalica, novellistica; comuni a tutte queste forme sono però, da un parte, un ritmo e un tono recisi, nonché, dall'altra, una capacità di interrogare le caratteristiche della *novità* e la validità dell'eredità semantica tradizionale, ossia quelle parole che sono le pietre miliari di una tradizione repubblicana niente affatto pacifica (*legge*, *libertà*, *equalità*, *giustizia*, *sapienza*, *arti...*).[9]

Ciò non significa minimamente, per i Fiorentini del tempo, che le parole della politica debbano cambiare, ma solo che conviene risemantizzarle e ridefinirle, o meglio ridescriverle (giacché s'impone una certa sfiducia nei confronti di definizioni astratte e chiuse) in funzione degli imperativi del momento. Non significa neppure che si debba rigettare qualsiasi enunciato troppo largo e qualsiasi parola di stampo generico – anzi, è proprio il contrario, come si vedrà dopo.

(Machiavelli 2002–10). Sul legame tra la scrittura di cancelleria e quella del *Principe* si veda Cutinelli-Rèndina 2008.

8   Ma non va tuttavia esagerata la rigidità di tale procedura dilemmatica e si devono ancor meno nutrire illusioni sulla nostra capacità di rendere conto in modo esaustivo della realtà, grazie a quelle strutture binarie di pensiero.

9   Si veda a questo proposito Fournel 2014.

3   Il lessico della guerra nel testo machiavelliano: distinzioni e composizioni

Infatti nella lingua della guerra del Machiavelli (quella che va studiata non solo nell'*Arte della guerra* ma anche nei *Discorsi*, nel *Principe*, nelle *Istorie fiorentine* e negli scritti e carteggi di cancelleria) non domina sempre e soltanto il fenomeno di tecnificazione progressiva, né quello di contaminazione tra ambiti e registri diversi (secondo un'articolazione lingua comune *vs.* lingua specializzata). La lingua militare viene invece segnata da due fenomeni che dipendono da temporalità opposte: da un lato, la modellizzazione ancorata nel *passato* (diacronica) con il ruolo assunto dai latinismi dei testi di riferimento (soprattutto Vegezio e Frontino come esempi maggiori di quelli che formano i *veteres scriptores de re militari*, che offrono un serbatoio di parole e di esempi)[10] e d'altra parte la *contemporaneità* radicata nel *presente* (sincronica), con la circolazione delle parole tra le varie lingue volgari (spagnolo, italiano, francese, tedesco, inglese) o tra le varie componenti della *koiné* volgare italiana. In questo modo, ad una stratificazione temporale (con parole nuove che si aggiungono a parole vecchie senza farle scomparire) fa *pendant* una stratificazione spaziale (con parole che dicono la stessa cosa ma vengono da territori differenziati). Tale situazione, induce a volte un sopravvento preso dalle parole che hanno una certa origine e appartengono ad un dato patrimonio lessicale quando dominano in un campo specifico i tecnici di tale o tale altra madrelingua – sarà il caso per gli ingegneri e gli architetti militari italiani nel secondo Cinquecento, così come era il caso per i canonnieri francesi nel tardo Quattrocento e nel primo Cinquecento. La lingua della guerra è infatti al contempo un lascito dell'eredità classica e il prodotto di un fenomeno storico multinazionale e, per l'Italia, multiregionale (con un posto, limitato ma presente, lasciato per esempio ad alcuni toscanismi).

Prendiamo un esempio di quell'ultima componente del linguaggio militare di Machiavelli. In un passo di D II.17, quando si parla delle 'zuffe campali',

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10   Un tale *corpus* è una novità nei confronti della diffusione del solo Vegezio nel Medioevo. La prima edizione collettiva che comprende i testi di Vegezio, Frontino, Eliano (tradotto dal greco in latino) e dello pseudo-Modesto compare nel 1487 (a cura di Giovanni Antonio Sulpizio da Veroli – Roma, Eucharius Siller – il quale ristampa il lavoro alla fine dell'anno 1494...). Un'altra importante edizione di questi testi viene curata nel 1496 da Filippo Beroaldo il Vecchio (ristampata poi nel 1505 da Giovanni Antonio de Benedictis). La prima edizione francese collettiva risale al 1515 (Parigi, Guy Breslay – ristampato a Lione presso G. Huyon nel 1523), in Germania al 1524 (Colonia, ristampata nel 1532). I primi commenti invece sono pubblicati solo alla fine del Cinquecento e portano ad una prospettiva umanistica, meno tecnica. Si veda Richardot 1998 e Allmand 2011.

Machiavelli scrive che esse sono 'chiamate ne' nostri tempi, con vocabolo francioso, giornate, e, dagli Italiani, fatti d'arme'. Alla parola *zuffa* di origine sconosciuta (probabilmente germanica), ma che viene considerata come fiorentina, corrispondono due parole, la parola *giornata* (che Machiavelli considera 'francese' poiché *giornata* viene secondo lui da *journée* – sebbene qui la logica degli andirivieni linguistici sembri mostrare che 'journée' in francese s'impone appunto solo grazie ad un 'ritorno' oltr'Alpe dell'italiano 'giornata' avvenuto appunto con le guerre d'Italia...) ed un'altra qualificata come 'italiana' con l'espressione *fatto d'arme*. A questo proposito, si noterà che si tratta dell'unica occorrenza di *fatto d'arme* nei *Discorsi*, una espressione che non compare né nell'*Arte della guerra*, né nelle *Istorie fiorentine*, né nel *Principe*, mentre *giornata* e *zuffa* si dividono equamente le occorrenze per nominare la battaglia (la prima parola piuttosto per le battaglie campali, la seconda piuttosto per i conflitti interni – infatti l'aggettivo *campale* viene raramente associato a *zuffa*). Machiavelli non sembra ricorrere ad una espressione ('fatto d'arme') che egli lascia agli 'italiani', mentre tale parola è invece molto frequente in Cornazzano, ma anche in Guicciardini, soprattutto nei primi libri della *Storia d'Italia* (dove si trova solo una volta la parola *zuffa*).

Nel Machiavelli la stratificazione spaziale è tuttavia nettamente meno presente di quella temporale: la dialettica più feconda nel testo machiavelliano è quella tra latino e volgare, non quella tra i diversi volgari italiani ed europei.[11] In questa prospettiva, il problema maggiore della lingua militare machiavelliana è quello dell'articolazione tra l'eredità lessicale latina, la vivacità e l'innovazione lessicale contemporanea in campo militare e, infine, la porosità della frontiera tra conflitto interno e guerra esterna. Si può dire che, per il lessico della guerra nei testi machiavelliani, siamo di fronte – schematicamente – ad una triplice fonte con la tripartizione lingua generica/latinismi/lingua d'uso contemporaneo (prevalentemente tecnica). Ma si vedrà anche come, pure nel-

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11   I pochi studi sintetici sulla lingua italiana della guerra nel Rinascimento, come quelli di Piero del Negro, hanno mostrato che il Cinquecento è il momento di un balzo quantitativo e qualitativo nel lessico della guerra: tutto aumenta, il numero dei neologismi, quello delle traduzioni (con un uso dell'italiano come 'lingua maieutica'), quello dei passaggi da una lingua all'altra, specialmente tra le tre lingue romanze maggiori ma anche con il tedesco e l'inglese. La poliglossia è di regola negli eserciti mercenari, tanto più quanto le giovani lingue volgari non sono ancora stabili. Inoltre, come si ricordava già sopra, le nuove guerre sono un momento di invenzioni e innovazioni tecniche e tattiche, fosse solo per il peso che vi assumono le armi da fuoco: ora la lingua della guerra non dipende mai soltanto da una trasmissione passiva e deve integrare quelle novità. In una situazione simile, i paradigmi dell'*influenza* (di una lingua sulle altre), della *rivalità* tra le lingue, o della *gerarchia* degli idiomi non bastano. Si veda Del Negro 1997 e 2002.

la lingua tecnica e nei latinismi, esista un ricorso alla logica generica che è molto produttivo. Riprendiamo ora questi vari punti.

4   Lingua generica: il caso-Principe

Essa non appartiene, o non solo, al mondo della guerra guerreggiata e ci ricorda che Machiavelli (ma anche Guicciardini) non sono 'professionisti' della guerra, anzi hanno sempre considerato che la milizia moderna è solo l'ombra dell'antica e che non avevano granché da imparare dai capitani del presente. Nella lingua per la guerra dei fiorentini del tempo, non solo nel Machiavelli, si nota infatti un uso massiccio di un lessico generico della guerra che non è ancorato in un lessico tecnico. Tale uso viene illustrato da parole come *amore*, *armi* (ovviamente), *cose di dentro e cose di fuora*, *disciplina*, *esercizio* (il più delle volte adoperato in un contesto militare – P 10, 14, 21), *esercito*, *fianco*, *genti*, *giustizia*, *milizia*,[12] *necessità*, *odio*, *ordine*, *terra* e tante altre parole.

Lo spazio specifico di quella lingua generica (la quale è presente in tutti i testi), è giust'appunto *Il Principe*. Infatti nell'opuscolo le armi sono sempre presenti e sono al cuore del ragionamento, ma tale ragionamento si cristalizza attorno a quattro questioni maggiori, nessuna delle quali viene trattata con un lessico prevalentemente tecnico: i mercenari come questione politica-economica-morale; la capacità militare del principe nuovo; l'articolazione tra leggi e armi; infine, il sopravvento della politica estera su quella interna con l'emergenza del *terzo umore* dei soldati.[13]

Il Principe dice quindi, in fin dei conti, poco attorno alla questione militare come componente strettamente tecnica delle pratiche militari. Si pensano invece nel *Principe* la *disciplina* dell'esercito, *l'inimiciza* strutturante delle relazioni politico-militari (bisogna sapere essere vero *amico* o vero *inimico*, secondo quanto viene enunciato nel capitolo 20),[14] la necessità di una forza minima

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12   La parola *milizia* viene usata abbastanza spesso, ossia una quarantina di volte nell'*Arte della guerra* e una ventina nei *Discorsi*, ma due volte soltanto nelle *Istorie fiorentine*. La parola *militi* è usata solo una volta nei *Discorsi* e un'altra nell'*Arte della guerra*: Machiavelli sceglie accuratamente i suoi latinismi.

13   Non è un caso se quell'introduzione dei soldati come *terzo umore* compare alquanto tardi nel testo, nel capitolo 19, come una delle maggiori tracce dell'autogenerazione del testo del *Principe*, ossia della capacità dell'autore di fare nascere *dal* testo stesso alcuni momenti dell'argomentazione senza che essi siano stati preventivati e pensati nello schema iniziale del lavoro.

14   La cosa era stata chiaramente messa a fuoco per Machiavelli durante le sue legazioni, come dimostra l'uso della coppia amico/nemico nelle sue lettere mandate dalla corte di

(nel capitolo 10), la forza della religione (nel capitolo 11) ma anche la forza che toglie la religione (capitolo 12), la *composizione* delle truppe, la neutralità o il sistema delle alleanze, il sapere, la virtù e la fortuna dei *capitani* e dei principi, la conoscenza dei siti, l'amore dei soldati per il loro capo, la mancanza di virtù militare in *questi nostri corrotti tempi*, la giustizia e il tempo delle armi.

Ma non ci si sofferma molto – tra altre questioni maggiori – sul reclutamento (il famoso 'deletto' dell'*Arte della guerra* e il nodo cruciale dell'ordinanza nel 1506), sull'artiglieria (non allude una sola volta ad essa nel testo), o più generalmente sulle armi da fuoco (quale il famoso *scoppietto* di cui tesse l'elogio nell'*Arte della guerra*), sulla nominazione delle armi, sugli ordini dell'esercito prima della battaglia, sulle fortificazioni campali, e neanche sull'organizzazione pratica dell'economia del mercenariato ecc.

È vero che ci sono anche poche ma decisive eccezioni, ma ogni volta esse vengono ridimensionate non appena sono state espresse. Prendiamone alcuni esempi. Il riferimento rapido alla creazione di una milizia di *fanti* e arcieri da parte del re di Francia Carlo VII nel capitolo 13, serve solo a condannare l'abbandono, da parte della Francia, della strada giusta di un esercito nazionale. Il trattamento della questione delle *fortezze* nel capitolo 20 risulta un ennesimo modo per ribadire la necessità di avere il popolo amico e, in fin dei conti, il tema della fortezza risulta qui alquanto strumentale. L'opposizione *fanteria/cavalleria*, che compare dapprima nella genealogia schematica delle compagnie di ventura italiane nel capitolo 13, è il caso forse più interessante, perché viene ripresa solo nelle ultime pagine del libro, nell'*Exhortatio* dell'ultimo capitolo con il ragionamento sul *terzo ordine* della fanteria in grado di resistere sia alla cavalleria che ad un'altra fanteria; ciononostante, Machiavelli non intende entrare qui nel discorso sulla '*generazione* delle arme e la *variazione delli ordini*' (P 26), ossia sulla natura degli armamenti (picca, spada, scoppietto ecc.) e sull'ordinamento delle file di combattenti sul campo (quanto verrà descritto nel terzo libro dell'*Arte della guerra* per filo e per segno). Si può presumere che l'autore voglia infatti rimandare ad un'altra opera 'quelle cose che, di nuovo ordinate, danno reputazione e grandezza a uno principe nuovo' (P 26).

Cesare Borgia o da quella di Luigi XII. Così, il 18 luglio del 1510, in un sua lettera ai Dieci, Machiavelli racconta come Luigi XII gli dichiarò: 'io voglio sapere chi è mio amico o mio inimico' (Machiavelli 1999, p. 1257).

5   Il tempo delle parole: il confronto con il latino

Ciononostante, l'articolazione del sapere tratto dall'esperienza diretta della guerra con la convinzione che la milizia moderna sia inferiore a quella antica spinge Machiavelli (soprattutto nell'*Arte della guerra* – e quasi mai nel *Principe*) a lasciare uno spazio peculiare al lessico della guerra di origine latina e a pensare il posto di esso nei confronti di un lessico più contemporaneo (sia esso generico o tecnico e specializzato). Il complesso sistema dei volgari moderni, che nello stesso momento storico s'instaura appunto in articolazione con il latino, conferisce d'altronde ai latinismi un posto specifico, specialmente nella redazione della storia o dei dialoghi o trattati didattico-morali.

Machiavelli sviluppa un suo uso peculiare del latinismo, come si vedrà con l'esempio di *deletto* o di *asta*). I latinismi vengono messi quindi a confronto con una lingua tecnica sempre più copiosa, creata per descrivere le realtà inedite degli armamenti e delle campagne o pratiche militari, con forme di mediazioni e di negoziati spontanei per alcune parole della lingua d'uso, con traduzioni-adattamenti immediati di termini che diventano neologismi nell'altra lingua, nella lingua d'arrivo, ma con sensibile colore straniero: Machiavelli è profondamente consapevole di quel fattore di ulteriore complessità sorto con il passaggio generalizzato dal latino al volgare. Risponde ai problemi posti adoperando, a seconda dei testi e dei contesti argomentativi, varie soluzioni compatibili e complementari. Lo studio della lingua della guerra e della lingua militare in Machiavelli non può essere fatto solo alla luce di una delle sue opere maggiori: è importante tentare di dire quali siano le differenze a questo proposito tra le opere (ivi compresi quei testi che non sono vere e proprie opere, come le legazioni o commissarie). Non ci si può neanche accontentare di dati quantitativi (per esempio l'abbondanza numerica dei latinismi lessicali nell'*Arte della guerra* e il loro numero limitato negli altri testi): bisogna infatti prendere in considerazione un uso qualitativo dei latinismi.

Il posto dei latinismi militari nell'*Arte della guerra* può essere illustrato dall'esempio del termine *deletto*, tratto dal latino militare, il quale rimanda al reclutamento dei fanti per costituire una milizia (proposta, si sa, molto cara al Machiavelli dall'ideazione dell'ordinanza fiorentina del 1506, e proposta che nutre anche la riflessione tattica militare dei capitoli 12–13 e 26 del *Principe*). Ora, *deletto* nell'*Arte della guerra* non compare né come il solito latinismo (come modifica limitata di una parola latina trasferita in volgare ma destinata ad uso comune), né come un calco (come trascrizione passiva), ma si configura come una ripresa dinamica e singolare di una parola che ha un peso tale da non potere essere trasmessa da un semplice atto di traduzione (viene rimandata esplicitamente ai Romani con l'espressione 'il deletto di essi, che così

lo *chiamavano* gli antichi'). La parola, per cristallizzare una forza ed un significato maggiori, appare addirittura come 'bruciata' non appena viene usata: dopo una trentina di occorrenze, quasi tutte nel primo libro dell'*Arte della guerra*, quando si tratta la questione politica delle *armi proprie*, vi si ricorre solo un'altra volta nel dialogo, e due volte nei *Discorsi* (D III.30 e 33). In tutte le altre opere di Machiavelli e nelle opere militari del tempo che ho potuto consultare l'uso di *deletto* non compare.

La stessa analisi potrebbe essere fatta attorno ad un termine ancora più tecnico, l'*asta* (che appare anch'esso solo nell'*Arte della guerra*), e alle altre parole che rinviano a questo tipo di armi. Machiavelli scrive a questo proposito in tre momenti diversi del dialogo: prima ricorda che i Romani 'avevano uno *dardo* in mano, il quale *chiamavono pilo*, e nello appiccare la zuffa lo lanciavano al nimico' (A II); poi in un altro passo (A II) dichiara che 'le falangi di Macedonia, portavano *aste* che chiamavono *sarisse*, lunghe bene dieci braccia, con le quali eglino aprivono le stiere nimiche e tenevano gli ordini nelle loro falangi'; in fine, ancora più in là, quanto al 'modo dello armare presente', afferma (A II) che 'hanno i fanti, per loro difesa, uno petto di ferro e, per offesa, una *lancia* nove braccia lunga, la quale chiamano *picca*, con una spada al fianco piuttosto tonda nella punta che acuta'. Si nota quindi ogni volta un'esitazione tra due termini (uno generico e uno tecnico e storicamente determinato; *dardo/pilo*; *asta/sarissa*; *lancia/picca*) con la chiara consapevolezza che esistono ad ogni epoca problemi di nominazione (come dimostra la ricorrenza del verbo *chiamare*).[15]

L'*Arte della guerra* è dunque il luogo specifico di uso dei latinismi vivaci, ma il Machiavelli è consapevole di farne un uso che gli è proprio, lasciando uno spazio linguistico al lessico latino tecnico (come se volesse ridare vita a queste parole latine), ma anche limitando i latinismi ad alcuni casi e momenti specifici. In questo modo i latinismi sono illustrazioni della temporalità mutevole delle parole, del fatto che esse hanno una vita loro, o invece del fatto che esse possono rinchiudersi in una morta testualità puramente libresca. Non basta riprendere le parole se non si capisce la natura del collegamento tra queste e la storia del tempo presente; le parole, quando non corrispondono più a nessuna realtà, possono morire o diventare semplici tracce dei morti del passato lontano, suscettibili di interessare solo quegli antiquari criticati nel proemio dei *Discorsi*. Così nella lingua militare di Machiavelli non esistono sempre parole

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15   Nel libro III Machiavelli riprenderà di passaggio questo esempio, scrivendo: 'le loro *lance*, le quali chiamavano *sarisse* erano sì lunghe che la sesta fila passava con la punta della sua lancia fuora della prima fila' (A III), ciò che mostra una vera esitazione per il termine generico tra *lancia* e *asta*.

corrispondenti per tutte le parole degli antichi e, simmetricamente, egli non ammette le false corrispondenze dei moderni.[16]

La dimostrazione più chiara delle specificità della lingua militare machiavelliana nell'*Arte della guerra* e nei *Discorsi* o nel *Principe* sta, *a contrario*, nell'esame che si può fare del lessico militare delle lettere di cancelleria. In quelle lettere Machiavelli non esita ad adoperare un lessico più tecnico. Nelle lettere di cancelleria è anche molto presente ovviamente il lessico della *condotta* (il quale stranamente non compare nelle più acerrime denunce dei mercenari nel *Principe*): di *condotta* o *condottiere* si trovava una sola occorrenza nel *Principe* e solo una quindicina nelle *Istorie fiorentine*, mentre nelle lettere di cancelleria se ne trovano più di 300. Simili considerazioni potrebbero essere fatte a proposito di termini come *lancia*, *rivellino*, *tagliata*, *ripari*, *bastione*. Invece, come ci si poteva aspettare, Machiavelli non usa mai nelle lettere di cancelleria il lessico tecnico direttamente preso in prestito dal latino, che sarà invece molto frequente nell'*Arte della guerra* (penso per esempio a parole come *dardo*, *pilo* e *sarissa*; nel carteggio appare solo una volta *asta*, mai *caterva* e *legione*). Ma l'esempio più lampante della capacità di Machiavelli di tirare in ballo il lessico tecnico del proprio tempo, sta nel parlare che fa di artiglieria o di armi da fuoco: nel carteggio di cancelleria distingue tra *archibuso*, *bombarde grosse*, *bombardelle*, *cannone*, *cortaldo*, *falconetto*, *passavolante*, *spingarda*.[17] In quelle lettere si può però anche dare al termine di *artiglieria* un significato generico (ancora più generico di quello che gli è conferito nell'*Arte della guerra*, dove il termine viene usato per ogni tipo di cannone, e anche per ogni arma da fuoco con l'eufemismo di *artiglieria minuta*, a sostituire la sfilza dei nomi tecnici dei cannoni e armi da fuoco):[18] questo significato ultragenerico (dove *artiglieria* designa tutto ciò che è necessario per l'uso delle armi da fuoco) si legge nella frase: 'Le artiglierie che ieri e stamani abbiamo inviate a cotesta volta son

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16   Per ragioni di spazio rimando, per un ulteriore sviluppo di questo tema, ad un altro lavoro in corso.

17   Niccolò Machiavelli al capitano e commissario di Livorno, 12 luglio 1503, in Machiavelli 2002–10, vol. 3, p. 187. Vedi anche la voce 'Artiglieria' che abbiamo redatto per Sasso 2014.

18   Una volta sola *cannone* viene usato nell'*Arte della guerra* (A III) in senso più tecnico, con precisazioni sul calibro, la portata ed il peso: 'L'artiglierie dell'esercito, bastano dieci cannoni per la espugnazione delle terre, che non passassero cinquanta libbre di portata; de' quali in campagna mi servirei più per la difesa degli alloggiamenti che per fare giornata; l'altra artiglieria tutta fusse piuttosto di dieci che di quindici libbre di portata. Questa porrei innanzi alla fronte di tutto l'esercito, se già il paese non stesse in modo che io la potessi collocare per fianco in luogo securo, dov'ella non potesse dal nimico essere urtata'.

queste: 10 archibusi, 3 barili di polvere, 391 libbra di piombo, 5 casse di passatoi, 3 code di spingarde, e inoltre una soma di piombo'.[19]

Simmetricamente, il trattamento del termine *artiglieria* nell'*Arte della guerra*, così come è stato ricordato prima, e dei termini collegati con il lessico delle armi da getto e da fuoco, propone, con la scelta di usare un'unica parola per tutti i tipi di cannoni e quasi tutti i tipi di armi da fuoco, un esempio interessante del modo di sviluppare la logica generica. A questa onnipresenza del termine *artiglieria* fa eccezione – e *pendant* – nell'*Arte della guerra* la parola *scoppietto*, secondo una modalità che aiuta a lanciare ponti tra logica tecnica e logica generica al di là della questione dei tempi (e del confronto tra lingua antica e moderna). L'uso di *scoppietto* potrebbe sembrare contraddittorio con il tropismo generico di cui si parlava sopra. Ma non lo è, giacché, per i Fiorentini, la parola viene spesso adoperata per additare tutte le armi da fuoco portatili. Questo spiega anche l'assenza nell'*Arte della guerra* di un termine come *archibugio* o *archibuso*: Machiavelli non ne ha bisogno, non rifiuta di usare tali termini ma preferisce a loro una parola più naturale che è immediatamente disponibile, quella di scoppietto giust'appunto. E, a ulteriore dimostrazione di ciò, nella sua traduzione francese dell'*Arte della guerra* Jean Charrier 'ristabilisce' la parola *arquebuse* per tradurre *scoppietto*.[20] Inoltre quando usa le parole *scoppietto* e *scoppiettieri* (una diecina di volte nell'*Arte della guerra*), Machiavelli insiste sull'importanza di quell'arma moderna chiamandola 'istrumento nuovo – come voi sapete [è quindi una *dóxa* ammessa da tutti] – e necessario' (A II). Si potrebbe tornare in modo proficuo, a questo proposito, sulle troppo frettolose condanne di Machiavelli da parte degli specialisti della cosa militare, come uno che non capì niente delle armi moderne: Fabrizio Colonna vuole infatti nelle file del suo esercito un numero cospicuo di scoppiettieri (1000 ogni 6000), i quali sul campo sono più utili delle artiglierie pesanti.[21] L'inserzione delle armi da fuoco nella fanteria trasforma in questo modo lo *scoppietto* –

19   Machiavelli ai Commissari di Poppi, 6–17 novembre 1498 (Machiavelli 2002–10, vol. 1, pp. 125–6).

20   Machiavelli 1546, p. 18v e p. 24r.

21   A III, p.134: 'vero è che assai più nuocono gli scoppietti e l'artiglierie minute, che quelle'. Vedi anche *Arte della guerra* I, pp. 68–9: 'dico che Pompeo e Cesare, e quasi tutti quegli capitani che furono a Roma dopo l'ultima guerra cartaginese, acquistarono fama come valenti uomini, non come buoni; e quegli che erano vivuti avanti a loro, acquistarono gloria come valenti e buoni. Il che nacque perché questi non presero lo esercizio della guerra per loro arte, e quegli che io nominai prima, come loro arte la usarono'; si veda anche D III.25 e A I: 'I miei Romani, come ho detto, mentre che furono savi e buoni, mai non permessero che i loro cittadini pigliassono questo esercizio per loro arte'.

come la *picca* – in un'arma dei popoli poveri e liberi, che combattono i nobili a cavallo.[22]

Lo sfoggio di conoscenza delle macchine da getto e del lessico della poliorcetica in uso presso i Romani va letto, *a contrario*, come un'ulteriore illustrazione della stessa articolazione sofisticata tra lingua generica e lingua tecnica. Machiavelli scrive nell'*Arte della guerra*, VII: 'Gli instrumenti co' quali gli antichi difendevano le terre erano molti, come *baliste, onagri, scorpioni, arcubaliste, fustibali, funde*; ed ancora erano molti quegli co' quali le assaltavano, come *arieti, torri, musculi, plutei, vinee, falci, testudini*. In cambio delle quali cose sono oggi *l'artiglierie*, le quali servono a chi offende e a chi si difende; e però io non ne parlerò altrimenti', elenco che riprende pari pari quello di Vegezio (A IV), e che mostra che Machiavelli cita queste macchine più per mostrare di conoscerle che per adattarle al mondo moderno. Questo lessico antico è morto, interessante solo per quegli antiquari derisi nel prologo dei *Discorsi*. Una sola parola basta per queste tredici parole: *artiglieria*. D'altronde Machiavelli non intende tornarre su tale elenco ('*e però io non ne parlerò altrimenti*') e neanche esplicitare i significati di parole non chiarissime per uno che non abbia letto Vegezio – solo la parola *torri*, per motivi ovvi, si ritrova adoperata nelle altre opere del Segretario fiorentino e neanche la parola *ariete*, di uso comune, lo è.

Da quell'esempio possiamo inferire che il lessico generico non è portatore d'approssimazioni, ma può condurre a precisare parole, usi e tattiche. Se le cose vanno così, lo si può ricondurre alla convinzione semplice ricordata sopra, secondo la quale se il militare e il civile sono indissociabili (come ricordano i capitoli 12–14 del *Principe* e il prologo dell'*Arte della guerra*), non significa che vadano confusi, giacché *l'esercizio* della guerra non deve essere per i cittadini o i sudditi (non è così per i capitani e i principi) un'*arte*, un mestiere (è quel che ricorda Fabrizio fin dall'inizio del dialogo). Insomma Machiavelli, in questa prospettiva, non trascura la precisione delle parole quando occorre, ma non ne fa una condizione dell'enunciato sempre e comunque. L'unica cosa che conta è l'effetto dell'enunciato nella situazione specifica ed esso presuppone a volte una lingua non propria del solo campo militare, una lingua apparentemente più generica o che sa giocare con la genericità degli elementi di lessico adoperato (siano essi tecnici, latineggianti o di altro tipo), ma che è molto semplicemente la lingua dello stato come spazio di dispiegamento della politica come conflitto. In questo modo le soluzioni proposte da Machiavelli sono

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22   Si noterà *en passant* che l'inserzione delle armi da fuoco nelle file di fanti viene qui attribuita ai Tedeschi e agli Svizzeri più che agli Spagnoli, contrariamente a quanto viene per lo più sostenuto nella storiografia militare.

diverse a seconda dei momenti e delle opere, con forme di equilibrio sofisticato tra i vari lessici. L'unico criterio di quell'arte della lingua che si mette al servizio dell'arte dello stato è l'efficacia. La situazione d'emergenza e di guerra permanente non induce il sopravvento delle cose sulle parole (contrariamente a quanto viene a volte frettolosamente opinato), ma richiede un nuovo tipo di collegamento tra esse. La scelta fondamentale delle *armi proprie* non significa solo ricorrere a truppe non mercenarie, ma anche ad armi che siano proprie dell'ordine repubblicano, di un certo tipo di comunità politica; e a quelle armi proprie corrispondono parole proprie.

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'Uno piccolo dono': A Software Tool for Comparing the First Edition of Machiavelli's *The Prince* to Its Sixteenth Century French Translations

Jean-Claude Zancarini

1   Travelling Texts

My starting point concerns the importance of translations in the western world. The history of translations seems to be an important part of the history of western thinking, literature, philosophy and political thought, insofar as texts travel and have an effect in the countries and cultures into which they are introduced by means of translations. Recent research into translation (Antoine Berman, Henri Meschonnic)[1] has stressed the role played by translations in the construction of the language and literature of the translating countries. Berman has underlined the role of 'great translations' in this process and the founding role of Nicole Oresme and Jacques Amyot in France. At the very moment when Meschonnic was asserting that 'Europe is born from translation and in translation', he also warned against what he called the 'erasing translations' which tend to make people forget the process of the modification of the target language by means of the introduction of elements from other cultures.[2] Placing the concept of 'rhythm' at the centre of his reflection, he defended a form of the act of translation that privileged the translation of a text by another text that does in the translating country what the original text does in its country of origin. He also argued against translation choices that favoured the sign and its distinction between *signifiant* and *signifié*, which brings in its wake either the translation of the meaning or literalism.

The French translations of *The Prince* are an integral part of this necessary history of translation. They have been numerous: four in the sixteenth century

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(Jacques de Vintimille, unpublished until the twentieth century, Guillaume Cappel, 1553, Gaspard d'Auvergne, 1553 and Jacques Gohory, 1571), three in the seventeenth century (Amelot de la Houssaye, le sieur de Briencour and Testard), one in the eighteenth century (Guiraudet) and three in the nineteenth century (J.-V. Périès, L.H. Halévy and C. Ferrari).[3] Some of these translations play an important long-term role in the diffusion of Machiavelli's ideas: the translation by Gaspard d'Auvergne was present throughout the second half of the sixteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth century. Jacques Gohory's translation disappeared for several centuries only to re-appear, in a more or less modified form, in the Pléiade edition of the second half of the twentieth century. Amelot de la Houssaye's translation, which was published in 1683, 1684, 1686 ('Revüe, corrigée, et augmentée par le Traducteur') and 1694, served as the starting point for the *Anti-Machiavel* of Frederick II of Prussia and Voltaire and was, as a consequence, re-published eighteen times, between 1740 and 1793. To put these versions in parallel and to analyse the way in which each of the translators translates or 'naturalises' Machiavelli's text is to study an activity and to account for the way in which Machiavelli entered the French heritage.[4]

2   Coherence of the Act of Translation

Within our area of research into political texts Jean-Louis Fournel and myself have undertaken translations and have reflected upon this practise. We have established 'partial rules' from this reflection that we consider to be in harmony with Meschonnic's invitation to translate the text while taking good care of 'what it does'. In the *Dialogo del reggimento di Firenze*, a text by Francesco Guicciardini, there is an exchange between Bernardo del Nero, an experienced man, who, as he confesses, 'is not well-read', and Piero Guicciardini. In answer

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3   There have been more than twenty translations in the twentieth century and the list gets continually longer! Without attempting to be exhaustive, the twentieth century translators include: Brion, T'Serstevens, Colonna d'Istria, Bec, Lévy, Luciani, Marie Gaille, Ménissier, Larivaille, Fournel and Zancarini, and Jacqueline Risset.

4   Meschonnic 1999, p. 11: 'C'est sur les grands textes anciens que s'accumulent les traductions. C'est là qu'on peut confronter un invariant et ses variations. Leur pourquoi, leur comment. Le seul terrain d'expérimentation du langage: où peuvent indéfiniment recommencer des expériences. Là, traduire est une poétique expérimentale' (Translations accumulate upon the great ancient texts. That is where one can confront an invariant with its variations: their why and their how. The only terrain for language experimentation: where experiments can be indefinitely recommenced. There, the act of translation is experimental poetics).

to a question asked by Piero Guicciardini, who is surprised at the 'knowledge of the affairs of the Romans and the Greeks' which he has demonstrated, Bernardo del Nero says that he has had 'the pleasure to read all the books translated into the vulgar language' but nuances the importance of his reading by adding that he does not believe 'that these translated books have as much sap as the Latin works' (*né credo che questi libri tradotti abbino quello sugo che hanno e' latini*).[5] If there were one general rule that should be followed, it would be expressed thus: let French translations have 'as much sap' as the original texts. In what way do our aspirations as translators appear to be related to those of Meschonnic? The desire to provide in French a text which has 'as much sap' as a sixteenth century Italian text closely resembles the idea that a translator must know what the original text does in its language and attempt to produce a French text which has the same effects, which retains the same semantic fields, which alludes to other texts and which breathes with the same breath. Obviously – and this is perhaps where our closeness to Meschonnic ends since he is more radical than us on this point – we think that this is basically an aim which we are far from sure of achieving. But, in our opinion, this aim has at least the not inconsiderable merit of defining a direction to be followed and a goal to be reached. It also reminds us that our acts as translators are not fundamentally situated in a translation theory debate about whether proper translation practise chooses to favour either the 'source language' or the 'target language'.[6]

Moreover when one examines what has been written about translation – from Cicero, Horace, Saint Jerome, Bruni, Luther and Dolet to Schleiermacher and Benjamin or the numerous and major contemporary contributions[7] – one

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5   Guicciardini 1994, p. 188.

6   Meschonnic 1999, p. 23, considers that 'cette répartition n'est autre que la division du signe, selon sa notion classique, l'alliance d'un signifiant, phonique ou graphique, la forme, et d'un signifié, le sens' (this distribution is none other than the division of the sign, according to its classic notion, the alliance of a phonic or graphic *signifiant*, the form, and a *signifié*, the meaning).

7   Without returning to the previously mentioned work of Berman and Meschonnic, for France we have in mind the works of Mounin 1955, and 1963; Cary 1986; Ladmiral 1979, and the collective work undertaken since 1984, on the initiative of the ATLF and the ATLAS, during the Assises annuelles de la traduction littéraire en Arles (the Acts are regularly published by the Editions Actes Sud/Atlas). On the history of translation, see the forthcoming publication by the Verdier publishing house of the works directed by Jean-Yves Masson and Yves Chevrel, *Histoire des traductions en langue française*, of which the volume devoted to the nineteenth century appeared in 2012. On the specific issue of the translation of philosophical works, see: Moutaux and Bloch (eds.) 2000.

realises that nothing can be taken for granted in the oppositions which provide structure to the debate so long as one does not embark upon the actual act of translating, that is, the way people really translate. How translations are done cannot be explained by the choice between the alternatives in pairs such as *ad sensum/ad verbum*, accuracy/inaccuracy, beauty/awkwardness, but, rather, by the analysis of the translations themselves. From our point of view, a passage by Saint Jerome[8] seems to reveal the relative nature of these great oppositions.[9] Saint Jerome argues in favour of *ad sensum* translation: 'I declare that in my translations from Greek into Latin […] I do not intend to render word for word but to reproduce the meaning' (*non verbum de verbo reddere sed sensum exprimere de sensu*). But then, in the same clause, he adds that when it is a sacred text, 'even the order of the words is part of the mystery' (*et verborum ordo mysterium est*). This clearly lets it be understood that there is at least one text for which 'the very order of words', their recurrences, their echoes and the networks that they weave amongst themselves can be decisive.

A great translator of contemporary Italian poetry, Bernard Simeone, would insist on the need to detach the translation from the 'fantasy of transparency, of accuracy, of passage, even of pure transmission'. He explained that a translation 'is not a pure passage, but always a [piece of] work on one's own language, a chance given to the latter to call into question its certitudes and its limits through the irruption into its space of foreign works and [pieces of] writing. In that, it does not content itself with reflecting an origin, it enlarges the field of expression of the target language'.[10] For Simeone, 'translation only refers to the radicality of writing'.[11] We share this point of view that we consider to have a major consequence: beyond instances of *petitio principii* and 'general rules', a translation establishes itself by means of its coherence. We define this coherence by means of both a series of 'partial rules' and a series of prohibitions that one sets oneself and from which one does not deviate.[12] We have adopted this conception of the activity of translation, particularly in our own translation of

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8   Hieronymus 1980, p. 13.

9   May we be excused for having previously quoted him in Fournel and Zancarini 2002; see also: Zancarini 2002.

10   Simeone 1998.

11   Simeone 2002; this text was presented at a colloquium on transmission organised by the 'Espace analytique' association and has been published several times in French and in Italian in tribute to Bernard Simeone since his death. See also Simeone 2014.

12   We have previously explained our 'partial rules' in Fournel and Zancarini 2002. On the 'prohibitions', see the 'four forms of teratology in translation' (deletion, addition, displacement, non-agreement and anti-agreement) mentioned by Meschonnic 1999, pp. 27, 45, 164.

The Prince. It is definitely the practise of translation that interests us when we put the original text and the French translations in parallel using *HyperMachiavel.*

3   An Approach to the Texts: Political Philology[13]

We combine the strictly historical reading with studies on the language, its construction, its shades of meaning and its evolutions, studies that enable us to check in detail the common practises of writing and the verisimilitude of our historical reconstructions. From our perspective, the language used by our authors is a central issue as is the way in which they use it. The terms used are indeed to be interpreted according to the political circumstances (what Machiavelli calls 'the quality of the times') and according to the stakes determined by the political actors; which signifies that their meanings may be different to what they were earlier or what they will become later. The way in which these terms are used, with a certain syntax, with modes of particular argumentation, with tonalities, borrowings, quotations and allusions, also has its importance. Terminological use cannot be dissociated from the political or historical analyses that provide writing with meaning. The *discourse* must be considered since this is where a dialectic of the 'names' and the 'things' is perpetually at work. This double approach to the precise meaning to be given to the lexicon and the modes of writing, this approach to the texts that intends to take into consideration 'the quality of the times' is what we call 'political philology'. Its starting point is the love of language – in truth, the love of both languages involved in the work of translation and interpretation. Its deployment revives the philological tradition in its radical and utopian aspects. The hope to reproduce the text as its author had 'really' conceived it, to restore it to its full force and its entire meaning, is one that is never realised, as we well know. But the function of this hope is to introduce a tension towards an unattainable state of perfection, the very existence of which is open to doubt. Realised in a work, this tension towards the elucidation of the maximum possible meaning of the texts under consideration is at the heart of the work of every philologist. But for whosoever defines her/himself as a 'political philologist', it is also important to never forget that the meaning and the strength of texts actually derive from their insertion into a given historical moment. It is also important to bear in mind the function of these texts, which, when they were written, aimed at un-

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13   We refer to Zancarini 2007. This paragraph summarises some of the hypotheses that are developed there.

derstanding and provoking understanding, for action and for provoking action. We might as well say that the political philologist is inextricably linked to historical analysis and that the pairing of these two methodologies is the necessary prerequisite to the insertion of the works of Machiavelli, Guicciardini or Savonarola into the history of ideas or political philosophy. Savonarola, Machiavelli and Guicciardini wrote during the period of the wars in Italy, after the arrival of the troops of Charles VIII, King of France, in 1494. If the upheavals which we think we see at work in the relationship to the City or to war do not appear in the very substance of the language used by these authors, if the language was not marked by this, then our hypotheses for historical reconstruction would obviously have to be revised. Conversely, these historical hypotheses are needed, at the outset, to define the questions that will be applied to the language and the way these authors wrote.

If these hypotheses and reflections are well founded, then their validity must be tested. In a certain way our research into the language of politics of Guicciardini[14] and Machiavelli[15] support these initial tests. However, before advancing further, in order to better understand the act of translation in action, it seemed useful to have at our disposal a tool to provide, for a text, a vision of how the translators tried to render 'what it did', a vision of the effects of the act of translation in the target culture and, in return, its effects on the knowledge (and questioning) of the original text. The choice of *The Prince* for this trial seemed self-evident for the following reasons: the importance of the text, which has been present in the entire world for the last five centuries; the accumulation of translations noted by Meschonnic; its brevity which made the experiment more reasonable (it is, in its author's words, an 'opuscule'); and our own 'intimacy' with the text and its effects. These reasons led to the decision to construct this software tool with the fundamental assistance of Séverine Gedzelman, an information technology engineer at the Triangle research laboratory, and to use it, first of all, to compare the *editio princeps* of the *Principe* (Rome, Blado, 1532) with the sixteenth century French translations, to which Amelot de la Houssaye's translation would be rapidly added.

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14   Fournel and Zancarini 2009.

15   See, in particular, the sections which we have written on certain Machiavelli keywords ('Armi', 'Artiglieria', 'Cavalleria', 'Fanteria', 'Fortezze', 'Guerra/pace', 'Nemico', 'Parte', 'Amore/odio', 'Pietà/crudeltà', 'Ruina', 'Tirannide') for Sasso and Inglese 2014.

4 *Stato* and Its Translations: Polysemy, 'Interference', and 'Tension in Meaning'

The level 1 graph of the HM software tool provides the entire set of translations used for a word (here: *stato*) by the whole group of translators. It also generates a table for the number of occurrences of the words used to translate the term under investigation, providing a clear vision of the most frequent translations and those that are exceptionally rare. Apart from the translations of the word envisaged, a level 2 graph provides the other Italian words which have been translated by the French words used to translate *stato*. The graphs will be presented successively, first the level 1 graph of *stato*, then the level 2 graph, before returning to the principal French translations of *stato* (*état*, *seigneurie*, *pays*).

A broad polysemy of the term can be noted, with more than forty French terms. There are, however, three main translations of *stato*: *état*, *seigneurie*, *pays* (See Figures 2.1 and 2.2).

An example of this polysemy can be clearly seen in the translations of paragraph XX, 25 (See Figure 2.3).

The movement from Italian to French and back to Italian reveals a link in meaning between the majority of these words that belong to the vocabulary of political institutions. To avoid biases which might have been provoked by rarely-used French words, even exceptionally, to translate *stato*, this presentation will focus on the three words which are the most frequently employed by the translators to render *stato* (*état*, *seigneurie*, *pays*) and investigate which other Italian words they serve to translate.

Etat serves to translate *stato* as well as *imperio*, *dominio*, *principato*, *governo* and *principe* (See Figure 2.4).

Pays is above all used to translate *stato* and *provincia* but also *paese*, *dominio*, *regno* and *patria* (See Figure 2.5).

Seigneurie translates *stato* but also *principato*, *dominio*, *imperio* and *regno* (See Figure 2.6).

This verification can be continued by returning to the Italian as a starting point and examining the French translations of three of the words (*dominio*, *imperio*, *principato*) which have been translated by the three French words most often used to translate *stato*.

Seigneurie, *domination*, *règne*, *pays* and *domaine* mainly translate *Dominio*. *Imperio* is rendered in the vast majority of cases by *empire* or *empereur* but also by *seigneurie*, *puissance*, *gouvernement* and *état*. *Principato* is generally translated by *principauté* or *prince*, but also by *monarchie*, *seigneurie*, *état*, *empereur*, *empire*, *souveraineté*, *seigneur* and *royaume* (See Figures 2.7–2.9).
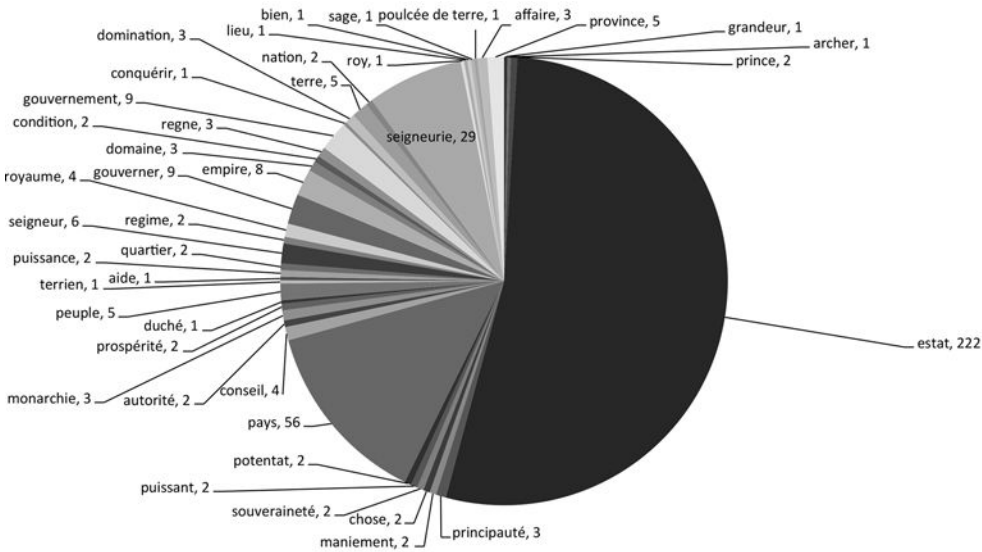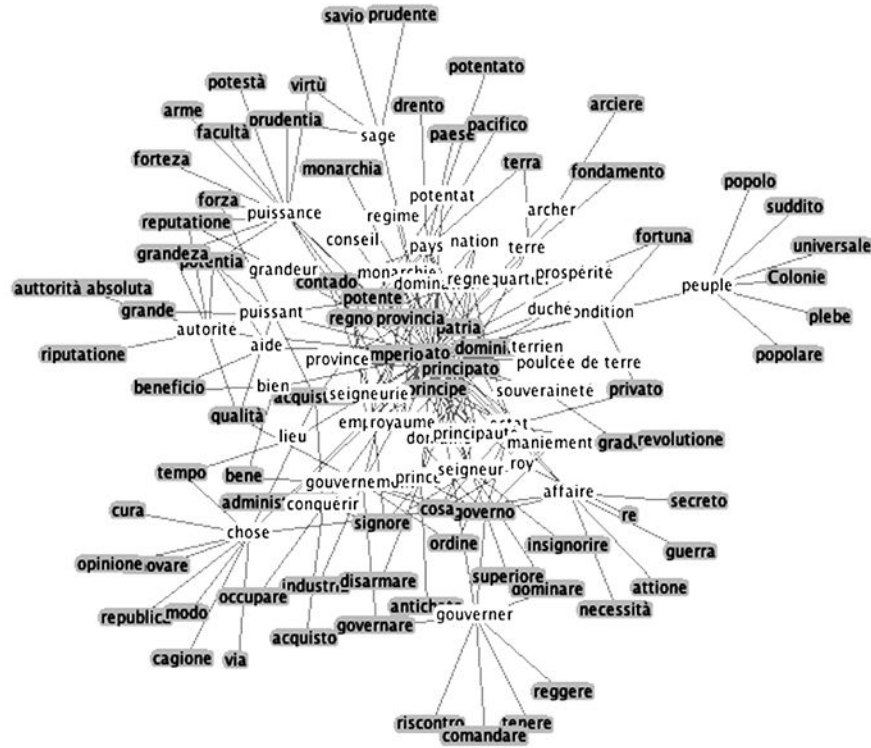
FIGURE 2.1   Stato *level 1*

FIGURE 2.2   Stato *level 2*

BLADO	VINTIMILLE	GASPARD	CAPPEL	GOHORY
Io lodo questo modo, perche gli è usitato antichamente: nondimanco, Misser' Niccolò Vitelli, ne tempi nostri, s' è visto disfare due forteze in Città di Castello per tener' quello stato ; Guido Ubaldo Duca d' Urbino, ritornato nel' suo stato donde da Cesar' Borgia era stato cacciato, rovinò da fondamenti tutte le forteze di quella provincia et giudicò senza quelle havere a riperdere più difficilmente quello stato; i Bentivogli ritornati in Bologna, usorno simil' termine.	La façon m'en semble bonne et louable pource qu'elle est de toute ancienneté en usaige. Touteffois nous avons veu en nostre temps faire le contraire à Nicolas Vitelly prince bien estimé, qui pour mieulx tenir la seigneurie de la cité de Chastel, feit raser deux forteresses qui y estoient. Pareillement Guidebaut duc d'Urbin, après qu'il fut remys en estat, dont il avoit este chassé par César Borgia, feit abatre jusques aux fondemens toutes les forteresses de son pays, estimant pouvoir mieulx garder son estat sans chasteaux qu'aultrement. Les Bentivoles, après s'estre remis en la seigneurie de Boulogne, en feirent tout autant de leurs chasteaux.	Ie ne puis bonnement blasmer ceste maniere, parce qu'elle a esté d'ancienneté pratiquée. Toutefois le Seigneur Nicollas Vitelli s'est veu de nostre temps avoir demoly deux forteresses en la ville de Castello, seullement pour asseurer l'estat. Le duc Guidebaut d'Urbin estant retourné en son duché, dont Cesar Borgia l'avoit auparavant chassé, rasa iusques aux fondemens toutes les places fortes d'iceluy païs : estimant sans icelles devoir plus difficillement reperdre son dommaine. Les Bentivolles feirent le semblable, apres qu'ilz furent rentrez dans Bouloingne.	la maniere en est a priser, d'autant que anciennement elle estoit en usage. Neantmoins de nostre temps messire Nicolas Vitele a rase deux forts en la ville de Castel pour tenir le païs : Guidebaud duc d'Urbin estant remis en ses estatz, desquelz il avoit este chasse par Cesar Borge, il abastit à fleur de terre toutes les forteresses du païs, estimant que s'il n'y en avoit point il ne l'en perderoit pas de rechef si aisement : les Bentivoilles retournez en Boulongne en firent de mesme.	la maniere en est à priser, d'autant qu'anciennement elle estoit en usage. Neantmoins de notre temps messire Nicole Vitelle a rasé deux forts en la ville de Castel pour tenir le païs. Guidebaud Duc d'Urbin estant remis en ses estats, desquels il avoit esté chassé par Cesar Borge, il abbatist rez pieds rez terre toutes les forteresses du païs, estimant que s'il n'y en avoit point, il ne l'en perderoit pas de rechef si aisement : les Bentivoilles retournez à Boulongne en firent de mesme.

FIGURE 2.3 *Prince, ch. XX, 25*: polysemy of *stato*
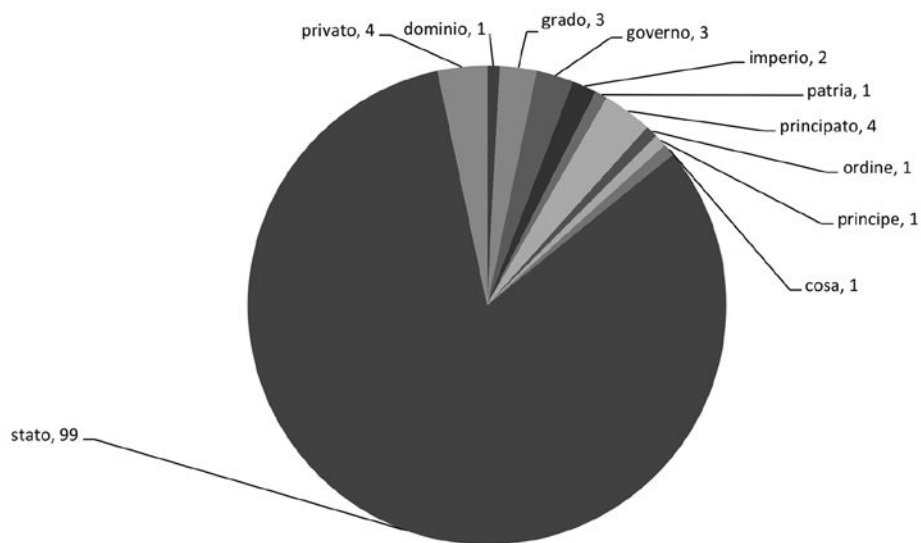
FIGURE 2.4 *État level 1*
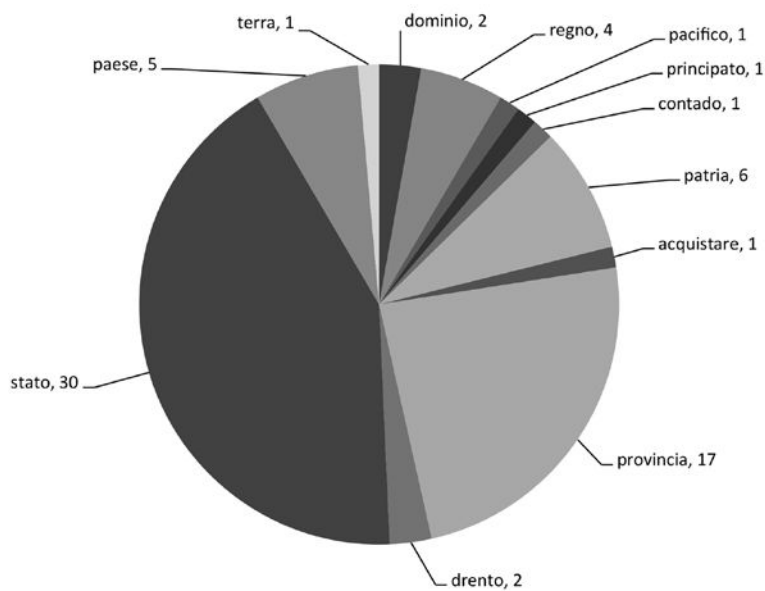
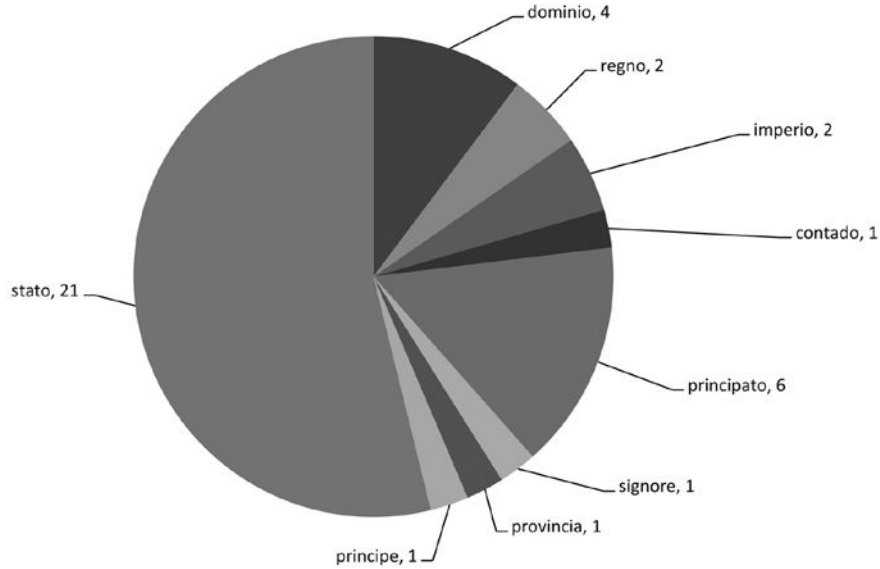FIGURE 2.5 Pays *level 1*

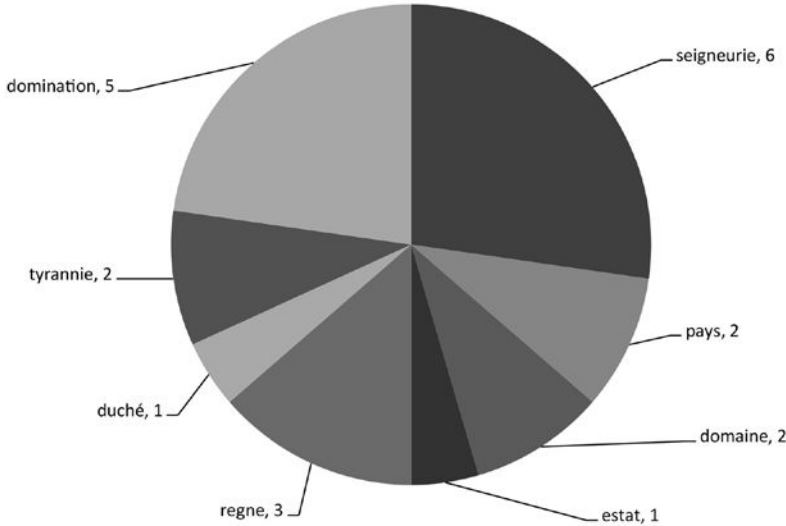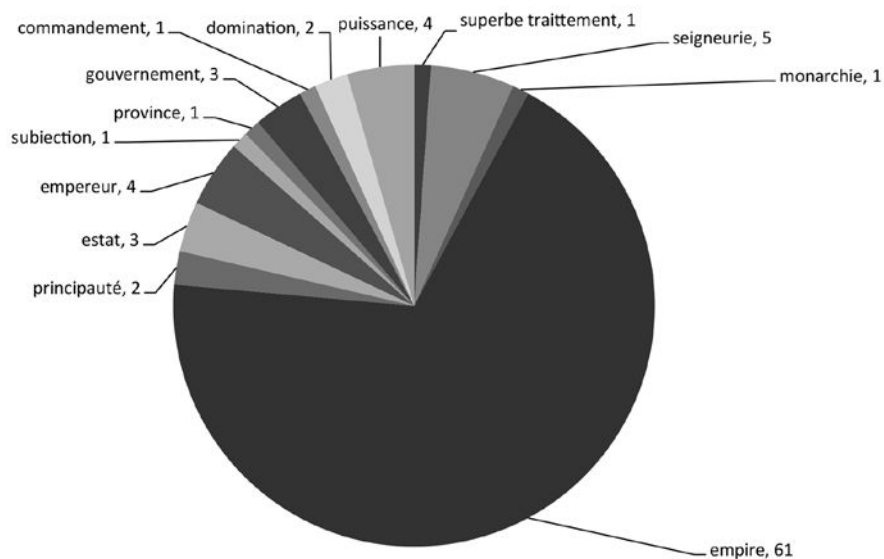FIGURE 2.6   Seigneurie *level 1*

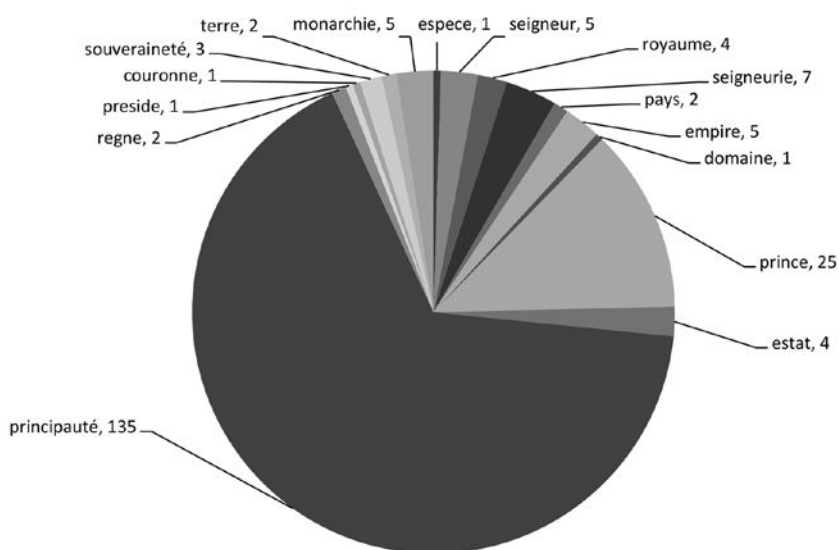

FIGURE 2.7   Dominio

FIGURE 2.8 Imperio

FIGURE 2.9 Principato

It is thus possible to state a thesis about the language of *The Prince* and the effects of translations of the vocabulary of politics. Machiavelli expresses and seeks to explain the workings of 'new things' that are complex. Their 'semantic territories' crisscross and overlap. There is interference at the origin in the analysis of the workings of politics. The effects of translation reinforce this interference (a series of terms tending to become equivalent and to globally designate the place and the forms of power: *état*, *empire*, *puissance*, *seigneurie*, *principaulté*, *gouvernement*, *domination*...). Obviously this does not prevent there also being principal meanings, which can be traced in the frequency of recurring translations.

The use of the HM software tool has thus enabled the stating and verification of the hypothesis of a constant tension in meaning and of the polysemy of the terms employed. This polysemy arises out of the way in which Machiavelli, using the same terms with meanings that are sometimes different, carves out the new objects or the forms of political action in order to understand them and to have his readers understand their workings. This hypothesis of the tension in meaning leads to a specific reading of *The Prince*. It accepts from the outset that there co-exist different meanings of the terms, which, therefore, must not be considered *stricto sensu* as concepts, in order to avoid the necessity of talking of incoherences or contradictions, or to decide to forcibly reconstruct a coherence to the detriment of tensions. The tension in meaning is an intrinsic element of the very description of the new objects that Machiavelli set out to describe, with the means of language at his disposal, with the desire of understanding how they work.

5   Reflections on the Act of Translation

The HM tool enables us to understand the different approaches of the translators and clearly see their lexical and syntactic choices. Several examples of this use of the HM software follow below. These will envisage some significant aspects of how Vintimille, Cappel, Gohory and Gaspard d'Auvergne translated *The Prince*.

The characteristic that strikes the reader of the translation by Jacques de Vintimille is the very systematic presence of additions, which are elucidations or even commentaries of the text that he translates.[16] Nevertheless, and this is

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16   A few examples are sufficient to demonstrate this (the additions are in italics). P III, 42: accreu la puissance d'un grand seigneur, *qui estoit l'Eglise*, mis en icelle un estrangier très puissant, *qui estoit le roy d'Hespaigne*; P III, 43: Lesquelles cinq faultes pouvoient durant sa

not initially apparent, Vintimille often respects more scrupulously than the others the polysemy of the words used by Machiavelli. Thus, he generally translates *stato* as *estat* (*estat* is used by him 89 times against 49–8 for Cappel-Gohory and 36 for Gaspard d'Auvergne) and this choice of essentially retaining the same translation shows a form of understanding of the fact that the polysemy of the term can make sense for designating a complex reality such as the Machiavellian *stato*.

Cappel and Gaspard d'Auvergne, the authors of the two 1553 translations, translate in very different ways from each other. Gaspard d'Auvergne, like Vintimille, tends to make additions and commentaries unlike Cappel who stays much closer to the text. Contrary to Vintimille, both tend to disrespect the polysemy and the tension in meaning present in Machiavelli's text. They translate the same words with numerous different French words with Gaspard d'Auvergne doing this much more often than Cappel. Gohory's 1571 translation was published at the same time as his translation of the *Discourses on Livy*. It is practically – give or take a word here and there – the same as Cappel's (and a parallel reading constantly proves this). Its characteristics are therefore exactly the same as those of the Cappel translation: no additions, explanations or commentaries but a relative respect for the polysemy (greater than in the d'Auvergne translation but much less than in the Vintimille). Implicitly, by implying that Cappel did not know a word of Italian, Gohory leaves one to understand that he did not 'copy' the translation of Cappel but, as it were, he recovered his own possession. Similarly, he republished in his name the *Discourses* (which he had published without the name of the translator in 1544 for book I and 1548 for books II and III) at the same time as Hierosme de Marnef and Guillaume Cavellat published a joint edition of the *Discourses* and *The Prince* (the latter in the Gaspard d'Auvergne translation and the former in the un-named translation which was in fact by Gohory).[17] It is quite difficult to decide between the two hypotheses since, although there is undoubtedly

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vie ne luy redonder à dommaige, *pour la grande puissance et réputation qu'il avoit,* s'il n'y eust adjouxté la sixieme qui fut quand il se rua sur les Vénitiens pour les priver de leur estat; P IV, 17: Ce néantmoins lesdictz successeurs maintindrent *paisiblement la monarchie de toute l'Asie qui auparavant avoit esté dominée par les Perses et dernièrement par Darius*; P VI, 6: *Voilà donc la première facilité qu'il y a à maintenir telz estatz. C'est que chacun redoubte la vertu ou la fortune de ce nouveau prince.*

17   'Pareillement sur le livre du Prince retombant n'agueres entre mes mains nonobstant deux traductions d'icelluy ia publiées par deux personnes diverses: dont l'un a esté mon familier et domestique, qui n'avoit jamais mis un pied à cent lieues de l'Italie, de l'autre ie n'en suis pas plus certain, lequel on m'a rapporté avoir voulu n'agueres usurper le labeur de ma traduction ancienne des discours dont est question, soubs ombre que ie n'y avoys

Segment 15			
Ne ti basta spegnere il sangue del' Principe, perche vi rimangono quelli Signori che si fanno capi delle nuove alterationi, et non li potendo contentare ne spegnere, perdi quello stato qualunche volta venga l'occasione.			
Jacques de Vintimille	**Guillaume Cappel**	**Gaspard d'Auvergne**	**Jacques Gohory**
et ne suffict pas avoir exterminé la lignée du prince, pour ce qu'il y reste plusieurs autres seigneurs qui se font chefz de nouvelles rébellions, dont il advient que tu perds l'estat sitost qu'ilz treuvent l'occasion de révolter : et ce pour cause que tu ne les peulx ny contenter, ny destruyre.	Outre ce qu'il ne suffit pas d'estaindre le sang royal, pource qu'il demeurera tousiours des Seigneurs, qui se feront chefz de nouvelles mutations, lesquelz d'autant qu'on ne peut contenter ni ruiner la premiere occasion qui se presentera, tous les estaz gaignez seront perduz.	Et ne sera pas assez en cest endroit d'abolir la race, et le sang du Roy, parautant que les autres Seigneurs demeurent tousiours, qui se feront a un besoing chefz de nouveaux changemens. Et ne les pouvant du tout contenter, ne destruire, il faut necessairement que tu en lasches la prise, et soie dechassé aux premieres occasions, qui s'offriront contre toy.	Outre ce qu'il ne suffit pas d'estraindre le sang Royal, pource qu'il demeurera tousiours des Seigneurs qui se feront chefs de nouvelles mutations : lesquels d'autant qu'on ne peut contenter, ne ruiner, à la premiere occasion qui s'offrira, tous les estats acquis seront perdus.

FIGURE 2.10   *Prince, IV, 15*

plagiarism, one cannot be certain who the plagiarist is. However, it is certain that Gohory defines a line of translation that is definitely that of 'Cappel-Gohory' and is opposed to that of Gaspard d'Auvergne: 'Or a il [*i.e.* Gaspard d'Auvergne] tenu une voye contraire à la mienne de iuger tousiours son style meilleur, d'autant que il s'eslongneroit plus de son auteur, lequel avoit premier anticipé les motz propres et naturelz, et les termes d'estat' (However he followed a route contrary to mine in always judging his style better, all the more so as he strayed further from his author, who had first anticipated the proper and natural words, and the terms of State). The commentary on the style of the translation by Gaspard d'Auvergne is perfectly appropriate and it should be sufficient to provide an example that will enable the reader to compare the styles of the translators (P IV, 15)(See Figure 2.10).[18]

6   Some Differences and Their Consequences: The Example of *Il Principe* XXI, 24

Blado (then Giunta) reads, 'Ma la prudentia consiste in saper' conoscer' le qualitati de gli inconvenienti et *prendere il modo tristo per buono*'. Yet the translations of the last clauses of the sentence are different and give the impression

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inseré mon nom, comme en un aprentissage qu'il se vouloit bien attribuer pour chef d'œuvre' (Gohory 1571).

18   In the translation by Gaspard d'Auvergne; the additions are: '*en cest endroit, la race et, tousiours, a un besoing, il faut necessairement que tu en lasches la prise et soie dechassé, qui s'offriront contre toi.*'

that Vintimille had a different source text to the three others. Vintimille translates coherently relative to the text of Blado and Giunta, 'prendre le mauvais party pour bon' (to take the bad decision for good), the three others seem to have a text which says that one must take the 'moins mauvais pour bon' (the least bad for good) (D'Auvergne: 'prendre le moins mauvais pour le bon'; Cappel: 'choisir le moins mauvais pour le meilleur'; Gohory: 'choisir le moindre pour le meilleur'). However, the text that says 'prendre le moins mauvais pour bon' is the text of the manuscripts used in the various successive critical editions, from Lisio in 1899 to Inglese in 2013: 'pigliare el men tristo per buono'. A verification of the post-1532 editions shows that from 1535 (s.l.)., the editions include the variant 'prendere il mancho tristo per buono' and that they exist simultaneously with editions that continue to reproduce the Blado-Giunta text. Is this an *ad sensum* correction or did the editors who chose the 'manco tristo' variant have access to manuscripts? This cannot be known with certainty, but it does seem necessary to relativise (even if it is globally correct) the idea according to which the Blado edition is the starting point for all the Italian editions until the end of the eighteenth century (when the manuscripts started to be used to establish the text, the first critical text being the 1899 Lisio edition). Nevertheless, while the vast majority of these editions depend on the tradition of the *editio princeps*, they introduce minor differences, which are then repeated and can have interpretative consequences.[19] In order to obtain an exact idea of the texts of *The Prince* that readers could have held in their hands, it would be useful to undertake systematic research into these ancient editions including both comparison and history.

I entitled this contribution *uno piccolo dono*. The HM software tool and its web version *HyperMachiavel* are indeed dedicated to the community of researchers who are interested in Machiavelli as well as the theoretical and practical issues of translation. The web version is already available online; the HM software tool can be shared with those who would like to use it. In particular, it is possible to envisage the comparison of translations in other languages. I hope that the initial results that I have just presented will serve to convince researchers that this is a useful 'little gift' indeed.

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19   Concerning P XVI, Jérémie Barthas has already demonstrated this in the *temuto vs. tenuto* variant (Barthas 2013). I have also noted this in P XXV, in the *miserabile vs. mirabile* variant.

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Of 'Extravagant' Writing: *The Prince*, Chapter IX

Romain Descendre

The difficulty of interpreting chapter 9 of *The Prince* ('*De principatu civili*') is well known.[1] It is attributable equally to 1) the intrinsic difficulties of the notion of the *principe civile* (the 'civil prince'), 2) the problematical nature of the construction of the whole chapter and 3) the very unusual absence, for Machiavelli, of any convincing historical example enabling a better understanding of the subject-matter. Moreover, this last point has often led critics to propose a very 'Florentine' interpretation of the *principe civile*: some identifying this prince as the old and/or new Medici, others as Piero Soderini or even Girolamo Savonarola.[2] Certain analysts have developed a very pro-Medici interpretation of Machiavelli (a 'Machiavelli pallesco') whereas others see the expression of his republican loyalty.[3] Nevertheless, the reading of the generally contradictory and indecisive main interpretations of the chapter leads me to the conviction that although the approaches linking Machiavelli to the political situation in Florence are both necessary and legitimate, ultimately they do not facilitate the clarification of the text; some of these interpretations even go so far as to blur even further the understanding of the text. From my perspective, it does not seem conceivable that the absence of any mention of a 'modern' case of the *principe civile* corresponds to a kind of fear on the part of the

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1 Sasso 1976; Cadoni 1971; Sasso 1974; Cadoni 1974; Larivaille 1982; Sasso 1988; Inglese 1992; Larivaille 1998; Martelli 1999; Fournel and Zancarini 2000a; Frosini 2005; Inglese 2006; Martelli 2006.

2 For these two respective interpretative lines, see, above all, the work of Giorgio Inglese and the work of Mario Martelli. It goes without saying that the French reference, proposed by Cadoni, has little support these days. Quite rightly, I feel, in the specific case of chapter 9 even if it is true that the different analyses of the French monarchy proposed by Machiavelli from his *Ritratto di cose di Francia* to the *Discorsi* constitute an important element for the understanding of what he means by *civiltà* when he applies the term to an area which is not strictly republican (concerning this, I would like to refer readers to Descendre 2014a and the forthcoming article Descendre 2015). But if one has to make a decision, it seems, in any case, more plausible to see in the figure of the civil prince a reference to the Medici rather than a criticism of the recent republican period.

3 See, respectively, Martelli 2006 and, for an opposite but more prudent interpretation, Fournel and Zancarini 2000a.

author – even if he wrote shortly after undergoing the *strappado*. It seems to me, however, that this absence of any contemporary exemplification should encourage us to account for the specific dynamics of the reflection, in its deployment within the chapter, by favouring a textual analysis and an internal approach. At the risk of appearing rash, I would like to attempt such an analysis in the hope that it might contribute to untangling certain knots. This reading will first examine the semantic aspects of the expression *principe civile* as Machiavelli defines it at the beginning of the chapter and will then turn to the two following moments of the text in which the discourse is displaced.

1 Civil Prince and Roman Law

Is the expression *principe civile* an oxymoron, a contradiction in terms, or a paradox? In the context of fifteenth and early sixteenth century Florence it can indeed appear to be in contradiction with the typically Florentine political notion of *civilità*. If one associates *civile* with the word 'republican' the expression is all the more problematic. What is more, this is a *hápax* in the writings of Machiavelli: he did not employ it again either because he did not have the opportunity – but the content of the *Discursus florentinarum rerum* could have led him to do so – or because he recognised the non-functional nature of the expression outside *The Prince*. However, in the antique Roman historiography the very idea of a 'civil prince' had a long tradition, consubstantial with the birth of the principate. The invention of the *principe civile* is indeed wrongly attributed to Machiavelli: in the sources of the imperial period, the *princeps* is said *civilis* – 'citizen' – to signify that he is not breaking with the tradition of the *res publica*. But the ideal of *civilitas* does not belong to the republican period: it rises precisely when the Republic falls, to emphasise the legality of the new *imperium*, the submission of the prince to the law, his respect for senate, people and magistrates.[4] Citizen in a community of citizens whose rights he guarantees, the Roman *princeps* is *civilis*, in Pliny the Younger, Tacitus and Suetonius, from the moment that he does not behave like an absolute monarch. As for Livy – the friend of Augustus – he already uses the word *civile* to qualify the respect patricians show to the laws or to the tribunes, or the short term of the exercise of a magistracy (*Ab urbe condita*, XXXIII xlvi 3; VII v 2; XXVII vi 4).

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4 Lana 1972; Wallace-Hadrill 1982; Pisapia 1997.

The Roman ideal of *civilitas* survived in the Florentine *vivere civile* and even more in the *Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Tito Livio*.[5] It remains implicit in the *Prince*: herein too the language of Roman political law is chosen to define the *principe civile*, but not in the antique Roman way, as this definition does not deal with the exercise of the prince's power but with its origin. The prince is *civile* because the 'favour' of the citizens elevates him to the principate.

What specifically defines the *principe civile* is the agreement among the citizens to bring him to supreme power.[6] Yet this completely explicit definition is in no way unusual or paradoxical for such an expert in the 'istorie' as Machiavelli. For whosoever assiduously reads the early books of Livy and is accustomed to asking the Ancients the 'reasons' for their actions, this genesis of princely power must appear perfectly 'ordinary' in the specifically Machiavellian meaning of the word since this genesis corresponds to the *ordini* of Rome.

According to the ancient sources, how does one become king during the Roman monarchy? By the original legal act that is the command of the people by means of which the people imparts an obligatory nature to the order it gives: namely the *iussum populi*.[7] In several passages, both Livy and Dionysius of Halicarnassus devote particular attention to the crucial moment when each of the kings is constituted as such by the people. In his first book, Livy particularly emphasises the legally problematic case in which the favour of the people was not granted in accordance with the correct forms: in particular, the fact that the young Tarquinius contested the legitimacy of the reign of Servius Tullius by insinuating that he reigned without authorisation from the command of the people, 'se iniussu populi regnare' (*Ab urbe condita* I xlvi 1). Livy explains that this is why, once he had gained the favour of the plebs ('conciliata prius voluntate plebis'), Servius asked the people if it wanted him as king and obtained greater agreement than anyone else before him ('tantoque consensu quanto haud quisquam alius ante rex est declaratus').

Another passage, however, is of even greater interest for us. In it Livy indicates that after the death of Ancus Marcius the Roman people had made Tarquin the Elder king with unanimous approval: 'eum [...] ingenti consensu populus Romanus regnare iussit' (*Ab urbe condita*, I xxxv 6). Machiavelli

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5   Descendre 2014b.

6   Machiavelli 1995 (P 9, 1): '... quando uno privato cittadino [...] con il favore delli altri sua cittadini diventa principe della sua patria, – il quale si può chiamare principato civile'. For my commentary it is necessary to quote *Il Principe* using Giorgio Inglese's critical edition which identifies segments as well as chapters: the first number indicates the chapter, the second indicates the segment. The same goes for the *Discorsi*: the Roman numeral indicates the book, the second the chapter and the third the segment (see Machiavelli 1984).

7   *Ab urbe condita*, I xvii 9.

happens to allude to this phrase in chapter 4 of the third book of the *Discorsi* when he asserts that Tarquin the Elder believed that he did indeed legally possess his kingdom, since it had been given to him by the people and confirmed by the Senate ([gli pareva] *possedere quel regno giuridicamente, essendogli stato dato dal popolo e confermato dal senato*).[8] It is significant that Machiavelli should have taken even more care than his source to emphasise the legal nature of the delegation of power: both through the use of the adverb *giuridicamente* and through the mention of ratification by the Senate. The legal nature of the constituent power of the people, that is of the act by which the people delegates its power to the prince, appeared in the fact that this *iussum* was realised in a law, the *lex curiata de imperio* (later improperly renamed *lex regia*), through which the *imperium* was conferred (first upon the king and later upon the *princeps* or emperor).[9] On the other hand, this act originally had no need for confirmation by the Senate. This detail provided by Machiavelli is thus a form of hypercorrection; Livy only indicated the *iussum* of the people. This hypercorrection specifically contributes to increasing the legal character of this accession to power: it indeed became the custom that the Senate should ratify the decision of the people in *comitia* taken by virtue of the *de imperio* law. One can also think, however, that this erroneous mention of the Senate came naturally to Machiavelli given that, to his eyes, the relationship between the prince and the citizens who have chosen him is always a relationship between the prince and the 'dua umori diversi' composing the city, namely, the people and the greats (that is, the Senators in Rome).

In all events, using the *Discorsi* to clarify chapter 9 of *The Prince* seems to be justified on several counts. Firstly because the *principe civile* is never defined by any other means than through his mode of accession to power, that is, through the specific fact that he is voluntarily brought to power by the citizens. The point is made twice, at the beginning of chapters 8 and 9: the case of the *principe civile* is solely that of the 'privato cittadino' who 'con il favore delli altri sua cittadini diventa principe della sua patria' (*Il Principe*, 8, 2 and 9, 1). There is no major difference between this accession to the principate by means of the favour of the members of the city and the accession of Tarquin to the royal dignity by means of the *iussum* and the *consensus* of the people. According to the terms of the definition provided by Machiavelli, the *principe civile* corresponds to the central institution of sovereign power in Rome. At the risk of wandering away from strictly Machiavellian sources, that is, from the texts

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8 Machiavelli 1984 (D III.4, 3).

9 For a complete panorama concerning the *leges regiae*, the activity of the *comitia curiata* and, in particular, the curiate laws, see Bujuklic 1998.

written and commented by him, we could perhaps go so far as to wonder if, more widely, there is not in this idea of the *principe civile* the distant echo of the lively debates on the *lex regia* which were omnipresent in the pre-modern legal tradition. This 'Ancient law' by which the Roman people granted to the *princeps* all its *potestas* and its *imperium*, was the very source of his legitimacy (*Codex* 1, 17, 1, 7; *Digesta* 1, 4, 1 pr.; *Institutes* 1, 2, 6). For every interpreter of Roman law or jurist in the service of princes, there was no doubting that the *princeps* held his legitimacy from a legal act in which the people had entrusted its power to one of their number.[10] The people had conferred this power. In reiterating these data, I do not intend to suggest that the *principe civile* should be given a legal interpretation: whereas jurists examine the transfer of popular sovereignty in order to emphasise its legitimacy as well as the extent and the limits of the *potestas* of the prince, Machiavelli is interested in the political force which this transfer does or does not confer on the prince. Nevertheless, the very idea of the *principe civile*, far from constituting in itself an oxymoron or a paradox, was present at the very core of the *lex de imperio*, the practice of which, in the era of the kings, is endlessly described in Livy's first book. It was present in the *lex de imperio*, that is to say also present in the *lex regia*, according to the name used to refer to this idea in the legal texts of the imperial period when it was applied to the *princeps*.

2   'Avere il populo amico'

In the third book of the *Discorsi*, Machiavelli's evocation of the legal nature (i.e. sanctioned by the people) of the power of Tarquin the Elder is enlightening regarding the comprehension of the *principe civile*: this effect is also attributable to the specific discursive logic of the passage in question which bears a certain resemblance in terms of its broader argumentative structure to the first part of chapter 9 of *The Prince*. To counter the idea that the original legality of the reign of Tarquin could have sufficed to ensure its continuity, Machiavelli asserts that, on the contrary, it deceived him and led him to commit a political error: 'Tarquinio Prisco fu ingannato da parergli possedere quel regno giuridicamente, essendogli stato dato dal Popolo e confermato dal Senato'. It is not sufficient to have been brought to power by the people or even to have been

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10   For the glossers and commentators, the whole issue was to know if the transfer pertained to an alienation or a delegation (Cortese 1964, vol. 2, p. 171 et seq.); for the imperial, royal or curial jurists, the issue was the determination of the extent to which law reinforced monarchic power or limited it in favour of popular control (Kantorowicz 1961).

confirmed by the Senate, it is above all necessary to conserve this power. In other words, a legally established principate does not constitute a politically secure principate. What matters is not so much the origin of power but the conditions of its exercise. The warning illustrated by the example of Tarquin the Elder is directly addressed to the prince: it deals with the exercise of his power and asserts that 'no prince' – including one who has been legally chosen by the *iussum* of the people – 'can ever be assured of his principate while those who have been dispossessed of it live'.[11] In a different vein, in chapter 9 of *The Prince*, the political warning asserts that no matter whether the prince was brought to power by the greats or the people granting him its favour, he must rely upon the support of the people. In both cases, however, the importance of the origin of power diminishes in comparison with the conditions of its exercise: only these conditions are determining in the conservation of princely power. In *The Prince*, the opposition between the two types of *principe civile* – 'colui che viene al principato con lo aiuto de' grandi' and 'colui che arriva al principato con il favore popolare' (P 9, 4–5) – counts rather less than the secondary opposition, in which it seems to be resolved (P 9, 8), that is, the opposition between the prince 'who has the people for enemy' and the prince who has the greats as his enemies. However, this opposition concerns not only the *principe civile* but also all new princes and even every prince. As early as segment 6 and continuing through segment 13, Machiavelli develops a line of argumentation that extends far beyond the sole issue of the *principe civile* (whose genesis is *civile*). He returns to this initial issue in segments 14 to 17 because of the first double conclusion: the prince who is brought to power by the people must conserve its friendship; the prince who is brought to power by the greats must befriend the people. This first conclusion is, however, explicitly subsumed within a general conclusion which for Machiavelli constitutes a rule for every new prince whoever he might be: 'Concluderò solo che a uno principe è necessario avere il populo amico, altrimenti non ha, nelle avversità, remedio' (P 9, 18). Consequently, there is no reason to be surprised that Machiavelli should immediately provide the example of Nabis. All the ancient sources paint a particularly black picture of Nabis.[12] Machiavelli took his example from Livy who reminded his readers that Nabis had usurped the throne of Sparta and as a tyrant in origin, like other tyrants of this city, he was the very opposite of the *principe civile* (Livy XXXIV 32 2). Why mention an example of a notorious tyrant *ex defectu tituli* in a chapter supposedly entirely devoted to the most

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11   Machiavelli 1984, D III.4, 5: 'si può avvertire ogni principe che non viva mai sicuro del suo principato, finché vivono coloro che ne sono stati spogliati'.

12   Birgalias 2005.

perfect opposite, the prince called 'civil' given the fact that he has been brought to power by the will of the people? It is most striking that while no contemporary case is mentioned, the only example given in this chapter illustrates the issue of the prince capable of basing his power on the people while being a notorious usurper.

Facts must be faced: Machiavelli quite simply no longer talks of the civil prince in a large portion of the chapter that he claims to devote to this subject. Apparently borne along by the velocity of his reflection and writing, he passes without a solution of continuity from the issue of the prince brought to power by his fellow citizens (and we can hardly insist enough that this is the only definition he gives of the *principe civile*) to the issue of the prince who reinforces his power by relying on the support of the people; this prince is not necessarily a *principe civile* in the Machiavellian sense but can equally be a prince such as Nabis who acceded to the principate 'per qualche via scelerata e nefaria', like those he evokes in the preceding chapter (P 8, 2).

Moreover, attention paid to the structure of chapter 8 provides a better understanding of the structure of chapter 9, given the extent to which they function as parallels. After developing the issue of the accession to the principate of wicked men (by means of two examples: Agathocles and Oliverotto da Fermo), Machiavelli poses the question of why some of them conserve their power unperturbed. He answers that this arises from the fact that cruelties can be 'male usate o bene usate' (P 8, 23); instances of 'bene usate' cruelties are only used in the taking of power so that the prince can then 'fondarsi sopra e' sua sudditi' (P 8, 28). Thus the issue of the taking of power is merely the point of entry for a reflection the fundamental stake of which is to find a means of 'founding' power on the 'subjects'. This founding is indeed essential for the passage from the phase of accession to the principate to the phase of conserving this principate. Already, the most important element here is the exercise of a power ensuring the solidity of the link between the prince and his subjects. It is true that in chapter 8 Machiavelli does not yet distinguish between the two 'humours' between which the subjects or citizens are shared. However, he does indicate where the true 'foundation' of the prince's power lies: not in the origin of his power, but in its exercise and in the relationship between the prince and those upon whom he exercises this power.

In all events, this parallel with chapter 8 and, more widely, in Machiavelli's texts, the recurrent and persistent nature of the necessary link between the prince and the people can reinforce our idea that the expression *principato civile* does not have a double meaning, contrary to the position held by Gennaro Sasso.[13] In his analysis of chapter 9, Sasso distinguishes between a formal

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13   Sasso 1988, p. 360 et seq.

meaning regarding the genesis of power and a substantial meaning regarding the exercise of this power. He goes so far as to assert: 'la vera ed autentica "civiltà", quella che, nei fatti, garantisce forza ed efficienza, deve andarsi a ricercare non solo nella genesi, ma anche, e più, nella qualità e nel concreto esercizio del potere: il quale, dunque, tanto più, in questo senso pregnante, sarà "civile" quanto più venga esercitato in favore del popolo'.[14] I believe this is forcing an over-interpretation upon the text and burdening it with a consequential and conceptual logic that it simply does not contain. Machiavelli simply does not use the term 'civil' to define the prince who exercises his power in favour of the people.

Let us synthesise: *civiltà* is never at any moment determined as that which 'guarantees force and efficacy', no more so in chapter 9 of *The Prince* than elsewhere in Machiavelli's writings; in chapter 9, the *civile* prince is not defined by his exercise of power but only by the path followed to acquire this power; the necessity of the philo-popular exercise of power does not concern the civil prince in particular but the prince in general. We might add that all the uses of the word *civile* in the other texts by Machiavelli undermine the rather rash idea that there 'can be no doubt' that 'Cesare Borgia, Francesco Sforza, Nabis and Agathocles are "civil" princes'.[15] Let us take as a starting point the use of the adjective to be found in a text which, chronologically, is close to *The Prince*: that is, the fragment of a letter to Francesco Vettori from February-March 1514, in which Machiavelli relates to his friend the actions of Lorenzo de' Medici. He emphasises that 'l'ordine della sua casa è cosi ordinato, che ancora vi si vegga assai magnificenza e liberalità, nondimeno non si parte da la vita civile; talmente che in tutti e progressi suoi estrinseci e intrinseci non vi si vede cosa che offenda, o che sia reprensibile; di che ciascuno pare ne resti contentissimo'. Giorgio Inglese's perfectly convincing commentary insists that, in this passage, 'civil life' indicates 'uno stile rispettoso delle consuetudini cittadine e alieno da atteggiamenti signorili o "tiranneschi"'.[16] This meaning is thus very close to the signification of this expression in the *Discorsi*, or in the writings of Guicciardini.[17] It is a meaning certainly distinct from the one assigned by the only explicit definition of the *principe civile* ('civil' through its genesis), but most similar to the *civilitas* granted to the *princeps* by the Roman historians, which renders untenable the interpretation according to which the true civil prince is

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14   Sasso 1988, p. 360.
15   Sasso 1988, p. 361.
16   Inglese 2006, p. 238, note 101.
17   Fournel and Zancarini 2009, pp. 99–124.

the prince who is capable of founding his power upon a people which he favours, including those princes who do so by cruel and tyrannical means.

3 'Dall'ordine civile allo assoluto'

We still have to deal with the most difficult question posed by the last paragraph of chapter 9 that begins with the assertion: 'Sogliono questi principi periclitare quando sono per salire dall'ordine civile allo assoluto' (P 9, 23). I have adopted the lesson of the Munich manuscript now chosen by Giorgio Inglese: 'questi principi' not 'questi principati'. It seems to me that both this lesson and my preceding development enable us to corroborate Paul Larivaille's interpretation, which has been adopted and reinforced by Jean-Louis Fournel and Jean-Claude Zancarini:[18] that is, the expression 'questi principi' designates new princes in general, not 'civil princes'. To be specific: the expression does not refer to civil princes no matter what meaning might be given to the term: whether this is the meaning explicitly given by Machiavelli, i.e. those who have been brought to the principate by the citizens, or the secondary meaning generally attributed to it by the commentators, i.e. those who exercise their power by relying upon the people. Indeed, what Machiavelli evokes from this point on is no longer the modality of accession to power (*scelerata* or *civile*), nor the social groups for the advantage of which and with the help of which the prince can or must exercise his power (the greats or the people), but the *ordine* of this power: 'ordine civile' or '[ordine] assoluto'. This is the exercise of power in its institutional dimension (an institutional dimension which massively corresponds to the different uses of the singular form of the word *ordine* in the first book of the *Discorsi*).[19] More specifically, this is the issue of sovereignty, whether it is shared or not by the prince in the exercise of his power, or, more exactly, the sharing of the 'command' (P 9, 24–5) – that is also of the *imperium* which, in Rome, was shared between various magistratures, under both the kings and

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18   Machiavel 2000, p. 333.

19   The use of *ordine*, in the singular, to designate an institution or a measure of an institutional order is verified in most of the chapters of book I of the *Discorsi* (this is less true of books II and III; which can undoubtedly be explained by the preponderance of political and/or military themes, contrary to book I in which legal institutional issues are of greater importance). But the expression *ordine civile*, in the singular, does not appear there. On the other hand, it appears in the plural, in chapter 11, in the phrase 'ordini civili e militari', referring to the very institution of the Senate which confirms our analysis: 'E si vede che a Romolo, per ordinare il Senato, e per fare altri ordini civili e militari, non gli fu necessario dell'autorità di Dio …'.

the republic, but which tended not to be shared under the principate and the empire.

Therefore, Machiavelli makes clear the meaning of the prince 'elevating himself' (*salire*) to the 'absolute' order when he indicates that the prince resorts to be 'seizing absolute authority', 'pigliare l'autorità assoluta' (P 9, 25). In the specific context of this passage, this means refusing to share his power of command (his *imperium*), refusing to command 'through the intervention of magistratures' ('per mezzo de' magistrati') and, by this, refusing to allow certain citizens to 'receive from magistratures' a power of command ('avere e' comandamenti da' magistrati', P 9, 24–5). The 'ordine assoluto' should be understood as the opposite of the 'ordine civile' (in the *Discorsi*, the work in which he uses the adjectives 'civile' and 'assoluto' the most often, they also clearly function as antonyms, no matter how precise a meaning is given to them). Given his meaning of the 'ordine assoluto', I believe that, here, the *ordine civile* does indeed correspond to the case in which princes 'command through the intervention of magistratures' and that the *ordine assoluto* corresponds to the case in which they 'command in person'. That is how I would specify the meaning of segment 23 and the first proposition of segment 24: 'Questi principi [nuovi] sogliono periclitare quando sono per salire dallo ordine civile allo assoluto. Perché questi principi [nuovi] o comandano per loro medesimi [e sono cioè nell'ordine assoluto], o per mezzo dei magistrati [e sono cioè nell'ordine civile]'. The continuation of segment 24 already provides the beginning of the explanation of why princes endanger themselves when they attempt to pass from the civil order to the absolute order: because when they command through the intervention of magistratures, that is when they are within the civil order, they are made all the weaker as they share power with other citizens. Let us now return to segment 23: once a prince who has followed the civil order, that is a prince who has governed through the intervention of magistratures, decides to exercise sole command and prepares himself for this, he 'experiences danger' and 'he imperils himself'. Such is, indeed, the meaning of the Latinism *periclitare*, which refers to *periculum*, that is, in its prime meaning, to experience and trial, and, in its second meaning, to risk and danger. These two meanings are present in Machiavelli's writing and are condensed, as can be seen in the concluding sentence of the chapter, in which, in order to better designate the action evoked in the first sentence of the paragraph, that is the passage from civil order to absolute order, he summarises it in the single phrase: 'questa esperienza pericolosa' (P 9, 27). Why is this a dangerous experience? Because citizens who have possessed power by holding these magistratures quite simply have no intention of renouncing them, *a fortiori* in contrary or uncertain times. Times which, on the one hand, are of the

utmost interest to Machiavelli: it might seem obvious but it cannot be said too often when interpreting this text which deals not with 'the prince' in general but with the new principates in time of war; a text written in the thick of the Italian Wars and above all under the influence of these wars which transformed the state of emergency into a permanent characteristic of Italian political life. On the other hand, such times provide opportunities for both the prince and the 'citizens and the subjects' to 'variare' or 'mutare' governments.

We can certainly presume quite a lot of things. For example, that Machiavelli is thinking of the greats when he evokes the citizens who 'receive from magistratures their commands', and thus that he distrusts the *ordine civile* and even adopts a perfectly pro-Medici position[20] (even the position of an ultra *pallesco*![21]) which consists of recommending that the Medici should make the change towards 'absolute' government as quickly as possible before it is too late. Conversely, it can be thought that the antithesis formed by the two adjectives *civile* and *assoluto* should be understood as having a meaning identical to that found in the *Discorsi*. In the *Discorsi* the *civile* government cannot be reduced to republican regimes alone but corresponds to any supreme power which subjects itself to the laws (the King of France, for example), whereas *assoluto* government is not only *legibus solutus* but is even explicitly assimilated to tyrannical government. Given this, we could interpret the 'ordine civile' as the regime followed by princes who respect the laws and submit to them. That indeed is the semantic core of the 'vivere civile' as Machiavelli expounds it in the *Discorsi*, which, moreover, contributes to placing it much closer to legalist aspirations than had long been believed, aspirations that, within the medieval legal tradition, were nourished by the numerous commentaries on the *Digna vox* law of the Justinian Code.[22] But this reference to the law and, even more significantly, to the prince who voluntarily submits to it is nowhere to be found in chapter 9. If this reference is present and decisive in other texts, it would be out of place in the general context of *The Prince*. This explains why I do not support this hypothesis any more than its opposite. I do not support the hypothesis that consists in believing that, for republican political reasons, the intent behind chapter 9 was to encourage the Medici not to 'salire dall'ordine civile allo assoluto'. It is true that these two mutually incompatible hypotheses – the republican and the *pallesca* – are not individually entirely incompatible with what Machiavelli writes in the paragraph. But this is not *what he wrote*, neither is it the *explicit message which he conveyed*.

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20   Larivaille 1982, and 1998.

21   Martelli 2006.

22   Descendre 2015. More extensively: Quaglioni 2011.

However, this message is clear and can be formulated in two points: 1) when the prince shares command with several magistratures, he is exposed to a very great danger when he decides to exercise sole command, in his own person; 2) whatever the mode of command (whether the civil 'order', shared with several magistratures, or the absolute 'order', exercised by him alone), the prince must act in such a way that 'the citizens need the State and him' (P 9, 27).

In the case of shared command, the first point clarifies and specifies the general conclusion of the preceding chapter: 'E debbe soprattutto uno princi-pe vivere in modo, con e' suoi sudditi, che veruno accidente o di male o di bene lo abbia a fare variare: perché, venendo per li tempi avversi le necessità, tu non se' a tempo al male, e il bene che tu fai non ti giova, perché è iudicato forzato, e non te n'è saputo grado alcuno' (P 8, 30). This is a sentence which, already, deals with the general case of the new prince albeit within a chapter devoted to the particular case of the prince who 'per qualche via scelerata e nefaria' el-evates himself to the principate: we have already noted the reproduction of the same dynamics in chapter 9. This very clear condemnation of the 'variare' of the prince, in a situation marked by urgency and adversity, thus appears as one of the strong political messages of the treatise, whether this change concerns the way in which the prince acts or the institutional configuration of his power. Moreover, in a specular manner, in a completely different place, Machiavelli enjoins republicans to not 'variare l'ordine' of their actions when they decide to take power by means of a conspiracy. We find similar vocabulary to that used in chapters 8 and 9 of *The Prince* and in the long chapter of the *Discorsi* devoted to conspiracies, more specifically when dealing with the 'pericoli' to which one is exposed when putting them into execution (D III.6, 100). In chap-ters 8 and 9 the condemnation of the *variare* extends beyond the particular cases of 'wicked' and 'civil' princes, so, similarly, in this passage of book III of the *Discorsi*, which is significantly illustrated by the conspiracy of the Pazzi against Lorenzo and Giuliano de' Medici, this same condemnation is expressed in a general rule which extends beyond the single issue of conspiracies: 'Dico adunque come e' non è cosa alcuna che faccia tanto sturbo o impedimento a tutte le azioni degli uomini, quanto è in uno instante, sanza avere tempo, avere a variare un ordine e a pervertirlo da quello che si era ordinato prima' (D III.6, 101). Despite the difference between the two contexts and the different mean-ings of the word 'ordine' in these contexts, the political message is expressed in the same terms and is, in the final analysis, identical. To express this meaning in nautical terms: at the critical moment one should never change tack.

The second point, which is expressed in the very last paragraph of chapter 9, 27, restates differently the thesis developed in the long central portion of the chapter 8, 4–22: the 'modo' which allows that citizens should 'sempre et in ogni

qualità di tempo' need the prince and the 'stato' consists in basing power upon the great majority of them, that is the people, and in protecting them from the greats. But in restating this point after developing the other thesis relating to the two 'orders' of princely government and the dangers consisting in passing from one order to the other, Machiavelli lets it be understood that both of these orders are compatible with an exercise of power 'based' upon the people. This is the case of the prince who governs alone, of course, since he can more easily capture the affections of the people. It is, however, also necessarily the case in the 'civil order', when the prince shares his power within an institutional framework including magistratures within its structure. For, how would it be possible to reconcile the fact that Machiavelli qualifies the intention of passing from the civil order to the absolute order as a 'dangerous experience' with the idea, defended by Paul Larivaille or Mario Martelli, that the passage towards the absolute order would be that 'modo' which allows that citizens should need the prince and the *stato*? Rather, we should accept that at the end of the chapter 'the range of possibilities is more open than it appears'.[23]

4   Broken Lines

The specialists of Italian literature and language and, more specifically, the specialists of the language and literature of Florence in Machiavelli's time know how free the Florentines were when it came to syntax. The language of the fifteenth and sixteenth century Tuscan authors often even seems quite chaotic when judged from specifically modern linguistic perspectives marked by the regulation of rule-based usage and the diffusion of normative grammars. In the area of the *questione della lingua* debated during the period in which he was writing his major works, Machiavelli was diametrically opposed to the solutions advocated by Pietro Bembo. These solutions consisted mainly in imitating the written language used a century and a half before by the Tuscan authors, Boccaccio and Petrarch, so that the written vulgar language should become noble, as it were, by means of a stable lexicon and an elevated register, regular and normed morphology and coherent and solemn syntax. These were judged to be the essential conditions for the vulgar language to be able to accede to the status of a literary language shared by all men of letters in Italy. Machiavelli flatly refused this, preferring, on the contrary, a living language, in better agreement with everyday life and the orality; he liked to identify with the language in use in Florence – like a significant proportion of his

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23   Fournel and Zancarini 2000a, p. 334.

compatriots from the preceding century and others after him, more particularly those who attempted to preserve the link, which is so strong in Florentine culture, between the humanities and the popular and bourgeois world of artisans and merchants. But in matters of syntax these authors cared little for aligning their propositions with the rules and even less for putting them into a hierarchical order within a rigid and imposing hypotaxis, quite unlike an author such as Bembo who shielded himself with the regularity of Boccaccio while actually seeking to rival the classical rigour of Cicero. The *ad sensum* constructions, substitutions of subjects, syllepses, anacolutha, in short, the entire phenomenon of syntactic disruption, were not abnormal: far from it, they *were* the norm.

Apart from the fact that in Machiavelli's writings – *The Prince* as well as his other works – the disrupted construction was a perfectly ordinary occurrence, how can this have any relation whatsoever to the interpretation of chapter 9 of *The Prince*? From my point of view, the link can be found in the fact that disruption or breaks seem to characterise not only the syntax of his language but also that of his thinking. Not because this reflection is lacking in rigour, but because it does not comply with rationalist methodological norms which impose the sequential reconstitution of the successive stages of reflection. The text is often written according to the rhythm of a line of thought that proceeds like lightning, by an author who is not preoccupied by following a pre-established plan. Even if the developments which he follows lead him to change the very object of his discourse, he does not bother to inform the reader: one after the other, he pursues the ideas which seem to be the most important to him, even if they do not correspond to the title of the chapter or if they lead unexpectedly to a different understanding of its meaning. He starts by developing the subject that he stated in his title, that is, the civil prince, that private citizen brought to power by his fellow citizens. This then leads him to tackling another issue, admittedly linked to the previous one, but nevertheless quite distinct from it, and above all more important than it: namely, the privilege the prince should grant to the people for the maintenance of his power. This second issue then leads him to deal with a third, once again different to the previous two, but lexically linked to the first by the term *civiltà*: the issue of the prince who, although he shares his power within an institutionally regulated framework, is about to exercise sole command. It appears to be illusory to claim to articulate and unite these three issues under the single notion of the 'civil prince' or the 'civil principate'. Each movement from one to the other of these three issues is realised by means of a disruption in construction. Just as in his use of language, this does not prevent these different propositions from being presented within the same syntax, within the same reflection. But during this long sentence

constituting chapter 9, the 'civil prince' is only the first subject; the only subject to be precisely defined; and the action of which he is the subject – this birth by the will of the citizens – is the only action which is imputed to him as a 'civil prince'. Two other subjects follow and take on greater importance than the first and for precisely this reason they replace him: the prince who founds his power upon the people; and the prince who shares command with other magistratures. The discourse has been self-engendered and, to go beyond the confines of chapter 9, the entire treatise presents coherence within blocks rather than a linear logic, as other scholars have already indicated.[24] This has definitely nothing to do with thinking which would be structurally and profoundly contradictory. Rather, it is the result of the speed of the reflection and the rapidity of a quill dipped in the ink of 'adverse times'.

In a letter from 1521, Machiavelli was defined as 'ut plurimum extravagante di opinione dalle commune et inventore di cose nuove et insolite'. We know what this meant for his friend the jurist, Guicciardini: Machiavelli was the man who strayed furthest from the *communis opinio* of the doctors, from what constituted, for the legal doctrine, the guarantee of authority and scientificity.[25] But Machiavelli was not only *extravagante* in his new and unusual ideas, but also in the very process of their discursive presentation. In chapter 9 as in other passages of *The Prince* and several other texts – the *Discorsi*, at the forefront – this *extravagante* disrupted the wise lines of the treatise in order to better lead the prince towards the political and strategic choices which Machiavelli thought were crucial. In this instance, the function of his extravagant writing has the aim of reaching, as quickly as possible as if in an emergency, the assigned goal.

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24   Fournel and Zancarini 2000b.

25   Quaglioni 2011, pp. 71–2.

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'Italia' come spazio politico in Machiavelli

Giorgio Inglese

Quando prendiamo a considerare le sfide concrete cui il pensiero machiavelliano cercò di rispondere, ci viene incontro una situazione a due facce: sulla scala europea, i lineamenti grandiosi della nascita di un nuovo mondo; su quella italiana, i tratti inequivocabili della *catastrofe*.[1] Non uso il termine nella moderna accezione epistemologica, ma nel suo valore antico di 'scioglimento luttuoso di una vicenda tragica'. Nel 1527–30, la vicenda dei prìncipi e delle repubbliche italiane si conclude come si conclude l'*Amleto* – con una strage e con i colpi di cannone fatti sparare da un invasore straniero.

Machiavelli vive e studia appunto la *catastrofe*, la dissoluzione nel sangue, del sistema politico al cui servizio ha pure militato fino al penultimo giorno di vita: un mosaico di signorie semifeudali e repubbliche municipali, le une e le altre incapaci di far fronte a nuove entità statuali, centralizzate e armate, come Francia e Spagna.

L'orizzonte del realismo politico è la *ruina*, ossia la crisi di una stabilità superficiale, che mette a nudo la violenza magmatica della verità effettuale. L'Italia, 'sanza capo, sanza ordine, battuta, spogliata, lacera, corsa', è la scena della *ruina*. L'indispensabile confronto con un'idea e con una ideologia dello "spazio" italiano era dunque la matrice del nuovo realismo.

Un'idea e un'ideologia. L'idea di 'Italia' elaborata dalle cancellerie degli stati regionali era quella del bilanciamento di potenze. Con le parole di Machiavelli: 'Avanti che Carlo re di Francia passassi in Italia, era questa provincia sotto lo imperio del papa, viniziani, re di Napoli, duca di Milano e fiorentini. Questi potentati avevano ad avere dua cure principali: l'una, che uno forestieri non entrassi in Italia con le arme; l'altra, che veruno di loro occupassi più stato. Quegli a chi si aveva più cura erano papa e viniziani: e a tenere indietro e' viniziani, bisognava la unione di tutti li altri […] e a tenere basso il papa, si servivono de' baroni di Roma'.[2]

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1   Si veda Asor Rosa 2009 (vol. 1, capitolo vii: *Il Rinascimento e la grande catastrofe italiana*). – Riprendo e sviluppo, in questo intervento, spunti già proposti nel mio intervento alla giornata di studi *Unità d'Italia e Istituto storico italiano* (Inglese 2013, pp. 73–80) e nell'Introduzione a Machiavelli 2013, pp. ix–xix, dove si troveranno anche i riferimenti bibliografici.

2   Machiavelli 2013, pp. 74–75 (P 11).

L'ideologia legittimante, in cui repubbliche e principati italiani potevano riconoscere sé stesse, come individui e come membri di una 'comunità', era vecchia di secoli, ed era imperniata sul mito dell'Italia figliuola di Roma. Potrei citare un cronista municipale come Giovanni Villani (IX 36), o un grandissimo retore dell'umanesimo politico come il Petrarca, – che, una volta sradicato da vincoli municipali, poté formulare una 'visione panitaliana' proiettata sulla restaurazione di Roma antica in forza del suo primato civile e culturale. Petrarca, ad esempio, per stigmatizzare le alleanze straniere dei potentati italiani le assimila, come loro replica, agli antichi e rovinosi compromessi dei Cesari con i barbari.[3] Per Petrarca, *noi* siamo i Romani; e '*noi* cademmo giustamente nelle miserie che tardi e in vano lamentiamo, dopo che i portoni levati e serrati dalla divina provvidenza, le Alpi e i mari dei quali in luogo di mura la natura volle cingerci, con le chiavi dell'odio, dell'avidità e della superbia spalancammo ai Cimbri e agli Unni, ai Pannoni e ai Galli, ai Tedeschi e ai Vandali'.

Per quanto declinata *ab origine* come confronto polemico fra il passato glorioso e il presente miserabile (e perciò riutilizzata dal medesimo Machiavelli anche nella chiusa del *Principe*), l'ideologia del 'latin sangue gentile' aveva un'inderogabile natura continuistica e consolatoria. La nuova idea machiavelliana dell'Italia come spazio politico si genera, invece, a partire dalla constatazione che, tra Roma antica e il mondo moderno, è intervenuta una discontinuità profonda. Una discontinuità che, se non arriva a cancellare la possibilità dell'imitazione, conferisce però all'imitazione stessa i caratteri di un'aspra e severa 'riforma' dello stato presente.

La differenza radicale tra mondo antico e mondo moderno è colta da Machiavelli nell'influenza del Cristianesimo. Il Cristianesimo, si può dire, plasma il tratto essenziale di ciò che Machiavelli chiama 'moderno', o 'presenti tempi' (e che, dal nostro punto di vista, è 'medioevo' prolungato a includere gli anni della crisi). Questo tratto essenziale è la dissociazione di valori tra vita morale e arte dello stato, fra tensione oltremondana e azione mondana.

> Pensando dunque donde possa nascere che in quegli tempi antichi i popoli fossero più amatori della libertà che in questi, credo nasca da quella medesima cagione che fa ora gli uomini manco forti: la quale credo sia la diversità della educazione nostra dall'antica, fondata dalla diversità della religione nostra dalla antica. Perché avendoci la nostra religione mostro la verità e la vera via, ci fa stimare meno l'onore del

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3   Petrarca, 1933–42, XI viii, al doge di Venezia, Andrea Dandolo.

mondo: onde i gentili, stimandolo assai e avendo posto in quello il sommo bene, erano nelle azioni loro più feroci.[4]

E più aspramente: 'Questo modo di vivere [secondo la norma cristiana] adunque pare che abbi renduto il mondo debole e datolo in preda agli uomini scelerati, i quali sicuramente lo possono maneggiare veggendo come l'università degli uomini, per andarne in paradiso, pensa più a sopportare le sue battiture che a vendicarle'.[5]

Tale è il carattere generale del mondo moderno rispetto all'antico. Ma l'Italia, i suoi prìncipi e le sue repubbliche, vivono il grado estremo del corrompimento etico-politico, istituzionale e ideologico.

L'occasione del *Principe* ha questo carattere di massima miseria (ciò non è compreso da chi, ad es., va cercando situazioni 'più favorevoli', alla Dedica dell'opuscolo, di quanto non fosse l'inverno del 1513/14). Agli occhi di Machiavelli, l'Italia conosceva allora il punto più basso della propria storia. Si trovava in una condizione peggiore rispetto alla schiavitù d'Israele in Egitto, alla servitù dei persiani sotto i medi, alla dispersione degli ateniesi prima di Teseo.

E così Machiavelli coglie l'identità italiana, fissandola in un non-essere della virtù, e, insomma, in una dimensione negativa. (Non mancano, all'*Exhortatio*, una retorica paradossale e una vera difficoltà della proposta: perché resta da scoprire dove si trovi invece il 'positivo', cioè la forza nuova della riorganizzazione e rifondazione). Ma come il mondo moderno è quello che è perché la vocazione 'spiritualistica' e ascetica del Cristianesimo lo ha segnato, così l'Italia è quella che è perché una *cagione*, più d'ogni altra, ne ha segnato il destino: la presenza della Chiesa romana.

Si riprenda il capitolo dodicesimo del primo libro dei *Discorsi*, fin dal titolo che addirittura contrappone la *religione* (pagana o 'cristiana') alla *Chiesa*: '*Di quanta importanza sia tenere conto della religione; e come la Italia, per esserne mancata mediante la Chiesa romana, è rovinata*'.[6]

La necessità della sintesi non porti a smussare gli spigoli, le asperità del discorso machiavelliano. In termini generali, la negatività politica del Cristianesimo è posta nella sua tensione verso un mondo diverso da quello in cui si sviluppano le lotte fra gli uomini e fra gli stati. Ma, in specifico, alla Chiesa di Roma si rimproverano gli *esempli rei*, di conclamata immoralità, per i quali 'abbiamo [...] con la Chiesa e con i preti noi italiani questo primo obligo, di essere diventati sanza religione e cattivi' (D I.12).

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4   Machiavelli 1984, pp. 298–99 (D II.2).
5   Machiavelli 1984, p. 299 (D II.2).
6   Machiavelli 1984, p. 94.

Il rimprovero è tradizionale (mi basta citare nuovamente il Petrarca) e onnipresente (basti pensare alle battute di Guicciardini). Difatti la vera novità del dodicesimo capitolo è in un altro argomento, che più precisamente determina, nel caso concreto, la singolarissima proprietà del Cristianesimo di essere *nel* mondo senza essere *del* mondo.

Per Machiavelli, con la Chiesa e i suoi preti *noi italiani* abbiamo un altro *obligo*, 'maggiore [del primo], il quale è la seconda cagione della rovina nostra: questo è che la Chiesa ha tenuto e tiene questa provincia divisa'. La Chiesa, come entità temporale, non è stata abbastanza forte da occupare tutta l'Italia e farsene principe; ma lo è stata abbastanza da impedire a qualunque altro potentato di realizzare quell'obiettivo.

In questa valutazione, si ripresenta la 'formula' dell'equilibrio italiano. Ma il ruolo del papato vi è distinto da quello di Venezia, o di Napoli – di cui pure si potrebbe dire che, non essendo abbastanza forti da unificare l'Italia, lo furono tanto da impedire che altri la unificasse. A differenza di quei potentati, Roma fa giocare nello spazio italiano una straordinaria capacità di attrarre alleanze 'esterne' – capacità derivata dall'autorità spirituale della Chiesa, che è universale ma viene giocata sul piano temporale e in dimensione locale. Sì che la funzione negativa della Chiesa consiste nell'avere impedito ogni processo d'aggregazione favorendo, per i propri fini di sopravvivenza, l'ingresso in Italia di potenze straniere – dai tempi di Carlo Magno a quelli di Agnadello.

> Veramente alcuna provincia non fu mai unita o felice, se non la viene tutta alla ubbidienza d'una republica o d'uno principe, come è avvenuto alla Francia e alla Spagna. E la cagione che la Italia non sia in quel medesimo termine, né abbia anch'ella o una republica o uno principe che la governi, è solamente la Chiesa.[7]

Per quanto si prendano le giuste distanze dal Machiavelli 'nazionale' del nostro Ottocento, sarebbe un errore disconoscere o attenuare la novità di un paragrafo come questo. Non c'è dubbio che Machiavelli contrapponga, a una caratterizzazione dello spazio politico italiano come spazio della pluralità e della difettività istituzionale, un modello progettuale che valorizza l'unità politico-statuale (non più ideologica!) del paese.

Disconoscere la novità dell'impostazione è impossibile. Ma bisogna aggiungere che l'idea dell'unità si presenta in termini così limpidi solo quando, come avviene in *Discorsi* I.12, la *rovina nostra* è tema di considerazione largamente prospettica. Quando invece la pagina machiavelliana è orientata da una più

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7   Machiavelli 1984, p. 96 (D I.12).

stringente intenzione propositiva, la figura unitaria si attenua, o ad essa si ri-
nuncia del tutto.

Nel *Principe*, la negatività del policentrismo italico si legge tutta nella difet-
tività politico-militare di ciascuno dei soggetti: 'se si considera quelli signori
che in Italia hanno perduto lo stato ne' nostri tempi, come el re di Napoli, duca
di Milano e altri, si troverrà in loro, prima, uno comune difetto quanto alle
arme […] di poi si vedrà alcuni di loro o che arà avuto inimici e' populi, o, se arà
avuto il populo amico, non si sarà saputo assicurare de' grandi'.[8] L'opuscolo
raccoglie infatti le 'regole' che, virtuosamente applicate, consentirebbero di
dar vita a un organismo politicamente nuovo e vitale, ma circoscritto in un
territorio tutt'al più regionale.

Il ventiseiesimo e ultimo capitolo presenta questo nuovo principe come
possibile 'redentore' d'Italia – cioè come promotore (nel 1513–14) di una reazio-
ne antispagnola e antielvetica – e forse come suo 'federatore': 'vedesi [l'Italia]
tutta pronta e disposta a seguire una bandiera, pur che ci sia uno che la pigli'.
Non però come 'unificatore'.

Il modello unitario, cui allude *Discorsi* I.12, si trova poi, non negato in sé
(vedi il paragrafo 8), ma certo allontanato dal caso italiano in *Discorsi* I.55 – un
capitolo che mi sembra trascrivere pensieri machiavelliani del 1517 o 1518. Lì, il
tema del rapporto popolo-grandi nelle varie realtà italiane viene approfondito
e rimodulato in relazione alla *inequalità* o *equalità*, cioè alla presenza o assen-
za di una nobiltà di tipo feudale (gentiluomini che hanno rendite, castelli e
sudditi propri). La relazione tra situazione sociale e forma di governo, repub-
blicana o monarchica, è presentata in modo schematico, ma comunque rigido.
In alcune regioni d'Italia vi è *inequalità*, in altre (anzitutto in Toscana, ma an-
che a Venezia) *equalità*. 'Costituisca adunque una republica colui dove è o è
fatta una grande equalità, e all'incontro ordini un principato dove è grande
inequalità; altrimenti farà cosa sanza proporzione e poco durabile'.[9] La conse-
guenza implicita, ma necessaria, è che imporre una forma politica unitaria a
un'Italia così difforme in sé stessa, sarebbe 'cosa sanza proporzione e poco du-
rabile'. A meno che non si facesse avanti un soggetto capace di 'spegnere tutti i
gentiluomini', per fare una repubblica – o di crearli dove non ci fossero, affin-
ché lo aiutino a 'fare' e mantenere un regno. In questo secondo caso, a dire la
verità, si rovescerebbe la logica stessa del principato civile. Ma in questo come
in quello la materia richiederebbe 'uno uomo che per cervello e per autorità sia
raro'. E Machiavelli non conosce, fra i suoi contemporanei, uomo di tale statu-
ra.

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8   Machiavelli 2013, p. 160 (P 24).
9   Machiavelli 1984, p. 177 (D I.55).

Nelle sue chiose ai *Discorsi* machiavelliani su Livio, composte nel 1530, Guic-
ciardini non ha commentato il 'discorso' I.55. Si sofferma a lungo, invece, sul
capitolo dodicesimo del primo libro.

Dopo aver approvato la tesi storiografica di Machiavelli – secondo cui la
Chiesa romana ha impedito il formarsi di una 'monarchia' d'Italia – Guicciardi-
ni rovescia il segno del giudizio, con una mossa interrogativa e dubitativa tipi-
ca del suo stile: 'Ma non so già se el non venire in una monarchia sia stata
felicità o infelicità di questa provincia'. Proprio in contrasto col calamitoso sta-
to presente, Francesco vede nel passato prossimo un'Italia municipale ricca e
fiorente. L'Italia divisa, e politicamente fragile, ha pure 'avuto al riscontro tante
città floride che non arebbe avuto sotto una republica [= sotto il dominio di
una repubblica], che io reputo che una monarchia [= uno stato unico] gli sa-
rebbe stata più infelice che felice'.

La piega del discorso rivela che Guicciardini, come penso lo stesso Machia-
velli, ancora non riesce a immaginare una 'monarchia' italiana se non come
soggetta a una sola città dominante (come tale, o, nel caso di uno stato princi-
pesco, come privilegiato retroterra di una dinastia). In ogni caso, Guicciardini
non mostra di condividere l'analisi machiavelliana della disformità italiana,
troppo condizionata da 'regole' di causalità storica cui egli intimamente non
crede. L'analisi sua si rifà, piuttosto, a motivi profondi e sfuggenti, se non inson-
dabili: la natura degli uomini, o addirittura il fato. 'O sia per qualche fato di
Italia, o per la complessione degli uomini (temperata in modo che hanno inge-
gno e forze), non è mai questa provincia stata facile a ridursi sotto un imperio
[...] anzi sempre naturalmente ha appetito la libertà, né credo ci sia memoria
di altro imperio che l'abbia posseduta tutta che de' romani, e' quali la soggioga-
rono con grande virtù e grande violenzia [...]'.

Data questa premessa, il giudizio sulla *rovina* del paese viene logicamente
scollegato (come certo non accadeva nel Machiavelli del *Principe* e dei primi
Discorsi) da una qualsiasi caratterizzazione dello 'spazio politico' italiano.
Quando, terminata la propria vita pubblica, si volge indietro a riguardare i de-
cenni trascorsi, Guicciardini si persuade che la *rovina* d'Italia non vada spiega-
ta ricorrendo a questa o a quella formula politico-strutturale. Il 'giudizio' sulla
catastrofe si risolve per intero nella narrazione attentissima delle varie ambi-
zioni ed errori umani che, sottilmente intrecciati ai casi di fortuna, l'hanno
prodotta. La grande narrazione storica che intitoliamo *Storia d'Italia* non ha
infatti l'Italia come vero e proprio oggetto, ma solo come arengo (lo hanno ben
notato anche Fournel e Zancarini); e non ha niente da dimostrare se non 'a
quanta instabilità, né altrimenti che uno mare concitato da' venti, siano sotto-
poste le cose umane [...]'.

Che cosa intercorre fra l'ordine perduto (e rimpianto) e il disordine presente? Solo un atto di forza: 'entrò [Carlo VIII] in Asti il dì nono di settembre dell'anno 1494, conducendo seco in Italia i semi di innumerevoli calamità […] e si disordinorono di maniera gli instrumenti della quiete e concordia italiana che, non si essendo mai poi potuta riordinare, hanno avuto facoltà altre nazioni straniere e eserciti barbari di conculcarla miserabilmente e devastarla'. Guicciardini non ricerca negli eventi di ieri la 'cagione' degli eventi di oggi – se non nella concatenazione e coincidenza, volta a volta, delle irrazionali paure e ambizioni di principi e maggiorenti. Non trova invece ragioni strutturali per sostenere che la catastrofe di oggi sia necessariamente, o anche solo probabilmente, un effetto dei 'peccati' di ieri, dei 'cattivi ordini'.

Un'idea di 'Italia' come spazio politico nasce in Machiavelli, insieme con una disperata, ma intellettualmente forte, iniziativa politica – dalle cui pratiche contraddizioni deriva le sue stesse incoerenze teoriche. Regredisce e si dissolve già sotto la penna di Guicciardini, dopo che la sconfitta è venuta a separare, per il presente e per ogni plausibile futuro, grande pensiero e arte dello stato.

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Machiavelli the Tactician: Math, Graphs, and Knots in *The Art of War*

Gabriele Pedullà

The *Art of War* is the most difficult of Machiavelli's political works, and the least read by contemporary political thinkers and scholars. Of course there are some beautiful passages, such as the famous final invective against the Italian princes, invariably present in all the anthologies of the Florentine secretary's works; and yet, as a whole, the book has suffered from its high degree of technicality for at least 200 years now. Not only does Machiavelli speak of something that we know little about and that does not concern us anymore (classical and early sixteenth-century military practices), but he asks us to follow him through very minute discussions about the shape of weapons, the disposition of the army during a battle, or the layout of the camp. And while readers of *The Prince* can often draw broader conclusions from Machiavelli's analysis of political competition in Renaissance Italy, here any similar attempt fails instantly, as *The Art of War* poses numerous obstacles to the non-specialist.

The main barrier to understanding and appreciating the tract is paradoxically that which makes it so different from classical and humanistic military theory: its willingness to discuss the tiniest aspects of the war experience in great detail. Thus, when scholars use words like technical or technicality, these carry with them a negative connotation, where technique seems to be the negation of politics. In this reading, after the return of the Medici to Florence, Machiavelli chose a more prudent subject in order to avoid irritating the *de facto* lords of the city – his decision to write a military treatise has been seen as a voluntary step backward from explicit political engagement.[1]

According to Federico Chabod, for instance, *The Art of War*'s principal scope was the overcoming of the division into civil and military life, typical of the Italian States that depended on mercenaries. Machiavelli's work, for Chabod, was nothing more than an attempt to reconnect what should never have been separated. Similarly, though he had not read Chabod, Antonio Gramsci appreciated *The Art of War* because he saw in Machiavelli's military reform a willing-

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1   See, for example, Sasso 1980, p. 581 (who takes to extremes a thesis already present in Chabod 1964, pp. 221–2), and Bausi 2005, pp. 230–45.

ness to involve the countryside in urban political conflict, exactly as the Jacobins would do almost 300 years later, at the time of the French Revolution. In *Class Struggle in France*, Karl Marx had attributed the defeat of the June 1848 revolution to the inability to forge a bond between peasants and urban labourers; and, following him, Gramsci found in Machiavelli the first insights regarding the need to overcome the separation of town and countryside, centre and periphery, industry and agriculture. From this point of view, Machiavelli would have been nothing less than 'the first Italian Jacobin' ('il primo giacobino italiano'), as we read in the *Letters from prison*.[2]

Although different, the influential readings of *The Art of War* by Chabod and Gramsci have in common a tendency to concentrate on the premises already contained in Machiavelli's previous works – that is, his preference for a conscripted army – while essentially ignoring that which makes the 1521 dialogue so different from everything the Florentine had written until then. But I think it is time we take a more positive view of the technicality of *The Art of War*, which entailed a huge effort by Machiavelli to clarify, correct and assimilate the insights contained in *The Prince* and the *Discourses*. Several of the arguments in those treatises look like mere declarations of principle when compared to the discussions in *The Art of War*, where every detail is finally subject to a merciless analysis. Even if in many ways we are following the path opened by *The Prince* and the *Discourses*, the choice to focus only on military problems need not be considered a step backward. On the contrary, it should be appreciated as an attempt to reinforce one of the key points of Machiavelli's political project: the complete Romanisation of the modern world.

Two examples will suffice. The first is more radical. In chapter 12 of *The Prince*, Machiavelli criticises the mercenaries because they refuse to fight during the winter; however, in *The Art of War*, reconsidering the problem in a broader context, the winter interruption – which was perfectly normal and sensible for military practice in the Renaissance – is deemed acceptable. More importantly, discussing the organisation of the infantry in the last chapter of *The Prince*, Machiavelli closes his exhortation dreaming of a hypothetical 'third order' (*ordine terzo*), capable of winning against both the Swiss pikes and the Spanish swordsmen; but in *The Art of War* this 'ordine terzo' disappears, leaving room for a simpler combination of the types already described in *The Prince* (a sort of neo-Roman legion with 3000 swordsmen, 2000 pikes, and 1000 musketeers).

Of course, from *The Prince* and the *Discourses* to *The Art of War*, the key questions do not change: first of all, the prudent politician must recognise

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2 Gramsci-Schucht 1997, pp. 791–792.

what really counts, according to the method of evaluation of the actual strengths (*vires*) described in chapter 10 of *The Prince*. But the answer does not change either. The only certain foundations are the 'armi proprie' (that is, one's own forces) – and this is why Machiavelli decides to improve his study of military techniques:

> All of the arts that are organised in a republic for the common good, all of the measures prescribed for living with fear of the law and of God, would be useless if their defence were not prepared [...] And similarly, good orders, without military aid, lose their order, like a superb and regal palace does, even ornate with gems and gold, if it does not have a roof to defend it from the rain.[3]

A beautiful image, where the roof functions as a barrier against the destructive fury of water, just as the riverbank does in *The Prince* (chapter 25).

To be a good political thinker, politics is not enough, because you have to become a military expert as well: this is Machiavelli's fundamental belief. From this point of view, his decision to improve his military analysis resembles the young Karl Marx's choice to devote himself, a philosopher, to the study of economics: a necessary step from the moment in which he understood that, otherwise, overturning Hegel's philosophy would be ineffectual. *The Art of War* is a technical work because anyone who says that the main political problem is to be able to fight in the open field must discuss even the smallest details if he hopes to prove the effectiveness of his theory.

My argument here is that, if we really want to understand Machiavelli's political thought, we need to take *The Art of War* more seriously. The particular kind of technical knowledge its author so ardently sought gives us precious clues about his working method that are potentially valid for his political treatises as well. Moreover, we might think that Machiavelli's project, minus its technical analysis of Renaissance warfare, would look a little bit like a *Das Kapital* that failed to provide economic analysis.

The biggest innovation of *The Art of War* in the history of military theory is probably the extraordinary role given to the tactical dimension, namely troop

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3 'Tutte l'arti che si ordinano in una civiltà per cagione del bene comune degli uomini, tutti gli ordini fatti in quella per vivere con timore delle leggi e d'Iddio, sarebbono vani se non fussono preparate le difese loro; le quali, bene ordinate, mantengono quegli ancora che non bene ordinati. E così per il contrario i buoni ordini, sanza il militare aiuto, non altrimenti si disordinano che l'abitazioni d'uno superbo e regale palazzo, ancora che ornate di gemme e d'oro, quando sanza essere coperte non avessono cosa che dalla pioggia le difendesse'.

deployment and movements.[4] But tactics – beyond etymology – means first of all a different operational scale, more attentive to the ways in which the smaller units react and how their ability to respond and coordinate affects the outcome of the battle.

Machiavelli's interest in this narrower dimension of combat may be the most original aspect of his military work, whether compared to the classical authorities (Vegetius and Frontinus) or to their medieval and humanist imitators (Roberto Valturio and Antonio Cornazzano). In the *Epitoma rei militaris* by Vegetius we find both the brain of the general and the arm of the soldiers, the molecular unit and the set, whereas in the *Stratagemmata* by Frontinus we have none of this, as its topic is the cunning of the general who deceives his enemies and anticipates their plans. Just a quick glance at Vegetius' work suffices to show the clear dualism of his approach. On the one hand, it tells us how to choose the recruit, how to train him, with what weapons of offense and defence he must be provided, how to keep up his morale and ensure his discipline even in the most difficult moments. On the other, it teaches us the great breakthrough and encirclement manoeuvres or the stratagems that allow the general to reverse the fate of the battle. The connection between these two levels, however, remains very weak: as if some general principles on military discipline or a simple list of officers were enough to ensure – we are not told how – the essential communication between commander and individual soldier.

Reading Vegetius's chapters on the movements of the troops (*Epitoma rei militaris* III, 19–20) or their humanistic version by Roberto Valturio (*De re militari* VI, 12), we immediately see that in their works there is no room for the middle grades: the discourse is kept at the level of the strategic direction of the entire army. With the exception of a few patterns – the 'cuneus', the 'caput porcinum', the 'serra', the 'globus' – Vegetius has no interest in the movements of single platoons. He looks to the army as a whole body, or at most as a set of three parts strictly joined: the centre and two wings, following a conception that remained in vogue throughout the Middle Ages.[5] The seven elementary models of combat that every battle in the open field can have, according to the *Epitoma*, are precisely identified only thanks to the movements of the three elements – the 'cornus dextrum', the 'media acies' and the 'cornus sinistrum' – occasionally assisted by cavalry and light troops. Smaller military units simply

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4   On humanistic military theory, see Verrier 1997, and Settia 2008, pp. 35–65.

5   On the importance of Vegetius during the Middle Ages, see Contamine 1984, pp. 210–12, Richardot 1998, and Allmand 2011.

do not exist. Nor would any original contribution on this point come from the Italian fifteenth century military theoretician Valturio.

It is in this space that Machiavelli builds his military theory. The scale is smaller, but the key problem is still the movement of the military body. Developing a very common metaphor to allude to the army, one could say that Machiavelli tries to offer his readers a full theory of the nervous system of his legion. Or we may adapt a well-known formula by Michel Foucault to suggest that in *The Art of War* a sort of 'microphysics' of the war appears. A 'microphysics' that is absent from the military sections of *The Prince* and the *Discourses*.

In fact, a considerable part of *The Art of War* is dedicated to intermediate figures that must ensure the cohesion of the army:

> because in armies two orders are to be followed: one is that which men in each battalion must do, and the other is that which the battalion must do when it is with others in an army; and those men who do the first one well, easily observe the second, but without knowing that, one can never achieve the discipline of the second.[6]

It is no small task, but it is absolutely necessary that a military commander start from here, for 'a brave army is not brave because its men are brave, but because it is well ordered'.[7] Indeed, according to Machiavelli, the ability to manoeuvre is much more important than individual courage and experience. As he writes,

> the soldiers who do this well are experienced, and even before they have looked an enemy in the face, can be called old soldiers. And on the contrary those who do not know how to keep their positions, even if they had fought in a thousand wars, would still need to be considered new soldiers.[8]

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6 'Perché negli eserciti si osserva due ordini: l'uno quello che deono fare gli uomini in ciascuna battaglia, e l'altro quello che di poi debbe fare la battaglia quando è coll'altre in uno esercito; e quelli uomini che fanno bene il primo, facilmente osservano il secondo, ma senza sapere quello, non si può mai alla disciplina del secondo pervenire'.

7 'Perché lo esercito animoso non lo fa per essere in quello uomini animosi, ma lo esserci ordini bene ordinati'.

8 'I soldati che sanno fare questo bene, sono soldati pratichi, et ancora che non avessero mai veduti nimici in viso si possono chiamarre soldati vecchi. Et al contrario quegli che non sanno tenere questi ordini, se si fussero trovati in mille guerre, si deono sempre istimare soldati nuovi'.

And again:

> Nor is military discipline other than knowing how to command, and to
> follow; nor is a disciplined army other than an army that is expert in these
> manoeuvres; nor would it be possible for one who in these times uses
> such discipline to be beaten.[9]

With the abundance of quotations I intend to signal the importance of disci-
pline in *The Art of War*. Machiavelli changes the scale of the discussion, shift-
ing from general questions about the discipline of soldiers to their ability to
perform movements: turn, bend to one side, or even retreat without losing
their battle position. The intermediate officers (neglected by Vegetius and Val-
turio) here assume a decisive role. Without training them and their soldiers –
assumes Machiavelli – any attempt to effectively manoeuvre the body of the
army will simply be in vain.

Predicting, understanding, inventing new stratagems is completely useless
if the army does not follow the general's instructions. But to have a perfect re-
sponse to the impulse coming from the top, a long training period is necessary.
This is why

> one must put them together in these formations as often as possible, so
> the officers learn to keep these battalions in these formations. In fact,
> simple soldiers must keep their position in the battalion, while the offi-
> cers must keep the battalions in order and obey the commands of the
> general.[10]

Also the great deal of attention given to the role of the *capodieci* (the Roman
Decurion) depends on the need to tightly connect the general and the single
unit. In *The Art of War* the Decurion is nothing but the most experienced sol-
dier, who – as a cornerstone – stands at the end of a ten-man line, the most

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9   'Né è altro la disciplina militare che sapere bene comandare et esseguire queste cose, né
     altro uno esercito disciplinato che uno esercito che sia bene pratico in su questi ordini; né
     sarebbe possibile che chi in questi tempi usasse bene simile disciplina fusse mai rotto'.

10   'Si dee più volte che si può mettergli insieme in queste forme, perché i capi imparino a
     tenere le loro battaglie in questi ordini. Perché a' soldati particolari s'appartiene tenere
     bene gli ordini di ciascuna battaglia, a' capi s'appartiene tenere bene quelle in ciascuno
     ordine di esercito e che sappiano ubbidire al comandamento del capitano generale: con-
     viene pertanto che sappiano congiungere l'una battaglia con l'altra, sappiano pigliare il
     loro luogo in un tratto'.

difficult position because no other soldier is there to protect the right side of his body. Needless to say, we do not find anything like this in Vegetius.

Even Machiavelli's insistence on battle signals is a direct result of his unprecedented attention to tactics. In order that the army will not come apart, the signals must be unequivocal and soldiers trained to understand them immediately. Any uncertainty, any delay, can be fatal once the battle begins, and so *The Art of War* frequently advises that misunderstandings are to be avoided: the army needs much training; trumpets and drums are to be preferred to all other musical instruments; any unnecessary noise has to be avoided, so as not to increase the confusion; orders must always be clear.[11]

The fourth and last aspect of Machiavelli's focus on connections is far more striking: the use of numerous graphics to show where the men should stand depending on the needs of the moment (during the march, on the battlefield, in the camp). The visual aid is a direct effect of the evolution of Machiavelli's military theory toward technique, an evolution that, again, takes place as we move from *The Prince* and the *Discourses* to *The Art of War*. Graphics help the author to very precisely describe the formations to be made so that the army can take position exactly as the general imagines. But graphics are especially valuable for not leaving anything to chance, according to the principle that even the most insignificant details are 'very important' ('di gran momento') in war. Machiavelli gets tactical, and in fact the plates of *The Art of War* show the position of units of about 500 men (including *velites*), which is not even very many if we consider that Machiavelli's whole army should count around twelve thousand men organised into two legions.

Scholars have not given these images the attention they deserve. Yet the question is legitimate: since neither Vegetius nor Frontinus, nor any medieval or humanist military theorist, used graphics like these, how did Machiavelli realise that diagrams could be so helpful in describing (and understanding) the disposition of the troops? The answer lies in one of the ancient military treatises included at the end of the collected edition where Machiavelli read Vegetius and Frontinus: the *De instruendis aciebus* written by the Greek Aelianus and published in Rome by Eucharius Silber, in 1487, in Theodorus Gaza's Latin translation.[12]

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11   For a 'rhetorical' reading of *The Art of War*, see Spackman 1993.

12   Surprisingly enough, no Machiavelli scholar has tried to understand how Machiavelli came to the conclusion that a full series of tables was necessary to his *Art of War*. But Aelianus' presence is everywhere in Machiavelli's military dialogue, and recognition of this fact necessitates a new commentary on the work. Only Hale (1988) recognises the

Aelianus' brief works takes up just thirty of our pages in the Latin translation, but it would enjoy great success during the sixteenth century and be a key reading for Maurice Nassau's military reform in the Netherlands.[13] Aelianus departs from the belief that the secret of war lies in mathematics and aims to teach his readers how to display a phalanx of soldiers and also how to pass from one figure to another according to the unpredictable needs of the battle. For Aelianus, the great theoretical weakness of the authors who preceded him is the unsurprising result of their ignorance in mathematics. Soldiers must be arranged according to the power of two (2, 4, 8, 16, 32, 64, 128, 256, 512, 1024...), so that every line can always be divisible by two (so as to double their face or their ranks) according to the need of the hour. In fact, a by no means negligible part of the *De instruendis aciebus* focuses precisely on the different ways in which men must not only take up position but also 'turn' (the technical term used by the sixteenth century Italian translator is *volteggiare*). That is to say, to advance, go back, or slide to the side to fight a particular type of enemy on a given terrain.

Aelianus leads us to a series of issues entirely different from those raised by Vegetius and Frontinus. The purely strategic level – that is the conducting of the battle or even of the entire campaign – is here superseded by a shift to individual units (in only one case a diagram of *De instruendis aciebus* shows more than 200 armed men, while in the majority of cases they are just a few dozen). From this point of view, the nickname of 'Tactical' used to distinguish our Aelianus from the Greek historian Claudius Aelianus seems particularly appropriate. Between the general and the soldier there is a space to be filled, first at the theoretical level; otherwise the phalanx will collapse.

In fact, the Greek army described by Aelianus takes its strength from its perfect organisation. If a Roman legionnaire can survive outside the platoon, because he is equipped with heavy armour and handles both sword and shield, Macedonian pikesmen are much more vulnerable when the formation collapses because their long *sarissa* (a six meter pike) is effective only in a group. Indeed, precisely because the phalanx requires a rigid collective discipline no detail can be left to chance.

In *The Art of War* Machiavelli still follows his dream of giving birth to a neo-Roman legion. This is why, rather than solutions, he seems to have taken from

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importance of the Greek theorist's lesson for the graphics introduced in sixteenth century military theory (starting with Machiavelli).

13   On Maurice of Orange, see Delbrück 1990, vol. 4, pp. 155–71, Roberts 1955, pp. 7–10, and Parker 1988, pp. 18–22. On his classical culture (including Machiavelli), see Puype and Wiekart 1998.
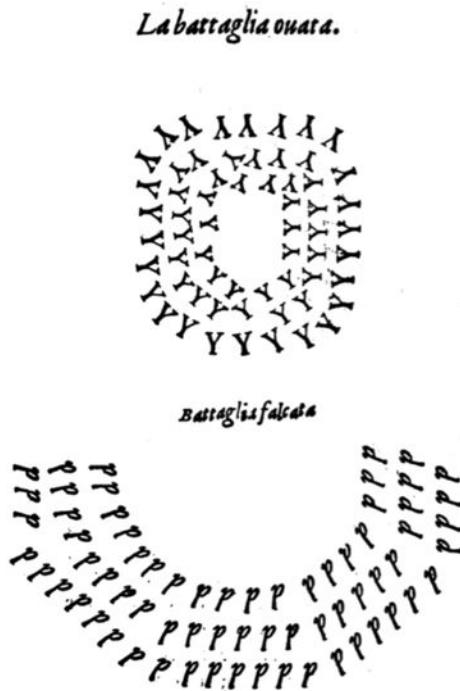
La battaglia ouata.

Battaglia falcata

FIGURE 5.1
Eliano, De' nomi e degli ordini militari*,*
TRANSLATED BY DIEGO CARANI, FIRENZE,
FIRENZE, LORENZO TORRENTINO, 1522

the *De instruendis aciebus* a working method and a series of questions, apply-ing them to his project in an original way. Some of his key ideas on tactics, like the role of the *capodieci* or the insistence on unequivocal signals, in fact come directly from Aelianus, in light of the importance given to the army's cohesion. But even when *The Art of War* differs from its Greek source (for instance with the shift from 16- to 10-men lines), the model is still clearly recognisable.

Machiavelli's interest in Aelianus is not casual. On the contrary, we might say that the evolution of military technology and art at the beginning of the sixteenth century created a very favourable context for the rediscovery of the *De instruendis aciebus*.[14] The new techniques spread by the introduction of the Swiss square of pikes, at least from the 1470s, required special discipline from soldiers and could be interpreted as a revival of ancient Macedonian tech-niques.[15] All their strength was put into holding the formation and raising a sort of iron wall made of pikes against the enemy. All of a sudden, individual

14 For a general portrait of military techniques and tactics at the time of the Italian Wars, see Pieri 1952, Hale 1985, pp. 46–74, and Mallet 2012, pp. 177–97.

15 On the Swiss military revolution, see Delbrük 1990, vol. 3, pp. 545–633, and vol. 4, pp. 3–21, Pieri 1952, pp. 235–49, Hall 1997, pp. 32–8, and Rogers 2010, pp. 204–8.

FIGURE 5.2
Eliano, De' nomi e degli ordini militari,
TRANSLATED BY DIEGO CARANI,
FIRENZE, LORENZO TORRENTINO, 1522

courage and energy in the fray lost their importance compared to the skill of
maintaining the cohesion of the square whatever happened.[16] But, to hold the
formation even in the midst of the battle, special training and a special under-
standing between the commanders and soldiers are needed.[17]

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16   'Pikemen had to be prepared to sacrifice part of their formation in order to maintain the
       integrity of the whole, and any failure on their part usually resulted in the breaking up of
       the entire mass. How was a willingness to be inculcated in the common soldier to sacrifice
       himself, not on the traditional altar of the eponymous heroic valor, but anonymously,
       ingloriously, and in the name of the company'? (Hall 1997, p. 32).
17   'Pikemen were terribly vulnerable once they had lost their order [...] Good order was not
       an ideal. It was cruel necessity [...] In the sixteenth century collective training became as
       important as individual prowess, and the most disciplined had a decisive edge [...] Roman
       calls for intensive training and strict, almost obsessive maintenance of order spoke
       directly to the modernisers' (Eltis 1998, pp. 49–60).

It is no coincidence that Machiavelli was not the only one to turn to the Greek theoretician in those years. In that same 1521 that saw *The Art of War* published, in fact, another military treatise that tried to apply Aelianus' diagrams to contemporary military technique was published: Battista Della Valle's *Vallo*. The author had served for many years as infantry commander under Francesco Maria della Rovere, Duke of Urbino, and therefore had extensive first-hand experience that surely contributed to the great success of his book (ten editions by 1564, plus translations in French and German and a plagiarised Spanish publication). For the most part, Della Valle's is a treatise on the art of defending and conquering lands (*terre*), meaning, according to medieval terminology, fortresses. The first two books focus on this topic, where the techniques illustrated by Vegetius and Valturio are offered to readers with a marked practical interest in the matter, in an anything but impeccable syntax; and the fourth book (after a brief parentheses against men of letters) concerns itself with regulations for duels (in the footsteps of jurist treatises like Paride dal Pozzo's *Tractatus elegans de re militari*).

But it is the third book that interests us. Here Della Valle also turns to Aelianus (without explicitly naming him), using his diagrams to show the formations into which an infantry commander should place his pike squares. The *Vallo* moves from the simplest to more complicated situations: the 'battaglione a triangolo', the 'battaglione a punta', the 'battaglione a forbice', and the 'battaglione a fronte' (from 100 to 1000 pikes). The final images stage a real fight between pikesmen, arranged in unusual shapes in order to contain the enemy assault or to strike the decisive blow. Thanks to the shared reference to Aelianus, the *Vallo* is a precious tool for evaluating the originality of *The Art of War* with respect to the Greek source. The few scholars who have examined the works of Machiavelli and Della Valle in parallel tend to underscore the distance between the elegant prose of the humanist – expert in letters and concerned with giving perfect form to his writing – and the more limited and in any case practical objectives of the war professional who gained his knowledge through experience and with great sacrifice.[18] And yet if we leave aside the biographies of the two authors for a moment and instead concentrate on the two works, we see quite easily that such a contrast is insufficient. The superiority of *The Art of War* certainly has something to do with the style and literary ambitions of its author, but it is not limited to these, and in fact it would be unfair to attribute it to writing alone. Indeed, Machiavelli shows himself to be superior above all from a conceptual point of view. Having read the same authors (certainly Vegetius and Aelianus), Machiavelli elaborates a thorough reflection on

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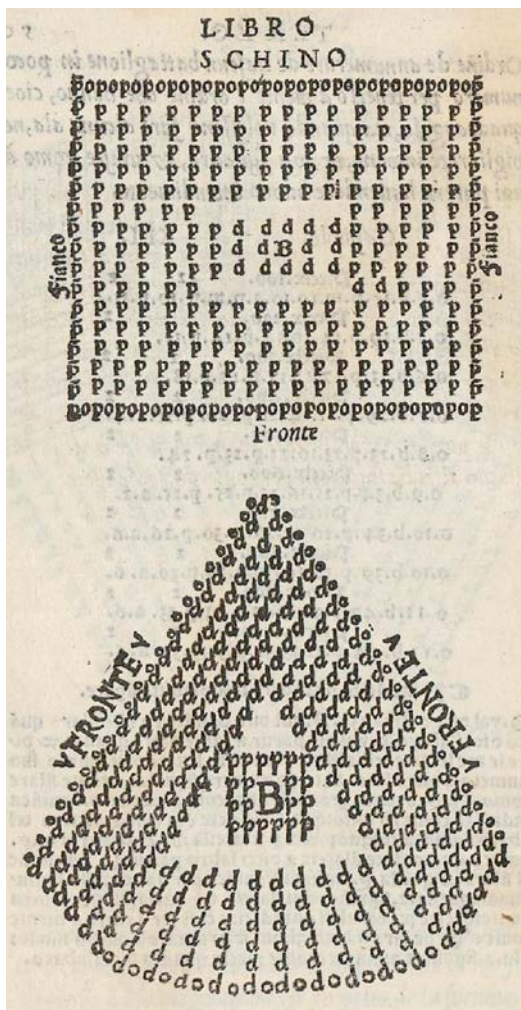18   See for instance Verrier 1998, p. 240, and Long 2001, pp. 193–94.

FIGURE 5.3
Battista Della Valle, VALLO,
VENEZIA, EREDI DI PIERO RAVANO,
1543

the way in which a complex organism like an army of several thousand units can first be built and then led to perform. And it is for most effectively resolving the problems connected to such an organism's movements that the *De instruendis aciebus* offers Machiavelli an extraordinary analytical tool.

Della Valle, on the other hand, conceives of something quite similar to a self-help manual and offers a series of suggestions, largely disconnected from one another, that may prove useful to an infantry commander who finds himself in the same situations. In his case, Aelianus serves only to represent in an immediately comprehensible manner complex figures, which Della Valle would not be able to describe so well with words (the accompanying text is

almost inexistent). Thus the images fill a lacuna in the literary education of the author and, quite likely, his readers.

With respect to Aelianus and Machiavelli, who see in the mathematisation and the graphicisation of tactic a powerful aid for resolving conflicts in their favour, Della Valle's ambitions are also much more limited. He is simply concerned with completing – with fewer difficulties – the traditional exercises, never losing sight of the fact that the outcome of the battle 'depende a' cor magnanimi, e in petto della fortuna', that is, 'depends on courage and fortune' (*Vallo*, III, 40). The diagrams are not an occasion for theorising troop placement but are essentially a convenient tachygraphic instrument for putting on paper what the old commander had learned while in the service of Francesco Maria della Rovere. Della Valle's Aelianus is for all practical purposes a trivialised Aelianus.

At the same time, though, anyone who reads the two works side by side cannot help but be struck by another aspect. A military man with little reading behind him, Della Valle seeks recognition on another level and in his polemic against the humanists tries to obtain a social legitimation denied to commanders of inferior rank; for this reason his treatise combines strictly practical considerations with praise of the militia and concludes with a discussion of the principles of the duel that seeks to connect warfare back to the theme of honour and to civil life. In *The Art of War*, however, we find no interest in such questions, which had enjoyed great popularity among the humanists of the previous century. Machiavelli uses Aelianus because he wishes above all to theorise the practice of war and employs his schemes in order to get closer to the 'effective reality of the thing' (*la verità effettuale della cosa*).

Della Valle's book does more than just show, by comparison, the quality of *The Art of War*; it suggests that Machiavelli was not alone in his concerns. It is not, then, just about the extraordinary flourishing of a work like Aelianus', which offered its readers new questions, but about a real need triggered by the most recent changes in military technique. In short, when Della Valle writes, at the very beginning of his work, that the principal quality of the captain must be to know how to place his troops (*Vallo* I, 1), this merely reflects a precise conviction of his epoch.

The fortunes of Aelianus' Macedonian phalanx in Renaissance military theory depend directly on the spreading of the Swiss model across the continent. Though still convinced of the superiority of the Roman army, in the *De instruendis aciebus* Machiavelli found a number of insights useful to his project. His obsession with small units and intermediate officers, his attention to an effective transmission of orders, and his insistence on the centrality of perfect coordination all come from the Greek theorist. Most importantly, the absolute
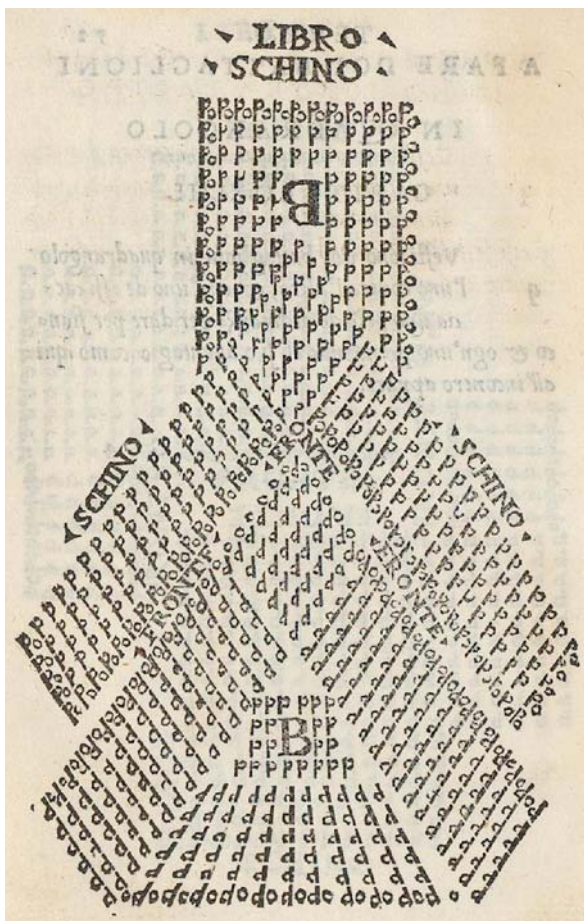
FIGURE 5.4
Battista Della Valle, VALLO,
VENEZIA, EREDI DI PIERO
RAUANO, 1543

centrality accorded to tactics is at the same time the principal innovation of
The Art of War and the greatest legacy left by Aelianus to the Florentine. Thanks
to his unprecedented attention to the 'microphysics' of the battle, Machiavelli
is the first theorist of one of the great shifts in sixteenth century military doc-
trine: namely, the tendency to consider the army not as a single entity or as the
combination of only three elements (the centre and the two wings), but rather
as an unstable mixture of a large number of battalions and brigades cooperat-
ing with each other but tactically independent.

Curiously, nineteenth and early twentieth century military historiography
was especially harsh with the innovations that made *The Art of War* a real turn-
ing point in Western military theory. From time to time Machiavelli was re-
proached: 1) the lack of attention to the officers (Hans Delbrück); 2) the naive
credulity in the Livian description (*Ab urbe condita* VIII, 8) of the movements

performed by the Roman army to neatly fold the ranks in order to receive fresh forces (Delbrück and Martin Hobohm); 3) the excessive confidence in the ability of a hypothetical neo-Roman army arranged into only five lines to resist a Swiss square with a front of one hundred men sixty or seventy lines deep (Max Jaehns); 4) the inability to really grasp the profound connection between the particular weapons of the soldiers and their placement on the battlefield (Piero Pieri). Otherwise Machiavelli was simply accused of not understanding the military technology of the ancients as well as modern philology did. But he was also reprimanded for falsifying history, as for the Battle of Ravenna, where – according to Machiavelli's witnessing alone – the Spanish soldiers fighting with sword and shield revealed the weakness of the French pikes (the numerous sources that repeat this version of events are in fact all subsequent to his writings).

Without new documentary evidence the Ravenna question of course remains open.[19] In the other cases, the military historians' objections are even more surprising, as they blame Machiavelli for not doing enough of what he was the first to do. Take for instance the problem of the connections. Before Machiavelli, no theorist insisted on the importance of the *Decurion*, but because they compare Machiavelli's neo-Roman legion with late sixteenth and seventeenth century armies, military historians accuse him of underestimating the fundamental role of the officers. From a teleological perspective that takes the professional troops of the *Ancien Régime* as the standard and the model, Machiavelli's organisation seems to them still too medieval. And this makes them forget that *The Art of War* precisely marks the turning point.

It is not impossible that the neo-Roman legion described by Machiavelli would have failed on the battlefield; however, in the absence of an experiment that nobody conducted, we can only compare Machiavellian theory to other abstract speculations. As soon as we choose to do so, and start reading *The Art of War* along with Catone Sacco, Roberto Valturio, Francesco Patrizi da Siena or Antonio Cornazzano (to mention only the most important predecessors), we realise that Machiavelli's work easily prevails over humanistic theory in completeness of information, in passion for detail, and in the ability to grasp the hidden relationships that tie together different fields of military doctrine. And

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19   Here Baldini 2012 is of little help. The scholars who do not trust Machiavelli should at least think that *The Prince* was addressed to Lorenzo de' Medici and, through him, to his uncle, pope Leo X, who – at that time only a cardinal – was present at the battle of Ravenna as Pontifical legate. Machiavelli seems to have known less of the battles fought in Southern Italy between the French and Spaniards, but for a recent reconsideration of the problem, see Fournel 2011.

above all – in the wake of Aelianus – it shows a special attention to a purely tactical dimension that was hitherto unknown to Renaissance military speculation and would become essential in the subsequent years.[20]

A work of theory, even one conceived to influence the practice of the battle, can only be compared to other works of theory (at least until someone tries to make it real). From this perspective there is no doubt that *The Art of War* is no less innovative as a military treatise than *The Prince* or the *Discourses* are as political ones. And the reactions of Machiavelli's contemporaries, among whom the admiration always goes hand in hand with astonishment and scepticism and sometimes turns into open mockery, sufficiently demonstrate the extent to which his pages posed new kinds of questions.[21]

Some did not like it. In a famous *novella*, for instance, Matteo Bandello ridicules the distance between Machiavelli's theory and his absolute inability to put it into practice when the 'condottiero' (commander) Giovanni dalle Bande Nere gave him the opportunity to dispose the actual troops in a real parade. 'It became clear then how big the difference is between he who knows and never applied what he knows, and he who – besides the knowledge – gets his hands dirty, as it is customary to say' (*Novelle* I, 40).[22] For centuries, this anecdote, forever reworked in new forms, has served as the basis for building an anti-Machiavellian tradition that derides theoretical knowledge devoid of any real-world experience.[23]

But things are perhaps more complicated. We know for instance that Bandello was re-enhancing an old literary topos, that comes from the *De oratore* by Cicero (II, 76), where we can read the story of Hannibal ironizing against the Peripatetic philosopher Phormio, who claimed to discuss the art of war in a purely academic way – and, moreover, in Hannibal's presence. Yet the fact that Bandello chose Machiavelli as a target tells us something interesting all the same. If Machiavelli represents the ideal candidate to play the role of the mili-

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20   'The evolution of the increasingly complex infantry tactics led to the emergence of a new military rank, that of the sergeant major, who had a particular role both in training the infantry, and in positioning them ready for battle. A hierarchy of command was emerging within the companies; a corporal for every ten men became the standard distribution of non-commissioned officers' (Mallet 2012, p. 190).

21   A full history of *The Art of War*'s reception still awaits its author. A first overview is in De Mattei 1969, pp. 265–331; for the sixteenth century see Anglo 2005, pp. 477–572 (rather unreliable in his judgement, for instance, the idea that Machiavelli was 'irrelevant to the practical evolution of the art of war', p. 552).

22   'Si conobbe alora quanta differenza sia da chi sa e non ha messo in opera ciò che sa, da quello che oltra il sapere ha più volte messe le mani, come dir si suole, in pasta'.

23   On Machiavelli's practical experience we are now well informed by Guidi 2009.

tary theorist *par excellence*, it was not merely because, just a few years after his death, he already had an extraordinary reputation as a military expert, but instead because *The Art of War* contained particular suggestions and – especially – unprecedented attention to tactics.

Bandello attacks Machiavelli not only for his general tendency to abstract speculation but also because he is the first modern military thinker who believes it possible to provide an exact science of something that – until his time – theory had refused to take into account: that is, the smaller aspects of military conflict. In other words, it is precisely Machiavelli's attempt to abstractly legislate the movement of individual platoons that looks a little bit ridiculous: exactly as too-ambitious projects often look. So, comic correction is used to punish the crazy presumption of the former Florentine secretary converted to mathematics by Aelianus.

To properly understand Bandello's resistance to Machiavelli's theorisation of the tactical scale of the conflict, we must put it in a broader context. Both Bandello and Machiavelli grew up in an Aristotelean cosmos, and for both of them, as for all their contemporaries, reality was made of substances and accidents. Substances were stable, and that made it possible to have scientific knowledge of them; accidents, on the contrary, were closely related to chance, and could not be studied with the same precision. In their case you could only have practical knowledge – in politics, what was called prudence. The same limit was true for military theory, which tended to confront only general problems of the biggest scale because smaller-scale problems were so particular as to have solutions that worked only case by case. It is quite likely, then, that Machiavelli's effort to so precisely legislate the tactical dimension would seem an absurd attempt to cross the reasonable limits of theory and to take accidents for substances, forgetting that scientific knowledge (as a knowledge of the universals) is possible only with recurrent, reliable phenomena. As such, according to Bandello, Machiavelli's fault would have been his tendency to deny the importance of chance and unpredictable events on the battlefield, just as amateur and armchair theorists do. From this perspective, the recourse to mathematics for reducing the power of the unforeseen would merely be a sin of intellectual pride and *naïveté*.

Of course Bandello would not be alone in this polemic. Many late sixteenth century opponents of Machiavelli, such as the French antiquarian Blaise de Vigènere, eventually accused him of having taken something as important as the art of war for the game of chess. At the same time, in the very same years, the diagrams and the drawings introduced by Machiavelli became a standard instrument of explanation for military theorists throughout Europe.

Bandello's short stories were first printed in 1556; and a couple of generations later, in a work of military theory deeply influenced by *The Art of War*, the *Paralleli militari* by the Platonic philosopher Francesco Patrizi from Cres (1594), we find an anecdote that seems to be a reply to Bandello's accusation. Here, in order to persuade the reader of the importance of military theory, Patrizi claims twice to have seen the great architect Andrea Palladio 'ordering 500 infantrymen with great ease and repeating all Aelianus' figures',[24] and specifies that Palladio had no previous practice of warfare, except for his reading of Caesar, Aelianus and the Byzantine Emperor Leo VI.

The mirror effect of the two stories is too perfect to be coincidence. Of course Patrizi was not interested in defending the good name of Machiavelli, who at that point was already banned by the Index. At the same time, though, he was not willing to second Bandello's mockery of modern military theory, perhaps in part because of his own admiration for mathematics, nourished by his readings of Plato. And so, more than as a historical record, Patrizi's testimony must be read as an attempt to counter a voice that could harm his plan for a military science by referring to a great figure like Palladio, at that moment no less famous than the author of *The Prince* and the *Discourses*.

Bandello's Machiavelli and Patrizi's Palladio obtain opposite results, but they share a belief in the possibility of building a theory of the tactical dimension of combat, just as they share the same model: Aelianus. Not one modern commentary on *The Art of War* registers the name of the Greek author in the footnotes, but all the same it is not possible to overemphasise the importance of the *De instruendis aciebus* in Machiavelli's military thought. The decisive idea that migrates from Aelianus to Machiavelli is that military theory does not have to do only with weapons, grades, machines, drills, discipline, and rewards and punishment, for the real core of the battle is located somewhere else. In other words, military theory has to deal primarily with the movement of the troops.

For both Machiavelli and Aelianus, tactics are just this. Of course, the 'tactical drive' has broader consequences, and *The Prince*'s readers could easily tie it to the numerous passages where Machiavelli explains that men's actions must be judged in their context, avoiding any abstract moral rule (the principle of *necessitas*). It is only in connection and movement – not considered abstractly, not observed from afar – that the different elements possibly show their virtue, or rather their flaws.

This is not a mere upgrade of the standard military theory of the day: this is a conceptual revolution full of consequences in Machiavelli's work. From this

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24   'Far fare a 500 fanti con grande ordine e facilità tutti i moti di Eliano'.

point of view, the long misunderstood *Art of War* puts us in a better position to judge *The Prince* and the *Discourses* and, indeed, becomes a decisive piece in the Machiavellian puzzle. On the level of scale, in fact, Machiavelli's political thought is more tactical than strategic. Of course, this does not mean that he lacks a broader perspective or that a greater political project is absent from his work; on the contrary, if there is a theorist of Big Politics, it is certainly Machiavelli. His work deserves to be described as tactical because it emphasises the necessity of always establishing a connection between the general plan (the movement of the whole army) and the actions of the single component (the platoon or even the man).

In politics, the primacy accorded to the problem of bonds and links will go together with the condemnation of the 'republics and principalities that have never been seen or known to be true' (P 15).[25] For Machiavelli, making something possible is to find the way to tie together an ambitious project and its reluctant contingencies.[26] So, one of the possible definitions (and not the worst) of the much-celebrated realism of Machiavelli could be precisely this: the ability to reconnect the brain to the arm. That is – to keep the body metaphor that Machiavelli so often uses – to put the more distant branches of the political and military body in motion through a complicated system of nerves.

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25   'Repubbliche e principati che non si sono mai visti né conosciuti in vero essere'.

26   Machiavelli's political thought could be read as an endless reflection on ties and connections. On this point, see Pedullà 2013.

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PART 2

Machiavelli and Philosophy

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Lucretian Naturalism and the Evolution of Machiavelli's Ethics

Alison Brown

Introduction

The influence of the Epicurean revival was not fully felt until the seventeenth century, but within Italy, and especially in Florence, it contributed to a much earlier shift in thinking.[1] By the middle of the fifteenth century, Lucretius's *De rerum natura* and Diogenes Laertius's newly translated *Life of Epicurus* were circulating in Florence and they both encouraged new, transgressive thinking there, especially Machiavelli's.[2] Although Machiavelli never cited Lucretius openly, his transcription of *De rerum natura*, now in the Vatican Library, clearly left an indelible impression on him, which is reflected not only in his early political and philosophical writings but also in his poetry and in the *canzoni* he wrote almost at the end of his life.[3] In what follows, I shall argue that the close parallels between the writings of these two men demonstrate the extent of Machiavelli's debt to Lucretius and his naturalistic ethics. According to the marginalia in book II of his transcription, his interest was initially aroused by the revolutionary implications of Lucretius's swerve of atoms, which then influenced his thinking on a series of interrelated topics that betray his radicalism. I shall centre my argument on the influence of Lucretius and Epicurus's 'hard primitivism', since it helps to explain Machiavelli's morality and its relationship to later social contract theories.[4] But in order to understand its place in Machiavelli's wider outlook, I begin by examining Lucretius's atomism and his psychological interpretation of the role of human passions, which also in-

1   See Wilson 2009; Johnson and Wilson 2007; Palmer 2012.
2   Brown 2010a, pp. 1–2, 68–97. On transgressivism in Florence and its influence on Machiavelli, see Fubini 2009, pp. 282–3.
3   Brown 2010a, pp. 68–87 and 113–22, see 2010b, 2013.
4   See Lovejoy and Boas 1935, pp. 222–42.

fluenced Machiavelli in important ways – especially his emphasis on free will as the mental freedom to act as autonomous agents, and on the influence of fear and desire as motivating forces in our lives. Because they help to explain Machiavelli's apparent inconsistencies, they also help to demonstrate the coherence of his political and ethical thinking as a whole.

The puzzle about Machiavelli is where he stands in the debate about the cosmos, since he apparently believes both in free will and in astrological fatalism, in the same way in which he apparently advocates both republicanism and princely rule.[5] Here Lucretius may offer a solution, for as an Epicurean he combined the elements of freedom and determinism in the world differently from other ancient philosophers and from Christian scholastics. In contrast to the providential creationism of the Platonists and the Christians and the teleology of Aristotle, the Epicureans believed the world was neither divine nor purposeful: 'in no way has the nature of the world been made for us by divine power', Lucretius wrote in the second book of *De rerum natura*. Instead, the Epicurean world was one of many mortal worlds which were created in an eternal universe by the random collision of swerving atoms in space and would die, 'worn out by old age', with no prospect of immortality for its inhabitants nor a final end beyond this life. Despite the philosophy's materialism and absence of an after-life, however, it offered freedom of a different sort. Thanks to the swerve, it escaped rigid determinism ('the decrees of fate') and allowed us freedom to follow our desires and go 'whereever our mind has taken us'. Because our world eventually developed regular cycles of development according to necessitating laws of cause and effect (*foedera naturae*), it was possible for Epicurus to explain that some things happened of necessity, others by chance, and others 'through our own agency', for whereas 'necessity destroys responsibility and chance or fortune is inconstant', 'our own actions are free'. This tripartite balance of forces has interesting resonance in Machiavelli in balancing chance and necessary laws with freedom, perhaps – as I have suggested elsewhere – representing the early modern outlook better than traditional creationism or Aristotelian teleology.[6] For although, according to Lucretius, 'nature is always free', 'it has no proud masters and does everything

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5   See Parel 1992. On contrasting ancient views, see Sedley 2007.

6   *Vitae* (a), 10, §133; *Vitae* (b), fol. 179r (citing Traversari's translation that Machiavelli would have used, ink foliation [1480] in BL 167.d.6): 'partim vero a fortuna partim a nobis quod necessitas obnoxia non sit instabilisque fortuna. Quod autem a nobis est, dominatu caret'. On necessity describing the mechanical sequence of cause and effect rather than a world made by intelligent design see Sedley 2007, pp. 181–86. See also Brown 2014, and for an important discussion of necessity, fortune and freedom in Machiavelli see Del Lucchese 2002, pp. 45–57.

freely (*sponte*) by itself without the help of gods', atoms nevertheless 'fell into their present arrangement' after their initial buffeting about by establishing regular cycles of development that preserved the species after the early fearful struggle for survival in primitive nature. So lions and foxes survived through their ferocity and guile that over time became inherited traits, and although humans acquired additional polish through education (*doctrina politos constituat*), they too retained in their genes the original traces of these animal passions that had been responsible for their survival.[7] Underlying these motive forces was the emotion of fear, the dominant theme of *De rerum natura*, which Lucretius wrote in order to dispel superstitious fears of death and the unknown with true scientific understanding, believing as he did – in contrast to Plato and Aristotle – that emotions and desires were intermingled with reason in the psyche and could be changed by beliefs and reasoning.[8]

In Machiavelli's world, too, the passions form an integral part of the psyche, and animals like lions and foxes explain human traits. More than that, his world is also governed by the same mixture of continuity (necessity), flux (change) and individual freedom (self-agency) as the Epicureans. First of the building blocks is a universe that is unchanging. Closely following Lucretius who believed that 'everything is always the same' and that 'atoms will behave now as they did in the past, and will do in the future', Machiavelli too believed that 'the world has always been in the same condition', and 'in all cities and in all peoples there are always the same desires and the same humours as there always were', so (following Lucretius's rhythm) 'it is, and always has been, and always will be, that evil follows after good, good after evil'.[9] Within this unchanging universe of space and atoms, there is nevertheless constant movement, the second building block. 'Things go on with incessant motion in every part', causing species to increase and diminish in repetitive cycles of change as atoms come and go, according to Lucretius, and Machiavelli agrees that 'human affairs are always in a state of flux, they move either upwards or downwards', and since 'worldly things are not allowed by nature to stand still', provinces go from order to disorder and back again, with varying degrees of success, 'men's deeds' being 'sometimes more effective in this country or that

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7   *De rerum natura* II. vv. 1090–92; I. vv. 1021–27, II. vv. 300–2; III. vv. 307–9 (see note 18 below), 741–53; V. vv. 855–77.

8   On the Epicurean psyche, see Gill 2009, pp. 126–28, 129, 140–41.

9   See Brown 2010a, p. 76, citing *De rerum natura* II. vv. 294–303; Machiavelli 1971, pp. 145, 122, 250, and 1989 (cited here and subsequently for its page references, not usually following its translation), vol. 1, pp. 322, 278, 521, citing D II. Preface, D I.39, D III.43 ('di necessità').

according to the type of education from which their inhabitants have derived their way of life'.[10]

And the third building block is freedom, which for Lucretius was provided by the swerve, enabling 'living creatures all over the earth to go freely where pleasure leads us, swerving our motions just where our mind has taken us'. This is the most controversial element in Machiavelli's tripartite world, in view of his reputation as a fatalist who believed – according to Anthony Parel – in astral determinism. However, Machiavelli's marginal comment on Lucretius's passage on freedom quoted above – that thanks to the swerve, 'we have a free mind' (*motum varium esse & ex eo nos liberam habere mentem*) – shows the importance he attributed to it.[11] Read in conjunction with Machiavelli's two references to free will in the early 1500s (one misinterpreted, the other omitted by Parel), it seems clear that he was rethinking the problem of free will at this time and now agreed with Lucretius that men and animals did enjoy free volition. In the first of these, the Florentine astrologer Bartolomeo Vespucci's reply in 1504 to Machiavelli's no longer extant letter, Vespucci agrees with him that although the stars are unchanging, the wise man *can* adapt himself to changing circumstances 'and change himself'. And in the second, Machiavelli's *ghiribizzi* or musings to Giovan Battista Soderini in 1506, Machiavelli adds, in a contrapuntal marginal comment, that 'each man must do what his mind prompts him and try his luck with daring, regaining the initiative when fortune slackens off by behaving differently from usual'. This in turn is entirely consistent with what he says about free will in *The Prince*, chapter 25, where he replaces the traditional view of a world governed 'by fortune and by God', with a world in which power is shared between fortune and men, 'in order to keep our free will alive', thereby effectively excluding the providential role of God, who he tells us in the following chapter, 'doesn't want to do everything in order not to deprive us of free will'.[12]

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10   *De rerum natura* I. v. 995, II. vv. 71–9; Machiavelli 1971, pp. 145, 250, 738, and 1989, vol. 1, pp. 322, 521, vol. 3, p. 1232 (D II. Preface; D III.43; IF v.1).

11   *De rerum natura* II. vv. 250–55, in MS. Vat. Rossi 884, fol. 25r, discussed by Brown 2010a, p. 74 and note 16. See Parel 1992, pp. 75–7.

12   On Vespucci's letter and the *Ghiribizzi*, see Sasso 1987–88, vol. 2, pp. 42–56, especially pp. 43, 52–3; Brown 2010a, pp. 73–4. The former is mistranslated by Parel 1992, p. 76, while the marginal addition to the *Ghiribizzi* is not mentioned. The *Ghiribizzi* (13–21 September 1506: 'che ognun facci quello che li detta l'animo et con audacia') are in Machiavelli 1984, p. 242 (β), and 2004, p. 134; see P 25: 'perché el nostro libero arbitrio non sia spento' and chapter 26: 'Dio non vuole fare ogni cosa, per non ci torre el libero arbitrio' (Machiavelli 1971, pp. 295, 297, and 1989, vol. 1, pp. 90, 94). On Machiavelli's free will and the hendiadys 'fortune and God', see De Caro 2013, especially pp. 122–23. See *infra*.

Reading Machiavelli through the lens of Lucretius, it seems clear that freedom meant for him free volition, suggesting that in practice he believed a wise and energetic man could 'change step' and think outside the box (as we might put it today). It had little or nothing to do with the moral freedom of Christians to choose between good and evil, as scholars like Cary Nederman suggest. Machiavelli apparently rejected the idea of individual souls, translating *anima* as imagination rather than as soul or spirit, and he was considered by his friends not to be an orthodox Christian.[13] Moreover, he evidently shared Lucretius's belief that this mental freedom was a natural attribute of 'all living creatures', animals as well as men. Lucretius illustrates this with two examples, by a horse's moment of delay in moving after the gates are raised and by man's ability to resist pressure to move. For Machiavelli, man's freedom consists in his ability to change step, and animals' freedom is represented by the upstanding boar's refusal to return to being a human in *The Golden Ass* – as well as by the advice Machiavelli gave to his son Guido in 1527, to let their mad mule go free so it could 'regain its own way of life'.[14] This suggests that Epicurean naturalism exercised a powerful influence on Machiavelli's outlook, replacing Greek-Arabic fatalism and Christian providentialism with a balance of the same three forces, free will, necessity and chance, which Epicurus had described.[15] It provides the context for understanding the coherence of the political and ethical ideas that developed from these early building blocks.

1 Hard Primitivism and the Growth of Expedient Justice and Religion

Machiavelli's account of man's early development is restricted to a few lines in his *Discourses on the First Decade of Titus Livy*, book I, chapter 2, where he describes how, 'at the beginning of the world, when there were few inhabitants, men lived for a time scattered like animals' – or, as Lucretius put it, 'in the roving manner of wild beasts'.[16] He refers to this early stage of life in chapter 16, in which he compared people restored to freedom after living under a prince to 'a

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13   On Nederman see Brown 2010a, p. 71, note 11; on Machiavelli's religion see Brown 2010a, pp. 80–3.

14   *De rerum natura* II. vv. 263–71, 272–83, discussed by O'Keefe 2009, p. 144; Machiavelli 1971, pp. 973, 1248–49, and 1989, vol. 2, p. 770, and 2004, p. 413; see Brown 2010a, p. 84.

15   See note 6 above. Although Lucretius is the most obvious source of Machiavelli's Epicureanism, he used the *Vitae* of Diogenes Laertius for his *Life of Castruccio Castracani* and is likely to have known it earlier (see Garin 1970, pp. 55–6; Sasso 1987–88, vol. 1, pp. 202–3; Rahe 2008, pp. 34–5).

16   Machiavelli 1971, p. 79, and 1989, vol. 1, p. 197; see *De rerum natura* V. v. 932.

brutish animal […] by nature fierce and silvan but brought up entirely in pris-
on and in servitude'; both, he said, would fall prey to the first person who tried
to recapture them if released into freedom because they would have lost their
primitive survival skills.[17] This 'natural instinct' for self-survival would direct
our 'movements and passions' if not restrained by law or force, Machiavelli
wrote in his poem *On ambition*, where (like Lucretius) he also referred to edu-
cation polishing or 'supplementing' nature.[18]

Florentines were already familiar with Lucretius's 'hard primitivist' account
of early man, which contrasted with what Lovejoy and Boas call the 'soft prim-
itivism' of Ovid's 'golden first age' in his popular *Metamorphoses*.[19] Bartolomeo
Scala was one of the first Florentines to use Lucretius when describing to Cosi-
mo de' Medici in 1463 (probably using Cosimo's own early copy of Lucretius)
how primitive men were:

> at first rough and uncouth, scattered about in woods, without culture,
> without shrines, without a settled home. They used tree trunks to shelter
> from the force and turbulence of winds, and they came forth as naked
> and shaggy creatures.

Although Scala professed this was no more than a myth, Lucretius's primitiv-
ism was picked up by other early readers of *De rerum natura* – such as Bartolo-
meo Fonzio, who wrote in the margin of Francesco Sassetti's copy, 'on the first
kind of man and how wild and uncultivated he was'. In November 1495, a year
after the French invasion of Italy and the downfall of the Medici regime, four
lines of Lucretius's account of life *ante legem* were quoted openly in Marcello
Adriani's public inaugural university lecture of the year to describe the state in
which Florence then found itself, where, he said, quoting *De rerum natura* v.
958–61, men 'couldn't look to the common good, knew no customs and used no
laws; each man carried off the booty that fortune gave him, learning to survive
and live off his own bat' – a state of primitivism confirmed two years later by
one of Adriani's students when he told his former teacher that 'we live as we

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17   Machiavelli 1971, p. 99, and 1989, vol. 1. p. 235: 'un animale bruto […] di natura feroce e
      silvestre […] nutrito sempre in carcere ed in servitù' (D I.16).

18   Machiavelli 1971, p. 985, and 1989, vol. 2, p. 737, citing *Dell'ambizione*, vv. 79–81 ('istinto
      natural', 'per proprio moto e propria passione') and 113–14 ('perché può supplire
      l'educazion dove natura manca'); see also D III.43 and *De rerum natura* III. vv. 307–9: 'qua-
      mvis doctrina politos constituat […] tamen illa relinquit naturae cuiusque animi vestigia
      prima'. See *supra*.

19   Lovejoy and Boas 1935, pp. 10–1, on pp. 43–7 citing Ovid, *Metamorphoses* I. vv. 76–215 (89:
      'aurea prima sata est aetas'). See also Gambino-Longo 2011.

please'.[20] Lucretian primitivism would have been entirely familiar to Machiavelli as well, since he was also one of Adriani's students and his father a friend of Scala's. So despite dealing so briefly with early man in this chapter of the *Discourses*, his view of man's nature was consistent with the idea that survival and self-defence, not Ciceronian moral improvement, was early men's objective in first banding together.[21] These were the utilitarian origins of natural justice and religion.

According to Machiavelli, justice developed after primitive men had gathered together as their numbers increased, choosing the strongest and bravest man as their leader (*capo*) to defend themselves:

> It was thus that men learnt to distinguish what is honest and good from what is pernicious and wicked, for the sight of someone injuring his benefactor evoked in them hatred and sympathy [...] well aware that the same injuries might have been done to themselves.

To prevent this happening, they began to make laws and punish those who broke them, 'and so the notion of justice came into being'.[22] This account compresses what is a two-part process in Epicurus and Lucretius, first a covenant or agreement not to harm or be harmed by another, and then the creation of laws which established the concept of justice. The first stage, summarised by Epicurus in maxim 31 ('natural justice is a symbol or expression of expediency, to prevent one man from harming or being harmed by another'), was expanded by Lucretius into a description of how men were softened by mating and having children and joined up with neighbours for self-protection; eager 'not to hurt nor suffer violence' (*nec laedere nec violari*), they formed agreements (*foedera*) that most people observed in order to preserve the human race.[23] It was after kings had been appointed and overthrown that 'statutes and strict rules of law' (and punishments) were established. This is the second stage, only after which is it possible to talk of justice, according to Epicurus, but even so justice was not based on absolute standards ('there never was an absolute justice', 'injustice in itself is not an evil'), nor was it universal like Aristotle's

20   Scala 1997, p. 276, and 2008, pp. 72–5 (*Dialogus de consolatione*); Brown 2010a, pp. 26, 30
       (on Fonzio), p. 44 and note 5.
21   On the contrast between Lucretius's and Cicero's primitivism, see Lovejoy and Boas 1935,
       pp. 243–59; and Schiesaro 2007, pp. 46, 51–2.
22   Machiavelli 1971, pp. 79–80 ('donde venne la cognizione della giustizia'), and 1989, vol. 1,
       p. 197, and 1950, vol. 1, pp. 212–13.
23   *Vitae* (a), 10, §150–54, maxims 31–40, *Vitae* (b), fol. 181r: 'naturae ius utilitatis est signum, ut
       neque se invicem laedant neque laedantur'; *De rerum natura* v. vv. 1011–27 at 1020, 1025.

natural law, but instead it was based on what was agreed to be expedient by different communities of men.[24] This is its novelty, and although Machiavelli's account of justice is very summary, it adopts the key features of Epicurean justice that make it distinctive, in being expedient, based on agreement, and defined by laws made effective by punishment.

These two stages in the establishment of justice help to explain the apparent contrast between what we might call the 'soft' and the 'hard' aspects of law in Machiavelli. The first stage, when men agreed 'it was right for all to pity the weak', as Lucretius put it, is based on the precept of not doing to another what you do not want done to yourself, or, as Machiavelli puts it, feeling 'hatred and sympathy' at the sight of someone injuring one's benefactor, well aware that we might suffer the same injuries. This 'sign of expediency' (*signum utilitatis*), was identical to the Golden Rule preached by Christ in his Sermon of the Mount – as Bartolomeo Scala acknowledged in his 1483 *Dialogue on laws and legal judgments*, a work that Machiavelli certainly would have known, since his father figured in it. It is also the same precept of reciprocity that Hobbes describes as his second 'law of nature' in *The Leviathan*, which he, too, compares to 'that law of the Gospel; *whatsoever you require others should do to you, you should do the same to them*'.[25]

The contrast between this first stage of establishing justice and the second lies in the introduction of harsher – and to us post-Freudians more alarming – laws that relied on the psychology of fear to be effective. The hidden fear of punishment, *metus poenarum*, stalks Lucretius's poem, where it is described as 'tainting the prizes of life', assailing wrongdoers in their sleep, and, in order to propitiate the wrath of the gods, 'filling the cities with altars and performances of sacred rites'.[26] Fear of punishment as both a political and a religious sanction is also omnipresent in Machiavelli's writings. As he often told his friend Francesco Vettori, fear is 'the greatest master there is', and in the *Prince* chapter 17 he said it was better to be feared than loved, because 'fear is sustained by a

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24 *Vitae* (a), 10, §152, maxim 37, *Vitae* (b), fol. 181r: 'Iustitia nihil per se esset, verum in contractibus mutuis quibuslibet locis id foedus initur ut non laedamus neque laedamur. Iniuria per se malum non est'; fol. 181v: 'quod expediat in usu mutuae societatis eorum quae iusta putantur esse', etc. On the distinctivness of Epicurean justice and its two stages, Alberti 1995, especially pp. 166, 186–87.

25 Scala 1997, p. 344, and 2008, pp. 174–75, citing *Matthew* 22: 37; see Brown 2010a, pp. 29, 85; Hobbes 1946, p. 85.

26 *De rerum natura* v. vv. 1151–68; see Alberti 1995, p. 173, citing the Epicurean Hermarchus on 'fear of the penalty laid down by the law' being the only remedy against 'ignorance of the useful'.

dread of punishment that never leaves you'.[27] Fear became a recurrent word in Machiavelli's political lexicon and a key concept for his psychological analyses of Roman history, in the way that Gabriele Pedullà has recently described.[28] Nor was it only an instrument of control since it also served to undermine contracted obligations, as we can see from Machiavelli's poem *Ingratitude*, where the prince's confidence in his supporters is undermined, because 'his fear of you is more potent than the obligation incurred'.[29]

   The use of fear as a religious weapon of control had been expounded by Marcello Adriani, Machiavelli's teacher, in his Lucretian 1497 inaugural lecture *Nil admirari* ('Fear Nothing'), which explained to his students how propitiatory religion exploited their fear of the unknown by holding them in its thrall instead of liberating them – that is, by making them wait until the Last Judgment to settle their debts in order to extort from them more gifts (indulgences), as though God was a pawnbroker, he said, not a healer.[30] Adriani's approach to religion was anthropological in using the example of the ancient Egyptians and the Romans to explain the origins of propitiatory religion, but it was also political in aiming its attack at Savonarola for what Adriani saw as his abuse of power. The same is true of Machiavelli, for whom the anthropological function of religion lay in keeping people happy and united through prayers and ceremonies, whereas its political function was to control them – as Savonarola did, in claiming that he enjoyed Moses' divine prophetic authority and then using it to frighten the people that they could only be saved by placating God with 'fasting, alms and prayers'. As Machiavelli wrote in the *Discourses*, 1.11:

> There never was lawgiver who didn't seek God's help when introducing extraordinary laws, for otherwise they would not have been accepted. [Even] the Florentines were persuaded by fra Girolamo Savonarola that he talked with God.[31]

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27   Machiavelli 1971, pp. 1238, 282, and 2004, p. 395, and 1989, vol. 1, p. 62.

28   See Pedullà 2011, chapter 2, especially pp. 242–46, referring to his special debt to Lucretius on p. 245.

29   Machiavelli 1971, pp. 983, 110–12, and 1989, vol. 2, p. 744, vol. 1, pp. 257–58 (*Dell'ingratitudine*, vv. 172–76: 'perché li è più potente la paura ch' egli ha di te, che l'obligo contratto'; D I.29).

30   Brown 2010a, pp. 53–5, and on the title of his lecture, *Nil admirari*, pp. 51–2.

31   Machiavelli 1971, pp. 94–5, and 1989, vol. 1, pp. 225–26. See also chapter 6 of *The Prince*, and *L'asino*, v. vv. 106–11 ('digiuni, limosine, orazione'), in Machiavelli 1971, pp. 264–65, 967, and 1989, vol. 1, pp. 26–7, vol. 2, p. 763; Brown 2010a, pp. 78–9, also p. 29 on Scala describing how Minos and Moses used fables to make people more obedient 'by invoking the authority of the gods' (Scala 1997, p. 357, and 2008, pp. 210–11). On the two facets of Machiavelli's approach to religion, Najemy 1999, especially p. 663.

Although Machiavelli was clearly influenced by his experience of Savonarola, as well as by historians like Polybius, it is his psychological understanding of the role of fear in religion and politics that makes his view distinctively Lucretian.

According to Lucretius, it was only in the fourth stage of social evolution, introduced by the discovery of gold, that laws and the fear of punishment began to 'taint the prizes of life'. This followed the first state of nature, in which men and animals fought each other as equals, then the second stage, when primitive communities agreed, or 'contracted', not to hurt each other (since it was not considered wrong to pity the weak), and the third stage, when an alpha-group of natural leaders emerged to transform primitive life in new ways, headed by kings distinguished by 'beauty, strength and genius', who founded cities protected by citadels.[32] Although the order of Machiavelli's cycle of change is slightly different from Lucretius's and more influenced by the Greek historians Polybius and Dionysius of Halicarnassus in advocating mixed government as the solution to corruption, he nevertheless adopted key features of Lucretius's account of social evolution and especially its emphasis on psychological factors.[33]

The destructive role of ambition is a recurrent theme in both Lucretius and Machiavelli. Lucretius's attack on the folly of 'sweating blood in struggling along the narrow path of ambition' in book 5 is anticipated in earlier books by his description of the pleasure for an Epicurean of gazing from the safety of the shore at others' tribulations, as they try to 'climb the pinnacle of riches and lay hold on power', or as they vainly push rocks up a hill like Sisyphus, 'to sollicit power that is never granted'.[34] This desolate image was used by Machiavelli to describe his own situation to Francesco Vettori in December 1513, in vainly offering to roll stones for the Medici in order to get a job that was not granted.[35] Less personally, the folly of ambition is the theme not only of his poem to Luigi Guicciardini *On ambition* and his autobiographical poem *The Golden Ass* but it runs throughout the first book of the *Discourses* as the driving force of political unrest and change.[36] In *Discourses*, I, 5 Machiavelli described how the wealthy's

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32   *De rerum natura* v. vv. 925–1160 (1151 and 1111: 'pro facie cuiusque et viribus ingenioque'), this 'innovative five-stage account' of evolution is described by Schiesaro 2007, pp. 43–5.

33   On the cycle of change and the 'gradualist' or evolutionary approach of Dionysius and Machiavelli see Pedullà 2011, especially pp. 437–41.

34   *De rerum natura* v. vv. 1131–32; II. vv. 12–3; III. vv. 62–3, 995–1002 (998: 'nam petere imperium quod inanest nec datur unquam').

35   Machiavelli 1971, p. 1160, and 1989, vol. 2, p. 930, and 2004, p. 265; on Sisyphus, see Raimondi 1998, pp. 37–43.

36   See Najemy 2010, pp. 102–10, and note 38 below.

fear of losing their possessions made them acquire more, which stimulated those without possessions or power to emulate them. This in turn led to the degeneration he had described in chapter 2, for once power became hereditary, 'heirs began to degenerate from their ancestors', provoking a Buddenbrooks cycle of decline as they spent the money their fathers had created and devoted themselves to lives of luxury.[37]

The novelty of this psychological explanation of acquisition and degeneration distinguishes Lucretius and Machiavelli from writers like Cicero and Sallust and their humanist followers in Florence, who attacked ambition and the love of riches from a moral stance, for undermining the traditional Roman virtues of piety, nobility and honour.[38] By contrast, instead of attempting to eradicate these passions, Machiavelli, like Lucretius, accepted that they were part of human nature and needed to be controlled, not destroyed, which for Machiavelli meant incorporating conflict and dissent within the political system.[39] Novel though this was, it was in fact Machiavelli's naturalistic ethics that proved more subversive, as we can see from his poem *The Golden Ass*. Written around 1517, after Machiavelli's loss of office, the poem's use of animals to criticise men's 'civilized' behaviour offers another route to understanding the influence of Lucretian primitivism on his expedient morality.

2 Men and Animals

As Machiavelli spells out in *The Golden Ass*, animals are not only born stronger and better equipped for life than man, whom he describes, as Lucretius did, as a wailing *puer nudus* at birth, but they also retained the natural virtues of prudence, temperance and courage, from which men were de-routed by their ambition. The poem describes Machiavelli's early life of incessant activity – not even Christ could stop him running up the wide Via Larga, where the Medici had their palace – until his loss of office led to a Dantesque mid-life crisis from which a beautiful handmaid of Circe eventually rescued him. As guardian of Circe's flocks of men transformed into animals, she offered him the chance of

37 Machiavelli 1971, pp. 84, 80; Machiavelli 1989, vol. 1, pp. 206, 197–98 (D 1.5 and 1.2 'subito cominciarono li eredi a degenerare dai loro antichi'). See *supra*, and Guicciardini 1951, pp. 39–40, note 33.

38 Schiesaro 2007, pp. 45–51; and Pedullà 2011, pp. 325–33. Though written without reference to each other, both make the same point about the novelty respectively of Lucretius and Machiavelli in their approach to ambition.

39 Pedullà 2011, especially pp. 123–33, 196–98, 333–36 (citing D 1.4, 6–7, 37, 46; IF III.1, VII.1).

talking to one of them, the boar, who after refusing the chance of being changed back into a human, set out to destroy Machiavelli's 'self-love' by demonstrating that animals are much more moral than humans. They are more prudent than men in choosing for themselves the appropriate climate in which to live and the appropriate food to eat, whereas men move to restlessly to seek wealth, often to unhealthy climates and polluted atmospheres. Animals are stronger than men and act valorously without the spur of glory. They are also more temperate, spending little time on love-making or on searching for rare foods. And they are 'closer friends to Nature', fully clad and sharper in all the senses except for touch, whereas man is born weeping and unprotected except by his hands and speech, which he uses only to feed his ambition and avarice and to kill, crucify and plunder others.[40] Since the virtues of prudence, courage and temperance constitute (with justice) the four cardinal virtues in classical and medieval moral schema – as in the *Good Government* frescoes in Siena, for example – Machiavelli is making the point that, far from enjoying an *a priori* status, they, like justice, all have a natural, utilitarian origin.[41]

The Golden Ass can be read as a satire in which Machiavelli lampoons his contemporaries as animals, or as an Aesopian fable that uses animals as moral *exempla* – like the *Prince*, which we are told 'turns Cicero upside down' in recommending the beastly fox and lion as models for a prince.[42] But if we approach both works from the viewpoint of Machiavelli's primitivism, we read them not as satires but as evidence of his nature-based morality, according to which animals exemplify the necessary self-survival skills that Lucretius had described. Subversive though this morality was in narrowing the gap between humans and animals, it was based on a historical understanding of how animals had survived in primitive nature and which traits had ensured their survival. Since the same traits had left traces in human genes as well, animal behaviour was more relevant to humans than classical moralists like Cicero suggested.

There is another natural quality shared by men and animals, that is, the free will to go 'where pleasure leads us' and 'where our mind has taken us', as Lucretius described it in the passage picked out by Machiavelli in his transcription.[43]

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40   Machiavelli 1971, pp. 973–76, and 1989, vol. 2, pp. 750–72 (*L'asino*, especially book VIII); see Sasso 1991–94; and Brown 1210a, pp. 83–4.

41   Skinner 1986, pp. 46–55; Donato 2001, p. 66.

42   Skinner in Machiavelli 1988, pp. xix–xx; see *De officiis*, I, xiii, 41 (pp. 44–5). On *L'asino* as satire, see Anselmi and Fazion 1984; Inglese 1985, and note 44 below.

43   In transcribing Pomponio Leto's reading of 2, line 262, Machiavelli wrote that 'men' are 'ruled' by their will through their limbs, rather than that the will conveys movement through the limbs (Brown 2010, p. 74).

In *The Golden Ass* free will is exemplified by the boar's refusal to be turned back into a man after his transformation by Circe, since he believes he is better off as an animal, more independent and more moral than humans. Although Machiavelli borrowed this episode from Plutarch's *Gryllus*, the boar's defiant words, as he rises upright on his feet, 'I don't want to live with you and I refuse' are Machiavelli's own and represent the argument that animals as well as men – 'all living creatures' – have the ability to move independently in response to their own free will.[44] In the *Prince*, this ability enables an exceptional leader to buck the trend and break the downward cycle of political decline in the space left to him by God and fortune. For as we have seen in the passages in chapters 25 and 26 already described, Machiavelli transformed the traditional view that fortune and God were jointly responsible for what happened in the world by suggesting that fortune shares with us, not with God, half of the responsibility for events, in order to prevent our free will from being extinguished.[45]

In referring to both fortune and God, Machiavelli makes it clear that he is asserting the individual's freedom of action in the face of traditional theories of Christian providence and Greco-Arab astrological fatalism. The extent of his challenge to these traditions is shown by his role in Luigi Guicciardini's draft dialogue *On Man's Free Will*.[46] In it, the character 'Niccolò' wants to hear from 'some serious and learned man' how 'divine providence, the influx of the heavens and the free desires of humans' can be reconciled. Despite the difficulty (we are told) of reconciling the evils in the world with divine Providence, and moral responsibility with natural determinism, the two other disputants, 'Cesare' and 'Girolamo' both speak as Christians for whom free will can never contradict religion, leaving Machiavelli exposed as a doubter or agnostic, who 'if I didn't doubt, wouldn't have an intellect, nor would I merit more for believing the truth than someone who had never thought about it'. Equally transgressive is his natural morality, which the dialogue goes on to contrast with Girolamo's conventional morality that draws a clear distinction between men and animals. For whereas the lives of animals are ordered by Nature, Girolamo says, men order their own lives, using legislation to promote virtue (especially poverty, 'the true mother and origin of all virtuous deeds') and condemn its enemy, leisure. To this, 'Niccolò' immediately objects that since men strive all their

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44   Machiavelli 1971, p. 973, and 1989, vol. 2, pp. 769–72 at 770 (VIII. v. 28: 'Viver con voi io non voglio, e rifiuto'); see Brown 2010a, p. 84; Rahe 2008, p. 35; *Moralia* §985–92, especially 986 F–988 E; on its ambivalent readings see Warner 1997.

45   See note 12 above.

46   See Guicciardini (Luigi), *Del Libero Arbitrio*, partly edited and discussed by Gilbert 1938. For Machiavelli's poem *De ambizione* to Luigi, see note 18 above.

lives to escape poverty and enjoy leisure, 'Nature would have been too harmful to humans to have given them appetites so contrary and – according to you – injurious to their health'.[47]

The dialogue is unfinished and postdates Machiavelli's death in 1527. The role it assigns to 'Niccolò' nevertheless usefully highlights the novelty of Machiavelli's naturalistic ethics in suggesting – contrary to what Girolamo had said – that men and animals share the same passions and the same love of freedom. This view is entirely consistent with the real Machiavelli's emphasis on man's acquisitive and ambitious nature, which he thought should be acknowledged and controlled rather than eradicated. So in the *Prince* he warns the prince not to 'touch the property of citizens and subjects', for 'men sooner forget the death of their father than the loss of their patrimony', and in later chapters, commenting that 'most men live happily provided they're not deprived of their property or their honour', he anticipates the *Discourses* in writing that citizens must be encouraged to practise their trades and professions freely without fear of losing their possessions or having them overtaxed.[48] As we saw, the fear of losing one's possessions provides the dynamic that drives those who already own property to want more, in order not to lose what they have, and the have-nots to emulate them, partly for revenge and partly to become rich and powerful themselves.[49] But instead of condemning this vicious cycle, Machiavelli suggests that the force of its driving passions should be used build a prosperous and competitive State, whether it is a princely State or – better – a republic, since:

> all towns and all countries that are in all respects free profit by this enormously. For populations increase where marriages are made freely, since everyone is happy to have children if he is sure that he can raise them and that his patrimony won't be taken away, and that not only are they born free and not slaves, but through their ability they can become rulers.

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47 *Del libero arbitrio*, citing fols. 65v ('lungo tempo ho bramato udire da qualche grave et doctissimo huomo discorrere […] come insieme unitamente concorrino […] la divina providentia, l'influxo celeste, con le libere volontà humane'), 63v ('Se io non dubitassi, non harei intellecto, né meriterei più nel credere di poi el vero che coloro che non mai ci pensorono'), 67r ('la vera madre et la propria origine d'ogni virtuosissima opera'), 67v ('Per certo, la Natura harebbe con troppo danno de' mortali introducto nel animo di ciascuno appetiti tanto contrarii et tanto inimici seconda la opinione vostra della salute delli homini'). This text is unpublished, hence the fol. references.

48 Machiavelli 1971, pp. 282, 284, 292–93; 230–31, 658–59, and 1989, vol. 1, pp. 62–3, 67, 84; vol. 3, p. 1080 (P 17, 19, 21, also D III.23 and IF II.1).

49 Machiavelli 1971, p. 84, and 1989, vol. 1, p. 206 (D I.5). See *supra*.

> Riches multiply […] for everyone tries to acquire possessions that they think they can enjoy once they've acquired them. So it comes about that competing with one another, men look to their own and the public advantage, so that both make wonderful progress.[50]

The lesson of the *Discourses*, that laws and institutions are necessary to control men's ambition and desire for material prosperity, is also the moral lesson of Epicurus. 'When we have achieved tolerable security against our fellow-men', he writes in one of his Maxims, 'with enough power to be materially prosperous, then we achieve the genuine freedom from care that is provided by a quiet private life'.[51] Both men believed that material prosperity depended on being safe from assault – the first concern of early societies – and free enough to pursue our desires, which for most people was more important than exercising power. For 'in all republics … there are never more than forty or fifty citizens capable of holding power, all the rest, for whom it's enough to live in security, can easily be satisfied by laws which provide general security as well as protecting the ruler'.[52]

Conclusion

It is possible to trace the influence of Epicurus and Lucretius in other fields that are less directly connected with Machiavelli's 'hard primitivism' but which nevertheless reveal the influence of Epicurean naturalism and expedient ethics on his thinking. For instance, he shared their argument that language – like law and justice – develops naturally from animal-like sounds and not from pre-existing concepts, since like them it systematises useful practices that are not based on such concepts or norms but develop spontaneously for their practical utility.[53] Machiavelli agreed with Lucretius that we need to use 'new words' to describe new concepts, and also to incorporate words from other countries and cultures in order to enrich our own expanding culture and record it for posterity, developing this double argument in his *Discourse or Dialogue*

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50   Machiavelli 1971, p. 150, and 1989, vol. 1, p. 332 (D II.2).

51   *Vitae* (a), 10, §143, maxim 14, *Vitae* (b), fol. 180v: 'cum humana securitas fuerit usque ad aliquid virtusque innixa et purissima fecunditas sit, quae ex quiete et quae a multis recedendo securitas provenit'.

52   D I.16, see IF II.1, on the security provided by new towns in conquered territories (Machiavelli 1971, pp. 100–1, 658–59, and 1989, vol. 1, p. 237; vol. 3, pp. 1080–81).

53   This analogy is discussed by Alberti 1995, pp. 170–71.

Concerning our Language and in his *Florentine Histories*.[54] But whereas for Lucretius it was the dearth of Latin words in which to describe 'the obscure concepts of the Greeks' that required new words, for Machiavelli new words were required to describe not only new scientific concepts but also his own novel political ideas. The analogy between language and law suggests his political vocabulary may have benefited from his naturalistic theory of justice and morality in enabling him to use new, value-free words that no longer carried traditional moral overtones – in order to achieve what has recently been called the 'technification of his lexicon'.[55]

We can also see Lucretius exerting his subtle influence on Machiavelli in the *canzone* Machiavelli wrote for his beloved mistress, the singer Barbera Salutati Raffacani, towards the end of his life in 1525–26: 'How sweet is the deception [...] that deprives another of distress and sweetens every bitter taste. O sublime and rare remedy that shows the straight path to wandering souls, you, O Love [...]'. The song plays on the famous lines '*Suave, mari magno*' that open book 2: 'How sweet it is when the sea is rough to watch another's distress from the shore', and then, from book 6, on Lucretius's equally famous praise of Epicurus, who 'showed us the straight and narrow path to which we should run without turning'.[56] Written with other songs as *intermezzi* for Machiavelli's plays *La Mandragola* and *La Clizia*, it is not surprising that the *canzone* alludes to their themes of deception and remedy – as well as to the theme of pleasure, the Epicureans' 'highest good' and 'guide of life'. Satirical though the plays may be, the presence of *De rerum natura* in the song reminds us once again of the hold that Lucretius still exercised over Machiavelli, who wittily celebrates in his play the animal traits of guile and deception and even the young man's freedom to 'change step' in order to overcome old-fashioned superstition.[57]

Pulling these threads together, we can see how much Lucretius and the Epicureans contributed to Machiavelli's transgression and to his morality, which Riccardo Fubini describes as his unique and paradoxical combination

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54   *De rerum natura* I. vv. 138–39, 831–32; III. v. 260; v. vv. 1028–32, 1041–43, 1440–57; Machiavelli 1982, pp. 28–33, and 1971, p. 926 (D), and 1971, p. 637, and 1989, vol. 3, p. 1040 (IF I.5). See Brown 2013, pp. 9–10. On the originality of this double Epicurean argument, Atherton 2009, pp. 208–9.

55   By Pedullà 2011, pp. 148–49.

56   Philip Hardie (personal communication) also suggests the possible influence on this *canzone* of Lucretius I. vv. 938, 940–1 (on sweetening with *mellis dulci flavoque liquore* the *amarum absinthi laticem*).

57   Machiavelli 1971, pp. 882, 909, and 1989, vol. 2, pp. 804, 857; see Brown 2013, pp. 9–10. On *Mandragola* as a 'play about Florentine politics', see Martinez 2010, pp. 212–19, and on the *intermezzi*, Bruni 2005, especially pp. 382–84, 390–92.

of 'brutal naturalism and passionate moralism'.[58] By following only the Epicureans' influence on Machiavelli and not that of other ancient writers, I have hoped to show how consistently their philosophical outlook influenced Machiavelli's, imposing coherence on the wide range of topics he wrote about and making him break as openly as they did with the accepted orthodoxies of the day – hence his 'transgression'. In insisting on the freedom of all living creatures to act independently, despite the constraints of necessity and chance, Machiavelli was adopting the Epicurean balance of forces that ran counter to Christian providentialism and Aristotelean teleology.[59] So, too, did his emphasis on the importance of the passions and animal traits in man's psyche, which similarly contrasted with the views of classical moralists and Christians. This in turn encouraged the importance Machiavelli attributed to psychological explanations of human behaviour, especially the force of fear and ambition on man's development, which then became the basis of his naturalistic or expedient ethics – do to others what you would like them to do to you, and if they do not, then punish them.

Translated into political counsel, as realistic advice to the prince to rule by fear and force, to break his word, and, if necessary for his survival, even adopt the appearance instead of the practise of virtue, his apparent relativism has encouraged his posthumous reputation for immorality and wickedness.[60] Yet if we assess him by looking backwards to his Epicurean roots, which judged good and evil by 'sober reasoning', 'measuring one against the other and by looking at the conveniences and inconveniences', we find this is exactly what Machiavelli does. Unlike pope Julius II, whom he accused of behaving rashly in having 'no scales or measuring stick in his house', Machiavelli evaluates good and bad outcomes and bases his judgement on them, writing famously in the *Prince* that 'in the actions of all men, and especially of princes (where there is no appeal to a higher judgement), one looks to the end' – and if the end or outcome is good, the means to it will be judged favourably.[61] And if instead of looking backwards we look forward, we find that Thomas Hobbes, too, shares the same Epicurean approach in judging good and evil by measuring their advantages and disadvantages, or what he calls 'reckoning, that is adding and

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58 Fubini 2009, p. 288: 'paradossale combinazione, che *solum* è sua, di naturalismo brutale e di appassionato moralismo'.

59 See above at note 6.

60 See Anglo 2005, especially pp. 17–8, and chapters 4, 9, etc.; Kahn 2010, pp. 244–47.

61 Letter to Menoeceus, *Vitae* (a), 10, §130, *Vitae* (b), fol. 178v: 'Commensione itaque et utilium inutiliumque discretione diligenti haec omnia iudicare convenit'; Machiavelli 1984, pp. 242–43, and 2004, p. 135 (*Ghiribizzi to Soderini*: 'questo papa, che non ha né stadera, né canna in casa'), 1971, pp. 1082, 284, and 1989, vol. 1, p. 67 (P 18).

subtracting of the consequences [...]'. Accordingly, his first 'precept or general rule of reason' is '*that every man ought to endeavour peace*'.[62] The second precept of his 'law of nature' – as we have already seen – was identical to Machiavelli's (and Epicurus's) natural law of expedient self-interest, 'Do unto others', and since he also shared Machiavelli's view of men's ambitious and acquisitive nature that created an endless fight for power – what Hobbes calls 'a state of war' – he too concluded that the most expedient solution was to provide a government whose laws would provide security for its citizens to enjoy their possessions in peace.[63] His social contract is also a two-stage process, the second stage imposing laws with punishments after an initial agreement, or 'contract', not to do to others what you do not want done to yourself – and since verbal consent to the initial agreement was too weak to be relied on, 'the passion to be reckoned upon', as he puts it, 'is fear'.[64] So fear was as important a weapon of political control for Hobbes as it was for Machiavelli.

The most significant difference between them concerned free will. In Machiavelli's cosmos, the play of chance and the necessary laws of cause and effect left space for the individual to act 'through his own agency' that was lacking in Hobbes.[65] Nevertheless, in the context of his discussion with Bramhall about 'Questions concerning Liberty, Necessity and Chance', Hobbes – as his title suggests – was much closer to Machiavelli and the Epicureans in adopting their tripartite, naturalistic approach to what had previously been defined in terms of theology or fatalistic determinism. Like them, he thought freedom was compatible with necessity and chance – not because he shared their view that free will consists in acting 'through our own agency', but because he agreed with them that freedom to pursue our pleasure consisted in evaluating, or weighing-up, outcomes and adopting one's 'last opinion of the goodness or evilness' of the object, 'be the opinion true or false', which he, too, believed animals were as capable of doing as men (as a materialist, for whom 'will is appetite', Hobbes defined liberty as being able to choose whether to eat

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62   Hobbes 1946, pp. 25–6, 85 (*Leviathan*, 5 and 14), 1991, p. 123 (*De cive*, 2. 1–2). On Hobbes' Epicureanism, see Pacchi 1978, and Rahe 2008, pp. 291–320, especially note 3, listing at length the works in which it is unmentioned.

63   Hobbes 1946, pp. 85, 80–2 (*Leviathan*, 14 and 13); see 1991, pp. 148, 117–18 (*De cive*, 3, 26; 1, 12).

64   Hobbes 1946 p. 92 (*Leviathan*, 14); see 1991, p. 113 (*De cive*, 1, 3); Pacchi 1978, especially pp. 68–9.

65   Hobbes 1946, pp. 136–45 especially p. 137 (*Leviathan*, 21), 1991, pp. 228–9 (*De cive*, 10, 8). On Hobbes' progressive distancing himself from the void, *simulacra*, atoms and man's free will, despite his similar approach to language, law and mortalism, see Pacchi 1978, pp. 62–6, 69; see also pp. 68, 70–1, and note 63 above.

or not when hungry, but not whether to be hungry or not, which lay in the realm of necessity).[66] Although the *Leviathan* allowed less political freedom to its citizens than Machiavelli's free republican State, Hobbes, like Machiavelli, recognised that for most citizens what mattered was the State's ability to provide security and peace, so they could enjoy 'the liberty to buy, and sell, and otherwise contract with one another, to choose their own abode, their own diet, their own trade of life, and institute their children as they themselves think fit; and the like'.[67] Machiavelli, for his part, pragmatically recommended that, after the death of Lorenzo di Piero de' Medici in 1519, the Florentines should adopt a government that he called 'a monarchy' during the lifetimes of the Medici popes before it reverted to being a republic when they died.[68]

By following the trail of what Gerard Passannante has aptly called the 'absent presence' of Lucretius in many early-modern writings, we can identify the extent of his cumulative influence on both Machiavelli and Hobbes, and especially on Machiavelli.[69] For thirty years, Lucretius provided an explanatory thread that runs through all Machiavelli's writings, giving them coherence and explaining their novelty. As transgressive as Lucretius and the Epicureans in breaking taboos by his naturalism, Machiavelli was also as forward-looking as they were in grasping man's psychology and basing his expedient morality and politics on it.

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66   Hobbes 1999, pp. 70, 72, 74, 87; De Caro 2004, especially pp. 7, 24.

67   Hobbes 1946, p. 139 (*Leviathan*, 21).

68   Machiavelli 1971, pp. 24–31 at 30 ('è una monarchia'); Machiavelli 1989, vol. 1, pp. 101–15 at 113 (*Discursus florentinarum rerum*).

69   Passannante 2011, especially pp. 11–12; see Gambino-Longo 2011, p. 25: 'Lungi dall'essere dimenticato nascosto o censurato, il *De rerum natura* è una lettura costante lungo tutto il periodo che va dal suo ritrovamento per opera di Poggio Bracciolini alla sua presunta rinascita alla fine del '500'.

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Corpora Caeca: Discontinuous Sovereignty in *The Prince*

Jacques Lezra

Gramsci's arguments regarding the composition of *Il Principe* are well known. Here is the way they open, in outline: Machiavelli's text, Gramsci says, renders the figure of the 'prince' 'anthropomorphically', 'plastically', even artistically.[1] This strategy makes Machiavelli's 'short book' part of the 'modern age', as different in its argumentative procedure as in its content from medieval or early modern treatises on the education of princes, on the virtues of the good monarch, etc. *The Modern Prince* proceeds, in consequence, on three levels, which Gramsci understands to correspond to three levels on which Machiavelli's work also operates: Gramsci describes, with respect to *Il Principe*, a historic shift from pre-modernity to modernity; he tracks in Machiavelli's book a shift from a scholastic logic to a mythography or a rhetoric; and finally, he takes from *Il Principe* the 'modern' requirement *to* pass, and the means *for* passing, from the figure of the myth-prince conceived as an individual to a conception of sovereignty imagined as an 'organism', whose first 'cell' is the political party.

It is my intention to focus on the relation between these three levels or modes of argument in *Il Principe*, on the thoroughly irresponsible basis of an overly detailed reading of one symptomatic analogy from the last sections of *Il Principe*. These levels or modes of argument in *Il Principe* are, of course, imbricated with one another, and form a set of mutually-enforcing relays, history to rhetoric, rhetoric to logic, logic to history, and so on, in a series of permutations of surprising coherence. I think it is fairly controversial to suggest that Gramsci draws the 'organic' or cellular conception of sovereignty characterising the *modern* Prince from the formal coherence or continuity, the systematic relay-form, among history, rhetoric and logic, that he finds in *Il Principe* – and not from the thematics of Machiavelli's work.[2] However consequential it may be

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1 Gramsci 1967, pp. 135–37. Italian citations are from the 'Noterelle sulla politica del Machiavelli' (Gramsci 1975, pp. 1555–1652).

2 The reader of Gramsci's Machiavelli who comes closest to making this argument is, I think, Louis Althusser, in *Machiavelli et 'Nous'* (Althusser 2009). I am thinking in particular of his remarks on the first of the 'conditions' under which the 'adventure' of passing from private

– and it is highly consequential, since on this description of the 'continuism' of Gramsci's model the concept of hegemony will turn out to be a logical function rather than, or before becoming, a political one – however consequential it may be, though, this principle of continuity does not obtain universally, or continuously, in the text of *Il Principe*, where a different, disruptive set of effects is at work as well. One might be tempted to cluster these effects together, and say that they are evidence that a companion principle of *dis*-continuity rules *Il Principe*, and the prince himself as well – but the symmetry of this structure would be deceptive in the extreme. The principle of discontinuity in Machiavelli is not a principle; it does not gather its effects into a set organised axiomatically around a term or a function governing the class of effects and designating their concept. Discontinuities in *Il Principe* work instead like contingent indices, or acts of ostension, or of reference, or of designation – they are disorganising strokes of fortune, *eventa*. They are more like floods or earthquakes than like reasoned decisions.

So if the thought that is at work in *Il Principe* does *not* represent the dynamic conflict between symmetrical principles, what *does* it represent?

Let me first be clear on my terminology. I intend the notion of continuity in a fairly technical sense. It would seem nonsensical to claim for Machiavelli a proto-Leibnizian position: *natura non facit saltus* meshes badly with the catastrophism we find in *Il Principe*, where nature jumps about, society does as well, and the Prince must somehow react to the predictable occurring of unforeseen effects in both domains.[3] But neither natural nor social phenomena – which include unexpected earthquakes, plagues, floods, the whimsy of a bad prince, the spontaneous revolt of a people, and so on – are principally where Machiavelli's continuism can be marked – or so, at any rate, Gramsci will suggest. It is rather the coherence with which Machiavelli's argument is conducted that interests Gramsci – the highest example of which, *The Modern Prince* suggests, is to be found at the conclusion of *Il Principe*, where 'Machiavelli makes himself the people, merges himself with the people (*si confonde col popolo*) ... whom [he] has convinced with the preceding tract, whose conscious expression he becomes and feels himself to be, with whom he feels himself

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person to Prince, from a geographical location to a national state, can occur: the condition that the fortunate, or happy, *heureuse*, encounter between *Fortuna* (objective conditions of a conjuncture, in a given region) and *virtù* (subjective disposition of an individual in that conjuncture) have a *form*, whether the form of a correspondence, non-correspondence, or deferred correspondence (see Althusser 2009, pp. 133–35).

3   I am offering a very schematic version of Leibniz's principle, which is not, or not entirely, or not consistently, treated *as* a principle by Leibniz himself, and which depends in any event on quite a different notion of what 'nature' is than we find in Machiavelli.

identified (*medesimezza*): it seems that the whole of the "logical" work is only a reflection of the people (*un'autoriflessione del popolo*), an internal reasoning which takes place inside the popular consciousness and has its conclusions in an impassioned, urgent cry' (*un grido appassionato, immediato*).[4] This autopoetic, or reflexive, *autoriflessivo*, 'merging' of Machiavelli with a 'people' that *Il Principe* has convinced of its theses, and produced in consequence *as* a people, this autopoiesis involves – or so Gramsci's astute reading suggests – what we should call a strong continuity, signalled by the stress on identity, *medesimezza*, and on immediacy, *un grido* [...] *immediato*, badly translated by Louis Marks as 'urgent'. Machiavelli, his readers, and his work achieve an organic identity in and by means of *Il Principe* – or if we do not wish to make the point quite so strong, we may say that they are brought into similitude with one another, on the basis of which they may 'feel' themselves to be reflections of one another, con-fused with one another, identical to one another. On this description, the functional differences between author, work and reader are displaced or erased; an immediate, impassioned 'cry' is the result, the affective expression of self-thinking, and we understand this cry to issue from reader, writer and work as well.

Say, then, that Machiavelli's text is built on two not entirely compatible bases. We will first describe them according to a series of thematic and argumentative disjunctures. On one hand, we find a structural or formal continuity tending to distribute sovereign power across a broad field of potential political agents; and on the other hand we find the anthropomorphic figure gathering that dispersed sovereignty into one mythopoetic, individual form. On one hand, sovereignty invested in an-archic relations and divisible figures; on the other, a form of Sorelian, mythic sovereignty, conceived as an indivisible figure or a mask, a prosopon of an organism, in which the power to distribute power is arrested, concentrated, and embodied. On one side, what Gramsci refers to as 'a scattered [...] infinity of free wills which for the positive phase follow different and contrasting directions'; on the other, what he calls 'an organism; a complex element of society in which the cementing of a collective will [...] has already begun'.[5] The multitude on one hand; the hegemon on the other.

To think through these two bases, these disjuncts, is to sketch out the concept of their working-together, and the concept of the relation between continuously distributed sovereignty and effective sovereignty. When we begin to sketch out these concepts we notice that the provisional distinction between a principle of continuity and effects of discontinuity in *Il Principe* tends to be-

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4   Gramsci 1967, p. 136; Gramsci 1975, p. 1556.
5   Gramsci 1967, p. 137; Gramsci 1975, p. 1557.

come very messy as we move among the rhetorical, historical and logical levels on which, in principle, *Il Principe* operates. This dis-organisation is pervasive in *Il Principe*, and Machiavelli seeks throughout to turn it to his advantage, rhetorically as well as logically, by giving it a recognisable, seductive and effective shape.

The strong continuity that Gramsci describes in Machiavelli – a reflexive 'medesimezza' obtaining among the levels of the argument and among its modes of discourse – would seem, on first glance, to square badly with at least one principal thesis of Machiavelli's argument: the familiar argument that Fortuna is capricious, her actions unforeseeable, her domain of action uncircumscribable.[6] There is, of course, no requirement, beyond a vague sense that decorum would prefer it so, that the formal characteristics of an argument bear any relation to the subject or contents of that argument (for instance, one can argue in dialogue against the primacy of voice in philosophy, or propositionally for the superiority of poetic diction as a way of conveying general human truths) so this 'lack of squaring' between the formal principle of continuity that Gramsci finds in *Il Principe* and the disruptions of Fortuna at work in Machiavelli's treatise is perhaps trivial. I am inclined to think not, though – mostly because in *Il Principe* Fortuna is three things at least. She is of course first an anthropomorphism, or an allegory, of natural contingency – her purview, the fields of natural phenomena and of human history. But what Fortuna designates with respect to our everyday existence, with respect to the everyday world in which the prince, his narrator and his subjects work, Machiavelli's argument *also* registers as unmotivated discontinuities in the rational scheme, in the *continuity*, of *Il Principe*. Fortuna is thus, in the second place, the recognisable, seductive and effective shape that *Il Principe* furnishes, as cause, emblem, and instance of these discontinuities in the work's conceptual scheme. Finally, and in contrast, Fortuna is still again the name that Machiavelli gives to the set of logical and rhetorical operations (like stipulation, ordering, analogy, and so on) at work throughout *Il Principe*, whose function it is to create 'medesimezza', similitude or continuity *within* the argument, and among its discursive modes and levels. Fortuna, the great leveller, the goddess who produces natural and social horizontalities and lies behind the ephemeral verticalities of the socio-political sphere and of natural space, the figure who distributes sovereignty arbitrarily across the irregular field of human endeavours as an overflowing river distributes debris across a plain, Fortuna is also to be 'seized', to be seduced, forced, turned to advantage. She simultaneously falls without and within the purview of her operations; she is entirely similar to, but

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6 For the classic treatment see Pitkin 1984.

also utterly dissimilar from, the natural and discursive elements that she distributes. In the conceptual landscape that Machiavelli describes, the operation of Fortuna in the affairs of the world is the analogue, the mythopoetic avatar, for the *dynamics* of continuity in *Il Principe*; she is also the analogue for the effects of *dis*continuity in Machiavelli's text; and for the defective concept of the relation between the two, between principle and effect.

The lines in which Fortuna's role is treated most thoroughly in *Il Principe* are to be found in chapter 25, which treats the influence of Fortuna in human affairs, and describes how that influence is to be resisted. You recall how the narrating or arguing 'I' says – after a famous, and famously personalised, description of the proportion of influence that Fortuna has in the affairs of humans – that 'I compare fortune to one of those dangerous rivers [...]'. '[A] ssimiglio [fortuna] a uno di questi fiumi rovinosi che, quando si adirano, allagano e' piani, rovinano li arbori e li edifizi, lievando da questa parte terreno, pongono da quella altra: ciascuno fugge loro dinanzi, ognuno cede all'impeto loro sanza potervi in alcuna parte ostare'.[7] What seems at stake here is the relation between the possibility of planning for a disaster, like the flood, and the capacity to confront it once it has occurred, and to profit from the disaster. As to predicting when disaster will strike – here we are forced into paradoxical formulations: we can foresee *that* Fortuna will act, but not the conditions under which that will occur, its time or quality. Nothing can withstand the flood once it is underway, and no-one can tell when or where it will strike – but a properly foresighted people will build channels prospectively across the countryside, set up dams and dykes, reinforce bridges and so on, so that when the flood occurs its effects are minimised. The properly virtuous man – and the prince *a fortiori* – is the one who, when the catastrophe strikes, is able to take advantage of the desolation to recognise, or produce, effects of order: from the nonexistence, or the destruction, of the cultivated landscape, the virtuous prince will build a politically structured, fortified conceptual landscape that installs and protects his sovereignty – a dwelling. This is, in short, the definitive spot on which the humanistic reading of *Il Principe* rests – the canonical reading, advanced by Skinner among many others, that argues that the prince's *virtù* comes from, and is manifest in, his capacity to profit from Fortuna's unforeseeable outrages. This characterological argument has a companion, structural shape. Machiavelli describes two moments: the preparedness of the prince and the people for the unexpected – as well as the prince's capacity to act decisively in reaction to it. These moments are held together chronologically and conceptually by the narrative persona that Machiavelli employs – a

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7   Machiavelli 1988, p. 85, and 1995, p. 163.

narrator furnished with the capacity to point out this or that event, recollected or anticipated, and to draw analogies to it from which the reader, prince or commoner, can derive practical lessons. Between the prince, whose *virtù* consists in part in seizing the opportunity afforded by the unforeseen but predictable disaster, and the narrator, whose persona coheres precisely inasmuch as he can seize from history and circumstance cases to transform into examples, from which he can provide continuous analogies that cut across time and conditions, between these two figures something like a second-order likeness is established. Unstated, this second-order likeness underwrites the strange, organic mimetism at the heart of political patronage: the prince to whom *Il Principe* is directed draws his authority from the lessons provided by the secretary, who in turn draws his livelihood and authority from the prince he counsels.

It is a compelling account, as its persistence suggests – on one hand, the prince-as-individual, on the other, the narrator-as-prince. Each is a figure for the other; each guards the other, each serves as the base on which the other stands, his *suppositum*. This topologically invaginated structure provides a powerful counterargument, *avant la lettre*, to the charges of inconstancy and of logical incoherence lodged against *Il Principe* by anti-Machiavellians like Gentillet, who in the 1576 *Discours sur les moyens de bien gouverner [...] contre Machiavel* writes marvellously that 'We say usually that the monarch is the living law of his subjects, and that the prince must serve as a rule for his people. Wound not it then be absurd to maintain that the law should be inconstant, shifting with the wind? To the contrary: the law must be firm, constant, permanent, inviolable and unvaryingly and unviolably observed. Otherwise, it is not the law' (*Il faut que la loi soit ferme, constante, permanente, inviolable, et inviolablement observee, autrement ce n'est point loy*).[8] Law is law, and the sovereign is sovereign, and as sovereign the sovereign is the living and regulative law, only inasmuch as the law is constantly itself. Machiavelli's continuist *logic* in the chapter on Fortuna is quite different – the sovereign is himself inasmuch as he is supported, against Fortuna's uncertainties, by the continuity the narrating instance of *Il Principe* provides; the narrator of *Il Principe* is himself, is constant to himself, inasmuch as he is in turn protected from Fortuna's hand by the grace of the sovereign, who underwrites and patronises his project. Here Gramsci's *autoriflessione* works to the extent that a distinction is drawn between the *identity* of the prince and his narrator, and their mere *similarity*. It is not a tautologous *medesimezza* that *Il Principe* installs here and throughout, but a relation of mediate similarity between prince and narrator, a mutual determination-by-Fortuna from which each takes the other's vulnerability-to-

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8 Gentillet 1968, p. 512.

Fortuna as the *suppositum* guaranteeing his identity. It is this defective self-reflection, this second-order likeness, that anti-Machiavellianism reacts to tautologously, foreclosing psychotically the structure of mutual, defective determination that Machiavelli has set in place in *Il Principe*.

Hence the importance of the verb *assimigliare* and of the function, rhetorical as well as logical, of similitude and analogy – throughout *Il Principe*, but principally here, where Fortuna steps onto the page. Of course, the function of similitude is classically to provide a comprehensible, pedagogical, even doxological, mythopoetic shape to a concept. The nature of this transference of attributes – from the natural phenomenon to the abstract concept, from opinion to proposition, from *doxa* to *logos* – is not without controversy, in part because of the relation it proposes between individual experience and general truths. Can it indeed be that the opinion that multitudes derive from experience becomes naturally, gradually, continuously, the truth of propositions, as if there were no discontinuity between statements made in one mode and in another?[9] But in *Il Principe*, and in particular where Fortuna is concerned, matters are even trickier. For Fortuna is always most like herself when she is unpredictable, inconstant, constantly inconstant, as Gentillet calls her, 'muable a tous vents' – in short, Fortuna is most *like* herself when she is least *like* anything we already know, or anything we can foresee. She marks the very limit of similitude – and it is on this ground that the narrator's relation-to-Fortuna can be said to be *like* the prince's relation-to-Fortuna: the fortune of each stands in a similar, though specifically *not* identical, relation of similarity-to-that-which-has-no-similitude, the effects of Fortuna. The narrator and his prince are alike, they can sup-pose one another, in being *like* what has no *likeness*. The continuist logic of *Il Principe* turns on this moment: the limit of similitude lies within, but also designates and regulates from without, the continuous field of similitude.

But just *what* is Fortuna 'like', in this case? 'I compare fortune to one of those dangerous rivers [...]', writes Machiavelli's narrator, '[A]ssimiglio [fortuna] a uno di questi fiumi rovinosi che, quando si adirano, allagano e' piani, rovinano li arbori e li edifizi, lievando da questa parte terreno, pongono da quella altra: ciascuno fugge loro dinanzi, ognuno cede all'impeto loro sanza potervi in alcuna parte ostare'.[10] Let us take the liberty of asking whether this famous analogy to Fortuna has the fortune that I suggested earlier – let us ask whether this analogue to Fortuna registers, as Fortuna herself does, both the unmotivated

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9   The stakes become clearer if one recalls the necessarily mixed way in which Aquinas speaks of the function of analogy in *Summa Theologica* I.13.5 – where naming God's attributes by analogy to those of mortal beings is at once necessary and insufficient.

10   Machiavelli 1988, p. 85, and 1995, p. 163.

discontinuities *in* the rational scheme, in the *continuity*, of *Il Principe*, *and also* is one of the set of logical and rhetorical operations (like stipulation, ordering, analogy, and so on) at work throughout *Il Principe*, whose function it is to create 'medesimezza', similitude or continuity *within* the argument, and among its discursive modes and levels. Does our narrator's simile reasonably and continuously flow, like a strange river, between the decorous banks formed by commonly accepted, recognised, doxological traditions of exegeses and comparisons – or does it overflow those banks unpredictably and catastrophically? Can the virtuous reader, prince or narrator seize the opportunity of this catastrophe? Can we foresee it, plan out in advance the landscape of our eventual interpretations, and secure a position of relative authority over the desolate landscape?

Machiavelli's narrator is clearly doing his best to tie his simile to just this sort of doxological decorum: this is what the indexical exclamation 'questi fiumi rovinosi […]' intends, an ostensive gesture that links *Il Principe*'s description of Fortuna to a well-known hydrography. But the simile works, rhetorically, logically, not only because everyone is likely to have encountered an impetuous river, but also because the impetuosity of the flooding waters is a natural as well as a human character – a humanising attribute of the volume of waters, an attribute both of the physical volume of the water and of the wrath of the river as a natural object. Placing the simile under the aspect of ostension while at the same time personifying it has the effect, paradoxically, of universalising by means of the specific: everyone knows 'questi fiumi', we have all seen one of them; we have all seen these furious rivers, and can distinguish them from those quiet ones over there, the Arno on most days, the rivers we see every day calmly flowing, until Fortuna's hand turns the wheel and they rage across the land. And similarly all of us have encountered impetuous neighbours, or heard of impetuous monarchs, or have done this or that impetuously ourselves. Machiavelli's ostension thus links the 'io' of the narrative, already linked to the figure of the prince in the second-order analogy we have seen, to the experience of the reader – a considered rhetorical strategy with not negligible philosophical import, since it speaks to the way in which a collectivity is created, ostensibly, ostensively, on terms that bridge the natural and the human worlds – including the master term for narrative continuity in *Il Principe*, the ostensive index 'io', I, the first-person narrative instance.

Rivers run throughout Machiavelli's work – notably in the *Art of War*, where, as might be imagined, rivers pose classic, strategic problems to armies.[11] Here

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11   Machiavelli 1997: 'Molti, nel passare i fiumi, sono stati rotti da uno loro nimico accorto, il quale ha aspettato che sieno mezzi da ogni banda e, di poi, gli ha assaltati; come fece

their perils are those of being caught in the middle, with an army on the other bank; or where a facing army, as happens to Cesar in Gaul, is faced with a force on the other bank, making it impossible for the army to cross. When they flood disastrously, Machiavelli's rivers become something more still, as in the *Discorsi*, where the deluge, the 'inondazione', becomes the most important of the causes that 'come from heaven' to 'erase the memory of things'.[12] Its importance is capital, Machiavelli says, both because it is the most 'universal' of these acts of God, and because those who are spared by the flood are 'uomini tutti montanari e rozzi', who, having no knowledge of any past, 'alcuna antichità', cannot leave it to their followers, to posterity. The flood, the overflowing of rivers, becomes also a model for historical caesura, for the break between antiquity and the present. In *The Prince*, too, this normalised figure of the well-known river – *questo fiume* – works both as a strategic figure and as a figure of chronological catastrophe. This is also then used as a way of characterising Fortuna – who is also both anthropomorphised and naturalised; and also to give what one could call the rules of the dynamics of surfaces on which *The Prince* is based: the political/logical surface of the work is continuous but irregular, like a geological body – with mountainous verticalities rising against a plain. The figure of the raging stream is also a figure for the politico-logical structure of the argument, where verticalisations, relations of subsumption, abstraction, and generalisation, exist as the mountains do in the distance, their destructive effects only revealed when Fortuna intervenes and makes manifest the dynamic difference between levels. But do these hydro-logical rules, these hydropolitico-logical rules, provide us with a way of determining the didactic content of Machiavelli's figure? Of establishing on what conditions each of these discursive domains becomes sovereign over the others – becomes the semantically explanatory principle for the others – and thus for the simile itself?

This question seems local, but it is in fact structuring for the whole enterprise of *The Prince*, inasmuch as it bears upon *Il Principe*'s principle of ostension: it bears on the way in which Machiavelli's treatise does or does not succeed in referring, determinately, to a state of affairs from which a prince reading it would derive a concrete historical analogue for the matters he faces in early modernity. It bears also on the question whether *Il Principe* does or does not designate an indexical position for the writer, the 'I' who stands before this prince, *from* whom and as the secretarial, continuous responsibility *of*

Cesare a' svizzeri, che consumò la quarta parte di loro, per essere tramezzati da uno fiume' (A IV).

12   Machiavelli 1997b (D II.5). For English translation see Machiavelli 1970, p. 288.

whom the discourse of *The Prince*, *Il Principe*, emerges, and whose narrative instance might then be said to determine or suture the nature of the analogic register. Finally – and, as we will see, most consequentially – it bears on the way *Il Principe* imagines the relation between similitude and continuity. This entirely local problem, which concerns nothing but this cluster of famous, raging rivers, lies at the heart of *Il Principe*, and of the Prince who is the treatise's subject. What 'fiumi rovinosi' is 'io' designating when he turns to them?

One of them, as it happens, is a river that *no-one* has seen, though many of Machiavelli's readers would have encountered it. It flows through Book One of Lucretius's *De rerum natura*.[13] The lines I have in mind – the lovely verses beginning 'Principio venti vis verberat incita corpus / ingentisque ruit navis et nubila differt', – were profoundly influential in early modernity; Montaigne's rivers – and there are many of them in the *Essais* – flow from this source.[14]

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13   Machiavelli had used the figure of the river already (Machiavelli 2005, vv. 151–59): 'Come un torrente rapido, ch'al tutto / superbo è fatto, ogni cosa fracassa, / dovunque aggiugne il suo corso per tutto; / e questa parte accresce e quella abbassa, / varia le ripe, varia il letto e 'l fondo / e fa tremar la terra donde passa; / così Fortuna, col suo furibondo / impeto, molte volte or qui or quivi / va tramutando le cose del mondo'. The text of *De rerum natura* circulated in Florence before its first publication, in Brescia, in 1473, from the *editio princeps*. There were editions in Verona (1486) and Venice (1495). In 1500, the two editions were printed by Aldus Manutius (Venice); the first commented edition was that of Giovan Battista Pio, 1511; in 1512, we find an edition printed by Filippo Giunta, edited by Pier Candido, and dedicated to Tommaso Soderini. Machiavelli's knowledge of Lucretius is in part the subject of Alison Brown's decisive *The Return of Lucretius to Renaissance Florence* (Brown 2010), by far the most compelling account of the influence of Lucretius's poem in Machiavelli's time (see Brown 2010, pp. 113ff. for her comments on Machiavelli's annotated copy of *De rerum natura*, MS. Vat. Rossi 884).

14   *De rerum natura* I. vv. 271–98: 'Principio venti vis verberat incita corpus / ingentisque ruit navis et nubila differt, / inter dum rapido percurrens turbine campos / arboribus magnis sternit montisque supremos / silvifragis vexat flabris: ita perfurit acri / cum fremitu saevitque minaci murmure pontus. / sunt igitur venti ni mirum corpora caeca, / quae mare, quae terras, quae denique nubila caeli / verrunt ac subito vexantia turbine raptant, / nec ratione fluunt alia stragemque propagant / et cum mollis aquae fertur natura repente / flumine abundanti, quam largis imbribus auget / montibus ex altis magnus decursus aquai / fragmina coniciens silvarum arbustaque tota, / nec validi possunt pontes venientis aquai / vim subitam tolerare: ita magno turbidus imbri / molibus incurrit validis cum viribus amnis, / dat sonitu magno stragem volvitque sub undis / grandia saxa, ruit qua quidquid fluctibus obstat. / sic igitur debent venti quoque flamina ferri, / quae vel uti validum cum flumen procubuere / quam libet in partem, trudunt res ante ruuntque / impetibus crebris, inter dum vertice torto / corripiunt rapidique rotanti turbine portant. / quare etiam atque etiam sunt venti corpora caeca, / quandoquidem factis et moribus aemula magnis / amnibus inveniuntur, aperto corpore qui sunt'. Concerning Montaigne's

Lucretius's argument to this point in *De rerum natura* concerns the nature of matter – its composition, its principal attributes: whether it originates and if so how and under what conditions; whether matter can be said to pass out of existence, and if so how, and under what conditions. We are on the verge of the atomic and alphabetical paradigms, introduced back-to-back some hundred lines earlier, but not yet fully discussed. Here, where his raging river flows into the poem, Lucretius wishes to establish the rhetorical and logical ground on which he will proceed, in an exposition that will concern those things in nature that are in-visible. He will, in short, be not only arguing for a definition of the nature of matter, but arguing that we can know, by analogy, the component elements – the indivisible elements that lie beyond the sensible – by analogy to other phenomena and elements, apparently or manifestly invisible, whose effects reveal them, or which are revealed when they are looked at, for instance, in the slant light of a ray of sun. The impetus of atomic motion cannot be perceived by the senses, nor can the beginnings of a chain of material causes, but a wind, too, cannot be seen, nor can its elements be identified – the elements that make up air, which when at rest cannot be perceived – and yet its effects, the effects of these invisible elements, are manifest when the wind blows violently. We should imagine the wind to be composed of elements, Lucretius writes, in precisely the way that a placid stream is composed of the elements of water, whose nature is gentle (*mollis natura*), but whose mass and momentum become patent when the river bursts its bounds, and, in Rouse's translation, 'suddenly rolls in overwelling stream when a great deluge of water from the high mountains swells the flood with torrents of rain, dashing together wreckage of forests and whole trees, nor can strong bridges withstand the sudden force (*vim subitam tolerare*) of the coming water, with so mighty a force does the river, boiling with rain torrents, rush against the piers; it works devastation

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Lucretian rivers, I am thinking in particular of Montaigne's comments at the beginning of the essay *Des Cannibales*, to the effect that 'Il semble qu'il y ait des mouvements, naturels les uns, les autres fiévreux, en ces grands corps comme aux nôtres. Quand je considère l'impression que ma rivière de Dordogne fait de mon temps vers la rive droite de sa descente, et qu'en vingt ans elle a tant gagné, et dérobé le fondement à plusieurs bâtiments, je vois bien que c'est une agitation extraordinaire; car, si elle fût toujours allée à ce train; ou dût aller à l'avenir, la figure du monde serait renversée. Mais il leur prend des changements: tantôt elles s'épandent d'un côté, tantôt d'un autre; tantôt elles se contiennent. Je ne parle pas des soudaines inondations de quoi nous manions les causes' (Montaigne 1998, vol. 1, p. 341). Screech reports that Montaigne marked this passage with 'a series of firm broken pen-strokes [...] In addition the last two words [*corpora caeca*] are underlined' (see Screech 1998, p. 214).

with loud uproar and rolls huge rocks under its waves, and sweeps away what-
ever stands in its path'.[15]

Fortuna allows the arrow of Machiavelli's 'questi fiumi' to fall just here, in
Book One of *De rerum natura*, so let us grant that Machiavelli's river analogy
works at least in part by referring to, or by echoing, or by designating Lucreti-
us's famous lines. In *De rerum natura* the river is a complicated thing already
– and Machiavelli's reference to it, if that is what it is, is doubly so. In Lucreti-
us's poem, the river is not just a river, but also an analogue to the wind – which
is not just the wind, but an analogue to the atoms. The principle of similarity is
now manifestly cosmological: it crosses chronological periods, media, even
substantial differences, atoms being indivisible, and water not so. A strong,
naturalised version of the principle of continuity is manifestly in place. Ac-
cordingly, for *Il Principe*'s narrator, Fortuna is *like* a raging river, and this river in
turn is sufficiently *like* Lucretius's river to call it to the mind of Florentine read-
ers contemporary with Machiavelli, and this Lucretian river in turn is *like* the
wind, which is *like* the invisible atoms that constitute matter. That this chain of
similitudes is increasingly far-fetched may not make any practical difference to
Il Principe's argument: *questi fiumi* can refer to both a physical river (or to many
rivers) designated indexically, doxologically, by the expression *questi fiumi*; and
to Lucretius's river (or rivers) of wind and atoms. If one flows into the other, or
one takes the place of the other, the function and the logical coherence of the
argument are maintained.

But Machiavelli's indices do not quite cohere: designating a physical, recog-
nisable river turns out to be quite different from designating a tropic river in
Lucretius's poem, a river whose analogy to the variable and overwhelming
force of atomic flow depends precisely upon a suspension, if not an outright
destruction, of the semantics of designation. For alongside, and as a constant
simile for the chain of natural similitudes that he offers to atomic motion, Lu-
cretius unrolls the alphabetical paradigm that makes his poem itself, the literal
composition of his poem itself, the highest example of atomic composition –
as in Book I, verses 195–99, '*ut potius multis communia corpora rebus multa
putes esse, ut verbis elementa videmus, quam sine principiis ullam rem exsistere
posset*'. What matters here, to Lucretius as to his reader Machiavelli, is the dis-
tinction between the semantic level on which *De rerum natura* proceeds and
the elemental, literal level. Letters, *elementa verbis*, do not signify; indeed, it is
on the condition that they *not* signify that they can be re-used in other words.
The letters of the poem are, in the ambiguous way that Lucretius's lines favour,
corpora caeca, invisible bodies which are also blind to one another, to them-

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15   Passanante 2011, p. 35 briefly comments on Machiavelli's use of this Lucretian passage.

selves, to all things. We 'see', *videmus*, letters differently from the way in which we 'see' with our senses: letters are not phenomenally like the water or the effects of water and wind. But since we are manifestly seeing, *videmus* and *audimus*, Lucretius's letters, it is their mutual blindness, the way in which their entering-into-relation is independent of their phenomenal qualities as it is of their referential function, that *De rerum natura* intends. The elements of Lucretius's words blindly refer to themselves – but not on the basis of what the words mean, or of what the elements resemble: neither a principle of similitude, nor a semantic principle, governs the aleatory coming-into-relation of Lucretius's letters, or the effects of these relations in the poem and for its cosmos.

This bears on the second way in which these two rivers work differently. The hydraulics of the system are identical in both stories, in Machiavelli's and in Lucretius's – the impetuous movement of waters from the height to the valley, with disastrous consequences. But this hydrogeography can be maintained only in the domain of physical surfaces. In the Lucretian text the verticality of the relation between the elements of the name, the name itself in which these literal elements are collected, and the phenomenon named is constantly, but not predictably, not continuously, disturbed. In *De rerum natura*, the torrential current in Lucretius's analogy atomises the poem, and disperses the constituent letters of the verse across the poem: the semantic register is simultaneously confirmed and destroyed by the acting-out, by the instance, of the turbulent decomposition that the work momentarily names. Verticalisation may then be a principle, as continuity is a principle (these are not contradictory), but for Lucretius it produces contingent relations, as well as momentary and reversible ones – and it is always and already accompanied by effects of deverticalisation at work in the acts of reading and writing that bring letters together to form semantic units, and take them apart in ways that make operational, semantically as well as non-semantically, their relation to others: *natura facit declinationes*.

This is what makes Machiavelli's simile so extraordinary, as a reading of Lucretius. In *Il Principe*, just here, it appears, the anthropomorphic figure of Fortuna is not herself subject to fortune. Fortuna presides over the contingent world, without herself being an example of, or subject to, that contingency: her mythopoetic status is the guarantee that Fortuna will always act in the world, but that guarantee is itself impervious, materially, to the aleatory atomisation of Lucretius's poem. Fortuna's name is written inviolably; her name cannot be unwritten, or spelled out, or unspelled; Fortuna has no elements; she is herself the elementary, indivisible, atomic form of matter.

We might conclude, then, that Gramsci's initial insights with respect to Machiavelli's treatise were profound, but misplaced. It is not the *prince* whose mythopoietic, incorporated integrity becomes, in modernity, the political party – but elemental *Fortuna*. She governs, in particular, the topology of *Il Principe*: the narrative instance, the first-person narrative on which *Il Principe* stands, is no longer indexically definitive with respect to the field of its narrative – or to put it more simply, that the instance of narration does not provide a principle of continuity for *Il Principe*, because it is never the subject, exclusively or determinably, of its enunciation – but is always and unpredictably slipping into becoming the object of narration through the act of Fortuna. And the same obtains, of course, as concerns the *object* of the discourse, the prince – who flickers from standing outside *Il Principe*, as its addressee, to finding himself one of the elements of the discourse. Discontinuity in *Il Principe* is thus a structural effect, or an effect of structure, a consequence of the work's constant recourse to what we can call, not anthropomorphisms or myths, but defective concepts. A list of *Il Principe*'s defective concepts might include the terms 'impeto', which Skinner and Price translate as 'force'; 'ordine' and the derived verb 'ordinare', which is translated into English almost invariably as 'organisation' and 'to organise'; any and all uses of the ostensive register, to indicate this or that historical similitude or one or another classical analogue; as well as the personal pronoun 'io'. Each of these defective concepts has the peculiar logical function of being a member of the class of defective concepts, but also a definitive or suppositive term, even one might say a regulative or ordering principle, with respect to this class of defective concepts. Indeed, one of the things that makes these concepts defective is this double function – of being members or elements of the class of concepts that are defective, but also regulative with respect to them, or definitive of this class. Horizontal, vertical – axes in translation, under the hand of Fortuna. It is as if what one might call logical sovereignty had been split, and each defective concept is simultaneously 'prince', definitive, ordering or suppositive with respect to the other members of the class, and a subject, an element, a member of the class defined, sup-posed and ordered by the sovereign-term. What is distinctly and irreparably disruptive of the continuity principle in Machiavelli, of efforts to constitute *Il Principe*'s discontinuity effects as a principled and continuous field, and of efforts to conceptualise the relation between the principle of continuity and the work's discontinuity effects, is not that different elements can occupy different positions, as regulative with respect to a field or elements of that field – but that the mechanism determining what function these concepts serve is itself not only a member of neither field, but not a concept at all. Fortuna, elemental Fortuna, is the irreducible, indivisible and effective name we

give to the force constituting this class of defective concepts. She works throughout *Il Principe* indexically, ostensively. She not only provides a way of understanding the controversial relation between multitude and hegemony in Gramsci, but also a way of thinking the concept of modern sovereignty more broadly. For Fortuna distributes sovereignty as a raging river deposits the ruins of the cities, bridges and fields it overruns. The political party is not decidedly located in an instance, an 'io' or an organic representative, in a cell or an element which, *qua* element, would be similar to or continuous with any other element, or which could claim to have a representative relation to elements which resemble one another (in having similar class or economic interests, for example). Or rather, such sovereignty *can* be located decidedly in an element, we *can* employ the grand arsenal of defective concepts that *Il Principe* set before modernity, but modern sovereignty after *Il Principe* can only be decidedly located ephemerally, retrospectively, as one points for instance to the effects of a raging river which is not (just) a flowing river, but is also an example, or a wind, an atom, a word: *questi sovrani, questo sovrano*, *questo popolo, questo partito sovrano*.

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The Five Theses of Machiavelli's 'Philosophy'

Vittorio Morfino

In his paper at the Spinoza conference of 2002, in Urbino, Etienne Balibar proposed three possible interpretations of the famous passage in chapter 15 of *The Prince* on the 'effectual truth of the thing (*verità effettuale della cosa*)' and on the significance of its opposition to the 'imagination of it (*immaginazione di essa*)'.

Balibar's first reading is based on the philosophy of Spinoza: the opposition between 'effectual truth' and 'imagination' is interpreted in the light of Spinoza's opposition between reason and the illusion of finality. This reading is possible to the extent that politics, understood in Machiavelli's sense, constitutes another standard of truth in addition to that of mathematics 'that precludes the imagination'.[1] However, this interpretation does not lead to a simple opposition between reason and imagination, because the material of reason, in reality, is the imagination itself, and therefore reason tends to 'reduce the complexity of opinions and [...] to regulate the emotional conflicts that embody the imagination'; ultimately we can speak of '*engendering reason*, as an objective-subjective faculty, or as the faculty of adequating subjectivity to objectivity (*d'instituer l'adequation de la subjectivité à l'objetivité*)'.[2] An interpretation of this kind brings to light the ambivalence of the subjective/objective genitive in Machiavelli's expression 'the effectual truth of the thing':

> [...] the discourse of truth cannot be thought about only in relation to the mode of reflection, representation, and the subject-object division. It refers instead to a production, to a *retroactive effectiveness*, or in less abstract terms if you prefer, to the notion that its own effects are involved *in practice* in the constitutions of its agents, or its bearers (*porteurs*).[3]

The second reading is the one Althusser put forward in *Machiavelli and Us* in which Balibar sees 'both an original interpretation of Machiavelli, and a proto-

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1   Balibar 2007, p. 202.
2   Balibar 2007, p. 205.
3   Balibar 2007, p. 206.

col that also transforms the conception of truth in Althusser, causing it to shift from a "Spinozist" model of the opposition between causal rationality and the finalist or ideological imagination to [...] a Machiavellian model'.[4] This Machiavellian model of truth would reside in a conception of knowledge based on the division or on the disjunctive synthesis of opposing statements, since knowledge is implicated in its object and, what is more, the nature of this object is conflictual:

> However – adds Balibar – it would be completely wrong to interpret it as a failure of rationality and of its project of universality: it must be seen rather as a conflictual *construction*, immanent to the object, without the possibility of any neutral and neutralizing 'metalanguage', of universality itself.[5]

Finally, the third reading is based on the thought of John Austin; that is, according to Balibar's clarification, 'a possibility of confrontation [...] between the Machiavellian theory on the effective character of truth and certain properties of the notion of performativity'.[6] From this Austinian perspective, it should be emphasised that Machiavelli viewed his own discourse as one that is stated in a situation, which 'by its very utterance is capable of transforming the situation *in which* and *out of which it arises*'.[7] This makes it, at least metaphorically, comparable to a gigantic, complex, performative utterance (a comparison made possible because 'it is uttered in the first person, an essential characteristic of Austin's notion of the performative'). However, this reading would have the effect of correcting the subjectivism of the performative:

> [...] it would probably be possible – writes Balibar – to show that Machiavelli continues to question the idea that the effectiveness of discourse, especially the effectiveness of the discourse on truth, proceeds from its *author*, or from its 'manifest' (i.e., personal) author, necessarily *situated* in a univocal fashion in the political topography of the conflicts between opinions ('between humors') and between differences in social position, even though at different times it may fictitiously occupy more than one place; for example, the position of the 'Prince' or the 'Grandi' or the 'people'. The effectiveness of discourse, or the springboard of performativity,

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4 Balibar 2007, p. 207.

5 Balibar 2007, pp. 207–8.

6 Balibar 2007, p. 208.

7 Ibid.

tends to *retreat* toward something more impersonal, which is the instance of conflict itself, or the violence of political clashes reflected at the heart of discourse – toward the 'thing' we might say, in that which is intractable, even ungraspable, about it. And I think it is also that which contains the seeds of a profound correction of the 'subjectivist' theme in the performative, which we can hear in and through the *verità effettuale della cosa*.[8]

In all three cases, Balibar appeals to theoretical models that provide a framework for the Machiavellian expression 'to search after the effectual truth of the thing' and of its opposition to 'the imagination of it'. In effect, this passage does not appear to be self-explanatory. Or rather, its obviousness is more blinding than illuminating. It has been read as the foundation of modern political science (Max Horkheimer), as a proclamation of immorality (Leo Strauss), of political realism (Raymond Aron), as the foundation of a philosophy of political action in contingency and conflict (Claude Lefort), and so on and so forth. However, each of these interpretations imposes (surreptitiously, contrary to Balibar's explicit manoeuvre) a theoretical framework that is extraneous to Machiavelli's thought, without taking into consideration the theoretical problems that this imposition may imply.

What I propose in this essay is to explain the Machiavellian expression 'the effectual truth of the thing' and its opposition to 'the imagination of it' *iuxta propria principia*, that is, starting from a theoretical framework contained in Machiavelli's own philosophy rather than from one external to it. In a previous work I attempted to locate the philosophy of Machiavelli between a hypothetical Lucretian origin and an equally hypothetical Spinozist continuation,[9] but on this occasion I will bring out the philosophy needed to make this expression and this opposition intelligible purely from Machiavelli's own texts.

What is the meaning of the 'effectual truth of the thing'? On the one hand, we have the term 'truth', whose history forces us back through the entire history of philosophy, first in the form of the Greek *alétheia* and then of the Latin *veritas*, until appearing as *verità* in Machiavelli's Florentine vernacular. On the other hand, there is a term without a history, a neologism invented by Machiavelli, one that only appeared in Italian in that one passage and, later, in twentieth century translations of Hegel, to differentiate between *Realität* and *Wirklichkeit*, rendering the latter as '*realtà effettuale* (effectual reality)'. Of course, in the term 'effettuale' there is the Latin root of *effectus*, *facere*, *factum*,

but there is little more to be drawn from them. Moreover, they do not help us to penetrate its meaning in other contexts, since the syntagm is a *hápax legómenon*, appearing only once in Machiavelli's work.

A philological analysis of Machiavelli's syntagm will not help to elucidate his philosophy, then. 'Effectual truth' is the symbol of this philosophy, but it does not contain its meaning: in other words, 'effectual truth' is the name of a way of doing theory, but it does not contain the meaning of this theory, namely, the specific position that it occupies in the philosophical battlefield (*Kampfplatz*).

This specific position lies in the theoretical field opened up by five philosophical theses that appear in Machiavelli's work in a practical state. In other words, although they function in the text without ever being stated openly as philosophical theses, without them, it is impossible to identify the object of Machiavelli's theory, the 'thing' about which he speaks (political individuality *in fieri*):

1.   the thesis of invariance;
2.   the thesis of universal variability;
3.   the thesis of the primacy of the encounter over the form;
4.   the thesis of the primacy of the interweaving of times over a linear time;
5.   the thesis of the disarticulation of history and memory.

1   The Thesis of Invariance

Machiavelli's first philosophical thesis is set out in the preface to the *Discourses on Livy* and constitutes the methodological premise of the entire theory. In order to establish a knowledge of history that can be translated into practice, Machiavelli asserts the immutability of the natural order, which underlies the continuous change of events:

> Considering thus how much honor is awarded to antiquity, and how many times – letting pass infinite other examples – a fragment of an ancient statue has been bought at a high price because someone wants to have it near oneself, to honor 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 all 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 – indeed they are so much shunned by everyone in every least thing that no sign of that ancient virtue remains with us – I can do no other than marvel and grieve. And so much the more when I see that in the differences that arise between citizens in civil affairs or in the sicknesses than men incur, they always have recourse to those judgments or those remedies that were judged or ordered by the ancients. For the civil laws are nothing other than verdicts given by ancient jurists, which, reduced to order, teach our present jurists to judge. Nor is medicine other than the experiments performed by ancient physicians, on which present physicians found their judgments. Nonetheless, in ordering republics, maintaining States, governing kingdoms, ordering the military and administering war, judging subjects, and increasing empire, neither prince nor republic may be found that has recourse to the examples of the ancients. This arises, I believe, not so much from the weakness into which the present religion has led the world, or from the evil that an ambitious idleness has done to many Christian provinces and cities, as from not having a true knowledge of histories, through not getting from reading them that sense nor tasting that flavor 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 – *as if heaven, sun, elements, men had varied in motion, order, and power from what they were in antiquity*.[10]

Other passages in the *Discourses* refer to the same invariance thesis. In *Discourses*, Book I, chapter 11 Machiavelli writes: 'for as was said in our preface, men are born, live, and die always in one and the same order'.[11]

In the *Discourses*, Book I, chapter 39:

Whoever considers present and ancient things easily knows that in all cities and in all peoples there are the *same desires and the same humors*, and there always have been. So it is an easy thing for whoever examines past things diligently to foresee future things in every republic and to take the remedies for them that were used by the ancients [...].[12]

In the Preface to Book II:

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10   Machiavelli 1996, pp. 5–6 (emphasis added).
11   Machiavelli 1996, p. 36.
12   Machiavelli 1996, pp. 83–4 (emphasis added).

> And in thinking about how these things proceed, 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, as is seen by one who has knowledge of those ancient kingdoms, which varied from one to another because of the variation of customs, though the world remained the same.[13]

Finally *Discourses*, Book III, chapter 43:

> Prudent men are accustomed to say, and not by chance or without merit, that whoever wishes to see what has to be considers what has been; for all worldly things in every time have their own counterpart in ancient times. That arises because these are the work of men, *who have and always had the same passions*, and they must of necessity result in the same effect.[14]

To summarise: the same motion, order, power (*potenza*), the same mode, same desires and humours, the same passions. Althusser rightly notes that this Machiavellian thesis does not function as a theoretico-scientific proposition on history, but precisely as a philosophical thesis; a thesis that, on the one hand, asserts 'the objectivity and universality of the forthcoming scientific propositions; on the other, a thesis founding the possibility of the experimental comparisons between "cases" Machiavelli is going to make to produce his theoretical propositions':

> Were the human world not *the same* – Althusser writes – it would not be possible to make comparisons between antiquity and the present – on the one hand, between the diverse events and conjunctures of antiquity, and on the other, between the diverse events and conjunctures of the present (Italy and France, say), and, finally, between these two orders of conjunctures. If it were not the same – constant – it would not be possible to isolate the constants – the 'laws' – or, rather, their 'invariants'; it would not be possible to know it.[15]

In other words, the thesis of the homogeneity of times founds the very possibility of Machiavelli's discourse, in the same way that the thesis of the homo-

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13   Machiavelli 1996, p. 124.

14   Machiavelli 1996, p. 302 (emphasis added).

15   Althusser 1999, pp. 34–5.

geneity of the sublunary and celestial worlds would later found the possibility of Galileo's discourse.[16]

2   Thesis of Universal Variability

The thesis of universal variability is found in a veiled form in many passages in Machiavelli's work. Althusser cites a passage on this subject from *Discourses*, I, 6: 'since all things of men are in motion and cannot stay steady, they must either rise or fall'.[17] For my part, I will refer to a beautiful letter written on 31 January 1515 to Francesco Vettori, in which, to justify the changes in topics and tones in their letters, from matters of love to political affairs, Machiavelli writes:

> Anyone who might see our letters, my dear friend, and might note their diversity would be very amazed, for at one point he would think that we were very serious men, involved in weighty matters, and that we never entertained a thought which was not lofty and honest. But then, turning the page, he would discover that these same serious men were frivolous, inconstant, lustful, and occupied with trifles. This manner of ours, although to some it may be disgraceful, seems worthy of praise to me, because we imitate Nature, which herself is various, and anyone who imitates Nature cannot be criticized.[18]

Both the concept of fortune and the prejudice according to which fortune governs human affairs directly depend on the thesis of nature as variation. In the famous chapter 25 of *The Prince*, Machiavelli writes: 'This opinion has been believed more in our times because of the great variability of things (*variazione grande delle cose*) which have been seen and are seen every day, beyond every human conjecture'.[19] Nature is variability and fortune is 'unforeseeable' variability, 'beyond all human conjecture': these ideas are certainly represented by the metaphor of the 'violent rivers (*fiumi rovinosi*)' that appears in the same chapter of *The Prince*, but also by that of the 'wind storm' in the *Florentine Histories*, Book VI, chapter 34, 'which in Tuscany had effects unheard of in

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16   Cassirer 1946, pp. 116ff.

17   Machiavelli, 1998, p. 23 (D I.6). The passage is quoted in Althusser 1999, p. 35.

18   Cited in Machiavelli 1979, p. 54. See the Editor's Note to 'The Private Letters'.

19   Machiavelli 1998, p. 98.

the past and for whoever learns of it in the future will have marvelous and memorable effects'.[20]

These first two theses should not be thought of separately, as if, on the one hand, there was the persistence of forms and, on the other, the continuous variety of accidents, but rather as one inside the other. This avoids both a fossilisation of becoming through the concept, and a dissolution of its intelligibility into a structureless dispersal.

2.1 Epistemological Consequences of the Formulation of the First Two Theses

If, as Heidegger says, the principle of reason resonated in the history of Western thought before finding an appropriate form in Leibniz's statement '*nihil est sine ratione*', we might say that the first thesis constitutes a kind of Machiavellian principle of causality (of the type 'always and everywhere, in ancient times and in modern times, there is no effect that does not have a cause, and there is no cause which is not followed by an effect'). In other words, the first thesis is a principle of the intelligibility of the real, while the second is its immediate correction or modulation (of the type 'the constant variation complicates the linearity of the relationships between cause and effect').

Two epistemological consequences of extreme importance follow from the formulation of the first two theses: 1) a model of linear causality is rejected; 2) the model of essence tied to the model of linear causality undergoes redefinition.

With regard to the rejection of a model of linear causality, one could cite countless passages from Machiavelli's analyses in which we find this is at work in a practical state: the *Discourses*, Book III, chapter 21 offers a paradigmatic example. Significantly, it is entitled 'Whence It Arises That with a Different Mode of Proceeding Hannibal Produced Those Same Effects in Italy as Scipio Did in Spain'. Writes Machiavelli:

> I reckon that some might be able to marvel when they see that some captain, notwithstanding that he has held to a contrary life, may have nonetheless produced effects similar to those who have lived in the mode written about above. So it appears that the cause of the victories does not depend on the causes said before; indeed, it appears that those modes bring you neither more force nor more fortune, since one can acquire glory and reputation through contrary modes. So as not to depart from

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20   Machiavelli 1988, p. 270. My thanks to Gennaro Maria Barbuto who brought this passage to my attention.

the men written about above, and to clarify better what I wished to say, I say that one sees Scipio enter Spain and with his humanity and mercy at once make that province friendly to him, and make himself adored and admired by its peoples. To the contrary, one sees Hannibal enter Italy and with modes all contrary, that is with cruelty, violence, robbery and every type of faithlessness produce the same effect that Scipio had produced in Spain; for all the cities of Italy rebelled to Hannibal, all the peoples followed him.[21]

The next chapter examines the same problem from a different perspective: 'That the Hardness of Manlius Torquatus and the Kindness of Valerius Corvinus Acquired for Each the Same Glory'. Writes Machiavelli:

> There were two excellent captains in Rome at one and the same time, Manlius Torquatus and Valerius Corvinus. They lived in Rome with like virtue, with like triumphs and glory, and each of them, in what pertained to the enemy, acquired it with like virtue; but in what belonged to the armies and to their dealings with the soldiers, they proceeded very diversely. For Manlius commanded his soldiers with every kind of severity, without interrupting either toil or punishment: Valerius, on the other hand, dealt with them with every humane mode and means and full of a familiar domesticity. For one may see that to have the obedience of the soldiers, one killed his son and the other never offended anyone. Nonetheless, with so much diversity of proceeding, each produced the same fruit, both against enemies and in favor of the republic and of himself.[22]

However, it is in the famous 'Ghiribizzi al Soderini', written between 13 and 21 September 1506, that we find an epistemological declaration of the impossible linearity of the cause and effect relationship:

> At this I would wonder, if my fate had not shown me so many and such varied things that I am obliged to wonder but little, or to confess that I have not comprehended while reading and experiencing the actions of men and their methods of procedure. [...] And I see various kinds of conduct bringing about the same thing [...] and many who work differently attaining the same end [...].[23]

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21   Machiavelli 1996, pp. 262–63.
22   Machiavelli 1996, pp. 264–65.
23   Machiavelli 1961, p. 97 (Machiavelli to Soderini, 13–21 September 1506, Letter 116).

Here Machiavelli openly states that different causes can produce the same effect. The examples he gives are Hannibal and Scipio, like in the *Discourses*, but also Lorenzo de' Medici who 'disarmed the people to hold Florence' and Giovanni Bentivogli who 'in order to hold Bologna armed them'. Then 'the Vitelli in Castello and the present Duke of Urbino' who 'destroyed the fortresses in order to retain those States' and 'Count Francesco and many others built them in their territories to make themselves sure of them'.[24] This is how Machiavelli summarises the significance of these examples:

> We have seen and see every day those I have mentioned and countless others who could be used as instances gaining kingdoms and sovereignties, or falling, according to circumstances; and a man who was praised while he was gaining is reviled when he is losing; and frequently after long prosperity a man who finally loses does not in any way blame himself but accuses the heavens and the action of the Fates.[25]

Why are the same 'ways of acting [...] sometimes equally effective and equally damaging?' This is the answer that Machiavelli offers Soderini:

> I believe that as Nature has given men different faces, so she has given them different dispositions and different imaginations. From this it results that each man conducts himself according to his disposition and his imagination. And on the other hand, because times vary and affairs are of varied types, one man's desires come out as he had prayed they would; and that man is fortunate who harmonizes his procedure with his time, but on the contrary he is not fortunate who in his actions is out of harmony with his time and with the type of its affairs. Hence it can well happen that two men working differently come to the same end, because each of them adapts himself to what he encounters, for affairs are of as many types as there are provinces and States. Thus, because times and affairs in general and individually change often, and men do not change their imaginings and their procedures, it happens that a man at one time has good fortune and at another time bad. And certainly anybody wise enough to understand the times and the types of affairs and to adapt himself to them would have always good fortune, or he would protect himself always from bad, and it would come to be true that the wise man would rule the stars and the Fates. But because there never are such wise

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24   Machiavelli 1961, p. 98.
25   Machiavelli 1961, pp. 98–9.

men, since men in the first place are short-sighted, and in the second can-
not command their natures, it follows that Fortune varies and commands
men and holds them under her yoke.[26]

Nature as variation is what prohibits a model of linear causality being applied
to politics. The plurality of dispositions (*ingegni*) and the plurality of orders of
things (*ordini delle cose*) make inconceivable the time as a line along which an
individual's actions unfold according to an instrumental logic. The changing
times that Machiavelli speaks about are placed precisely at the intersection of
these two pluralities, in which there is no space for contingency as absence of
necessity or, viewed positively, as a manifestation of human freedom. Neces-
sity cannot be postponed or avoided, but it is not linear; and contingency aris-
es not from an absence of causes but from the complex interweaving of causes
that can only be viewed from an internal, partial perspective and never from a
panoramic viewpoint.

  Now, as I said, the rejection of a serial model of causality implies a redefini-
tion of the concept of the essence of mixed bodies. In a letter to Vettori dated
20 December 1514, Machiavelli implicitly formulates his concept of possibility:
'Because all the things that have been can, I believe, be again'.[27] The concept
of possibility – that is, the essence of a mixed body – comes after its existence.
In other words, the possible is not simply that which is not contradictory on a
logical plane, but what has existed or exists on a historical plane (in Hegelian
terms, we might define the former as abstract possibility and the latter as real
possibility). However, what has existed and now exists does not exhaust the
realm of the possible. On the contrary, this identity between possibility and
factual, historical existence is precisely what opens to the *novum*. In a letter to
Vettori, dated 10 August 1513, Machiavelli writes: 'I know that to this opinion of
mine is opposed a natural defect of man: first, wishing to live from day to day;
second, not believing that anything can happen that has not happened'.[28] In
Machiavelli, history functions as pure facticity and not as a guarantor of an
eternal repetition of the same. The proposition 'that which has been, is possi-
ble' does not preclude the *novum*, because the *novum* will be possible, once it
has happened; or in other words, the proposition 'what will be, will be possible'
is equally true.

  This concept of possibility is closely linked to the concept of essence that is
developed in a practical state in the work of Machiavelli: the essence of the

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26   Machiavelli 1961, p. 99.
27   Machiavelli 1961, p. 180 (Machiavelli to Vettori, 20 December 1514, Letter 235).
28   Machiavelli 1961, p. 130 (Machiavelli to Vettori, 10 August 1513 Letter 211).

mixed body is constituted by relations and at the same time is constantly redefined by them.

A famous example of this conception of the essence is in the *Discourses*, Book III, chapter 1 on the '*ritorno ai principii*':

> It is a very true thing that all worldly things have a limit to 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. Because I am speaking of mixed bodies, such as republics and sects, I say that those alterations are for safety that lead them back toward their beginnings. So those are better ordered and have longer life that by means of their orders, can often be renewed or indeed 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. The mode of renewing them is, as was said, to lead them back toward their beginnings, for all the beginnings of sects, republics, and kingdoms must have some goodness in them, by means of which they may gain their first reputation and their first increase. Because in the process of time that goodness is corrupted, unless something intervenes to lead it back to the mark, it of necessity kills the body. Speaking of the bodies of men, these doctors of medicine say: 'That daily something is added that at some time needs cure'.[29]

The continuous interchange of bodies threatens the relationship that constitutes the essence of the mixed body and therefore 'this return toward the beginning', whether done through 'extrinsic accident or intrinsic prudence', is the reconstitution of that relationship. Here, in a certain sense, the internal and the external seem to be givens, albeit in the variety of cases that can lead a mixed body back to its beginning.

However, we do find a second conception of the essence that complicates the picture. In *Discourses* Book I, chapter 4, the essence of the mixed body that is the Roman republic is not identified in a simple or mixed political form, but in the conflictual relationship between its elements, the 'disunion of the Plebs and the Roman Senate' (in other words it is not the form that organises the matter, but rather, the matter takes on a form through conflict):

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29   Machiavelli 1996, p. 209.

I do not wish to fail to discourse of the tumults in Rome from the death of the Tarquins to the creation of the tribunes, and then upon some things contrary to the opinion of many who say that Rome was a tumultuous republic and full of such confusion that if good fortune and military virtue had not made up for its defects, it would have been inferior to every other republic. I cannot deny that fortune and the military were causes of the Roman Empire; but it quite appears to me they are not aware that where the military is good, there must be good order; and too, it rarely occurs that good fortune will not be there. But let us come to other details of that city. I say that to me it appears that those who damn the tumults between the nobles and the plebs blame those things that were the first cause of keeping Rome free, and that they consider the noises and the cries that would arise in such tumults more than the good effects that they engendered. They do not consider that in every republic are two diverse humors, that of the people and that of the greats, and that all the laws that are made in favor of freedom arise from their disunion, as can easily be seen to have occurred in Rome.[30]

This conflictual relationship between the 'two humours' that are not poles of a simple contradiction, but unequal opposites, is the inner essence of the Roman Republic, the essence of its political and military organisation, and at the same time defines the nature of its external relations. In *Discourses* Book I, chapter 6, after analysing the political forms of Sparta and Venice, Machiavelli writes:

Considering thus all these things, one sees that it was necessary for the legislators of Rome to do one of two things if they wished Rome to stay quiet like the above-mentioned republics: either not employ the plebs in war, as did the Venetians, or not open the way to foreigners, as did the Spartans. They did both, which gave the plebs strength and increase and infinite opportunities for tumult. 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. In all human things he who examines well sees this: that one inconvenience can never be suppressed without another's cropping up. Therefore, if you wish to make a people numerous and armed so as to be able to make a great empire, you

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30   Machiavelli 1996, p. 16.

> make it of such a quality that you cannot then manage it in your mode; if
> you maintain it either small or unarmed so as to be able to manage it,
> then if you acquire dominion you cannot hold it or it becomes so cow-
> ardly that you are the prey of whoever assaults you.[31]

Thinking of the essence in terms of conflict seems to lead Machiavelli to com-
plicate the picture offered by the model of the return to beginnings: the exter-
nal does not present itself as a simple *possibilitas corruptionis* of an essential
inside, but as a power relationship that is closely implicated in it.

Finally, in his *Discourse or Dialogue Concerning our Language*, Machiavelli
goes a step further in distinguishing the concept of essence from the tradi-
tional concept of form. In analysing the life of a language, Machiavelli notes
that natural exchange does not appear only as an agent of disintegration, but
as something that enters constitutively into its essence, so that the power of a
language does not consist in maintaining its identity by rejecting otherness,
but in its capacity to change by including otherness:

> [...] languages cannot be simple, and [...] it is better that they are mixed
> with other languages. But a native language [...] converts words that it
> has borrowed from others into its own use, and it is so powerful, that the
> borrowed words do not disorder it, but rather, it disorders theirs; because
> that which it bears from the others it pulls to itself in such a manner, that
> it seems to be its own.[32]

Any language, to use the words of Balibar, 'exceeds the possibility of an identi-
fication with a natural or historic property of a community', because 'it is sub-
ject to a process of continuous transformation from its more or less violent
interference with other languages'.[33] An expressive bond does not define its
identity with a subject, but by a complex system of relationships – of power
relations – that define an always-temporary interiority. Machiavelli writes:

> because you cannot find a language that speaks about all things on its
> own without having borrowed from others, because in conversing
> together, people from different provinces take sayings from each other.
> In addition to this, whenever new disciplines or new arts come to a city,
> new words must come there, created in the language from which those

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31   Machiavelli 1996, pp. 21–2.
32   Machiavelli 2005, p. 138.
33   Balibar 2005.

disciplines or arts have come; but by being transformed, in speech, by the modes, cases, differences, and accents, they enter into the same kinship (*fanno una medesima consonanza*) with the words in the language that they encounter, and thus become a part of it.[34]

Therefore, the essence is a relationship, but a relationship in which contingency lies not only in the always-present possibility of disintegration, but also in the possibility of new forms of aggregation. In neither of the cases, however, does some sort of *télos* direct the process.

3   The Primacy of the Encounter over the Form

Machiavelli asserts this lack of *télos* in natural variation in a specific thesis that I would formulate in Althusserian terms as the thesis of the primacy of the encounter over the form.[35] This primacy of the encounter over the form is expressed in Machiavelli's work in the theory of virtue and fortune appearing in chapter 25 of *The Prince*:

> Nonetheless, in order that our free will not be eliminated, I judge that it might be true that fortune is arbiter of half of our actions, but also that she leaves the other half, or close to it, for us to govern. And I have likened her to one of those violent rivers which, when they become enraged, flood the plains, ruin the trees and the buildings, lift earth from this part, drop in another; each person flees before them, everyone yields to their impetus without being able to hinder them in any regard. And although they are like this, it is not as if men, when times are quiet, could not provide for them with dikes and dams so that when they rise later, either they go by a canal or their impetus is neither so wanton nor so damaging. It happens similarly with fortune, which shows her power where virtue has not been put in order to resist her and therefore turns her impetus where she knows that dams and dikes have not been made to contain her.[36]

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34   Machiavelli 1993, p. 928 (my translation).

35   I am referring to Althusser 2006, pp. 163–207.

36   Machiavelli 1998, p. 98. See also *Tercets on Fortune*: 'As a rapid torrent, swollen to the utmost, destroys whatever its current anywhere reaches, and adds to one place and lowers another, shifts its banks, shifts its bed and its bottom, and makes the earth tremble

Each form is secondary compared to the encounter, not only in the sense that it is the encounter which constitutes it, but also in the sense that the form bears within itself the contingency of its arising out of a relation of forces that never occurs once and for all. However, this contingency, as already noted, is not an exception to natural necessity, but rather the way in which this necessity itself occurs. Virtue, which he calls 'free will', is nothing more than the necessary inclination of the agent and fortune is 'a change beyond every human conjecture'.[37]

It is the encounter between these two orders of necessity that makes the model of a transitive or serial causality inapplicable to historical knowledge; and yet this does not mean, as Cassirer believes, that Machiavelli gives up on a rational explanation of politics and history.[38] Quite the contrary, human action is certainly exercised in times that are constantly changing, and this incessant variability is presented by Machiavelli in the form of the ancient pagan deity, fortune, but freed from any idea of distributive regularity.[39] But this does not lead to a denial of the intelligibility of the real. It is precisely because a cause

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where it passes, so Fortune in her furious onrush many times, now here now there, shifts and reshifts the world's affairs' (Machiavelli 1989, p. 748, vv. 151–57).

37 'On this also depends the variability of the good: for if one governs himself with caution and patience, and the times and affairs turn in such a way that his government is good, he comes out prosperous; but if times and affairs change, he is ruined because he does not change his mode of proceeding. Nor may a man be found so prudent as to know how to accommodate himself to his, whether because he cannot deviate from what nature inclines him to or also because, when one has always flourished by walking on one path, he cannot be persuaded to depart from it' (Machiavelli 1998, p. 100). We find almost the same words in the *Discourses*: 'Two things are causes why we are unable to change: one, that we are unable to oppose that to which nature inclines us; the other, that when one individual has prospered very much with one mode of proceeding, it is not possible to persuade him that he can do well to proceed otherwise. Hence it arises that fortune varies in one man, because it varies the times and he does not vary the modes' (Machiavelli 1996, p. 240). And also in the *Tercets on Fortune*: 'And since you cannot change your character nor give up the disposition that Heaven endows you with, in the midst of your journey she abandons you' (Machiavelli 1989, p. 747, vv. 112–14). We can see that human action is determined by two necessities: the necessity of one's natural inclination and the necessity of habit that tends to reproduce behaviours that have proved successful. On the relationship between necessity, freedom, and chance in Machiavelli see the very interesting reflections by Abbagnano 1969, p. 14; see also Badaloni 1969, pp. 675–708.

38 Cassirer 1945, pp. 116ff.

39 Compare with *Tercets on Fortune*: 'She times events as suits her; she raises us up, she puts us down without pity, *without law or right*' (Machiavelli 1989, p. 746, vv. 37–8, emphasis added).

can produce different effects, just as an effect can be produced by different causes, that we need a more complex model of rationality capable of accounting for the complexity of the real that arises out of the conjunction of two necessities: the necessity of virtue and the necessity of the times.

This conjunction has a philosophical name in Machiavelli, that of 'occasion' (*occasione*). Let us read the more well-known passage in chapter VI of *The Prince* in which the concept is formulated:

> But, to come to those who have become princes by their own virtue and not by fortune, I say that the most excellent are Moses, Cyrus, Romulus, Thesius, and the like. [...] And as one examines their actions and lives, one does not see that they had anything else from fortune than the *occasion*, which gave them the matter enabling them to introduce any form they pleased. Without that *occasion* their virtue of spirit would have been eliminated, and without that virtue the *occasion* would have come in vain.[40]

A historical event like the founding of a State is not the effect of a mythical first cause, which lies at the origin of a linear development in historical time (*ab urbe condita*); rather, it is the result of an encounter between virtue and fortune in the form of occasion – an encounter that can give rise to a world, but also put an end to a world. It is a deconstruction of the concept of 'first cause'.

Occasion is not *kairós* – it is not an instant in time responsible for a destiny; it is not the eruption of eternity into time. Rather, it covers the semantic field of 'event, circumstance, situation':[41] coming from the Latin *occidere*, *ob-cadere*, meaning, to fall forward, to the supine *occasum*, 'chance, event'. Now, if we understand this Machiavellian concept correctly, not as an interruption of necessity, but as a conjunction of differential necessities, it sums up the meaning of the first three theses, acting in a sense as their hinge. What it is affirmed it is the primacy of the relationship of things over some inner essence they may possess; and the primacy of the aleatory over any theology or teleology of the Cause.

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40   Machiavelli 1998, pp. 22–3 (emphasis added).
41   Cortellazzo and Zolli 1985, p. 819.

4   Thesis of the Primacy of the Interweaving of Times over Linear Time

The very idea of plural temporalities, of being having a plurality of rhythms, although not explicitly discussed by Machiavelli, is the condition of conceivability of the concept of occasion. In a theory with a single temporality – whether conceived from the perspective of a creationist theology or a philosophy of history – the power of the Machiavellian concept of occasion would be completely neutralised. As Jankélévitch writes so aptly, 'occasion is not the instant of a solitary becoming, but the instant complicated by "polychronism", that is, by sporadicism and by the plurality of durations. If durations were arranged between each other by an immemorially predetermined harmony, instead of marking out different measures of time; or if they created an absolutely formless cacophony between them, instead of lining up from time to time, there would be no place for opportunity. Miraculous occasion depends on polimetry and polyrhythm, as it does on the momentary interference of becoming'.[42]

From this perspective, the way Machiavelli re-transcribes Polybius's theory of *anacýclosis* is paradigmatic. In the *Discourses*, Book I, chapter 2 which examines the particular form of the Roman Republic in relation to the Platonic and Aristotelian typology, Machiavelli describes a cyclical movement that regulates the historical development of all forms of power, substantially repeating Polybius. However, after describing the six forms of government and the passional and generational dialectics (the first generation is always virtuous and the second is always corrupt), which causes the transition from one form of power to another, he highlights the abstract character of this serial succession of forms once it is placed in connection with the concrete plane of historical relationships:

> It is while revolving in this cycle that all republics are governed and govern themselves. But rarely do they return to the same governments, for 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. *But indeed it happens that in its travails, a republic always lacking in counsel and forces becomes subject to a neighboring State that is ordered better than it*; assuming that this were not so, however, a republic would be capable of revolving for an infinite time in these governments.[43]

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42   Jankélévitch 1980, p. 117.

43   Machiavelli 1996, p. 13 (emphasis added).

The serial temporality exhibited in the succession of forms of power appears as an abstraction of the imagination when faced with the reality of complex historical and political relations: there is no law of development governing a society's forms of power that is independent of the power relations which oppose and bind this society to other societies. Consequently, the intersection of the different cycles produces a temporality traversed by ruptures and discontinuities.

However, the distance he takes from the theory of *anacýclosis* is even more radical: Machiavelli does not limit himself to complicating the framework inherited from Polybius,[44] to simply noting that there are indeed cycles but that these interfere with each other. He does not conceive chance as the intersection of the necessary development of multiple cycles; rather, as we said, he places chance at the origin of the form. As soon as he begins to tackle his subject – the specific form of the Roman Republic – he gets rid of all the conceptual tools that come with the theory of *anacýclosis* in order to study his object in all its unique and lasting complexity. It is precisely the question of the duration of the Republics that allows Machiavelli to distance itself from a cyclical theory of history:

> I say thus 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. So those who prudently order laws having recognized this defect, avoiding each of these modes by itself, chose one that shared in all, judging it firmer and more stable; for the one guards the other, since in one and the same city there are the principality (*il Principato*), the aristocrats (*gli Ottimati*), and the popular government (*Governo Popolare*).[45]

When Machiavelli approaches his subject – the history of the Roman people – the philosophy of history is abandoned in favour of a study of the laws and institutions ('*leggi e ordini*' in the language of Machiavelli) that allowed the State to regulate and stabilise the power relations of the society's 'humours'.

However, before dealing with the specific object of his essay, Machiavelli offers two examples: the example of Lycurgus, which gave Sparta a constitution assuring political stability for eight centuries, and the counter-example of Solon, whose laws established a precarious form of power that soon turned into tyranny:

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44   For an outline of the differences between the naturalism of Polybius and that of Machiavelli see Sasso 1987, pp. 3–65.

45   Machiavelli 1996, p. 13.

> Among those who have deserved most praise for such constitutions is Lycurgus, who in Sparta ordered his laws so as to give their roles to the kinds, the aristocrats, and the people and made a State that lasted more than eight hundred years, achieving the highest praise for himself and quiet in that city. The contrary happened to Solon, who ordered the laws in Athens: by ordering only the popular State there, he made it of such short life that before he died he saw the tyranny of Pisistratus born there. His heirs were expelled after forty years and Athens returned to freedom, yet because it took up the popular State again, according to the orders of Solon, it lasted no more than a hundred years. To maintain it, [Athens] made many constitutions that had not been considered by Solon, by which the insolence of the greats and the license of the collectivity were repressed. Nonetheless, because it did not mix them with the power of the principality and with that of the aristocrats, Athens lived a very short time in respect to Sparta.[46]

There are two theoretical consequences, which actually remain implicit, that need to be noted about the two examples chosen by Machiavelli. On the one hand, the mythical character of Lycurgus – who in Machiavelli's text occupies the exemplary role of the legislator 'at a stroke (*ad uno tratto*)' (as opposed to legislations that arise by chance) – suggests that any form of first causality is in reality nothing but a form of mythology about the origin (and the irony about Moses's teacher strengthens this hypothesis, it seems to me). On the other hand, Athenian history invalidates the theory of *anacýclosis*, since the 'Athenian cycle' passes from a democracy into a tyranny, then back into a democracy, and finally into an oligarchy after the defeat suffered at the hands of Sparta in 404 BC.

In other words, Machiavelli suggests that the history of Rome must be analysed independently of the belief in the omnipotence of a legislator, as that of a predetermined historical development: history is the locus of random encounters between forces internal and external to the State, and it is the continuous regulation of these forces that make it possible for a State to endure. The broad description of the subject matter of the theory of history in the *Discourses* (the history of the Roman people) thus appears as the distance Machiavelli puts between himself and two fundamental ideas of classical philosophy: those of the legislator 'at a stroke', and cyclical time, or the eternal return of the same. Here is the long passage that closes the chapter:

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46   Ibid.

But let us come to Rome. Notwithstanding that it did not have a Lycurgus to order it in the beginning in a mode that would enable it to live free a long time, nonetheless so many accidents arose in it through the disunion between the plebs and the Senate that what an orderer had not done, chance did. For if the first fortune did not fall to Rome, the second fell to it; for if its first orders were defective, nonetheless they did not deviate from the right way that could lead them to perfection. For Romulus and all the other kinds made many and good laws confirming also to a free way of life; but because their end was to found a kingdom and not a republic, when that city was left free, many things that were necessary to order in favor of freedom were lacking, not having been ordered by those kinds. Even though its kings lost their empire by the causes and modes discoursed of, nonetheless those who expelled them expelled from Rome the name and not the kingly power, having at once ordered two consuls and the Senate in that republic, it came to be mixed only of two qualities out of the three written of above – that is the principality and the aristocrats. It remained only to give a place to the popular government; 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, after which the state of that republic came to be more stabilized, since all three kinds of government there had their part.[47]

The denial of the first cause embodied by the legislator-founder – who in the political space occupies the place that God has in the Christian cosmology – brings with it, with the same theoretical move, the denial of the series of transitive causes resulting from it: 'so many accidents arose in it through the disunion between the plebs and the Senate that what an orderer had not done, chance did'. In the beginning was chance, not intended as a roll of the dice in a vacuum, but as the power of occasion understood as the emergence of new possibilities for political action (which according to Machiavelli means the creation of new institutions), out of a given array of forces. It is therefore fortune in its multiple encounters with the political forms established by ancient virtue (virtue fossilised, as it were, turned into habit), which constitutes the field of action, the occasion, for new works of virtue. And this affirmation of ceaseless work that present virtue performs on the institutions and laws

47   Machiavelli 1996, p. 14 (D I.2).

established by the virtue of the past (such as the repeated and continuous effort to balance what, by nature, always remains unstable – the power relations that constitute a society) on both the ontological plane and on the more immediate plane of politics, breaks with every thought of the origin. At the same time, it breaks with a linear temporality, within which events are inscribed in a serial fashion according to a finalised plan, clearing the way for a conception of reality as the random space of the conjuncture. This is a space of struggle, whose outcome is never predetermined, but which depends on the risk taken, with no guarantee, by virtue as it is engaged in the complex and unpredictable twists and turns of fortune.[48]

Time is not plural simply because there are more cycles that interfere with each other, but, more profoundly, because any apparent historical linearity consists of an interweaving of times, rhythms, and encounters that constitute the specific quality of a conjuncture.

5   Thesis of the Disarticulation of Truth and Memory

This conception of time is precisely what forces the disarticulation of truth and memory that is central to the remarkable chapter 5 of Book II of the *Discourses*: memory is not the conceptual double of history, but a fragment saved from powerful causes of destruction. All this is to be found in the form of a reflection on the memories of the human race: 'That the Variation of Sects and Languages, Together with the Accident of Floods or Plague, Eliminates the Memories of Things'.

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48   Roberto Esposito writes: 'Every specific time needs a specific "foundation". Therefore, the act of "founding" is not limited to a logical *primum* that guarantees the entire subsequent development. [...] To the founding act of (self-)preservation, Machiavelli opposes, therefore, an innovative process of expansion. But does this mean full secularization of the political, a complete eradication of any presupposition, a linear projection toward the future? An interpretation along these lines – although prevalent in the critical literature – is entirely misleading. Not only due to the reduced complexity that the double-sided concept (politicization of theological categories and persistence of the theological core in the new political language) of "secularization" is subjected to in general. But, more specifically, due to the removal from sight of the fact that eliminating the foundation that provides resolution (once and for all) means exactly the opposite of a linearization of history: namely, the assumption of contradiction (not in the dialectical sense, of course, but as a contrastive opposition) as a constitutive principle of political action' (Esposito 1984, p. 199).

The beginning of the chapter is blunt, although apparently difficult to interpret:

> To those philosophers who would have it that the world is eternal, I believe that one could reply that if so much antiquity were true it would be reasonable that there be memory of more than five thousand years – if it were not seen how the memories of times are eliminated by diverse causes, of which part come from men, part from heaven.[49]

Machiavelli says here, through a very complex syntactic construction, in the first place, that the world is eternal, and in second place, that there are causes that erase the memory of things.

The power of the first philosophical statement is evident: it fully resumes the Averroistic thesis that, like an underground river, had flowed from the Arab Enlightenment, crossing through the late Middle Ages and Christian Humanism, running counter to the dominant philosophy at every turn. This is a statement that equally opposes Platonism (*Timaeus*) and Christianity. The second statement has the same polemical aims: it strikes at both the Platonic theory of memory understood as anamnesis and at the Holy Scriptures as the memory of human history beginning from its origin (the 5,000 years that Machiavelli mentions correspond exactly to the antiquity of the world described in *Genesis*).

Their combination leads to a new conception of historical knowledge; this is presented not as the conceptual double of the historical totality, but as a fragment saved from the powerful causes that destroy human memory. This fragment of memory is in no way an expression of the totality: no reason (understood as Sense) presides over its survival; it is not what remains of the encounters between the forces of nature and human society, and of the encounters between different societies. The error of Platonism and Christianity consists precisely in projecting the fragment onto the whole, an error that renders the world finite and establishes the alliance between memory and truth.

How, then, does Machiavelli divide up the causes of oblivion? Machiavelli begins his exposition with those that 'come from men', in other words, social causes:

> 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

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49   Machiavelli 1996, p. 139.

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 that ancient theology. It is true that they did 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 they made, we would not have any record of things past. 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, and spoiling every other thing that might convey some sign of antiquity. So if they had added a new language to this persecution, in a very brief time everything would be seen to be forgotten. It is therefore to be believed that what the Christian sect wished to do against the Gentile sect, the Gentile would have done against that which was prior to it. 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 – as happened to the history of Diodorus Siculus, which, though it renders an account of forty or fifty thousand years, is nonetheless reputed, as I believe it to be, a mendacious thing.[50]

Machiavelli makes three philosophical statements here:

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50   Ibid. About the 'mendacity' of Diodorus's narrative, Sasso writes: 'allowing (in principle) the "veracity" of these scattered fragments, he realized that it was, nevertheless, impossible to prove it. To prove it would have been necessary to resort to the "context", that is, the very reality that, destroyed in the things themselves, had also dissolved in human memory. [...] The Greek historian [...] seems to be the target of a two-pronged, although coherent, critique from Machiavelli: not only that he constructed an "imaginary (*favoloso*)" framework, but also, primarily, that he did not realize the methodological difficulty involved in investigating the more distant past ...'. According to Sasso, Machiavelli does not want to say that 'Diodorus's history is imaginary because it's about ancient things', but, on the contrary, that 'it is impossible to ascertain the truth about the most ancient past, because, [...] its context having been destroyed, of which there remain, if they remain, only fragments, precisely because they are only fragments, strictly speaking, we cannot decide whether they are true or whether they are false' (Sasso 1987, pp. 378–83).

1. The Christian religion is nothing more than one 'sect' among others.[51]
2. Religious sects are temporal dispositives of power that naturally tend toward hegemony: the logic of the relationship between sects on the world stage is therefore a logic of war.
3. The memory of an era's spiritual culture lies intact in the materiality of the language that expresses it; a language does not have the expressive centrality of a subject and, therefore, cannot be submitted to absolute control. Consequently, a language can be completely destroyed, but in the event that it avoids being destroyed, it escapes attempts on the part of power to control it: its materiality is the *de facto* guarantee of its eccentricity and its structured asystematicity.

The combination of these three philosophical statements sketches the outline of a theory of history in which memory, far from being the most powerful instrument of knowledge, is at stake in the struggles between different sects: the winners try to destroy the memory of the losers and impose their own narrative of the world as the only true one (an attempt that can only succeed if the memory of the losers is destroyed down to its material roots, that is, its language). We now turn to the passage in which Machiavelli sets out 'the causes that come from heaven', that is, the natural causes that destroy memory:

> As to the causes that come from heaven, they are those that eliminate the human race and reduce the inhabitants of the world to a few. This comes about either through plague or through famine or through an inundation of waters. The most important is the last, both because it is more universal and because those who are saved are all mountain men and coarse, who, since they do not have knowledge of antiquity, cannot leave it to posterity. And if among them someone is saved who has knowledge of it, to make a reputation and a name for himself he conceals it and perverts

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51 To understand the power of Machiavelli's position, it is perhaps helpful to read this passage from Innocent Gentillet (1576): '…autant peu sait-il qu'il veut dire, quand il dit que les sectes et Religions varient deux ou trois fois en cinq ou six mils ans, et que la derniere fait tousjours perir la memoire de la precedente. Car qui luy a revelé ce secret? qui luy a dit de nouvelles des choses qui ont esté faites devant Moyse, si ce n'est Moyse mesmes? En comme il n'y a ny raison ny histoire surquoy il puisse fonder cette bourde impudente. Mais il vouloit monstrer par cecy, que si aucon douttoit qu'il ne fust un vray Atheiste, qu'il n'en devoit plus douter: car pour preuve de ce, il fait declaration qu'il ne croit rien de ce qui est escrit en la sainte Escriture, de la creation du monde, ny de la religion de Dieu que nous tenons depuis Moyse' (Gentillet 1968, p. 179).

it in his mode so that what he has wished to write alone, and nothing else, remains for his successors.[52]

Here are the philosophical statements that can be drawn from this passage:

1. The history of mankind is deeply rooted in nature, whose power can brutally wipe out entire civilisations; as a result, the continuity that the narrative of memory provides is nothing more than the continuity of a fragment, an island that rises up in the middle of nowhere above the flood of oblivion.

2. Memory does not evenly permeate society: there is a layering of memory within the society that excludes the model of expressive causality and the *pars totalis*.[53]

3. Memory is much more an instrument of power and, therefore, perversion of the truth for political ends, than an accurate knowledge of the past.

The combination of these three propositions makes up a theoretical position, which could be read as an *ante litteram* refutation of the great systems of idealism. However, an unexpected source for this passage has been brought to light by the extraordinary work of scholarship that has been conducted on the texts of Machiavelli: it comes from Plato's *Timaeus*. In fact, in Plato's work on cosmology there is a passage on which, in many respects, Machiavelli's text seems to be modelled.

In the dialogue, Critias the younger relates a story that Critias the Elder had learned in Egypt from Solon, about the existence of a city in ancient Greece with inhabitants similar to those Socrates had spoken about in the *Republic*. Plato emphasises that this is a factual account and not an invented myth. The reason that we have lost the memory of this city is that the Greeks 'in mind [...] are all young; there is no old opinion handed down among you by ancient tradition, nor any science which is hoary with age'. This is why, according to the tale told to Solon by an old Egyptian priest:

There have been, and will be again, many destructions of mankind arising out of many causes; the greatest have been brought about by the

52   Machiavelli 1996, p. 140.

53   Balibar defines this principle as one of 'social homeomery'; it consists in thinking that 'in the social 'whole' (either political or social), the 'parties' or the 'cells' are necessarily similar to the whole itself' (Balibar 1997, p. 288).

agencies of fire and water, and other lesser ones by innumerable other causes. There is a story, which even you have preserved, that once upon a time Paethon, the son of Helios, having yoked the steeds in his father's chariot, because he was not able to drive them in the path of his father, burnt up all that was upon the earth, and was himself destroyed by a thunderbolt. Now this has the form of a myth, but really signifies a declination of the bodies moving in the heavens around the earth, and a great conflagration of things upon the earth, which recurs after long intervals; at such times those who live upon the mountains and in dry and lofty places are more liable to destruction than those who dwell by rivers or on the seashore. And from this calamity the Nile, who is our never-failing saviour, delivers and preserves us. When, on the other hand, the gods purge the earth with a deluge of water, the survivors in your country are herdsmen and shepherds who dwell on the mountains, but those who, like you, live in cities are carried by the rivers into the sea. [...] And whatever happened either in your country or in ours, or in any other region of which we are informed-if there were any actions noble or great or in any other way remarkable, they have all been written down by us of old, and are preserved in our temples. Whereas just when you and other nations are beginning to be provided with letters and the other requisites of civilized life, after the usual interval, the stream from heaven, like a pestilence, comes pouring down, and leaves only those of you who are destitute of letters and education; and so you have to begin all over again like children, and know nothing of what happened in ancient times, either among us or among yourselves. As for those genealogies of yours which you just now recounted to us, Solon, they are no better than the tales of children. In the first place you remember a single deluge only, but there were many previous ones; in the next place, you do not know that there formerly dwelt in your land the fairest and noblest race of men which ever lived, and that you and your whole city are descended from a small seed or remnant of them which survived. And this was unknown to you, because, for many generations, the survivors of that destruction died, leaving no written word.[54]

The essential point of Plato's narrative figures equally in Machiavelli's text: the floods destroy the memory of humankind, because the only survivors are illiterate. However, as is often the case in the history of thought, apparently similar

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54   Plato 2006, p. 74.

topics are inscribed in opposing theoretical strategies.[55] In Plato the flood acts as an argument in support of the thesis of an original wisdom that was lost in the beginnings – the thesis of the gradual decline in the ages of the world, made paradigmatic by Diodorus Siculus, which Machiavelli describes as a 'mendacious thing'. For Machiavelli, there is no original, lost wisdom; there is only disappearance forever of memory or political mystification of memory.

Machiavelli then traces the outlines of a theory of history in which the metaphysical hendiadys Origin-End is crossed out (to use twentieth century terminology); and in which a key role is played by the concept of occasion, as the encounter between virtue and fortune, in the form of a variety of material powers: the materiality of the apparatuses of religious power, the materiality of languages, hunger, diseases, natural disasters, and the cultural stratification of society. The memory of a civilisation, then, is nothing but a fragile fragment of matter faced with the immense power of nature, which has no teleological respect for it: memory can survive for a certain amount of time and imagine itself as eternal, projecting itself on the totality of time, but it is nevertheless fated for oblivion.

Conclusion

The 'thing' about which Machiavelli's discourse presents the 'effectual truth' (or which makes itself 'effectual truth' through discourse) thus becomes visible to the theory through the lenses that these five philosophical theses provide. The term 'thesis' comes from the Greek *thésis* that means 'position'. A thesis is a position, while the statement of a thesis is a taking of position in the given battlefield. Now, when using categories such as 'Western metaphysics' or 'onto-theology', there is always a risk of falling into generalisations that lose sight of

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55   Sasso stresses the difference between the two texts: 'True, but the concordance just noted does not also extend to the tone and structure of the two texts – Plato's and Machiavelli's. Both in the *Laws* as well as in the *Timaeus*, primitive humanity, of which no specific memory survives today, is presented with mythically positive traits; and in any case it appears quite foreign to the "maliciousness" that Machiavelli suspects it of instead, or establishes, in those who, having survived the extermination and finding themselves possessing some notion of the destroyed past, transmit it to posterity, but in a deformed and altered form' (Sasso 1987, p. 201). Sasso believes that this difference does not negate the concordance. For my part, I believe that the rejection of the myth of the origin and of the alliance between memory and truth is the clearest distance Machiavelli takes from Platonism; given this antithetical theoretical horizon, the parts that are in agreement serve as a warning to the learned reader: 'We are refuting Plato'.

the specificity of the individual authors. However, these categories become extremely useful when used as a background, as the horizon of a fictitiously homogeneous temporality regarding which it is possible to emphasise not only what escapes it but also what is opposed to it. Machiavelli's theses stake out a position against 'Western metaphysics' or 'onto-theology', one that – to state it openly – is radically materialistic. This is the reason why Machiavelli's philosophy has for a long time been invisible to Western thought: on the one hand, of course, because it is contained in a practical state in his political theory, and is therefore not directly perceivable or easily identifiable given the new, unheard-of meaning of his theses. On the other hand, however, this invisibility seems to have a deeper reason, taking the form of a repression, inasmuch as it is not limited to going beyond the horizon of Western metaphysics, but, in setting itself up as the truth of the thing, relegates all of metaphysics to the imagination of it.

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Tempo e politica: Una lettura materialista di Machiavelli

Sebastián Torres

1 Tempo, contingenza, conflitto

Per la filosofia politica contemporanea Machiavelli appare o si riafferma come il pensatore della contingenza e del conflitto. Le tre importanti letture dell'opera machiavelliana degli anni Settanta, che costituiscono le origini di questa interpretazione, sono quelle di Pocock, Lefort e Althusser.[1] Percorrendo sentieri distinti, questi tre studiosi iscrivono la riflessione di Machiavelli nel tempo; più precisamente, fanno del tempo storico, da un lato, e del tempo dell'azione, dall'altro, le chiavi interpretative di accesso all'opera machiavelliana, rendendo in tal modo possibile pensare un'ontologia storica del sociale.

Il conflitto, la divisione, è il punto d'inflessione a partire dal quale si prospetta il problema della *nascita* e della *durata* dell'ordine politico. Questi ultimi due termini rimandano necessariamente a due dimensioni del tempo, per cui la contingenza della fondazione, nella doppia estensione semantica dei termini 'costituzione' e 'istituzione', come atto dell'istituire e ordinamento dell'istituto, mostra che la contingenza si iscrive propriamente nel tempo; ossia, è un modo di nominare una temporalità complessa e non una 'contingenza trascendentale' anteriore al tempo storico, fondamento di una filosofia dell'evento e della libertà.[2]

Cambiamento, mutamento, novità, evento, sono termini che si trovano, in via di principio, in evidente tensione con i termini durata, permanenza, stabilità. Ed anche per gran parte del pensiero contemporaneo queste rappresentano delle vere opposizioni ontologiche. Il problema politico della fondazione e della durata, della determinazione degli effetti delle azioni e della loro per-

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* Traduzione di Daniele Petrella

1 Pocock 1975; Skinner 1978, e 1981; Lefort 1986; Althusser 1990, 1993, 1994, 1995.

2 L'espressione 'contingenza trascendentale' è di Marchart, che sostiene che Machiavelli sarebbe 'historically the first who might have touched on a coherent version of the radical notion of contingency in his conception of political autonomy; it might even be argued that the notion of contingency in all its radicalness is only perceivable retro-spectively from our own historical viewpoint' (Marchart 2007, p. 32).

manenza nel tempo a partire dalla costitutiva conflittualità del politico, non fa tanto della riflessione di Machiavelli una 'custodia' dell'indeterminazione; quanto, piuttosto, ci spinge a trovare nella pratica della sua filosofia un lavoro concettuale mai del tutto esplicitato.

Concentrarci sulla questione del tempo, obbiettivo della nostra lettura, richiederebbe che ci soffermassimo particolarmente sui *Discorsi*, in cui si dispiegano in tutte le loro dimensioni le differenti figure di una temporalità plurale, e sulle *Istorie fiorentine*, in cui queste stesse figure sono poste al servizio della storia singolare di una città e incarnano pertanto le differenti configurazioni di questo complesso corpo politico che è Firenze.

Ma chiamati ad intervenire per i cinquecento anni de *Il Principe*, prenderemo quest'occasione e questa ricorrenza come un'opportunità per lo sforzo che ci interessa fare, mostrare cioè come questa complessità temporale sia stata già abbozzata nel *De Principatibus*.[3] Pertanto i nomi di Pocock, Lefort e Althusser saranno i nostri punti di riferimento nello svolgimento di queste pagine. Nomi e tesi che rappresentano senz'altro la genesi di un processo interpretativo che esalta la complessità del tempo nell'opera di Machiavelli, ma dobbiamo aggiungere che la chiave del nostro discorso riprende e approfondisce – come si vedrà – le tesi di Morfino sull'ontologia delle relazioni e delle temporalità plurali, argomentate in dialogo con la lettura di Althusser.[4]

Delle due più evidenti figure del tempo, che hanno definito due maniere di leggere *Il Principe*, l'*occasione* (temporalità che circoscrive l'elemento proprio dell'azione, la sua effettività come possibilità data dall'opportunità) e la *storia* (il tempo cronologico a partire da cui si razionalizzano le azioni ed i processi), ci soffermeremo sulla prima. Nondimeno occorre sottolineare che la nostra lettura, sebbene non potremo svilupparla ampiamente in questa sede, ha diretti effetti sul problema del sapere storico e politico, poiché mette in discussione le interpretazioni costruite sull'opposizione tra un Machiavelli fondatore della scienza politica (priorità del tempo cronologico a partire dalla conoscenza delle regolarità presenti nei 'casi' particolari) e un Machiavelli decisionista (virtù fondantesi nella volontà) o umanista (virtù che ha sue radici nella tradizione).

In questo quadro, il 'momento machiavelliano' – per riprendere l'espressione di Pocock – si risolve nella complessa trama del tempo, nell'implicazione tra occasione e durata (un motivo che troverà la sua esposizione più completa nel terzo libro dei *Discorsi*, espansione di un pensiero materialista che eccede di molto la distinzione tra tempo divino e tempo umano, a partire dalla quale

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3   Abbiamo dedicato alla questione del tempo la seconda parte del nostro Torres 2013.

4   Morfino 2004, e 2005.

l'umanismo civico ha pensato la relazione tra libertà e storia nella stessa forma in cui l'ha esposta la corrente repubblicana). 'Andare drieto alla verità effettuale della cosa [piuttosto] che alla immaginazione di essa',[5] come sostiene il noto passaggio de *Il Principe*, implica evitare la riduzione del problema politico alla dialettica tra creazione e ripetizione, per cercare invece nelle differenti figure di una temporalità plurale la dimensione politica di questa difficoltà, che sarà impostata nel capitolo venticinque, in cui si afferma che gli uomini hanno raggiunto uno stesso fine con diversi mezzi (anche opposti) oppure diversi fini con gli stessi mezzi, 'il che non nasce da altro, se non da la qualità de' tempi che si conformano, o no, col procedere loro'.[6]

2   Il tempo controverso

La prima presentazione del tempo come occasione appare nel capitolo terzo de *Il Principe*, in cui Machiavelli offre una delle definizioni di prudenza come rimedio di fronte all'avversità:

> perché, prevedendosi discosto [gli scandoli presenti], vi si rimedia facilmente, ma, aspettando che ti si appressino, la medicina non è a tempo, perché la malattia è diventata incurabile; e interviene di questa, come dicono e' fisici dello etico, che nel principio del suo male è facile a curare e difficile a conoscere: ma nel progresso del tempo, non la avendo nel principio conosciuta né medicata, diventa facile a conoscere e difficile a curare. Così interviene nelle cose di stato.[7]

La prudenza è conoscenza del 'caso' particolare, richiede che si risponda ad un imperativo molto preciso: conoscere è poter agire nel 'momento opportuno'. L'analogia con la medicina non è nuova, ma risulta significativa se consideriamo l'affinità tra *occasio* e *caducitas*, termine medico e giuridico riferito tanto al deterioramento dei corpi vivi quanto a quello delle istituzioni (una relazione che riapparirà positivamente impostata nei *Discorsi*, ii.5 e iii.1, quando Machiavelli tratta della salute dei corpi semplici e complessi).

La relazione tra *caso* e *occasione* si situa inizialmente nella contingenza del tempo presente. Per Pocock, l'accettazione della finitezza e la messa in questione della temporalità escatologica costituiscono la nuova coscienza storica

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5   Machiavelli 1995, p. 102 (P 15).
6   Machiavelli 1995, p. 164 (P 25).
7   Machiavelli 1995, p. 18 (P 3).

umanistica e inquadrano il problema nella domanda relativa all'azione virtuosa, tesa a raggiungere i fini sempre contingenti della comunità. Tuttavia, l'idea di *secolarizzazione* che sostiene l'interpretazione di Pocock lascia irrisolto il problema che Machiavelli solleva nella parte finale del passo poco sopra citato; ossia, che agire e conoscere non si negano. Nella loro relazione è direttamente implicata la questione del tempo, di modo che questo *a posteriori* della conoscenza, cioè la conoscenza di ciò che è avvenuto o accaduto, è sempre preceduto dalla temporalità dell'occasione.

In un successivo passaggio, Machiavelli ritorna su questa idea per mostrare quanto l'azione dipenda da una particolare comprensione del tempo. Egli afferma, infatti, che agli uomini prudenti

> né piacque mai ... quello che è tutto dì in bocca de' savi de' nostri tempi, di godere il benefizio del tempo, ma sì bene quello della virtù e prudenza loro: perché il tempo si caccia innanzi ogni cosa, e può condurre seco bene come male e male come bene.[8]

Chi sono quelli che si aspettano tutto dal tempo? Sono coloro che comprendono la politica sotto la figura del tempo ciclico o cronologico. Non solo coloro che mantengono l'idea teologica del *kairós* – che sia destino, provvidenza o intervento divino (messianico) – nel tempo cronologico, ma anche quelli che attendono tutto dalla Fortuna, affidando la propria sorte nelle sue mani. Qui Machiavelli mette propriamente in questione il legame tradizionale tra tempo e politica – greco-romano, giudeo-cristiano, umanista – che trascende l'idea della semplice fiducia in tempi migliori, poiché il tempo che si attende, il tempo a venire, è la struttura immaginaria di un tempo comune, originario, la cui figura politica è la *Giustizia*. Per questa ragione, quelli che aspettano non sanno che ciò che il tempo porta con sé è tanto il bene quanto il male. In altri termini, non c'è una relazione tra la fisica del tempo (il divenire) e la geometria (o aritmetica) della giustizia, che 'ordina' e 'distribuisce' premi e castighi.[9] *Il tempo non è altro che l'insieme delle relazioni, di incontri e dissoluzioni di durate molteplici, che non ha in se stesso necessità alcuna, direzione o fine determinato.*

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8   Machiavelli 1995, pp. 18–19.

9   Si può vedere chiaramente la relazione tra tempo e giustizia nel frammento 1 di Anassimandro: 'Anassimandro [...] ha detto [...] che principio degli esseri è l'infinito [...] di dove infatti gli esseri hanno origine, lì hanno anche la dissoluzione secondo necessità: essi pagano infatti a vicenda la pena e il riscatto dell'ingiustizia secondo l'ordine del tempo' (*I Presocratici* 2006, p. 197).

Come pensare, dunque, l'azione? Com'è possibile una conoscenza del singo-
lare, del particolare, che permetta la possibilità di approfittare dell'occasione'?
E, ancora, qual è la relazione tra la conoscenza del singolare e la possibilità
della durata?

3   Il tessuto dei desideri

Per un principe governare sarà stabilire una logica di mutua adeguazione, sem-
plice e incompiuta, tra lui e il popolo – l'*universale* –, perché è la potenza del
popolo la causa principale della stabilità e instabilità dello Stato.[10] È l'irruzione
del popolo nella riflessione politica, ciò che rende possibile la maniera in cui
Machiavelli introduce l'idea di *corpo* politico associata alla vita e al desiderio,
piuttosto che a una 'forma': la molteplicità dei desideri, ciascuno di essi effetto
di una composizione di altri molteplici desideri, punto di intersezione di mol-
teplici relazioni. È la dimensione materiale, quella in cui si intreccia la tempo-
ralità dei corpi.

Nel capitolo terzo de *Il Principe*, dove appare il passaggio sul tempo oppor-
tuno prima citato, Machiavelli dice:

> Ma nel principato nuovo consistono le difficultà. E prima, – se non è tutto
> nuovo, ma come membro: che si può chiamare tutto insieme quasi misto,
> – le variazioni sue nascono in prima da una naturale difficoltà, quale è in
> tutti e' principati nuovi: le quali sono che li uomini mutano volentieri
> signore, credendo migliorare, e questa credenza li fa pigliare l'arme con-
> tro a quello: di che e' s'ingannano, perché veggono poi per esperienzia
> avere piggiorato.[11]

La volubilità non proviene dalle passioni intese alla stregua di vizi, come si è
compreso classicamente il motivo della corruzione nella casistica delle forme
di governo, ma dal desiderio, che in sé non è né vizio né virtù. La difficoltà ri-
sulta 'naturale' perché i popoli per natura desiderano migliorare; ossia, che per
natura desiderano. Per questo, il problema non risiede nel desiderio in quanto
tale, quanto nei suoi molteplici effetti politici. Il desiderio è anche il luogo
dell'immaginazione ed è per questo che i popoli si ingannano quando cambia-
no un signore con un altro, poiché credono che 'le disgrazie' affondino le radici
in questo o quel principe e non nella dominazione. E, benché 'l'esperienza' in-

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10   Machiavelli 1995 (P 9 e 19).
11   Machiavelli 1995, p. 10 (P 3).

dichi ai popoli che si sono sbagliati su questo punto, in quanto essa si limita ad una sistematizzazione di ciò che è accaduto, resta escluso un sapere dell''occasione propizia'. Per questa ragione, l'esperienza resta catturata in una concezione immaginaria del tempo e dell'azione. Conoscere la dinamica stessa dell'immaginazione permette di comprendere la genesi della strutturazione del tempo-uno.

Il problema dell'istituzione e conservazione dello Stato presuppone, fin dal principio, che non esistano forme eterne né artifici infinitamente durevoli. La logica della *durata* implica la possibilità di mantenere un insieme di relazioni nella permanente produzione degli effetti che seguono da esse, perché la temporalità dei corpi politici è una temporalità complessa, plurale, legata al vincolo desiderio-conflitto, movimento in cui l'*occasione* si configura come la temporalità dell'azione istitutiva, fondatrice allo stesso modo in cui la temporalità delle azioni istitutive si configura a partire da posizioni istituite. La virtù del governante richiede la conoscenza pratica di questa fisica dei corpi politici, che implica una conoscenza-dominio delle passioni, idea che si può vedere con chiarezza in un noto passo de *Il Principe*. Infatti, di fronte alla domanda se conviene essere temuto o amato, contro la versione moralista della politica classica, Machiavelli risponde che è meglio essere temuto che amato, posto che l'amore è una passione la cui causa si trova nel popolo (che è 'volubile'), mentre il timore è una passione la cui causa sta nel principe.[12] La *virtù* di questo sapere non è una certezza, ma *posizione* del sapere: posizione che definisce un senso dell'opportunità e un punto di intersezione nella complessa trama delle relazioni sociali-affettive che definiscono l'*occasione*.

È stato Lefort quello che ha posto il conflitto al centro della lettura di Machiavelli. Il conflitto, il desiderio e l'immaginazione, sono i termini a partire dai quali si configura la rappresentazione dell'ordine sociale. Nei *Discorsi* Machiavelli fa iniziare la storia di Roma con il conflitto tra i nobili e la plebe; nelle *Istorie fiorentine* fa iniziare la storia politica di Firenze con il tumulto dei Ciompi; nel *Principe* il conflitto tra i grandi e il popolo è descritto immediatamente dopo aver menzionato l'incontro tra virtù e fortuna:

> […] né a pervenirvi è necessario o tutta virtù o tutta fortuna, ma più tosto una astuzia fortunata, – dico che si ascende a questo principato o con il favore del populo o con quello de' grandi. Perché in ogni città si truovano questi dua umori diversi: e nasce, da questo, che il populo desidera non essere comandato né oppresso da' grandi ed e' grandi desiderano

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12   Si veda Machiavelli 1995 (P 17). Anche qui Machiavelli critica gli storici che elogiano i risultati dei principi e biasimano, però, le loro cause.

comandare e opprimere el populo; e da questi dua appetiti diversi nasce
nelle città uno de' tre effetti: o principato o libertà o licenza.[13]

Per Lefort non si tratta di un disaccordo tra termini pre-esistenti (le classi). Il
dato importante è che la divisione e i termini dell'antagonismo non precedono
questa relazione. Tuttavia, è la negatività del desiderio del popolo (il desiderio
di non essere dominati) ciò che apre all'indeterminazione costitutiva del poli-
tico, la sua contingenza. È il non essere del popolo ciò che sta alla base di que-
sta 'operazione della negatività', a partire dalla quale emerge la figura del terzo,
il Principe (Stato) che, oltre ad intervenire nel conflitto, permette che si possa
parlare di divisione, che si possa cioè rappresentare la divisione di *una* città, di
una società. Tanto le classi quanto l'unità, l'ordine, sono sempre secondi rispet-
to alla divisione. Per questa ragione, il Potere è sempre derivato, secondo in
ordine ontologico e tuttavia primo nell'ordine del discorso; ossia, il luogo del
Potere, della Legge e del Sapere – la loro trascendenza – è ciò che permette la
'costituzione simbolica del sociale'; è la divisione 'ciò che permette di decifrare
la costituzione'. La coscienza moderna dell'essere storico del sociale, iniziata
con Machiavelli, si centra allora in una doppia dimensione strutturale che, co-
minciata con una teoria della relazione, finisce dominata dall'ordine simbolico
poiché la divisione è impensabile senza l'ordine, benché l'ordine sia inspiega-
bile senza l'antagonismo.

Da questa implicazione tra negatività, conflitto e indeterminazione, segue
che il carattere storico dell'essere sociale si fonda nella libertà come invenzio-
ne di un ordine permanentemente esposto alla sua apertura originaria. Nello
sviluppo di questa argomentazione, che culmina nella libertà come indetermi-
nazione, Lefort trascura per lo meno due questioni che per noi sono centrali.
In primo luogo, la sua teoria della relazione fa dell'antagonismo una relazione
strutturale, la cui 'operazione della negatività' sfugge al tempo, lo dialettizza
(benché sia una dialettica diadica, inconclusa); in secondo luogo, vede in
questa negatività del desiderio del popolo un desiderio originario, senza nota-
re che questo desiderio è l'effetto di una singolare configurazione di una

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13   Machiavelli 1995, pp. 62–3 (P 9). È interessante notare che nello stesso capitolo Machia-
      velli torna a prospettare la diversità dei tempi che coesistono nelle città: 'E il principe non
      è a tempo ne' periculi a pigliare la autorità assoluta, perché e' cittadini e sudditi, che
      sogliono avere e' comandamenti da' magistrati, non sono in quelli frangenti per ubbidire
      a' suoi. E arà sempre ne' tempi dubbi penuria di chi lui si possa fidare; perché simile prin-
      cipe non può fondarsi sopra quello che vede ne' tempi quieti, quando e' cittadini hanno
      bisogno dello stato: perché allora ognun corre, ognuno promette e ciascuno vuole morire
      per lui, quando la morte è discosto; ma ne' tempi avversi, quando lo stato ha bisogno de'
      cittadini, allora se ne truova pochi'. Si veda Machiavelli 1995, pp. 68–9.

complessa trama di desideri che rendono conto di molteplici temporalità, non sussumibili sotto una dialettica negativa. Il desiderio di migliorare, il desiderio di sicurezza, il desiderio della vendetta, l'odio verso i grandi, sono la trama materiale di questo desiderio di non essere dominati.[14]

Machiavelli imposta la divisione tra i grandi e il popolo subito dopo essere tornato a menzionare l'incontro tra virtù e fortuna, perché il conflitto in se stesso non produce l'istituzione politica, ma è nella congiuntura che occorre trovare l'occasione per produrre un incontro tra un principe nuovo e il popolo.

4   Memoria involontaria

Avanzare nella direzione che ci propongono Pocock e Lefort, verso la repubblica come forma di governo che assume questo tempo secolare, de-sostantivando, ciascuno a suo modo, la libertà e il bene comune, ci obbligherebbe ad abbandonare *Il Principe* per dirigerci ai *Discorsi*. Sappiamo che all'inizio del capitolo secondo del *Principe*, Machiavelli dice che trascurerà il ragionamento sulle repubbliche e che si occuperà solo dei principati. Un capitolo de *Il Principe*, però, sviluppa una riflessione sui governi liberi che, per i nostri fini, è fondamentale. Nel capitolo cinque, dedicato a come governare le città che si regolano su leggi proprie, emerge un'altra dimensione del tempo vincolata alla memoria, che rende possibile ampliare la mappa delle figure del tempo presente in quest'opera:

> [...] e chi diviene patrone di una città consueta a vivere libera, e non la disfaccia, aspetti di esser disfatto da quella: perché sempre ha per refugio nella rebellione il nome della libertà e gli ordini antiqui sua, e' quali né per lunghezza di tempo né per benifizi mai si dimenticano [...] e subito in ogni accidente vi ricorrono: come fe' Pisa dopo cento anni che la era suta posta in servitù da' fiorentini. Ma, quando le città o le provincie sono use a vivere sotto uno principe e quello sangue sia spento, sendo da uno canto usi a ubbidire, da l'altro non avendo il principe vecchio, farne uno in fra loro non si accordano, vivere liberi non sanno: di modo che sono più tardi a pigliare l'arme e con più facilità se gli può uno principe guadagnare e assicurarsi di loro.[15]

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14   Si veda Torres 2007.

15   Machiavelli 1995, pp. 30–1 (P 5).

La divisione, nel conflitto, è attraversata da una temporalità complessa che rimanda anche all'esperienza di ciò che è accaduto, che è parte dell'esperienza del presente in quanto mondo dato. Machiavelli riconosce una doppia dimensione della memoria che eccede la mera differenza di percezione del *caso*, a cui rimanda il ricordo del passato. In altri termini, il tempo della dominazione è il tempo della 'ripetizione', in cui la memoria si costituisce in abito e occulta il conflitto. Come abbiamo visto in precedenza, anche nel caso in cui abbia luogo questo naturale desiderio di tutti i popoli di migliorare, il vincolo immaginario che i popoli stabiliscono con il passato non fa altro che ripetere ciò che è già configurato. D'altra parte, la memoria dell'antica libertà non rimanda direttamente alla costante presenza di una volontà di libertà, limitata dall'effettiva dominazione, ma a una dimensione involontaria della memoria, aleatoria e per questo vincolata al concetto di 'occasione', anche se a esso non identica. Iscritta nel corpo politico, può continuamente riemergere. Come possiamo qui notare, l'occasione già non è legata ad un sapere pratico, alla virtù del governante (i cui limiti appariranno alla fine de *Il Principe*). Infatti, nel passaggio citato l'idea di occasione si compone anche a partire da una definizione materialista della 'memoria' e, con questa caratteristica, mostra la sua complessità. Legata all'immaginazione, la memoria tende a cristallizzarsi sotto la finzione del ricordo di un tempo 'originario' o 'naturale' che occorre re-instaurare sotto la ripetizione. Per questo motivo, tanto l'abito della schiavitù quanto la 'memoria della libertà' designano la temporalità propria dei corpi, mostrando la costituzione affettiva della memoria, e ciò permette di comprendere in che maniera il desiderio di libertà possa facilmente mutarsi anche in una via di servitù. Questo accade – come ci mostra Machiavelli in questo caso – quando il desiderio di 'vendetta' contro chi ha schiavizzato il popolo dà contenuto al desiderio stesso della libertà; l'occulta trama del passato determina il desiderio del futuro e gli uomini cambiano volontariamente signore credendo di migliorare. La memoria della libertà, che trova nel momento opportuno la possibilità di interferire con l'ordine della dominazione, trasforma rapidamente l'occasione nella restituzione di un ordine che non è altro che la ripetizione di un continuo temporale, il quale – anche immaginato come tempo nuovo – finisce per mostrare la sua adeguazione a un continuo temporale.

Come abbiamo visto nella prima citazione di questo testo, conoscenza e azione si implicano reciprocamente, ma non si identificano in un tempo-uno; allo stesso modo, la memoria e la storia si implicano altresì reciprocamente, ma comprendono diverse esperienze della temporalità, che definiscono la posizione e le azioni del popolo e del principe. Legato alle azioni, ai differenti incontri e alle sue durate, tanto nella memoria quanto nella storia, il tempo presente, la sua posizione, è sempre *presenza affettiva del passato e desiderio*

del futuro. In questa complessa trama si costituisce tanto la libertà quanto la schiavitù, perché il tempo porta con sé tanto il bene quanto il male.

5   Il tempo della res (publica)

L'occasione per il *nuovo principe* e per *il popolo* non è la stessa. Il loro incontro porta con sé, infatti, qualcosa di aleatorio; non c'è necessità alcuna di questo incontro, come non c'è necessità alcuna che questo incontro possa durare. La virtù, come adeguazione al tempo presente, è la possibilità permanente di intervenire nella composizione di questo campo di forza in cui l'occasione, in quanto presuppone una compresenza di molteplici temporalità proprie dei corpi misti, cioè plurali, si apre anche al desiderio della libertà. È, difatti, a partire da questo tessuto passionale-temporale che Machiavelli potrà dire, nei *Discorsi*, che furono i conflitti a rendere libera Roma,[16] nella misura in cui è nel conflitto che un nuovo principe trova l'occasione per assumere la posizione del governo.

Un passaggio del capitolo sesto riassume le basi di quello che sarà la riflessione più radicale di questo materialismo della contingenza e di una temporalità plurale:

> Ed esaminando le azioni e vita loro [dei grandi uomini] non si vede che quelli avessino altro da la fortuna che la occasione, la quale dette loro materia a potere introdurvi dentro quella forma che parse loro: e sanza quella occasione la virtù dello animo loro si sarebbe spenta, e sanza quella virtù la occasione sarebbe venuta invano.[17]

È nella 'materia del tempo' che l'incontro tra *virtù* e *occasione* rende possibile intervenire nella trama delle relazioni date, per introdurre una nuova 'forma', cioè la produzione di un nuovo incontro che possa durare. La virtù è parte determinante, non assoluta, della nuova composizione delle relazioni sociali e politiche; non è volontà né decisione, poiché ha bisogno dell'incontro con l'occasione ed è sempre necessariamente determinata da questo complesso intreccio di relazioni non necessarie. È per questo motivo che la virtù-potere del principe dipende dall'incontro con il popolo; non è una sua invenzione.

Nel capitolo quinto, che possiamo considerare come dedicato alle repubbliche, si espone un'alternativa che non sarà ripresa dal principe nuovo. Quando

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16   Machiavelli 2008, pp. 70–1 (D I.4).
17   Machiavelli 1995, p. 33 (P 7).

il desiderio di libertà mantiene fresca la memoria delle istituzioni libere e un popolo attivo, l'unica cosa che resta è disperdere il popolo, decomporre questo 'corpo misto'. Il passaggio che chiude il capitolo è illuminante:

> Ma nelle republiche è maggiore vita, maggiore odio, più desiderio di vendetta: né gli lascia, né può lasciare, riposare la memoria della antiqua libertà; tale che la più sicura via è spegnerle, o abitarvi.[18]

La città in conflitto, che porta con sé la memoria della libertà, non è, come suppongono Pocock e gli interpreti dell'umanesimo civico, quella dove la forma-repubblica è una tradizione, tempo continuo che è stato interrotto e che tuttavia può essere restituito. È, al contrario, un singolare intreccio affettivo in cui si mettono in tensione temporalità multiple che si identificano con le potenze molteplici, in cui cioè l'occasione esige una maggiore virtù. Machiavelli chiama 'vita' questa complessa temporalità, composta di molteplici potenze attive, ma non unificate. Per questo, la moltitudine porta il tempo della vendetta, dell'odio, tanto quanto il desiderio di libertà. Nulla fa sì che sia necessaria la durata, però in questa il principe nuovo può trovare l'occasione per l'istituzione di un nuovo governo.

Indubbiamente, con maggior difficoltà, il principe può approfittare di questa situazione quando l'immaginazione struttura la memoria di un tempo-uno. Non ci sono qui maggiori garanzie, come non ce ne sono assumendo la temporalità presupposta nella casistica delle forme di governo o nella continuità di una tradizione, perché in tutti i casi, al di là del gioco principesco tra l'essere e l'apparire, si tratta di adeguarsi alla diversità dei tempi. Questa difficoltà è chiaramente esposta nel capitolo venticinque de *Il Principe*:

> Né si truova uomo sì prudente che si sappia accommodare a questo: sì perché non si può deviare da quello a che la natura lo inclina, sì etiam perché, avendo sempre uno prosperato camminando per una via, non si può persuadere che sia bene partirsi da quella. E però l'uomo respettivo, quando e' gli *è tempo di venire allo impeto*, non lo sa fare: donde rovina; che se si mutassi natura con e' tempi e con le cose, non si muterebbe fortuna.[19]

Non è la negatività del desiderio del popolo, come sostiene Lefort, ciò che definisce la costituzione dell'ordine sociale, né la conservazione di una cultura

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18   Machiavelli 1995, p. 31 (P 5).
19   Machiavelli 1995, p. 166 (P 25).

civica, come sostiene Pocock, ma la piena positività dell'intreccio di relazioni, di desideri – nel linguaggio di Machiavelli –, di molteplici durate e la loro permanente produzione di effetti. Al problema del potere non si risponde solo con il tempo-uno della produzione dialettica o conservatrice dell'universalità della legge e del bene comune. È la fortuna e l'occasione, nella materialità dei tempi, ciò a cui la repubblica fa fronte diversamente, come sostiene Machiavelli nel libro terzo dei *Discorsi*, rispondendo direttamente al capitolo venticinque de *Il Principe* su questa questione:

> Quinci nasce che una republica ha maggiore vita e ha più lungamente *buona fortuna* che uno principato, perché la può meglio accomodarsi alla *diversità de' temporali*, per la *diversità de' cittadini* che sono in quella, che non può uno principe. Perché un uomo che sia consueto a procedere in un modo, non si muta mai, come è detto, e conviene di necessità che, quando e' si mutano i tempi disformi a quel suo modo, che rovini.[20]

Ne *Il Principe* non è soltanto la figura della fortuna a rappresentare la contingenza ultima in cui si dispiega l'azione, ma è il concetto stesso di *occasione* che mostra i limiti della *virtù* intesa come l'azione di un soggetto individuale libero, cioè la sua inevitabile inclinazione naturale e l'impossibilità di distinguere chiaramente tra calcolo e abito, tra esperienza e ripetizione. Un individuo, un corpo simile, è anche una trama di relazioni che perdurano nel tempo.

Nel capitolo venticinque, la scommessa realizzata, non senza riserve, è liberare l'azione dalla trappola che impone la complessa relazione tra creazione e durata. La scommessa 'repubblicana' si distanzia ancora di più da qualsiasi retrogusto di un'ontologia della libertà, e tenta di pensare la libertà in maniera politica. Ma, indubbiamente, è un repubblicanesimo anomalo perché emerge dalla radicalizzazione della via materialista (contro il repubblicanesimo civico) in una ontologia dei 'corpi misti', corpi composti e complessi (un'ontologia

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20   Machiavelli 2008, p. 496 (D III.9). Poco più avanti Machiavelli afferma: 'E che noi non ci possiamo mutare, ne sono cagioni due cose: l'una, che noi non ci possiamo opporre a quello che c'inclina la natura; l'altra che, avendo uno con uno modo di procedere prosperato assai, non è possibile persuadergli che possa fare bene a procedere altrimenti; donde ne nasce che in uno uomo la fortuna varia, perché ella varia i tempi ed elli non varia i modi. Nascene ancora le rovine delle cittadi, per non si variare gli ordini delle republiche co' tempi, come lungamente di sopra discorremo; ma sono più tarde, perché le penono più a variare, perché bisogna che venghino tempi, che commuovino tutta la republica, a che uno solo, col variare il modo del procedere, non basta'. Il rinvio di Machiavelli ('come lungamente di sopra discorremo') è a D III.1.

della relazione, e qui seguiamo la lettura di Morfino),[21] dove l'occasione è immanente all'alterazione delle relazioni che definiscono la composizione del corpo politico. È rispetto a questa diversità dei tempi che l'azione individuale non è più il paradigma dominante della potenza trasformatrice, per diventare un motivo in più, e non il più potente, dell'alterazione delle relazioni della composizione politica.

Dall'*impeto* individuale alla modificazione collettiva degli *ordinamenti* si produce un transito, mai necessario né irreversibile, in cui la repubblica può essere pensata a partire da un 'materialismo dell'incontro', cioè nella partecipazione della moltitudine di potenze che misurano e definiscono il potere della città, facendo di ogni congiuntura un'opportunità per il rinnovamento. Questo dislocamento non si può confondere con un antagonismo tra azione e istituzione, tra la contingenza dell'ordine che dipende dall'azione e la stabilità dell'ordine che dipende da una istituzione. Se la repubblica ha il vantaggio del fatto che i *tempi turbolenti* ritardano di più nell'alterare gli ordinamenti che il governo di uno, allora alterare gli ordinamenti, per poter variare con i tempi, implica anche una complessità – per far nascere il nuovo – di una natura molto diversa dalla variazione della volontà e dalla prudenza di un individuo.

Nei *Discorsi*, variare con i tempi significherà chiaramente poter 'variare gli ordinamenti', ossia produrre e alterare permanentemente le relazioni sulle quali si fondano, sempre in maniera contingente, le istituzioni che cristallizzano le relazioni continuamente cangianti della conflittualità e la divisione sociale. In altri termini, come sostiene Machiavelli all'inizio del libro terzo, ritornare ai principi.

Il *ritorno ai principi* non è un ritorno al passato originario, né la restituzione di un principio trascendente, ma la capacità di incontrare nell'"occasione' la temporalità immanente della crescita dei corpi composti, la loro potenza come occasione per la composizione, l'incontro. L'idea del 'ritorno ai principi' è, infatti, il risultato di questa tensione presente ne *Il Principe*, che fa della riflessione sull'inclusione dell'occasione in una temporalità plurale il principio vitale della durata; durata che non sarà conservazione, ma espansione delle molteplici relazioni di composizione che incrementano la potenza dei corpi.

6   Considerazioni finali

A queste figure della temporalità dei corpi complessi (misti), dell'occasione e della fortuna, della memoria, legata con ciò che è accaduto, dell'immagina-

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21   In particolare, Morfino 2002, e 2010.

zione e degli affetti, delle divisioni e dei conflitti, che tracciano diverse durate, dei suoi incontri e non – e che nel suo insieme espongono le differenti dimensioni di questa temporalità molteplice – potremmo aggiungere dell'altro. Come, per esempio, la temporalità delle generazioni che appare nella figura del giovane virile domatore della dea fortuna, nel capitolo venticinque de *Il Principe*, che deve essere letto insieme alla figura dei giovani all'inizio del libro secondo dei *Discorsi*, in cui Machiavelli si avvale del disaccordo tra i vecchi e i giovani, della diversità dei tempi implicati in questo disaccordo, per criticare gli storici che raccontano la storia dei vincitori e non rendono conto del carattere pratico del sapere storico.

Lontana da qualsiasi modello di cicli vitali, la gioventù è espressione di un'altra dimensione della temporalità in cui appare il problema e la potenzialità di un altro incontro, quello che, lontano dalla necessità, si può dare tra le generazioni. Porre l'accento sui giovani inverte l'equazione che fa della tradizione il modello della durata per mettere al centro della temporalità plurale l'occasione, a cui appartiene la questione delle generazioni, come una linea in più, sempre attraversata da quelle linee che abbiamo menzionato prima.

Ma fermiamoci qui. Credo che con questa breve esposizione delle figure del tempo ne *Il Principe* abbiamo mostrato le differenti dimensioni di una temporalità plurale e ciò che sta in gioco in questa potente idea: l'incontro tra virtù e fortuna.

La sua complicazione, che non si può risolvere facendo della virtù un modello di ragione pratica[22] o l'atto sovrano di una volontà libera, va al di là dell'ambiguità che si produce quando Machiavelli, affermando: 'iudico potere essere vero che la fortuna sia arbitra della metà delle azioni nostre, ma che etiam lei ne lasci governare l'altra metà, o presso, a noi,[23] ricorre all'espressione 'libero arbitrio'; nozione che utilizza solo nei due capitoli finali de *Il Principe* e in due sensi diversi.[24]

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22 Né nel senso di una ragione pratico-tecnica, come in Cassirer, né nel senso di una ragione pratico-politica, come in Skinner. Ci riconosciamo più vicini all'analisi di Del Lucchese 2002.

23 Machiavelli 1995, pp. 162–63 (P 25).

24 Nel capitolo 25, a partire da questo termine Machiavelli stabilisce la 'proporzione' tra il dominio della virtù e quello della fortuna: '*Nondimanco, perché il nostro libero arbitrio non sia spento, iudico potere essere vero che la fortuna sia arbitra della metà delle azioni nostre, ma che etiam lei ne lasci governare l'altra metà, o presso, a noi*'. Quindi nel capitolo 26, molte volte letto come il capitolo programmatico che dà il contenuto politico al capitolo 25, ma con un senso perfino opposto al capitolo anteriore, Machiavelli nell'*Esortazione* ci dice che la libertà d'Italia dipende dagli uomini e non da Dio, in quanto Egli non desidera privarci del nostro 'libero arbitrio'. Così Machiavelli evita di scambiare la figura del Dio

La relazione tra conoscenza e azione, tra sapere e politica, resta aperta. Ma, come abbiamo affermato all'inizio, questa tensione non è una contraddizione o inadeguatezza. Si tratta di pensare di che cosa tratta una conoscenza dell'azione, in cui la contingenza e il conflitto non rappresentano necessariamente un limite (in ogni caso, permetterebbero di comprendere la genesi della verità a partire dal desiderio di sicurezza): 'perché – come sostiene Machiavelli nei *Discorsi* – tutte le cose del mondo in ogni tempo hanno il proprio riscontro con gli antichi tempi. Il che nasce perché, … [sono] operate dagli uomini'.[25] Poiché la storia non si ripete, questo implica che è possibile conoscere la trama complessa di incontri aleatori, dell'incrociarsi di differenti durate e della produzione dei suoi molteplici effetti. Si tratta di spogliarsi di questa grammatica profonda che ordina la nostra esperienza nelle differenti varianti di un tempo-uno per poter stare attenti all'occasione e cercare l'incontro tra virtù e fortuna.

In conclusione, a mio giudizio approfondire questa pista di ricerca offerta da *Il Principe* va anche al di là dell'interesse per i problemi esegetici e concettuali. Per noi si tratta di poter pensare ed elaborare le categorie politiche di ciò che ci spingeremmo a denominare come 'il momento machiavelliano latino-americano', con il fine di comprendere l'*incontro* tra una serie di processi diversi in cui si stabilisce una nuova relazione tra il popolo e lo Stato, che credo sia stato reso possibile grazie all'assunzione pratica e realista di temporalità molteplici. Ma seguire in dettaglio questo ragionamento ci porterebbe lontano e sarebbe senz'altro occasione di un'altra discussione.[26]

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cristiano – la sua buona e saggia volontà – con quella della Fortuna pagana: '*Dio non vuole fare ogni cosa, per non ci tòrre el libero arbitrio e parte di quella gloria che tocca a noi*' (Machiavelli 1995, p. 171). Risulta evidente che il concetto machiavelliano di libertà, concetto chiaramente politico, è assai distante da quello teologico-metafisico di libero arbitrio.

25   Machiavelli 2008, p. 565 (D III.43)

26   Pensiamo a un 'momento machiavelliano latino-americano' che si differenzia e dialoga con i 'due momenti machiavelliani' (il momento oceanico e il momento francese), secondo l'espressione che Gaille-Nikodimov 2007 riprende da Audier 2005. Su questa discussione si possono vedere anche i lavori di Gaille-Nikodimov, Ménissier, Remaud, in Senellart 2001.

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Imitation and Animality: On the Relationship between Nature and History in Chapter XVIII of *The Prince*

Tania Rispoli

> Although the envious nature of men has always made it no less dangerous to find new modes and orders than to seek unknown waters and lands [...] nonetheless [...] I have decided to take path as yet untrodden by anyone, and if it brings me trouble and difficulty, it could also bring me reward [...].[1]

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With his historical investigation of political orders – which constitutes an authentic rediscovery of the continent of History – Machiavelli poses a new challenge: not a venture into unknown waters, with the risk of failing or, like the Vikings, inadvertently reaching new lands, but a mindful, unequivocal and explicit discovery, as the illustrious Florentine Amerigo Vespucci had announced in his epistle from the New World. This discovery challenges 'the envious nature of men' and yet is paradoxically based on it: with the same move Machiavelli intends to inquire both the nature of history and human nature itself (of which envy and ambition are major features). The rest of the *Preface*, its methodological assumption, the compass and the charts that guide him in the Atlantic crossing, are part of a mimetic theory that is articulated with great originality, within the classical and general context of Humanism. Getting straight to the point, I would like to compare this oceanic opening of the Machiavellian masterpiece with the well-known metaphor of the centaur in *Il Principe* chapter 18. Here, imitation is put forward without mediation – in a

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* Cicero edited the posthumous work *De rerum natura* (ed. Ferguson Smith) of Lucretius in the middle of the first century BC and composed his *De officiis* in 44 BC. In fine, the *Historiarum florentini populi libri XII* of Leonardo Bruni were published between 1439 and 1444 and translated in Italian by Donato Acciaiuoli (*Historia fiorentina*) in 1473.

1 D *Preface*.

short circuit – and its object is a liminal figure that stands between animality and humanity, as the waves of the sea and those of history overlapped in the minds of those who sought less travelled routes.

'The imitation of the beast takes the place of the imitation of God' – is Leo Strauss's graphic declaration; the Beast Man opposed to the God Man includes and understands man in light of the sub-human rather than of the super-human and of contemplative life.[2] More precisely, the key feature of the Machiavellian anti-theology is the assumption that modern imitation is based not on the dual nature, human and divine, of Christ (as Auerbach interprets the medieval creatural figurativeness[3]) nor on the king's double body, but on the dual nature, human and animal, of Chiron the centaur. In the *figure* all the carnal and fleeting traits of the 'creatura'[4] – firstly Christ's suffering – vertically refer to a moment of the providential plan of our sacred history, explaining or anticipating it. The human body stands for the divine one, incarnating and representing it, following Kantorowicz's metaphorical reading: the metaphors of regality are traced up to Dante's Humanism, where the *corpus mysticum* is straightened out and secularised into the *humana civilitas*.[5] This duplicity therefore implies that mundane power is a tangible representation of the transcendent, that is to say precisely the theory of papal and secular imperial sovereignty from which Machiavelli distances himself, refusing a theological-political approach and embracing an empirical one.

Il Principe chapter 18 notoriously deals with the virtues that the new prince needs to have, ruthlessly playing on appearances: 'Therefore it is unnecessary for a prince to have all the good qualities I have enumerated, but it is very necessary to appear to have them'.[6] The issue of the re-qualification of virtues through mere appearance, and the correspondence between means and ends, led some scholars to interpret the chapter 18 – explicitly linked to the sixth chapter on Valentino – as a vivid illustration of the divorce between politics and morals.[7] Nevertheless we should try to focus on the opening of chapter 18,

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2 Strauss 1958, pp. 78 and 295–7. Machiavelli himself is a Chiron of a new kind, because he candidates himself as "teacher" of the new Prince, Lorenzo de' Medici, to whom Il Principe is dedicated.

3 Auerbach, 2013 passim see, for example, chapter 3, 'The Arrest of Peter Valvomeres', pp. 73–5. On figural interpretation, see Auerbach 1938, pp. 436–89. See also Singleton 1954, and 1958.

4 A late Latin term from *Evangelium*.

5 Kantorowicz 1957, pp. 467–8. See Kahn 2009, pp. 79–88 and 91–5, for the reconfinguration of the *humana civilitas* as cosmopolitan empire, in diametrical opposition to the Schmitt's notion of Catholic political theology.

6 P 18.

7 Sasso 1993, pp. 455–72.

where Machiavelli lingers on pedagogy: the prince has to follow the lead of a very special tutor and learn how to imitate the beast:

> You should know that there are two ways of fighting: one with the law, the other with force: the first way is peculiar to man, the other to beasts; but since the first in many instances is not enough, it becomes necessary to resort to the second. Therefore, a prince must know how to make good use of the beast and the man. This role was taught to princes indirectly by the ancient writers, who wrote how Achilles and many other ancient princes were given to Chiron the Centaur to be brought up and trained under his direction. This can only mean, having as a teacher a half-beast and half-man, that the prince ought know how to make use of both natures; and the one without the other cannot endure. Since a prince must know how to make good use the beast, he should choose then the fox and the lion; for the lion has no protection from traps, and the fox is defenceless against the wolves. It is necessary, therefore, to be a fox in order to know the traps, and a lion to frighten the wolves. Those who live by the lion alone do not understand matters.[8]

The aim of this essay is to explain, at least partially, why one must imitate a beast, and how this declaration fits into Machiavelli's philosophical framework. Moreover, what do beasts and humans have in common? In other words, in what ways, if any, do they share a place in the order of Nature?

In the well known example of the fox and the lion we can find a reference to Cicero's Latin source and its literal inversion:[9]

> For since there are two ways of settling a dispute: first, by discussion; second, by physical force; and since the former is characteristic of man, the latter of the brute, we must resort to force only in case we may not avail ourselves of discussion [...] With this I will close my discussion of the duties connected with war. But let us remember that we must have regard for justice even towards the humblest. Now the humblest station and the poorest fortune are those of slaves; and they give us no bad rule who bid us treat our slaves as we should our employees: they must be required to work; they must given their dues. While wrong may be done, then, in either of two ways, that is by force or by fraud, both are bestial: fraud

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8   P 18.

9   All the scholars concur on the hypothesis that Machiavelli reuses and reverses Cicero's allegory. See Raimondi 1993, pp. 146–7; Inglese 2013, p. 124; Martelli and Marcelli 2006, p. 236.

seems to belong to the cunning fox, force to the lion; both are wholly
unworthy of man, but fraud is the more contemptible. But of all forms of
injustice, none is more flagrant than that of the hypocrite who, at the very
moment when he is most false, makes it his business to appear virtuous.
This must conclude our discussion of justice.[10]

Cicero describes two ways of fighting: with the law or with force – the former
being the way of humans, the latter that of animals. When it becomes impos-
sible to appeal to reason, humanity, or jurisprudence, it is necessary to appeal
to force. In spite of that, after dealing with justice in war – loyalty, devotion,
moderation, compliance to oaths – Cicero returns to civics, specifying that it is
necessary to be just towards the humble (in this case, the salaried workers) and
dividing injurious and extra-legal behaviour in violence and shrewdness, re-
spectively ascribed to the lion and the fox. Cicero considers these animal traits
to be constitutively alien to the human being; if false appearance is a violation
of the truth and therefore of the law fitting the rationality of human nature,
the worst is the vulpine treacherous man who will appear as an honest one.

    In Machiavelli's passage we have an actual argumentative shift that comes
to rebut not only Cicero's quotation, but the entire earlier juridical tradition as
well. Here the tutor is at first the centaur: at first half man half creature, he is
then identified exclusively with the feral part, because the vulpine quality of
shrewdness, typified as a creature, cannot coherently embody either humanity
or rationality.[11] On this metaphorical basis Machiavelli justifies the necessity
to appear (*parere*): the predominant presence of creatures denies morality, be-
cause they teach the prince, through the metaphor of force, that in order to
captivate the people it is not necessary to actually possess certain traditional
virtues, as appearance alone will suffice. Nevertheless, even if they downplay
the classical model, the beasts do not deny it entirely: with the centaur – this is
the hypothesis on which I will draw my conclusions – Machiavelli reformulates
the frame of law within a concrete paradigm of conflict and force.

    Let us weigh one thing at a time. Firstly we need to find out where the dou-
ble metaphor of the two beasts and the centaur comes from. The former, aside
from Cicero, is most probably gathered from Aesop, Phaedrus and the medi-
eval *fabliaux*. It is also worth considering Lucretius[12] who deals with foxes,

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10   Cicero 1975, pp. 37–47.

11   For the argumentative shift in Machiavelli's description of centaur see Sasso 1997,
          pp. 153–5.

12   Brown 2010, pp. 84–5.

lions, and deer (the latter are absent from the Machiavellian bestiary) in *De rerum natura*:

> In the first place, the fierce breed of savage lions owes its preservation to its courage, the fox to its cunning, and the deer to its speed in flight.[13]

Force protects the fierce race of the lion and of other creatures, while shrewdness does the same for the fox, and escape for the deer. A more complete explanation can be found in book III, with reference to the doctrine of *animus* (*noûs*, *logikón* concentrated in the chest) and of the *anima* (*psuché*, *álogon* diffused through the whole body). These elements are considered to be material, formed by very thin round atoms, with an aerial component that varies with the body temperature of the creatures and of the types of human (warm, cold, mild, and so forth). Warm is the wrathful *animus* of the lion, windy that of the fugitive deer, mild yet not timid those of the oxen:

> But heat is the element that predominates in those creatures whose hearts are fierce and whose irascible minds readily seethe with anger. First and foremost in this class are lions, so strong and ferocious: often they growl and roar until they burst their bellies, since they are unable to repress their tempestuous rage. On the other hand, the chilling minds of deer contain more wind and are quicker to send icy currents of air blowing through the flesh, thus inducing a trembling motion in the limbs.[14]

The same goes for the human race, where education does not get rid of the ineradicable traces of disparate characters, the inclination to wrath or acquiescence and many other tones remains:

> Although education may give certain people equal refinement, it cannot obliterate the original traces of each individual's natural disposition. We must not suppose that faults of character can be extirpated, and that it is possible to stop one person from being excessively prone to sudden fits of rage, another from succumbing a little too readily to fear, and a third from accepting certain situations more meekly that one should. And in many other respects people must differ in character and consequently in behaviour.[15]

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13   *De rerum natura* V, vv. 862–64.
14   *De rerum natura* III, vv. 294–301.
15   *De rerum* natura III, vv. 307–14.

Whence the above-mentioned recurring behaviours (violence, shrewdness, escape), that are derived from the composition of the *animus*, i.e. in modern terms, from genetic heritage:

> Why, in the case of deer, is the instinct of flight transmitted from generation to generation, so that their limbs are spurred by inherited timidity? Indeed, why are all other such qualities implanted in the constitution of body and mind from life's first dawn? Surely the explanation must be that a mind, whose nature is determined by its own seed and breed, develops along with the body of each individual animal.[16]

The influential function of *De rerum natura* in Machiavelli's formation, in the years preceding his appointment to the chancellor's office, is well known,[17] and this influence was probably present even in the writing of the major works. In Lucretius the naturalness of instinctive animal behaviour that inhibits any moral condemnation can be found: there are no judges, and the combination of the creative and destructive events that stem from temperaments is a zero sum game. Therefore animals and human beings share a common instinctual heritage, notwithstanding the education that can be imparted to people. Machiavelli, on the other hand, is not interested in animals as such. Instead, for entirely political reasons, he is concerned with finding the animal substratum in the human being that he envisions as educated by a centaur, imagined exclusively as a feral creature. Beasts are thus detached from their ecological niche, while distinctive features are analysed in order to find different and alternate combinations in different times. The Machiavellian metaphors of fox and lion, while being clearly antagonistic to Cicero's, could rather be inspired by the naturalism of Lucretius, for which the animals express the vital forces, those atomic aggregations typical of the *animus*, which may also be present in humans.

Regarding the second metaphor, studies have amply found that the image of the centaur can be traced back to Xenophon's *Cyropaedia,* to references in Dante's *Inferno* (canto XII with reference to Chiron, and canto XXVII for the couple of vulpine and leonine qualities in Guido da Montefeltro), and mostly the *Commento* of the *Commedia* by Landino.[18] The Machiavellian use of these

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16   *De rerum natura* III, vv. 743–7.

17   Bertelli and Gaeta 1961 were the first who discover, in modern times, the influence of Lucretius on Machiavelli.

18   For the influences on Machiavelli's images of Centaur see Raimondi 1993, pp. 154–5; Sasso 1997, pp. 158–75; Martelli and Marcelli 2006, p. 235, Inglese 2013, pp. 123–4.

sources is quite free, if not instrumental: indeed he does not deplore the violent nature of the centaurs, nor does he seek to tame and civilise them, but focuses on the pedagogical role of Chiron precisely because of his violent side. In Greek mythology (and then in Dante, with the mediation of Ovidius and Statius) the centaur is a violent and bellicose character. However, Chiron makes an exception because he is gentle and wise, a *humanised creature* with extraordinary medical and educational abilities, to which Machiavelli opposes the *animalised man*; that is to say, a radically naturalised human being.

Is this a dismissal of the human element and a reduction of man to sheer animality? If humanity were to be understood as a transcendent element, the answer would be a positive one, as in the Christian and Neo-Platonic traditions. But the reduction of the Centaur's double nature to the singularly of the feral element, and its further refinement in fox and lion – namely in two beasts – would be 'anti-humanistic' only by presuming that the body and the soul are separated, and correspond respectively to force and to the law – from which the classical legitimisation of the moral and rational nature of law was deducted. Yet Machiavelli, albeit moving with a logical leap from the dual nature and from the couple force-laws to the metaphor (not strictly correspondent) of lion and fox, is showing us that force is not without intelligence and that laws are not without force. In the complex process of self-organisation, reason is a material emergence that cannot be reduced to the sum of its corporeal components – it is not a divine spark trapped in the body –, a control centre that manages the instincts of force and shrewdness within a collective and conflicting practice. The prince's collective dimension is thus determined by the role of humours in the maintenance of his power:[19] and like the centaur Chiron, the prince should be a physician too, a careful diagnostician and therapist, able to balance these humours.[20]

An analogous allegory is brilliantly illustrated in *Pallade e il centauro* (*Pallas and the Centaur*, 1482–1486), Sandro Botticelli's famous painting commissioned by Lorenzo il Magnifico – or maybe Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco, to whom Amerigo Vespucci, his friend and *protégé*, would send his reports on the *Mondo Nuovo*.[21] On an aquatic background stands Pallas, with a halberd and rings baring the Medici's motto *Deo amante*, taming a sheepish archer centaur holding him from the hair. In Steinmann's view[22] this is an allusion the diplomatic action of Lorenzo (Florence = Lorenzo) who was negotiating a truce with the

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19   As can be seen in P 9.
20   Fournel and Zancarini 2000, p. 578.
21   Brown 2010, p. 39.
22   Steinmann 1901, pp. 74–6.

Kingdom of Naples (in the background) in order to separate it from the anti-Florentine league promoted by Pope Sisto IV (centaur = Rome). Whereas Salvini[23] and Gombrich[24] tend to interpret it as an allegory of reason that triumphs over instinct, in the same neo-platonic context of other paintings such as *La Primavera* and *La nascita di Venere* – under the star of Marsilio Ficino, and not yet of Savonarola. By contrast, Machiavelli uses the metaphor of the centaur in the opposite way: it is Fortune who is held by the hair, while Chiron the centaur displays the coexistence of animal force and the human-rational element. If Botticelli's painting was meant to commemorate the *pax laurentiana* (which concurs with the informal suppression of the Florentine republic), in Machiavelli, who always praises conflict as a constitutive operator, weapons and laws run parallel,[25] and sometime coincide in the broad 'orders' that are indeed 'military and civil'.

With the imitation of creatures, a new vision of the role of law is put forward, one that breaks with the classical and humanistic tradition. Machiavelli, subverting Cicero's adage, transforms the relationship between law and force: rationality is immanent to force, while legality and the juridical both originate from and are constituted by force.

Furthermore, looking at the second question mentioned above, it is exactly at this point that a certain concept of human nature appears: one that shares with nature a necessary and causally determined structure. Can the Machiavellian man be animalised because he shares the specific nature of some brutes? To this regard, with profound consequences in the definition of a concept of human nature, the superimposition – or the syncretic fusion – of two different philosophical traditions, namely Lucretius and Aristotle, might have played a crucial role. Sure enough Aristotle viewed the mind (*noûs*) as an emerging feature of the soul (*psuché*), the human element that was not shared with animals and plants yet entirely natural and not transcendent. Furthermore, the naturalistic interpretation of *De anima* was widespread in the radical Aristotelianism or Latin Averroism and was also clearly reinforced by the Alexandrist Pomponazzi, who Machiavelli had probably been aware of, thanks to the notes of Raffaele Franceschi, who had discussed Pomponazzi in his lectures at the University of Pisa.[26] It is of no surprise that the ancient adage attributed to Guido Cavalcanti (*unus est interitus hominis et iumentorum*) was extended to life and temperament, as if the Epicurean and Pomponatian materialism about

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23   See Salvini 1965, pp. 72–3.
24   See Gombrich 1945; and 1972, pp. 31–81; Hadot 2006, p. 64.
25   Fournel and Zancarini 2000, p. 581.
26   Brown 2010, p. 76.

the common way that humans and animals die were transformed into a bio-political assumption. Machiavelli refuses the separation of man from nature, as if it were a 'sign' of a superior nature. He denies – one could say, precisely by stretching Spinoza's formula – that man constitutes an *imperium in imperio*, and he does so by binding, in the figure of the centaur, both the human and the animal modes of participation in nature. We are now at the opposite end of Ficino's adage *Bestia nostra, id estsensus; homo veronoster, id est ratio*.

The equivocally allegorical reference to the painting corresponds to the heterogeneous strands, both Lucretian and neo-Platonic, and respectively naturalistic and spiritualising, that predominated in the age of the Medici and of Botticelli. But in Machiavelli's case, the traditional image is appropriated only to be overturned – as in the case of fortune's intervention.[27] What is culturally and commonly accepted is used to determine the possibility of expressing the new. Machiavelli works on images in two different ways. Firstly as a *metadiscourse*: this is the case of the art of painting, analysed in the *Dedicatoria*, where perspective becomes a method to examine the issue of *principati*, the way the *Il Principe* must be read. Secondly, as an *intradiscourse*, in order to elaborate a new concept. Machiavelli's allegoric use of written images is therefore opposed to the mainstream Medici-Botticelli framework – the rationality of seigniorial power that masters the wild forces of society, republican conflicts and '*squittinii*' (the compiling of the broad lists of candidates to be selected for the offices by drawing). Great metaphors are used in aporetic and innovative times; in this case by interlacing strength and political rationality, violence and law in the foundation, preservation and refoundation of the republics, virtue (*virtù*) and chance (*occasione*) in the conjuncture. A pacifying image of concord is taken, and it is subverted in order to give it an unresolved tension. Imagination uses a powerful iconography that resolves possible argumentative complications in the figurative structure. How is it possible to envision the impossible that emerges and drives away from the classical and medieval juridical environment? Through a double image: a mythological centaur that is, in its turn, pressed into the image of the fox and of the lion, through which not only human nature is reconsidered – bypassing the hierarchy between spirit and matter – but also the subject is considered in its own right, separated from power. Political and juridical productivity does not cancel and pacify the laceration: it produces institutions.[28] The material bond between reason and force becomes graphic evidence with the centaur: it corresponds to the mate-

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27   About the role of allegory see Kahn 1994, pp. 41–3.

28   Esposito 1984, pp. 36–7.

riality of the State, similarly grounded on laws and territory, (good) orders and arms.[29] Nevertheless, this ground is perpetually precarious.

Once transcendence has been eliminated substantially from human nature – once the correspondence between law and force has been shown – politics is freed from any utopian or dystopian acceptation and finally becomes an object of realistic description. Jurisprudence is pragmatic, not prescriptive. Effective power is born from the conflict institutionalised and not from its representation – inscribed in the duality of the two bodies, following Auerbach and Kantorowicz, who have a clear understanding of the development of Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, as well as of the future destiny of modernity. The centaur stands in the middle of a crucial transition: it comes *after* the medieval debate on the nature of an absolute principle that looks over real political powers, and it comes *before* the re-establishment of a principle of absolute sovereignty, grounded on individuals and on the fictitious machine of covenant, obligation and consent. There is no longer (and not yet) a split between a transcendent body and an immanent one, but a distribution of orders (laws, reason) and force in the same immanent body. These elements are not heterogeneous: orders spring from power relations and also regulate and stabilise their balance.

Imitation of the dual human-animal nature of the centaur structurally brings into being imitation within the human inclination to follow travelled routes, due to the invariants of nature. The imitation of nature introduces the imitation of collective humours – the ones of the people and those of the optimates – as a social and antagonistic specification of the basic aptitudes of the animal and of the human being (force and law). This specification is also expressed through the range of the spirits of humanised beasts (lion-fox, impetuous-cautious) that could be adapted to the circumstances (the circle of occasion-virtue-Fortune.) The allegory of the centaur – in its twofold nature, assumed as an immanent whole – anticipates, in an individualistic foreshadowing, what will then be the case in historical-comparative and institutional terms. I will briefly show how this functions in my conclusions.

In chapter 18, Machiavelli indicates once again the necessity of political imitation – as indeed throughout *The Prince*, in the comparison with the France of Louis XII or with the founders of the ancient kingdoms – i.e. Alexander VI Borgia, known for failing to abide by pacts and for having favoured a policy based on cunning and force. Imitation even remains a conceptual constant in the *Discourses* as is made abundantly clear in the *Preface* – in which the comparison with the Roman model is made more direct. The

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29   Fournel and Zancarini 2000, p. 579.

famous motto *historia magistra vitae* (probably proverbial and also taken up by Polybius) is associated in the standard formulation of Cicero to the other definition *historia vero testis temporum*, which relativises the historical imitability to the change of times.

What is the value of the Machiavellian appeal to imitation? It is certainly not an ontological imitation, of a Platonic kind, which would include the adherence to an ideal model of which the object is a mere copy. Machiavelli detaches himself, thus following a general trend initiated by Humanism, that reuses the model for a new creation – as we can see looking at the role of philology, the reutilisation of ancient models in the arts and at debates on the imitation in literature. Therefore, the real innovation is the use of the debate on the active function of imitation at the level of concrete political practice: and this is precisely the 'path yet untrodden', that Machiavelli refers to at the beginning of his masterpiece. Imitation is a principle because it suggests a comparison between ancient and contemporary forms of politics, without requiring adherence to a preconceived model. It is a purely comparative, spatial and temporal principle.

The well-known passages of the *Discorsi* that deal with the foundation and the decline of the Roman republic exemplify this principle. Here Machiavelli explains why the Roman republic was perfect and how it reached its perfection: the struggle between the people and the greats, prompting the modification and innovation of orders, gave birth to a hybrid constitutional settlement. A theme of classical derivation, from Plato, through Aristotle to Polybius, the mixed constitution becomes a theme of debate amongst early humanists:[30] thus, in his *Costituzione fiorentina* Leonardo Bruni could describe, adopting the logic of the *mikté politeia*, the juridical framework of Florence, while in the previous *Historia florentini populi* he could not fail to outline the troubled history of the city, starting from the conflict between outside and inside (Florence and its domains) and by those internal conflicts that determine the 'mutation of the republic'.[31] For Machiavelli, Florence is subject to a structural constitutional imbalance and could not easily acquire a stable political form.[32]

In the stark comparison between Florence and Rome, the mixed constitution certainly emerges as an example, but as an example that is a conjunctural crystallisation, a temporary stabilisation of a political and social order, and

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30   There is a debate around Machiavelli's sources (alternatively Polybius or Dyonisus of Alicarnassus) for the theme of the mixed constitution: see at least Sasso 1967 and Pedullà 2011, pp. 419–518.

31   Bruni 1861, p. 433. On Bruni see Hankins 2012.

32   IF III.1.

not, as for the ancients, the mere imitation or exportability of a model. Furthermore, the metaphor of the centaur acts at a deeper level: the natural, telluric and necessary risk of force that imposes itself on the law, crossing it by configuring a new logic, if realistically understood.[33] To sum it up: in *The Prince* Machiavelli puts forward the necessity to imitate the centaur, a figure that reconstitutes the essential relationship between force and law. The centaur is not used here to describe human nature (in a comparison with animal nature), but also to enhance the immanent, concrete and contingent role that the correlation of forces play in the definition of laws and orders (jurisprudence, in its wider meaning). However, in the *Discourses,* the historical examples of people and institutions become objects of imitation. Through the comparison of different temporalities and different places, they come to outline a critical method whilst constituting a timely call to political action. In both cases the imitation always escapes mere reproduction, showing that historical changes and conjunctures are the constitutive traits of politics. Therefore what remains constant in the order of nature and history is precisely the knot that binds animality and humanity, the inevitability of conflict with the necessity of order, the interchangeable duplicity of law and force, that always reopens new possibilities within the practice of law and its rewriting. All these tensions are expressed in the medical-pedagogical figure of the centaur: he is not only the expression of the double movement of force and law, but also a preceptor of princes, that presides, on the border of nature and civilization, over the founding of institutions.

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33   Del Lucchese 2011, pp. 39–64.

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PART 3

Politics, Religion, and Prophecy

∵

Prophetic Efficacy: The Relationship between Force and Belief

Thomas Berns

I will start here, as many others have, from chapter 6 of *The Prince*. More precisely, I would like to depict the way in which Machiavelli develops the classic argument of the new prince giving form to matter with these three signifiers: fortune, opportunity (*occasione*) and virtue. On this basis, I will a) examine the idea of a knowledge of opportunity; b) show that this specific knowledge only makes sense when it is hinged to a temporality that endures beyond the moment of seizing the opportunity, but without finding its sense in the idea of a confirmation by the facts; c) argue that this endurance which embodies the knowledge of the opportunity is expressed by Machiavelli with the idea of 'forcing belief'. Machiavelli's thought, particularly in the first chapters of the *Discourses*, is fully nourished with this temporal structure characteristic of the knowledge of opportunity, meaning that an opportunity beyond its seizure is always postponed, 'deferred' (in the sense of delayed while introducing the idea of a primary difference), as well as with the link between belief and force that embodies this temporal structure.

Founders like Moses, Cyrus, Romulus and Theseus have received nothing from Fortune except 'la occasione; la quale dette loro materia a potere introdurvi dentro quella forma parse loro'.[1] Without this encounter between opportunity and virtue the first would have remained vain and the second would have faded away. This means that the Fortune of a founder and the opportunities that he encounters essentially consist of disorder and hardship that are, however, suitable to be put into order. As we will point out later, this is particularly clear in chapter 2 of the *Discorsi*. It is also what allows us to maintain the specificity of the 'tense' relationship developed by Machiavelli between these three signifiers in question. This specificity relies on the fact that these three draw their respective meanings exclusively by relating to each other, thereby

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1 Machiavelli 1971, p. 264 (P 6). I cite the Machiavellian text in Italian, and occasionally from my own extremely literal translation, based on the Mario Martelli edition.

implying that none of them can have substantial value without the other two; in other words, it prevents a historical determinism, as well as determinism of will, or even a harmonisation of these two through the idea of a constant will of what is, or of a simple versatility such the one defended by Pontano in his *De Prudentia* (1496).

I will not explicitly develop this point any further[2] but I will only say here that I believe Machiavelli's thought to be entirely shaped by a series of 'pure' or 'raw' relations which are less than links of cause to effect, or of a means to an end, but rather simply relations that Machiavelli endows with necessity and that are as undoable as strictly raw relations. But the counterpart of this raw materiality of relations is that their sense of meaning is always postponed, differed, as we will argue in the following.

The link between fortune, opportunity and virtue obviously needs to be understood according to this conception of raw relationality. Its radical immanence justifies the Althusserian idea of 'penser *sous* la catégorie de conjoncture' and not 'penser *sur* la conjoncture'.[3] However, this relational conception and this project of thinking 'under' *conjuncture* are given in Machiavelli's text through a series of necessities expressed exclusively in the past tense: 'Era necessario…', 'Conveniva…', 'Bisognava…', 'Non posseva…'.[4] Machiavelli says this in regard to each meeting of a founder and a specific reality, a reality that is not plainly favourable but rather full of hardship that remains nonetheless suitable for ordering. None of the necessities can be expressed here in the present tense, apart from the effects which appear to be necessarily inherent to the concerned relation or meeting and which are the very confirmation of this meeting and this relation.

In this way emerges, as Machiavelli points out again in the same paragraph, nothing less than a specific kind of knowledge: 'la eccellente virtù loro fece quella occasione essere conosciuta'. I propose to strictly respect the text considering that there is indeed a genuine issue of knowledge understood as the experience allowing a representation of reality: knowing an opportunity. This knowledge is certainly close to being an encounter in the same way we could claim that we have known a hardship or that we have known a woman or a man when speaking of sexual intercourse. Would it not be interesting to try conserving a cognitive consistency with this evoked experience?

We can effectively consider the same appeal to the register of knowledge understood as an encounter distinct from rational mastery: in the *Arte della*

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2   See Berns 2013.

3   Althusser 2009, p. 55.

4   Machiavelli 1971, pp. 264–65 (P 6).

Guerra, book VII, Machiavelli proposes a few 'general rules' for the practice of war specifying that we must 'sapere nella guerra conoscere l'occasione e pigliarla'.[5] The distinction between 'sapere' and 'conoscere', and the fact that the latter is not equivalent with the seizing ('pigliare') of the opportunity undoubtedly testifies that we are encountering a cognitive experience. One finds the same possibility of interpretation in the *Capitolo dell'Occasione* where, according to Ausonius's epigram, the opportunity is said to be 'a pochi nota', '*known* by few', turning, running, slinking away, dazzling to the point of being able to say: 'one does not [*re*]*cognize* me when I pass by'.[6] Given man's incapacity to know or to recognise it, opportunity is only expressed from the point of regret, from the repentance of those who have let it pass them by: for he who lets the occasion pass by is above all the very one who questions it and who, 'occupied by many futile thoughts' (that is to say: determining the opportunity), can only let it flee.[7] In short, we let the opportunity slip away just when we hope to master it through our knowledge to plan the encounter. Encounters with opportunity necessarily depend on a different kind of knowledge. But if we must designate a specific type of knowledge here, it is because opportunity shows, appears, or is genuinely revealed only following its seizure.

More accurately, the seized occasion *shall be* revealed as fully necessary; for it would be surely erroneous to consider the knowledge of opportunity as temporally limited to the moment of its seizure, despite the essentialness of the latter. If opportunity presents itself as slinking and resisting to a certain form of rational mastery, if regret is a constitutive (albeit a negative) form and if the truth of the encounter can only be expressed in the past tense when it had already become a necessity, it is because this necessity only imposes itself later. Opportunity is only known when order, as form slipping into matter at the moment of its encounter, is prolonged and appears to be effectively an order towards which this encounter and all that results thereof are necessarily striving. It is only as such that there is the convenience of a contrary situation presenting itself as an opportunity for the virtue of the founder. Knowledge of an opportunity is therefore an encounter that gains its consistency by reaching a point whereby it becomes the expression of a necessity. We could say that one of the peculiarities of Machiavelli's thought is to manifest this necessity by unravelling all the constitutive relations of this necessity and by bearing witness to the encountered opportunity. The continuation of chapter 6 of the *Prince* concerns precisely this duration, which alone testifies to the fact that the

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5   Machiavelli 1971, p. 385 (A VII).

6   '[...] non mi conosca quando io vengo' (Machiavelli 1971, p. 987).

7   'occupato da molti pensier vani' (Ibid).

opportunity has been encountered and that matter has thereby taken form, the form of an enduring order which, in return, reveals the knowledge of the occasion in question.

As we will see, the issue of force surfaces here with the difficulty that we are thereby confronted with: intuitively, from a point of view that we can qualify of instrumentalist, force necessarily seems to take place in a conception that separates form from matter with the assumption that force is mobilised towards and justified by an order that has already been given. Yet, Machiavelli's text precisely and actively resists this reading: force, married to belief, appears to indicate that an order had never pre-existed, i.e. an instrumentalist reading would be unable to give meaning to the idea of knowledge of the opportunity.

Let us examine how Machiavelli inscribes this enduring order, without acknowledging the pre-existence of the necessities that are its underpinnings, into what we have already evoked as the encounter between virtue and fortune. This is the question behind the introduction of the 'nuovi ordini', the difficulty of which, Machiavelli tells us, is not only that they hit those who have been benefiting from former orders and who are therefore said to be 'enemies', but mainly (and it is not trivial that Machiavelli emphasises this aspect) that these new orders are sustained only in a mild or lukewarm way by those who are meant to be protected by them. This is due to their 'incredulity': people 'non credano in verità le cose nuove' as long as they do not have 'una ferma esperienza'. This experience of novelty should be cared for, while admitting that such an experience is impossible by definition; which is why it is very much a question of 'belief' (that is to say: it is less on a classical cognitive level *and* more on the level of duration than the 'ferma esperienza'). The last part of chapter 6 consists of drawing in a repetitive and insisting mode the conclusion of this precariousness and necessity of the belief in new orders: the new prince shall not merely be prophesising or praying (which could be interpreted as the act of 'repeating' the order as the given object of belief). He must use force, add force to belief, he must 'forzare', a verb that Machiavelli uses twice without a complement (force does not entertain any link to exteriority with what it acts upon; it is not forcing something else or according to anything else than what is by itself forceful, for example it is not forcing an order upon matter). In opposition to Savonarola, the prophet must therefore be armed to maintain a belief that is meant to crumble: 'force belief' ('fare credere per forza') in a new order which is an idea that Machiavelli repeats several times, always combining registers of belief and force.

What can we draw out of these few lines binding force and belief, that would go beyond both the punctual critique that they represent of an institutions's reforms attempted by Savonarola as he presents it in his *Treatise* when he

precisely excludes the question of force (and more globally the one of political means) and beyond the coherence of this chapter in comparison with those that are dedicated to the civil character of religion (for example D 1.11–12)? What is this force that is entirely understood as a support and construction of belief? This requirement of forcing belief signifies that there are two rival possibilities dismissed by Machiavelli, one disregarding force and the other disregarding belief.

On the one hand there is the explicit idea that prophecy is self-sufficient for settling into belief in a new order. In other terms repeating the prophecy would suffice. We know that Savonarola, in his *Treatise* and particularly in the first lines of the third part, radically excludes the establishing of a political regime by 'the force of arms' justifying this by the fact that force is deprived of all common measure with reason (the latter is unable to resist against force). He affirms in the clearest way, mainly in his *Sermons*, as well as in his different texts about prophecy (the *Compendio di rivelazioni* and the *Dialogus de veritate prophetica*), that divine will acts directly upon his prophetic speech, appearing therefore as an instrument for immediately guiding the Christian community: Machiavelli radically responds to this immediate capacity of prophecy and its resulting marginalisation of the institution. Obviously, he does not respond by re-establishing the authority of the institution, but instead by insisting upon the insufficiency of prophecy to establish a new community. To understand this, we need to return to the question concerning the lukewarmness characteristic of the majority of the political community's engagement. Already in his *Letter to Becchi* (8 March 1498), Machiavelli explains that Savonarola's mistake lies in the fact that he considers, beyond those who were 'bad' that opposed him and those who were 'good' that supported him, a third type of men who are neither good nor bad, unable to tell good from evil, but who could only join the 'good' in case of direct conflict with the 'bad'.[8] Again in chapter 6 of the *Prince*, Machiavelli precisely refuses this evidence of the 'third type' *spontaneously* able to join the 'good' in case of a real conflict with the 'bad'. Responding to the majority's incredulity cannot rest upon the pursuit of the prophetic message alone. It requires adding force to prophecy, 'fare credere per forza'.

Yet Machiavelli's considerations that bind force to belief are equally opposed, albeit implicitly, to the idea that it would be sufficient to require or to force obedience to a new order, as if this order were not a matter of belief, as if it were given and founded independently of what it involves. Indeed Machiavelli's approach to the question of the new institution's duration is never limited to the question of obedience in it: the new virtuous prince, forcing and

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8   Machiavelli 1971, p. 1011 ('Lettera a Ricciardo Becchi', 9 marzo 1498).

maintaining belief, is in no case analysed as he who gives form to matter and insures then duration of this form simply by coercion and imposing its obedience. A similar scenario would be that of cities such as Sparta, which had benefited since its origins from a perfect constitution that had only to be preserved and conserved, a scenario that is constantly avoided by Machiavelli in the *Discorsi* (we shall see what would result from this shift). In this sense, again, the lukewarmness of the majority's belief (its tendency to incredulity) is an insisting problem that must be solved in the field of belief, by forcing it, and not simply by settling for the founded and rational character of the aimed reform.

This is what Machiavelli avoids by binding belief to force (therefore, accepting to follow up until a certain point the Savonarolian perspective while finally distancing himself from it only concerning the question of the arms). Both evoked perspectives having been avoided, it becomes clear that the use of the classical couple 'form *vs*. matter' in Machiavelli's text should never be understood as if the second were considered passive. In fact, both evoked possibilities must be avoided because they suppose certain autonomy of form and passivity of matter (whether matter does or does not yield – following the prophecy spontaneously or being constrained to obey). Forcing belief in the words of Machiavelli allows us then to evade both the religious *and* juridical assumptions. In other words, form and matter are conceived according to Machiavelli in an essentially mutual relation: order, resulting from form put into matter is not an actualisation of a possibility and its conservation in prayer or obedience; it is rather the expression of a state of power that is always put into act, such as a belief that is constantly being forced.

Here is the structure that has been emphasised up to now: in order to respect the *relational* mainspring of Machiavelli's thought, in particular in the case of chapter 6 of the *Prince*, and the relational nature of the trio fortune/virtue/opportunity, in such a way that the latter can be *known*, strictly speaking, it is necessary to take literally the proposition of *forcing belief* in a new order as opposed to settling for the sufficiency of the prophetic speech to ground belief, and as opposed to applying this new order and ensuring its respect. This structure is present in all Machiavelli's work. I will only limit myself here to make it visible in some other famous passages taken from the first chapters of the *Discorsi*. As we will see, if the encounter between force and belief, or more broadly between force and order (but an order that demands belief), is regularly repeated by Machiavelli as a constitutive relation of politics, this encounter should always be considered as drawing its meaning (what we call knowledge of the opportunity) in a deferred way. And this delay (this originary difference) is essential as it always prevents the establishing of any priority of order over matter.

In the second chapter of the *Discorsi*, Machiavelli presents different types of possible scenarios for a mixed constitution. First, he reports constitutions of cities such as Sparta which had the fortune of having since their founding a perfect constitution which they need only to preserve. We know what would become of such a scenario relying on the exceptional virtue of one good legislator and thereby on fortune (both could be qualified as extremely extrinsic): in a larger sense, these cities are condemned to conserve themselves. Faced with this situation, Machiavelli suggests the Roman history which had not benefited from the same original luck with its presumed roll of the dice. On the contrary, Rome finds its fortune in a series of hardships and upsets. If Rome had not had Lycurgus, if Rome had not 'ran into' (*abbattuta*) a prudent legislator and had then been marked by the *infelicità*

> nondimeno, furo tanti gli accidenti che in quella nacquero, per la disunione che era intra la Plebe ed il Senato, che quello che non aveva fatto uno ordinatore, lo fece il caso. Perché, se Roma non sortì la prima fortuna, sortí la seconda.[9]

And yet, it is this other *fortune* that had been maintained and kept at work ('*tanto le fu favorevole la fortuna*') through the development and persistence of internal dissensions that had never degenerated, in a way that the different forces drawing on these dissensions, were added to each other instead of mutually excluding one another. Within Fortune's register, displacements have given way to increasingly tighter types of relations, extended and deferred from the originating virtue.

The difference between the two possible scenarios, with their different ties to the virtue/fortune duo (in one case written since the origin and the other deferred) produces the major distinction that would never cease to be current in the history of political thought between a city the luck of which had been decided since the beginning, and a city the luck and form of which are a product of the history. The former conceived itself necessarily as limited from the demographic and institutional point of view, and certainly had been peaceful but could only maintain and preserve its own form. The latter is populous, open from the point of view of its institutions, inhabited by conflict and could only expand (D I.2–6).

This distinction acts essentially on a qualitative level: if two possible plots are thereby defined, there are two manners of thinking about order in the city. Machiavelli highlights the interest for considering the 'Roman' plot with the

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9 Machiavelli 1971, p. 81 (D I.2).

series of relations that constitute it as representing a model by itself, even though it seems, as he acknowledges, contradictory to the 'true *vivere politico*'.[10] He somehow elevates a non-model to the rank of a model. These two models seem legitimate and choosing one of them depends only on whether we wish reasoning about 'a republic that would give place to an empire' or about 'a republic for which it is sufficient to be maintained'.[11] Both appear to be equally constituted exclusively by a series of relations. These are the magisterial equations drawn by Machiavelli: determined by its origins, closed, aristocratic, peaceful, limited and conservative *versus* determined by its own history, open, popular, tumultuous and expansive.

We could go further and consider that taking Rome as a model against the traditional model (and the traditional idea of what a model is) has the consequence of making it apparent that we are in front of a series of relations, perfectly impermeable to one another. For what counts here is that these series of relations are undoable and that we are in front of two impermeable possibilities. And this is what their confrontation allows us to think of: no middle way; no possible balance between these two models by taking into consideration what seems to be the respective advantages of each (peace of the aristocratic model and power of the Roman model): that will be the object of chapter 6!

Even worse, given the fact that history is a constant movement, given the fact that 'necessity pushes you to things towards which reason has not',[12] Rome represents *in fine* the most interesting possibility upon which to reflect. The last word, with the qualitative advantage it expresses, is thereby given precisely by the impossibility of recovering any exteriority of form over matter, any priority of order even a posteriori: the real Fortune or rather the most human link to which we can tie it, is deferred, just as the sense of opportunity is deferred.

In fact, within the Roman example, another structural element of the Machiavellian subject should catch our attention: Machiavelli truly confronts the original moment of Roman history in chapter 9 and, after having only evoked it in a negative way in D I.2 (as not perfect), he plainly legitimates the fratricide that crystallises the Romulian episode.[13] Paradoxically, where the origin of the fortunate city of Sparta is entirely consumed by the *lógos* (the *lógos* of Lycurgus, to say it with Polybius) of its good legislator, with the simultaneous consequence of a political history that can only be understood as preservation

10   Machiavelli 1971, p. 86 (D I.6).

11   Machiavelli 1971, p. 84 (D I.5).

12   Machiavelli 1971, p. 86 (D I.6).

13   For the first time in the historiography of Rome, see Berns 2000, pp. 43–70.

(and with its lower political 'quality'), the origin of the Roman city is on the contrary always 'deferred', deferred on two levels. Deferred with regard to the structure of Machiavelli's discourse itself: Machiavelli starts by determining the institutions of Rome from the conflicts of Roman history on the basis of an initial indeterminateness, before catching up on what had started this history; he can then entirely bear its violent character that opens up to this difference, to this deferred sense. But also deferred in its content: properly speaking, this originating violence, in the name of which the leap from Machiavelli to Machiavellianism could be taken, does not *determine* anything, nor is it endowed with any content; it remains absolutely undetermined, it only opens up to an ever deferred history. This is the difference in the Derridian or Lyotardian sense that we encounter here: what is initial is a difference and therefore is deferred.

Finally, I would like to consider a last precious passage by Machiavelli, the one that opens D I.4, which will allow us to go back to the question of arms, though reflected in a collective perspective and thereby beyond the fratricidal moment. The passage is well known; Machiavelli says to be willing to go

> contro la opinione di molti che dicono, Roma essere stata una republica tumultuaria, e piena di tanta confusione che, se la buona fortuna e la virtù militare non avesse sopperito a' loro difetti, sarebbe stata inferiore a ogni altra republica.[14]

We know a fair amount about how Machiavelli deconstructs this providential reading of Roman history which, in conceiving the Roman disorder as a pure lack or absence (of order), has to seek an external force to explain its greatness.[15] Machiavelli brings fortune back down to earth, not denying disorder, but seeing strength in it; linking it with the Roman liberty and expansivity. Again, there is no passive matter in the equation. However, the providential and anti-Roman reading hereby attacked also carries with it (according to Machiavelli) the idea that the greatness of Rome could be explained by compensating its pure absence of order, not only by divine providence but also by armed forces. Such reasoning, that both isolates force from that in which it is

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14   Machiavelli 1971, p. 82 (D I.4). The translation runs as follows: 'against the opinion of many that Rome having been a tumultuous republic and full of much confusion that, if good fortune and military virtue have not had compensated these flaws, it would have stayed inferior to all other republics'.

15   This reading, that we can find for example in St. Augustine and that Machiavelli here reverses, is based on the same equation linking an originating violence (Romulus who kills his brother, who opens the doors of Rome to the brigands, the Rape of the Sabine women…) to the internal conflicts in the city and to the external wars (see Berns 2013).

applied *and* makes arms (the same as Fortune) an exterior tool of the city, is just as equally undone by Machiavelli: there is no 'military virtue' that is conceived in an extrinsic manner; militia, order and disorder, as well as Fortune, in the case of Rome, go together.[16]

Certainly, in chapter 6 of the *Prince*, when Machiavelli insists on the necessity to force belief (and not on the necessity to force obedience) against the disarmed prophet, the duration that he considers sufficient to say that the occasion has been seized is significantly shorter. This change of duration, however, does not alter the fact that in the *Prince* as well as in the *Discorsi*, force expresses the experienced persistence of the collective process, the collective experimentation of belief in something that, being new or relevant of the 'occorrenzia degli accidenti', precisely resists the classic cognitive experience and must then be thought of as deferred.[17]

Force is precisely what needs to be added insofar as it remains difficult to believe in new things. To say it positively, this means that we are forced to believe in new things the experience of which is by definition difficult, unavailable, deferred (and 'incompensable'), and depends on the course of events.

Conquest, in chapter 5 and 6 of the *Discorsi*, is precisely the deferred expression of the same phenomenon: it is not the consequence of a virtue independent of disorder or even exterior to it. It is the deferred order of the disorder itself. It is its expression of order. It could be said that I consider 'arms' or forces of different nature as equivalent, at times turned towards the inside of the city, at others turned towards the outside. However, it is precisely this distinction between the interior and the exterior, the inside and the outside, that crumbles for Machiavelli (against all the political tradition).[18] The conquest is a sign of the expansive character of freedom, which means that freedom of the largest number and therefore internal conflict can produce order.

In this respect, we can consider that, strictly speaking, it is knowledge of an opportunity that occurs, a knowledge that does not suppose or support any previous certainty about the adequacy of the order with respect to the matter put into form. This knowledge of the occasion is at the same time entirely turned towards this order and acknowledges that a belief has been forced,

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16   It seems to me that we can go further in the opposition between the link of compensation and the link of difference (the fact that a sense is deferred, and that what is initial is a difference).

17   Machiavelli 1971, p. 79 (D I.2).

18   In the beginning of the *Laws*, Plato makes once and for all a strict and hierarchical distinction between the inside of the city, with its specific virtues that can rule it, and the outside of the city, that requires courage but that can never reach order.

meaning that an event occurred and behind it a series of relations and tensions (constitutive elements of a conjuncture) were confirmed in a collective process. Knowledge of an opportunity makes the bonding of a necessity manifest, it consists in considering necessity as that which takes hold and binds according to a series of relations without, however, referring this necessity to an exterior and anterior order; without therefore being able to dissolve these relations or bypass the tensions that inhabit them. Machiavelli's thought fully extends towards this kind of knowledge.

Nonetheless, the efficiency of the armed prophet who forces the belief and that appears, in Machiavelli's text, as perfectly necessary is not performative, as Etienne Balibar underlines about the Althusserian idea of 'pensée sous la conjoncture'.[19] Indeed, it is not enough to consider that the armed prophet such as analysed by Machiavelli would find his own truth in the effects that are produced.[20] Instead, an entire type of knowledge is completely commanded in and of itself – that is to say through the tensions and multiple relations that constitute this knowledge – by what is accomplished, by what takes hold and binds in the network of relations and tensions.

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19   Balibar 2009, p. 27.

20   This can also be applied to the prophetic speech in the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* of Spinoza. In fact, Machiavelli is here to help us question the prophetic figure in the TTP, with the strange feeling that it produces when we perceive that strictly speaking, there is no 'false prophet'. The imaginative power that is constitutive of the prophetic speech relies on signs that settle prophetic certainty, surely without being relevant to mathematical certainty, however without having just to settle for waiting 'until it was confirmed by facts': prophetic speech is ever endowed with efficiency by its adaptation to the prophet and his community (Spinoza 1891, p. 29). This efficiency is the one of the Machiavellian 'profeti armati' of chapter 6 of *The Prince*. We can almost conclude that there is no *real* disarmed prophet as it is suggested in the famous passage of chapter 14 of *The Prince*, where Machiavelli states the following about the armed prince and the disarmed prince: 'non è proporzione alcuna'.

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Prophecy, Education, and Necessity: Girolamo Savonarola between Politics and Religion

Fabio Frosini

1 Fanaticism, Religion, and Politics

The 'Machiavelli-Savonarola' question has been affected for a long time by the consequences of a polemical contrast, whose origin can be traced back to the struggles and disputes that split Florence during the last decade of the fifteenth century. The spiritual leadership of Savonarola during 1494–98 – both cause and consequence of the 'revolution of 1494'[1] – unleashed some major changes in the geography of the Florentine political forces or 'parties'.[2] Among them, 'the constitutional changes of this period did create a new situation that directly encouraged the growth of factions'.[3] The expansion of popular participation in the process of decision-making with the creation of the Great Council, together 'with the abolition of quinquennial scrutinies introduced the need for coalition politics [...] And this, in turn, [...] encouraged the development of the distinguishing ideologies'[4] among which the Savonarolan sect of the 'Piagnoni' was, at least until 1497, by far the most powerful and united.

The peculiarity of the 'Piagnoni' movement lied in its fanaticism, largely due to the odd mixture of prophetic inspiration and political vision that nourished the public profile of its leader. The unexpected formation of a party that claimed to monopolise the religious inspiration of political life – whereas in Florence religiosity had been traditionally a terrain common to all 'parts' – changed the *form* of political struggle decisively. In his letter to Ricciardo Becchi dated 9 March 1498, Machiavelli can be assumed to react to this change, with a first attempt at grasping the novelty represented by Savonarola. Machiavelli's assessment (two of the friar's sermons on the *Book of Exodus*, given in the Cathedral of San Marco on the second and third of March are summarised in his letter) plainly reveals his repugnance towards the political model sym-

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1 See Brown 2000, pp. 13–40.
2 See Guillemain 1977, pp. 29–40; Bertelli 1980, pp. 17–36.
3 Brown 2011, p. 203.
4 Brown 2011, p. 204.

bolised, as in a microcosm, by the relationship between the orator and his public.[5]

This repugnance cannot be separated, however, from the awareness of the break represented by Savonarola. In 'the sway of that friar on a city like Florence', with its unprecedented newness, Machiavelli saw something 'monstrous', but, at the same time, in this monstrosity he recognised the presence of a 'rupture of the tradition' and the beginning of a profound 'revolutionary crisis' which could not be disregarded.[6] This ambivalent attitude towards the friar characterises his position. It is structural to Machiavelli's consideration of Savonarola and, for this reason, every attempt to reduce it to only one amounts to an unjustified trivialisation.

2   A Speculative Re-translation

Nevertheless, in the history of the 'Machiavelli-Savonarola' question what prevailed was precisely the reduction of an intricate and multifaceted relationship to a polemical stereotype. This is true above all for the Italian tradition, given the long lasting influence of Francesco De Sanctis's assessment in his *Storia della letteratura italiana*. De Sanctis contrasted Machiavelli and Savonarola as being representative of modern immanence and medieval transcendence respectively.[7] Later Luigi Russo, in his *Prolegomeni a Machiavelli*, published in 1931, would take up this image. Russo transformed the contrast between historical ages, set up by De Sanctis, into an opposition between 'two eternal moments of the human spirit', that is, the 'Church' and the 'State',[8] or, in other words, the political and the ethical, prophetic impulse towards the future and the political calculus of existing power, and so on.

In this way the historical concreteness of these two figures was completely lost. In fact, Russo's reinterpretation of the 'Machiavelli-Savonarola' question in 1931 is clearly inspired by Benedetto Croce's thesis, announced in 1924,[9] of 'ethico-political history' as an equilibrium and synthesis of the two eternal moments of the Spirit: force and consensus, or State and Culture, or immanence

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5   A thorough analysis of this letter can be found in Cervelli 1998, pp. 279–98. See also Garin 1961, pp. 183–200; Chabod 1964, pp. 267–73; Guillemain 1977, pp. 17–27; Brown 1988, pp. 63–5; Sasso 1993, vol. 1, pp. 25–39; Cutinelli-Rèndina 1998, pp. 13–17; Colish 1999, pp. 611–12; Cadoni 2000, pp. 264–65, and 2001, pp. 241–42; Bottoni 2003, pp. 192–94; Martelli 2009, pp. 258–67.

6   Dionisotti 1980a, p. 17.

7   See De Sanctis 1983, pp. 598–600, 634–35.

8   Russo 1931, p. 14.

9   See Croce 1924a.

and transcendence. Croce in the same year linked the idea of ethico-political history to a new interpretation of Machiavelli. In the article *Sulla storia della filosofia della politica* he characterised Machiavelli as the discoverer of the 'autonomy' of politics,[10] which, he added, had for Machiavelli the split aspect of a 'sad necessity' and of a 'sublime art' that he addressed 'with a religious strain'.[11]

Resuming this 'speculative re-translation of the most important outcomes in De Sanctis's interpretation',[12] Russo accepted also the underlying idea that any approach to politics and religion cannot grasp the specificity of either, unless it accepts Croce's 'ethico-political' approach. In fact, Russo sees Machiavelli and Savonarola as two separate faces of a same reality and, consequently, he postulates the hidden impulse of each one of them to trespass into the opposite: a realist politician into Savonarola and an utopist prophet into Machiavelli.[13]

In Russo's (and in Croce's) interpretation historical concreteness falls prey to a speculative logic, which is still recognisable in one of the last exponents of this tradition, i.e., Gennaro Sasso. In fact, in Sasso's book *Niccolò Machiavelli: Storia del suo pensiero politico* the image of Machiavelli is completely dependent on this tradition. Already in the analysis of the 1498 letter to Becchi, he argues that, despite the evident clash between Machiavelli and Savonarola, a deeper similarity can be detected because both attempted to introduce a radical reform in the life of Florence. In this regard, Sasso concludes, Machiavelli was actually even more radical and 'prophetic' than Savonarola.[14]

3 Discussing the Reasons

The approach I intend to adopt is quite different from the one sketched above. A new interpretation of the relationship between Machiavelli and Savonarola can arise only if any speculative approach is banned and historical research is placed back on a concrete historical basis. In this regard the main feature of the revolutionary years during Savonarola's predominance in Florence was the massive participation in political life, something that throughout the whole fifteenth century had been almost completely missing. It is in this fact and in its consequences (such as the growth of fanaticism, the political exploitation

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10   Croce 1924b, p. 195.
11   Ibid.
12   Paggi 1984, p. 391.
13   Russo 1931, p. 11.
14   See Sasso 1993, vol. 1, pp. 51–3; see also pp. 130–32.

of popular passions, the consolidation of mass formations on an ideological basis, etc). that we might find the roots of the curious mixture of repugnance and admiration with which Machiavelli writes about Savonarola.

I shall argue that only if one takes into account this fact is it possible to understand correctly Machiavelli's thought in its significance and implications. This point has been sharply spotlighted by Alison Brown in a contribution on *Savonarola, Machiavelli and Moses: a Changing Model*, which concludes with an original comparison between the political approach of the friar and that of the Secretary: 'For Savonarola', Brown writes, '"the people" no longer meant a restricted class of eligible citizens but the populace at large, women and children as well as men, whom he harangued in emotive sermons and organized into pressure groups for reform'[15]. This fact 'clearly impressed Machiavelli as one of the earliest writers to discuss the political power of popular opinion or "imagination"'[16].

This remark can help define the scope of my research: on the one hand, Savonarola introduced religious prophecy into the government of the State; and, in doing so, he expanded both the meaning and the actuality of the 'people' enormously. As a result, the passions – and with them religion itself – have directly become a real and concrete political subject. On the other hand, the central importance that Machiavelli assigns to the imagination in politics inevitably finds in Savonarola a figure to which it is necessary to constantly return, in order to draw from him the criteria for political analysis but also to unravel its theoretical implications. As to what has been noted by Brown I can only add that, in all likelihood, Machiavelli comes (in *The Prince* and in the *Discourses*) to assign great importance to the role of the imagination in politics precisely because of his experience during Savonarola's leadership.

This can be seen quite clearly in the already-mentioned letter to Ricciardo Becchi. Machiavelli describes the addressee of his letter as 'prudent': 'Now what the masses are saying (*che per vulgo si dica*), what men hope or fear, I leave you to judge, since you are prudent, because you can judge better than I can, since you know all about our humours (*gli umori nostri*) and the nature of the times (*e la qualità de' tempi*)'.[17] 'Prudent' is the one who knows how to analyse the arguments of the friar who, by virtue of the fact that he is addressing a crowd of all conditions, literally has the masses (or the *volgo*) standing before him.

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15   Brown 1988, p. 65.

16   Ibid.

17   Machiavelli 1961, pp. 88–9 (translation slightly modified).

As Machiavelli writes to Becchi, in his last sermons Savonarola 'began with great terrors, with reasons that for those who did not discuss them were very convincing (*con ragione a chi non le discorre efficacissime*), showing that his followers were the best men and his adversaries the most wicked, using every expression (*termini*) he could to weaken the adverse party and strengthen his own'.[18] In this way, Machiavelli implicitly sets up an opposition between the band of the friar's followers and – as Carlo Pincin pointed out – 'the one who discusses the friar's arguments, examining their content and bearing in mind the political situation, who can identify the motives that drive the speaker, taking into account those expressions which he doesn't touch' because they would reinforce his opponents' positions, and so on.[19] *To discuss* therefore means to examine and reconstruct the rhetorical mechanism, thanks to which the speaker produces certain effects upon the reader or the listener; it means to examine a 'discourse' in its pragmatic and political functionality.

Now, the capacity to 'discuss the reasons' is reserved to a rare few. In the letters of Machiavelli the auto-representation of the group of friends to which he belongs as clearly distinct from the 'masses' is repeated constantly. It would be possible in fact to examine *The Prince* and the *Discourses* purely from this perspective. Given that in both these works a well-defined patrimony of political 'prudence' has been systematised and placed at the disposal of the reader, what Machiavelli presupposes is an intrinsic distance between who is, and who is not, capable of 'discussing the reasons'; and the aim of these two works is precisely to eliminate, or at least to reduce, this distance. Naturally, it is necessary to ask who the readers are to whom these works are addressed, and how political prudence is represented, so that it can become something usable.

In this regard, *The Prince* has raised numerous difficulties and misunderstandings: it is enough to think of the 'oblique reading', the determination of who its readers really were, or Machiavelli's intentions in writing this work. But beyond all that, it must be said that the essential difference between *The Prince* and the *Discourses* lies in the fact, that while in the first, Machiavelli intends to make accessible to the reader a prudence already illustrated by the fundamental episodes in the life of a new principality, and therefore 'to the inexpert reader it is not easy to see the process by which he comes to his judgments, it is not easy to learn on one's own such a task';[20] in the *Discourses* his goal is to render that process as evident as possible, teaching how to 'make a discussion' of 'the

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18   Machiavelli 1961, p. 86 (translation slightly modified).
19   Pincin 1966, p. 75.
20   Pincin 1971, p. 399.

histories' on one's own.[21] The absolute novelty of the *Discourses* in respect to tradition is contained in this aspect of the work: as structure, as form, and as title.[22]

This novelty is also tied to the possible readership of the *Discourses*: given that Machiavelli does not limit himself to presenting the outcome of a prudence already catalogued, but tries to teach the art of 'discussing the reasons', we must think that he is addressing the 'imprudent' themselves. He therefore endeavours to shatter – to a large extent, at least – the division between 'those who know', and 'those who do not know', going beyond the limited circle of the young friends of the Palazzo Rucellai, who represented, 'in title and in wealth, the aristocracy of Florence'.[23]

4   Necessity, Virtue and Desire

The determination of the range of readers of the *Discourses* raises a further question. Let us take another look at the 1498 letter to Becchi: here Machiavelli considers religious rhetoric a means of preventing the arguments employed by the friar from being understood and critically discussed. Religious language is able to activate crowds of the population politically, in a way never before achieved; but this occurs at the expense of any real understanding of its true meaning. If the *Discourses* suggest instead the overcoming of the sharp division between 'those who know' and 'those who do not know', then the ties between religion and politics will also have to be completely reconsidered in them.

That religion unavoidably has to do with politics, *when politics involves the masses*, is an observation born directly from the Savonarolan experience. It was not the existence of this relationship that was in question, but rather its evaluation; and this changed according to the type of political perspective at play. Already in the letter to Becchi, as Mario Martelli has observed,[24] Machiavelli's assessment of the friar *as a politician* was, by all accounts, positive. What changes in the *Discourses* is the evaluation that Machiavelli makes of the tie between religion and politics, or, to be more precise, of the relationship between religion and *mass* politics.

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21   See Pincin 1966, pp. 77–8.
22   See Dionisotti 1980b, pp. 258–59.
23   Dionisotti 1980b, p. 259.
24   Martelli 2009, pp. 258–67.

This change is made possible by the introduction of two key concepts, which are not found in Machiavelli before the *Discourses* (here I obviously hold the assumption that the writing of this work was not initiated before 1513):[25] 'education' as a synonym of religion and 'necessity' as a synonym of virtue. It is in the light of these two synonyms that Machiavelli reinterprets in an original manner a notion that goes back to a very pervasive and 'classic' anthropology and that, on the other hand, had been at the centre of the debates regarding the political order in Florence throughout the fifteenth century: the notion of 'ambition'.[26]

The most direct mode of appreciating this new theoretical structure is to start with the 'Preface' to the first book of the *Discourses*. Here Machiavelli probes the reasons that prevent the men of today from acting like the ancients. It appears that Christianity is responsible for the loss of ancient virtue, also because it has tried in every way possible to erase any trace of the former 'education'. The answer at this point would seem to be clearly formulated: ancient virtue has been extinguished because of the affirmation of the Christian faith. But at this point Machiavelli makes an important clarification. He asserts: 'This arises, I believe, *not so much* from the weakness into which the present education has led the world, *or* from the evil that an ambitious idleness has done to many Christian provinces and cities, *as* from not having a true knowledge of histories (*dal non avere vera cognizione delle storie*), through not getting from reading them that sense nor tasting that flavor that they have in themselves'.[27]

Machiavelli states here that the 'true knowledge of the histories' – that is, the skill of 'discussing' them – depends on the ability to get their sense and to taste their flavour. This is not only a technical ability, but it relies on the conviction that the histories have something to say to the current world, something that renders them alive again. And it is for precisely this reason that he immediately adds: men judge 'that imitation is not only difficult but impossible – as if heaven, sun, elements, men had varied in motion, order and power from what they were in antiquity'.[28]

And so we have arrived at the conclusion of his reasoning. The weakness introduced by Christianity into the world makes imitation difficult, but not impossible. What makes people believe that it is impossible is instead the con-

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25   On the composition of the *Discourses* see Gilbert 1953; Dionisotti 1980c, pp. 101–53; Inglese 1992, pp. 943–1007; Vivanti 1997, pp. 893–95.

26   On the gradual transformation of ambition from a merely moral notion into a political one see Varotti 1998.

27   Machiavelli 1996, p. 6 (emphasis added).

28   Ibid.

viction that the ancients were *essentially different* from the people of today, because Christ (as one finds stated in more than one place in the *Discourses*) has 'shown the truth and the true way' (D II.2).[29] But the prudent knows that education – every kind of education – modifies 'desire' in a way that is always at the same time *effective* and *transient*. This modification is real, but at every moment reversible.[30] What limits the imitation of ancient politics, then, is not Christianity as such, but its pretence to absoluteness, to uniqueness. Since it is a political and not an ontological impediment, it reflects a relation of forces and not an unalterable necessity.

5   Interpreting Religion, and Education

Machiavelli illustrates how, indeed, Christianity has been and still can be interpreted in different, even contradictory ways:

> And although the world appears to be effeminate and heaven disarmed, it arises 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 defense of the fatherland, they would see that it wishes us to love and honor it to prepare ourselves to be such that we can defend it. These *educations and false interpretations* thus bring it about that not so as many republics are seen in the world as were seen in antiquity […] (D II.2).[31]

Since the meaning of education depends on its interpretation, it can be understood only in a realistic way, as the sum of the 'effects' it causes in a certain society.[32] But what this argument more generally demonstrates is that the claim of uniqueness advanced by Christianity is merely superficial, and that actually this 'sect' can reproduce the same dynamic of *any* other one.

This dynamic is tied, as we have seen, to the concept of 'interpretation'. As John Najemy has shown,[33] religion must always be *interpreted*, because it is not a system of independent ideas. Rather, religion depends always on the po-

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29   Machiavelli 1996, p. 131.

30   On the 'ontological foundation' that binds together, in the practice of imitation, 'historiography and politics' see Ciliberto 2005, pp. 74–5; and Garin 1993, p. 5.

31   Machiavelli 1996, pp. 131–32 (emphasis added).

32   See Najemy 1999, p. 668.

33   Najemy 1999, pp. 674–80.

litical function that it exercises. More radically, religion is not independent, and therefore must be interpreted, because it is only a temporary modification of passions: as such, it always contains within it all other possible modes of education, that is, of organising the passions into a specific civil, social and political order.

The political function of religion and its temporary nature are linked in the term that Machiavelli adopts in the *Discourses* to redefine religion: 'education'.[34] In this regard, religion is always a specification tied to a particular situation, to a given relationship between the 'humours', etc., and it is thus transitory; at the same time it is also an active element, of modification (that is, of 'education') of the desire, which reflects a very specific political project. As Machiavelli emphasises, speaking with reference to the Romans, religion gets interpreted 'according to necessity' (D I.14),[35] that is, according to the political necessity of the moment. Only *after each act of interpretation* did religion acquire its concrete form in Rome, which therefore did not exist in advance.

But – and here a much broader question can be asked – what exactly is 'necessity'? In the *Discourses*, Machiavelli, innovative both in respect to his own earlier writings, and *a fortiori* with respect to the dominant approach in Florentine politics – makes necessity equivalent to virtue.[36] There is no virtuous action that does not happen out of necessity, that is, in a situation devoid of alternatives. The term 'necessity' can be understood according to a series of meanings, all related: it indicates the external and violent constriction, on the part of circumstances or on the part of a more powerful force; but also the interior obligation, prescribed by laws and/or by religion. In general, obligation is not the opposite of 'liberty', but of 'choice' (*elezione*, in D I.1).[37] As such, necessity influences desire in an absolute way, even if only temporarily.

This point is established by Machiavelli with great clarity in chapter 37, book I of the *Discourses*, in which he explains that 'the desire is always greater than the power of acquiring', and that out of that, therefore, 'discontent' (*mala contentezza*) is born, and from this the 'variability' of 'fortune'.[38]

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34 In the first version of the 'Preface' to the *Discourses* Machiavelli adopts the formulation 'the present religion' which he later amends as 'the present education'. The two versions of the 'Preface' are edited by Giorgio Inglese in Machiavelli 1984, pp. 56, 60, and commented by Pincin 1966, pp. 72–5.

35 Machiavelli 1996, p. 41.

36 For an overview of the use of the concept by Machiavelli, see Raimondi 2009, pp. 32–49. Del Lucchese 2002 provides a thorough and convincing interpretation of the philosophical background of 'necessity' in Machiavelli's thought.

37 See Machiavelli 1996, p. 8.

38 Machiavelli 1996, p. 78.

Here Machiavelli notes specifically that the plebs had secured themselves against the nobility 'through the creation of the tribunes, the desire of which they were constrained to by necessity'.[39] Necessity therefore is synonymous with a situation in which desire coincides perfectly with action, because the plebs do not have to struggle to attain what they desire (which would, inevitably, leave desire unsatisfied), but, instead, desire what they are forced to strive for.[40]

Given such premises, there is evidently nothing more difficult to realise than necessity. Necessity must struggle constantly against circumstances and against human nature, but precisely for this reason it is the most powerful and most comprehensive form of 'education'. Only the form of education-religion that – through an appropriate 'interpretation', that is, through a good combination of circumstances and popular passions – reflects necessity is capable of ensuring the virtue and power of a city. But, as is apparent, necessity is the opposite of choice, that is, of the possibility to provoke desire. Therefore, necessity, according to which religion is interpreted, is that which limits desire, and this is possible only if religion 'doesn't speak in the mode of the powerful', as Machiavelli specifies in the chapter 12, book I of the *Discourses*,[41] but rather incorporates within the political strategy of rulers also the vindications of the ruled.

6   … One Should Speak with Reverence of Such a Man…

And so we arrive at Savonarola. His prophetic action is recorded in the *Discourses* at the end of chapter 11 of book I, in a well-known passage, whose last sentence, which represents the key to reading the text in its entirety, is usually omitted:

> To the people of Florence it does not appear that they are either ignorant or coarse; nonetheless, they were persuaded by Friar Girolamo Savonarola that he spoke with God. I do not wish to judge whether it is true or not, because one should speak with reverence of such a man; but I do say that an infinite number believed him without having seen anything extraordinary to make them believe him. For his life, learning, and the subject he took up were sufficient to make them lend faith. No one

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39   Ibid.
40   On this dialectic between ambition and power see Frosini 2001, pp. 85–90.
41   Machiavelli 1996, p. 37.

therefore, should be terrified that he cannot carry out what has been car-
ried out by others, for as we said in our preface, men are born, live, and
die always in one and the same order.[42]

As everybody knows, in this chapter Machiavelli contrasts the crude men with
whom Numa had to labour, to modern men, who are civilised and corrupt.[43]
This distinction is also to be found among the Christian peoples: '... whoever
wished to make a republic in the present times would find it easier among
mountain men, where there is no civilization, than among those who are used
to living in cities, where civilization is corrupt'.[44] Corruption stands therefore
as a further obstacle, together with Christianity (corruption is in fact a much
broader concept than the religious corruption that Machiavelli ascribes to the
influence of Christianity),[45] to imitating ancient politics.

But it is precisely here that Machiavelli identifies the possibility of *inverting
history*. Savonarola's action is the only modern example recorded here, and the
example of Florence is thus the only case pertinent to the last observation ('No
one therefore, should be terrified that he cannot carry out what has been car-
ried out by others [...]'), which refers back to the 'Preface'. What happened at
Florence demonstrates that it is possible to overcome the belief that imitation
is impossible.

The figure of Savonarola is important precisely for this reason. His popular
movement expressed itself as a rejection of the corrupted religion of Alexan-
der VI, but this was only a point of departure. The prophetic message of Savona-
rola, as all the readers of the *Discourses* at that time would have recognised,
gradually became identified with the fortunes of Florence, putting this city at
the centre of an exceptional destiny, constructed of power, glory and worldly
riches.[46] Machiavelli alludes to this specifically, and the fact that the *Discourses*
were conceived in a milieu, the circle of Palazzo Rucellai, partly influenced by
the 'piagnoni',[47] explains the emphasis he placed on this point, but does not
deprive it of its theoretical meaning.

Machiavelli tells us therefore that the prophecy of Savonarola affirms in
practice and with religious language what the prudent already knows in theo-

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42   Machiavelli 1996, p. 36.
43   See Machiavelli 1996, pp. 35–6. On this passage see Ciliberto 1999, p. 21; Barbuto 2009,
      pp. 59–60; Martelli 2009, pp. 254–57.
44   Machiavelli 1996, p. 35.
45   On the notion of 'corruption' see Bonadeo 1973, pp. 1–34.
46   See Weinstein 1970, and 2011.
47   See Dall'Aglio 2005, p. 125.

retical terms: that the structure of education can, at every moment, return again to its natural source, causing those forms of desire that belong to other types of education to re-emerge, apparently incompatible with the present one. To have a 'true knowledge of histories' implies, as we have seen, not being afraid of imitating the ancients, therefore it means believing that it is possible to act politically. But this is exactly what Savonarola did in Florence – by overcoming corruption and striving for an interpretation of religion against 'the mode of the powerful' men. The true knowledge of histories can therefore also originate *thanks to a prophecy*, which succeeds in interpreting religion 'according to necessity', that is, by exalting the role of the people against that of the grandees.

The way in which Savonarola's intervention in the Florentine political world changed it drastically was, in the eyes of Machiavelli, an example from which to learn politics: Savonarola introduced into the modern world the ancient union of virtue-necessity and religion-education, not as residue of a bygone era (as would have been the case of the small enclaves of 'mountain men'), but as an element belonging to the *new* order. That form of politics, as we mentioned at the beginning, included the 'populace' in active politics for the first time, breaking the strict limitations of 'the people', understood as the always-partial 'totality' of the 'citizens'.[48]

In this political innovation, religion, and prophecy in particular, had played a decisive role. It was only due to religion that the masses could be mobilised, and it was this aspect above all that most struck the traditional mentality. In effect, as we have remarked above, Savonarola appeared to Machiavelli as something 'monstrous' but, at the same time, as a revolutionary break in the tradition of Florentine politics. Such novelty consisted precisely in the prophetic-nationalistic structure of Savonarola's message: this was the decisive element in his mobilisation of the masses.

7   Savonarola's Prophetism

Machiavelli does not pass judgment on the prophetism of Savonarola and on its peculiarities in an open or explicit way: of his prophecies he records only the one that relates the invasion of Charles VIII (D I.56) and 'that he spoke with

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48   The new quality of the '*popolo*' formed by the followers of Savonarola is at the centre of Landi 2001, who at pp. 39 and 46 quotes Brown 1988 (see above, notes 15 and 16) and uses it as a basis for an insightful and thorough analysis of the Machiavelli–Savonarola relationship.

God' (D I.11). However, it is possible to indirectly reconstruct an interpretation related to the political character of Savonarola's prophetism. We can take the definition contained in chapter 6 of *The Prince*, that of an 'unarmed prophet'. In fact this is already a first attempt to *reduce* the concept of prophecy to its political dimension, given that Savonarola here is associated to four law-givers, of whom only one, Moses, is also truly a prophet.[49] When viewed in this light, the whole structure of the last chapter of *The Prince* can be seen as an attempt to *repropose* the Savonarolan scheme in a different time and on a different stage (no longer Florence, but Italy) and above all without the ambiguities regarding the 'arms' that caused the tragic fall of Savonarola.[50]

In order to absorb Savonarola's example into his own discourse, and to expunge its ambiguities, Machiavelli himself adopts in this chapter a religious language that, as has been remarked, exploits the 'providential logic' of Christianity implicitly assimilating it to the model provided by the Hebrew republic.[51] The reference to Jewish theology serves the purpose of emphasising the activistic aspects that are present also in Christianity, and on the other hand this translation is fully in agreement with at least one of the friar's arguments, which is the crucial role played by *charity* in his interpretation of Christianity. In fact, Savonarola's preaching was centred on the combination of Florentine nationalism with a strong stress laid on charity as an active virtue, as 'love transforming itself in action',[52] and this may well correspond to what Machiavelli writes in the *Discourses* on interpreting religion 'according to virtue'.[53]

Besides that, it is important to remember that Moses was at the centre of Savonarola's last sermons on the *Book of Exodus*, which Machiavelli summarises for Becchi in March 1498. In the way he reports the subject of these sermons, Machiavelli shows he is aware of the self-identification with Moses that Savonarola tries here to achieve.[54]

But it is in the *Discourses* that the relation of religion and politics is discussed in depth, and it happens precisely in chapter 12 of book I, where, as Cesare Vasoli has noted, Machiavelli formulates the concept of 'a kind of

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49   On Machiavelli's interpretation of Savonarola as a reduction to politics of a much more complex system of thought, see Prodi 1998, pp. 200–1.

50   On Savonarola's ambiguities see Zancarini 1998; on his refusal to resort to violence see Fournel and Zancarini 1993, pp. 25–35.

51   On the providential logic of P 26 see Martelli 1981–82; on the implicit assimilation of Christianity to Hebrew political theology see Vatter 2013, pp. 111–17, as well as his text, *infra*.

52   Polizzotto 1997, p. 151.

53   Machiavelli 1996, p. 132 (D II.2).

54   See Cervelli 1998, pp. 284–85.

haruspical prophecy'.[55] By comparison with this interpretation of ancient religion as functional to the control of time,[56] Machiavelli affirms implicitly, in relation to Christianity, that only its prophetic version, and in particular the *millenary-mundane* one, insofar as it is a kind of control of time and is directed toward the future as something that can be 'produced' by collective action, is capable of obtaining the force of mobilising the virtue that belonged to the religion of the Romans. *But this is exactly what Savonarola had achieved*, insofar as he had tied the destiny of his predication to the city of Florence and to its political fortune.

In the *Discourses* the translation of prophecy into political terms is completed and, at the same time, Machiavelli has transferred the figure of Savonarola into his own set of questions. In book I, chapter 12, the figure of the Dominican friar is rendered in fact even more important, because he unites the characteristics normally ascribed to oracles, diviners, and augurs, with those of the law-givers, while Machiavelli omits to mention his refusal to take up arms. This is why his only true point of comparison, as has been widely recognised by critics, is now Moses, inasmuch as Moses was at the same time a political leader, a prophet and a law-giver.[57]

What interests us, however, is the intersection between prophecy, education, and necessity. Contrary to what is said in chapter 6 of *The Prince*, in the *Discourses* Savonarola's role is not assimilated to that of a 'new prince', but, on the contrary, his proximity to Moses emphasizes the specificity of his prophetic arguments. And yet, contrary to what is found in the letter to Becchi, in the *Discourses* an organic, although difficult connection between the discourse of the prudent and the practical and fanatic action of the 'populace' is established. As the experience of Savonarola vividly shows, discourse and mass politics are no longer alternative, mutually exclusive forms. Instead, they foster one another reciprocally and are both indispensable. In the 'monstrous' encounter between religious prophecy and the populace, Machiavelli sees now not only the outbreak of a 'crisis', but also a kind of practical reactivation of ancient virtue or, more precisely, a political equivalent of the correct 'discussion' of histories. Savonarola's political intervention arises from his ability to get the *sense* of histories and to taste their *flavour*, that is, to perceive them as something that is still alive, that feeds the political will of men and women

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55   Vasoli 2004, p. 372.
56   On the crucial role of time (control of time and experience of time as open to human intervention) in Machiavelli see Orr 1972.
57   See Weinstein 1972; Brown 1988.

who, in turn, are capable of 'changing the world'.[58] Of course, Savonarola has done all this re-establishing the (political) sense and flavour of the *sacred* histories, or rather of 'history' in the singular. His intervention is a practical reactivation of ancient virtue, but the fact that it happens through the language of Christianism adds a specific dimension to the problem.

If in *The Prince* Machiavelli had solved the 'Savonarola question' – through a kind of shortcut – by evoking a model of Hebrew republic (that is, of a modern form of popular nationalism), in the *Discourses* his argument is far more complex, because it includes organically the relationship between 'reason' and 'masses', politics and religion, history and political praxis. The question is now not only how it is possible to mobilise popular energies, but also how these energies can be stabilised and acquire a political 'form' by passing through the religious-prophetic language.

If separated from the faculty to interpret, religious fanaticism is destined to squander its own political energy into a self-deceiving and self-destructive series of rebellions and, on the other hand, if detached from the masses, the capacity to 'discuss the reasons' is doomed to fall back into a mere practice of domination. That is the reason why the encounter of reason and masses is of vital importance for a politics that aims at being at the same time *modern* and *popular*.

The modes in which this encounter can politically happen in concrete terms is the actual concern, still unresolved, of all true democratic politics. Machiavelli, for his part, tried to give his own responses through the writing of the *Discourses*, which can be interpreted as his way of giving the people the weapons that they needed: weapons of a new and different sort, consisting in learning the difficult art of 'discussing the reasons', as a mode of conferring a certain stability to the new protagonist, very powerful but fluctuating, of politics, which had emerged in Savonarolan Florence: the populace at large.

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58   Pincin 1966, pp. 82–3.

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'Uno Mero Esecutore': Moses, *Fortuna,* and *Occasione* in the *The Prince*

Warren Montag

Before I attempt to offer a reading of Machiavelli on Moses[1] I want to point out that it was in relation to Moses and to the Bible that Machiavelli posed the question of how to read a text, especially a text so often read and thus so apparently, and perhaps deceptively, familiar:

> E chi legge la Bibbia sensatamente, vedrà Moisè essere stato forzato, a volere che le sue leggi e che i suoi ordini andassero innanzi, ad ammazzare infiniti uomini, i quali, non mossi da altro che dalla invidia, si opponevano a' disegni suoi.

> And whoever reads the Bible attentively, will see Moses, in wanting that his laws and his orders be observed, was forced to kill an infinite number of men who opposed his designs, moved by nothing else other than envy (D III.30).

'Chi legge la Bibbia *sensatamente*' (or 'whoever reads the Bible *sensatamente*', that is, as it has been translated, "attentively", "intelligently" or "with discernment", although I will return to this word): with this proviso Machiavelli in the *Discourses* introduces a proposition concerning Moses, a proposition that condenses into one hyperbolic sequence the necessary relation between laws (*leggi*) and institutions/orders (*ordini*), on the one side, and violence on the other. To defend his new State, and we should note that his laws and institutions are not yet fully realised, in part because of the obstacle of the envy (*invidia*) of others and unwilling to rely on *fortuna*, Moses was compelled to 'kill an infinite number of men' (*ammazzare infiniti uomini*) both to protect his laws and orders and to permit their development. But beyond the provocative content of Machiavelli's literal reading of scripture, is the provocation of its form: to read

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[1] For recent studies of Machiavelli's treatment of Moses, see Marx 1997, pp. 551–71; Geerken 1999, pp. 579–95; Najemy 1999, pp. 659–81; Nederman 1999, pp. 617–38; Karsenti 2012; Boyle 2004, pp. 224–46; Hammill 2011, pp. 31–66; Viroli 2010.

the Bible *sensatamente* is to reject the allegorical interpretation without which Christianity could hardly claim the Hebrew scripture as its 'Old Testament'. Machiavelli accordingly makes no effort to convert Moses' violence into a mere sign of a properly spiritual chastisement. But in the midst of the otherwise literal reading even of the acts of mass destruction that must accompany the founding of new principalities through *virtu*, the adjective '*infiniti*' stands out: we must not so quickly translate it as 'a great many' or 'countless', or reduce it to a merely rhetorical function. Moreover, Machiavelli insists that the idea of (killing) an infinite number of men and hence perhaps just as importantly the idea of the infinite itself, disguised here as an adjective, is found by reading the Bible or at least Exodus '*sensatamente*'.

We are thus presented with a paradoxical conjunction that only such a reading of the Bible can uncover: the infinite as a concept appears only at the moment of the beginning, as if that which has no beginning or end becomes thinkable against the backdrop of the void that can neither be found nor delivered by destiny but which must be made in order to be filled with new laws and institutions. Let us recall that in Exodus 23:20–4, God abandons the Hebrew people to the violence that they, rather than he, must commit, sending them not only to annihilate the nations that already occupy the land he has 'prepared for them', but even to smash the pillars of their buildings to pieces, as if they too were contaminated by idolatry and unfit for use. It might be imagined that what amounts to a total destruction of what came before, so that not even the memory of it remains, would leave the Hebrew people free to establish a State that, because it was founded on principles of justice and piety decreed by God himself, would persist forever as a light to other nations. But the establishment of such a State reveals only the opposite: the ceaseless, that is, infinite, concourse of *fortuna* inside as well as outside the new principality and its people, the very element within which the new order under the leadership of the armed prophet must perpetually adjust itself if it is to survive and not to fall to ruin. Machiavelli has thus been able to intuit, against the best efforts of translators, the fact that in the Hebrew of Genesis and Exodus no beginning is an αρχή and no end a τέλος. At this point we may begin to suspect that it is not simply his acuity as a reader that is at issue here; it is rather a question of the position from which he reads and of what becomes visible from its vantage point alone.

Of course, the injunction to read *sensatamente* applies not simply or even most importantly to the Bible, but also to Machiavelli's reading of the Bible and, in particular, the account of Moses. And there is no point in Machiavelli's work in which the complexities and stakes of his reading are more evident than in chapter 6 of *The Prince*. Completely new principalities, that is, principalities whose ruler and forms of government are new, are more likely to

endure if they are acquired and established through the forces and *virtù* of the new prince, rather by the favour or gift, that is, the χάρις or *gratia,* of *fortuna.* At this point, we cannot avoid confronting the difficulties posed by Machiavelli's use of the term *'fortuna'*, difficulties located above all in the text of *The Prince* and only secondarily in the readings advanced by interpreters. While readers such as Leo Strauss and Althusser might with no apparent hesitation translate *fortuna* as chance, contingency or accident and thus as a rejection of any notion of destiny,[2] more recent commentators have pointed out that the term was not necessarily understood in opposition to Christian notions of οἰκονομία, πρόνοια, or *providentia.*[3] Thus, *fortuna* might be conceived not only as the 'lived experience' of providence from the point of view of a single human individual who could not possibly grasp a concatenation of events in an order whose temporal span necessarily surpassed his understanding, but even as the ignorance of God's design necessary to its unfolding. The barbarian invasions of Rome, the destruction of the empire, the military defeat of so many princes, that is, the very events which appeared to constitute the operations of fortune (whether or not they were confronted by the actors endowed with *virtù* or simply passively suffered) might be lived as misfortune, but from the perspective of God's creation in its totality, could be seen as necessary means to the end of the universalisation of God's word. Further, was not the so-called *virtù* itself of a given prince, that which allowed him apparently to surmount or even simply adjust to circumstances, an element of providence, even if it took the form of an evil intention whose consequence was a greater good? Such notions, however, as Aristotle's *Poetics* demonstrates with great clarity are in no way incompatible with a sense of the tragic, which might precisely be located in the discrepancy between the contingency of lived experience (a contingency-for-us) and the teleology, which is the object of our faith even as its order surpasses our understanding.

Neither Strauss nor Althusser are unaware of the possibility of such a reading of Machiavelli and in different, and I would argue opposing ways, maintain that, in *The Prince*, the possibility of such a reading must constantly be suggested by Machiavelli himself, as if to remind the reader that the statements that initially appear to exceed the boundaries of Christian doctrine may finally be re-inscribed in it. For Strauss, this takes what we might call a topographical or at least vertical form: the notion of *fortuna* as chance lies under and is covered by a language of providence; the religious and biblical references are thus a 'mask' entirely external to the 'unbelief' they conceal and can accordingly be

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2   See Strauss 1958; Althusser 2001.

3   See Viroli 2010.

easily removed in the act of reading (if indeed the act of removing the mask can be separated from the act of reading itself). For Althusser who, it should be observed, does not perform what he elsewhere calls a 'symptomatic reading' of Machiavelli, these elements constitute contradictions or discrepancies whose form is always and necessarily horizontal and thus not susceptible to an uncovering or unconcealment in that they exist side by side but isolated from each other, such that the whole does not register the unity or even the coexistence of its parts.

To help us understand the conflictuality proper to Machiavelli's text, we might profitably turn to one of a number of unacknowledged references to Quintus Curtius, whose *History of Alexander* was an important source for Machiavelli's concept of *fortuna*. In a striking passage, Quintus Curtius goes so far as to define the very antinomy of *fortuna* (understood as chance) and providential order as the primary obstacle to understanding the actual sequence of causes that constitutes history: 'Those may scoff at my belief who are convinced that human affairs roll on and take place by mere chance, or that each man runs his ordered course in accordance with a combination of hidden causes determined long beforehand by an immutable law' (*Eludant videlicet, quibus forte temere humana negotia volvi agique persuasum est, nec serie nexuque causarum latentium et multo ante destinatarum suum quemque ordinem inmutabili lege percurrere*).[4]

Chapter 25 of *The Prince* begins: 'I am not unaware that many have been and still are of the opinion that the things of this world (*le cose del mondo*) are in a sense (*in modo*) governed by *fortuna* and by God, that men with their prudence cannot change them (*correggerle*), that there is no remedy for them and that thus there is no sense sweating over these things, but simply allow them to be governed by fate (*sorte*)'. What is remarkable here is the rendering equivalent, in a political sense, of the two otherwise opposed senses of fortune: indeterminacy and teleological determination. Both deprive political action of any effect: either an act is *a priori* without necessary or calculable consequences, as if once accomplished it simply disappears into the chaos of things never to be seen again, or, in contrast, an act is already inscribed in a causal order that preexists us and leads to an end unknown to us, in which case we are no more than means to the ends of a providential design that must surpass our understanding. Machiavelli's critique of the functional equivalence of the two notions of *fortuna* leads him to some of the most famous and indeed extravagant assertions in *The Prince*: while *fortuna* (however we understand it) is the arbiter of half of our actions, it leaves the government of the other half to us. Fi-

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4   History of Alexander, v. xi. 6–11.

nally, at the chapter's conclusion, *fortuna* can be mastered and compelled to submit as if it were a woman, by beating and overpowering it, as if a prince's *virtù* depended on the strength of his will, his resolve or audacity, alone.

Machiavelli at this point appears, as so many readers have insisted, to have confined his reflections to the familiar opposition between free will and determinism, or freedom and necessity; but if this is indeed the case, he has diverged from his own philosophical trajectory and abandoned the project of conceiving a necessity without finality, a necessity of the infinite that arises from contingent encounters, the only necessity that matters for politics, the necessity that determines whether a prince by being good will increase or decrease his power.[5] Althusser's conception not only applies to Machiavelli, but was certainly inspired by him: 'instead of thinking contingency as a modality of necessity, or an exception to it, we must think necessity as the becoming-necessary of the encounter of contingencies'.[6] Further, the opposition so essential to Machiavelli's political theory of *fortuna* and *virtù* is not only *not* confined to this familiar antinomy, but will disrupt it with the introduction of a third term without which any application of *virtù*, whether individual or collective, to *fortuna*, that is, to *la verità effettuale della cosa* would be impossible. This third term, 'occasione', derived from the Latin *occasio,* in turn derived from the Greek καιρός does not designate that which mediates between *virtù* and *fortuna*, but precisely the always only temporary absence of mediation, an opening or breach, what Althusser called 'a certain empty place, empty so that it may be filled, empty so that there may be inserted there the action of an individual or group of men who will take up a position in it and on this basis collect the forces capable, to constitute the forces capable of accomplishing the political task history has assigned them – empty for the future'.[7]

It is this other way of reading that allows us to imagine the term 'fortuna' in *The Prince* as neither univocal nor the site of a philosophical conspiracy that it is left to the reader to unmask. In other words, whoever reads *The Prince*, or more precisely *The Prince* as a reading of the Bible *sensatamente*, will discover not what is hidden but what cannot be hidden, that is, the contradictory development that advances with each word of the text. Roberto Esposito has argued recently that if one can speak of the specificity of Italian philosophy at its origins (Machiavelli and Bruno are his primary reference points), this specificity surely lies in its rejection of the project characteristic of the dominant forms of

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5 Morfino 2002; Frosini 2006, pp. 31–66; Del Lucchese 2011.

6 Althusser 1994a, p. 581.

7 Althusser 2001, p. 20.

European philosophical and political thought.[8] For Esposito this project is above all defined by the attempt to contain, if not master, *fortuna* as if it could be warded off by philosophical certainty or ever more complicated theodicies in which a logic of compensation absorbed every evil and derived from it a greater good. But most typically, *fortuna* took the form of a threatening exterior against which the social body in its integrity had to be protected or, in Esposito's phrase, immunised, rather than that which, from the inside as well as the outside, relates us to our thought and action by dividing us from ourselves in a kind of fold that increases our power.

Further, while to so many early modern philosophers *fortuna* would appear only negatively as the absence of order which, far from being a realm of freedom, was rather a condition of ungovernable contingency to which one could only submit, as if to fate, Machiavelli sees something else: not a hidden order whether immanent or transcendent, but something far more profound. In the absence of order, events fall like rain upon the world, sometimes to our benefit (when for example there is neither flood nor drought, and crops flourish), and sometimes not (when an increase in temperature ruins crops, and the people, fearing starvation, revolt). And when revolts fail, captive populations are enslaved and set to work, say, building magnificent cities. In the constant variability of things, for so many the cause of fear, in the events that fall upon the world and befall us, one, on the condition that the present or future prince can read *fortuna*, like the Bible, *sensatamente*, and exercises the *virtù* or power to seize that moment and occupy it, becomes the opening through which he, that is, his assembled forces, must pass to upend the fragile balance of power that constitutes the present to defend the laws and orders he has created or in contrast to establish something new.

Of such princes, Moses is neither the first nor perhaps the best example, even if he is an important reference point for an Italy struggling to liberate itself from the barbarians, and in addition, a prince whose cruelty, even if allegorised, was known and accepted. But the recourse to Moses was a way to accomplish what Althusser called 'the voiding of all the philosophical concepts of Plato and Aristotle in order to think the possibility of making Italy a national State'. Through Moses and therefore through his appropriation of a translation whose very obscurities and elisions testified to the uneasy co-existence of Hebrew, Greek and Latin concepts, the first two packed into the last and, by virtue of their incompatibility, straining its resources to the breaking point, Machiavelli is able not only to lay siege to Medieval Christian theology, but to exploit its internal divisions and thereby diminish its power.

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8   Esposito 2011.

The verse from Exodus 2:10 provides an opening: The Pharaoh's daughter names him Moses (Moshe/ משה in Hebrew), she says, 'Because I drew him out of the water', according to the King James Version, or in Hebrew, כִּי מִן הַמַּיִם מְשִׁיתִהוּ. The Vulgate renders the phrase *quia de aqua tuli eum,* a translation that transforms the Hebrew verb, 'to take out', 'to pull from', or 'pull out of' into 'tuli' the first-person singular perfect active indicative of *fero*, the Latin verb meaning 'to carry or bear'. This passage, of course, is one of those that compels the reader of any other version of Exodus than the Hebrew to acknowledge not only that the text is a translation, but that the particular causal inference cannot itself be translated: the baby is named Moses because he was drawn from the water, a statement that makes no sense except in the original language. The reader who reads *sensatamente* thus comes to know that there is something he does not know in the text. Further, even the great Medieval Jewish commentators such as Rashi, Ibn Ezra and Rashbam, were divided over the meaning of the name (and the book of Exodus is called in Hebrew Shemot/שמות – names): is Moses (Moshe/משה) derived from the root משה (to draw or to pull) or משך (to pull or draw out of)? Further, does the name Moshe signify (or merely suggest) the one who was pulled from or he who pulled (something or someone else) from, that is, does the name denote the subject or object of an action or both, perhaps simultaneously? In the crucial moment on Mount Horeb, at the burning bush (Exodus 3:1–4), Moses is called by God, pulled out of his way, as it were. As the text makes clear, however, God's call is preceded by Moses calling to and upon himself to turn towards the thorn bush as he pulls (himself) away from his path. In an important sense, this scene might better be understood as a swerving into an encounter and a conjunction, given that it is only when God sees Moses turning towards the burning bush that he calls out to him, taking him out of his way once again and calling him to be sent to take the Hebrew people out of the בֵּית עֲבָדִים or house of servitude.

Similarly, In Exodus 2:11–12, Moses is described as turning from his way without warning, and without a sign from God, or indeed any sign that God was present as either agent or observer of his action, at the sight of the slave-driver beating the Hebrew slave, 'his brother'. Thus, the pulling away or taking out of, the turning from, the deviation, the detour, the swerve (we might say, if we can imagine Machiavelli reading the account of Moses closely, and thus *sensatamente,* through Lucretius, rigorously, that is, to the letter, as if Lucretius's critique freed him from the reign of the concept of providence) was the pre-condition rather than the result of the encounter with God.[9] Let us then

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9 Brown 2010 has meticulously documented Machiavelli's interest in Lucretius, an interest so great that Machiavelli copied *De rerum natura* by hand in order to have access to the text.

follow Machiavelli's own text closely; we may discover that the *fortuna-virtù* relation, itself part of a multilingual semantic field in which Italian, Latin, Greek, and also, to the extent that Machiavelli speaks of Moses, Hebrew, condition, through the work of translation, above all, the work of translating what in an important sense resists translation, or, as in the case of the name Moses/Moshe, marking an operation of translation or substitution that cannot itself be translated, the association between the name and the act of pulling or pulling out of that poses problems even to readers of the original Hebrew text. Does not the Latin term '*occasio*' (or the Italian *occasione*) itself serve less as a translation in the usual sense (the substitution of one word for another, an act which assumes the generalised equivalence of languages and their transparency if only, as Benjamin suggests, in the mind of God) than as the index, if not symptom, of what translation excludes and suppresses in its rendering of the Greek term καιρός.[10]

Machiavelli begins chapter 6 with a contradiction that Althusser, among others, has noted: Those who would 'acquire entirely new principalities both in their prince and their government', that is, principalities acquired with *virtù* so that the laws and institutions that existed before are evacuated, leaving a void filled by the new prince with laws and institutions that in an important sense are unprecedented in that they represent the calculated response of a 'prudent' ruler to the specific circumstances of his principality. But, Machiavelli is careful to note, the entirely new can come into existence only by 'imitating' one's great predecessors, that is, by repeating their actions, albeit *sensatamente*, or even by entering the path cleared and repeatedly trodden by them. Of course, it is not possible to follow their steps exactly without deviation and although this deviation is initially marked as a decline (those who cannot walk in the steps of great men will at least preserve the 'odore' of greatness), the next sentence reinstates it as necessary to success itself. 'He should act like those prudent archers, who, when the target they are aiming at seems too far off, aware of the capacity of their bow, set their sight a good deal higher than the desired target (*loco*), not to reach such a height with their arrow but rather to be able, with the help of aiming high, to reach their target'. Thus archers, or rather, prudent archers, only hit their target by aiming not at it, but above it, as if to aim at a greatness we cannot hope to achieve will allow us to exercise the prudence necessary both to establish and maintain a completely new principality.

But perhaps there is another sense to this allegory of the archers, one that has little to do with the hierarchical distinction between the great and the

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10   Benjamin 1968.

excellent and those less so, whose only hope at success lies in imitating their betters: Machiavelli's example also refers to what is now called the archers' paradox: the fact that an arrow must be aimed slightly away from the centre of a target in order to hit it, that is, that an arrow fired in a straight line at a target will miss it. In fact, it is precisely this notion of warfare, and of the need to hit the target that allows us to argue that for Machiavelli one imitates great men by not imitating, that is, by aiming at and then deviating from their example, just as they in their greatness did not precisely imitate and in fact diverged, however infinitesimally, from their great predecessors, *ad infinitum*. The founder of the completely new imitates by deviating from those he imitates as they were compelled to deviate from what they imitated: he imitates their refusal to imitate, or to imitate by deviating from what is imitated, just as he must aim by not aiming at an always singular spot he must hit or be himself destroyed. It is precisely this idea of the target (as the terms *loco* and *disegno* in the passage are often translated) that leads us back to *fortuna* and to the question of the *occasione* through which alone men relate to it, even if this relation can never be one of mastery or domination.

In fact, a similar description of archers aiming at their targets appears in Euripides' *Supplicants* (l.745) where men in war are described as aiming 'the bow beyond the target'. The Greek word translated as target here is precisely καιρός, whose usage thus deviates from the predominantly temporal conception of *occasione* and compels us to turn towards the question of place. As Richard Onians has shown, *kairós* initially meant 'target' or 'mark', usually in reference to warfare. It signifies in the *Iliad*, for example, the deadliest place on the body that an arrow may penetrate.[11] More recently, Thomas Rickert has argued that the renewed focus on *kairós* in the Anglo-American study of classics has tended to neglect the spatial meaning of the term, a meaning that while older than its temporal sense, coexisted with it and gave it its force as a concept: 'the earliest uses of kairós were grounded in a sense of place, but not just any place. [...] Kairós does not just refer to the target at which one aims, but also a penetrable opening, an aperture'.[12] It is the weak point in a soldier's armour, the spot at which an archer must aim if he hopes to kill him or the point, 'the part of the body', and this is again a citation from Euripides, 'where a weapon can penetrate to the life within'.[13]

And just as all armour has its weak points, every State, no matter how well armed, has its vulnerable places that no effort at fortification (and I am speak-

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11   Onians 1951, p. 343.
12   Rickert 2007, p. 73.
13   Onians 1951, p. 343.

ing here both literally and metaphorically, politically as well as militarily) can entirely eliminate and may in fact, in an entirely dialectical manner, aggravate. But only a specific conjunction of circumstances will place that weak point within range of the archer skilled enough to strike it and penetrate to the life within, and the archer, for his part, must pull himself away from the straight line to see the aperture and point his arrow slightly away from the *kairós* to strike it. Machiavelli's image thus belongs to a trans-linguistic field composed of overlapping semantic networks and forms the aperture that his work has opened in it. Through it something is either pulled in or pulled out: a logic of location and dislocation operates here, or rather a location that rests on an originary dislocation. As we follow Machiavelli's argument through chapter 6, it appears that the concept of 'occasione' insofar as it refers to this history through a nexus of translations, allusions and associations cannot be rendered simply as 'opportunity' without losing precisely what will confer on his account of Moses its intelligibility, as well as its importance for *The Prince*.

Machiavelli advances his argument by postulating that the prince 'who has trusted least in fortuna has maintained his position best', succeeding 'per propria virtu', and it is in this last formulation, 'by his own *virtù*', that the problems peculiar to Moses alone among such princes are posed: 'And although one should not discuss (*ragionare*) Moses, for he was a mere executor of the things commanded by God (*uno mero esecutore delle cose che li erano ordinate di Dio*), he should nevertheless be admired for that grace (*grazia*) that that made him worthy of speaking with God'. This sentence, familiar to all readers of *The Prince*, is, like the narrative of Exodus itself, precisely too familiar; it has already been read for us, already translated not simply into another language but into a theological-political idiom and therefore from the strange into the familiar. There are few passages in Machiavelli's text with which translators have taken greater liberties, as if the passage were written to be translated, that is, as if the literal words were from the outset destined to fade before the meaning of which they are merely the sign. Of course, at the same time, no reader can fail to register the shock of seeing Moses linked to Romulus, a reaction that Machiavelli has carefully cultivated by appearing to admit that Moses, a mere executor, really does not belong to the list of those who have founded States through *virtù* (or rather *per propria virtù*) given that Moses' power was not his own. In part, however, by rendering him a mere executor or agent of God's orders, Machiavelli displaces the responsibility for the killing of an infinite number of men onto the legal/moral author of the actions, God himself. He thus legitimises the use of force, although it needed no such legitimation, and perhaps more to the point shows that violence, legitimate or not, was nevertheless necessary, even in the unique case of a State governed by God. But in another

sense, the *verità effetuale* of the prince's 'thing', that is, the *virtù* whose truth lies in its effects is never the property of the prince, his own *virtù*: it is that moment at which his will encounters that of the multitude and there erupts, as if from a sudden condensation of elements or things (*cose*), emitting a thunderous sound that terrifies those who hear it, but in which Moses could discern the intelligible voice of a God-like power, neither his nor his people's, a power which exists only in its effects, by means of the armed prophet who forms 'a thing' with the people, and whose truth can transfigure the world, this world.

But this does not exhaust the significance of the passage and above all the phrase that has often provoked translators to depart from the literal text in search of more figurative equivalents. I refer especially to the phrase 'le cose che li erano ordinate di Dio', which translators have condensed into 'God's will' or 'what God commanded', so that the text reads 'for he was a mere executor of God's will (or 'what God had commanded', in French, "des ordres de Dieu")'. The status of 'thing' or 'cosa' in Machiavelli text, where the word is often treated by translators as if it were a vague gesture at a more specific meaning that they feel compelled to supply is worth considering. In the phrase 'la verità effettuale della cosa', *cosa* or thing has a very precise meaning and function: the 'modi e governi di uno principe', together form a thing subject not to legal, moral or theological principles derived from an essence or *telos*, but to the variability of the *rerum natura*, the nature of things and the things that compose nature. Its truth as a thing among things, rather than an expression, representation, emanation or incarnation of that which lies beyond nature, lies in, and only in, the effects it produces in this world: those who look to the good beyond it will be destroyed and their good with them. It is precisely this variability and tumult that Machiavelli calls in chapter 3, 'On Mixed Principalities', 'l'ordine delle cose', the order of things, demonstrating that by reality and order he means the same thing. To take things to the extreme, we might even say that the 'l'ordine delle cose' (the order of things) and 'le cose che li erano ordinate di Dio', (the things ordered by God) not only can but must be equivalent, but that both, determined by the movement of Machiavelli's text, itself no more linear or progressive than the movement of history, are equivalent to 'il tempo si caccia innanzi ogni cosa, e può condurre seco bene come male e male come bene' (time chases each thing before it and brings both the good with the bad and the bad with the good).

What does this mean for our understanding of Moses? In a sense it reverses, or at least complicates, the order of causality and authority: the actions Moses 'executed' were *by the fact of their execution* ordered by God, in the double sense of being commanded and of being arranged by God. The case of Exodus is particularly pertinent here insofar as God, like time, according to

Machiavelli, sends the bad with the good, hardening the Pharaoh's heart in response to Moses' demand to set the Hebrew slaves free. Even as it is impossible after two millennia of Christian doctrine not to look for a providential meaning in the idea for which no explanation or justification is offered in Scripture that God caused the Pharaoh to do evil and to do so repeatedly and at great cost to himself and his people, it was possible, especially under the influence of Lucretius' critique of providence and destiny, to see God's order as the disposition of things as they are, without reference to an ideal or an intention beyond them. It is in this sense that Moses, 'who had so great a preceptor', was no different from the other princes who founded and maintained States by means of a 'mind disposed to turn itself according to the winds of fortuna and the variability of things' (P 18).

Has Machiavelli, as has been so often asserted, simply replaced God with great men endowed with a God-like power of political creation? On the contrary, the place of God has been abolished and replaced by an encounter not only between people but also and above all between 'things', an encounter that may not, and often does not, take place. Without the *occasione* that fortune offers those who possess the attribute of *virtù*, that *virtù* would be 'spenta' or extinguished, just as in the absence of *virtù*, the *occasione* 'comes in vain'. Out of this encounter, if it does take place, something new emerges, a new prince executing decrees that do not exist before or outside of their execution, an armed prophet whose weapon is the power of the armed multitude and whose fortress is their support.[14] Perhaps this encounter is what was once meant by grace, the grace that was not given by God, if we follow Machiavelli's text, but which allowed Moses to speak with him. Indeed, it is as if God himself appeared only from the conjunction of a prince and his enslaved people, from the swerve and the collision, to call out the name of Moses twice. 'Moshe, Moshe:' the one who was and will be pulled out, the one who has pulled and will pull the people out of 'slavery and the oppression of the Egyptians'. The name Moses thus marks a *kairós* in *The Prince*, a target of interpretation, an aperture in fortune's web, the hole through which Machiavelli's arrow passes, not to the life within, but to the infinite which opens before us with every word we read.

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14   See Winter 2012, p. 736.

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Machiavelli and the Republican Conception of Providence

Miguel Vatter

Given the Luciferine reputation of his political ideas, it was not long before readers of Machiavelli began to ask themselves what were his own religious beliefs.[1] Was he a radical epicurean, an atheist or a libertine; or was he a tormented Christian, all too aware, like Augustine, that the harsh realities of politics correspond to the fallen nature of human beings?[2] Recent historiography has moved Machiavelli's concern with religion back into the heart of his political thought, restating the central political significance of the question of God in his theory.[3] Traditionally, this conjunction of God and politics in Machiavelli has been explained in terms of an instrumental conception of religion, associated with the idea of a civil religion.[4] But does this hypothesis exhaust the role of religion in Machiavelli's political thought? Could Machiavelli also be employing a non-instrumental understanding of religion that explains why some parts of his political theory make sense only in light of certain theological premises? In this case, one has left behind the hypothesis of civil religion and moved on to ask about Machiavelli's 'political theology'.[5]

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1   This article was originally published in *Review of Politics* (2013), 75: 605–23. I thank the editors for permission to reprint. A shorter version of this paper is forthcoming in Italian under the title 'Politica plebea e provvidenza in Machiavelli', in *Machiavelli: Tempo e conflitto, edited by* Riccardo Caporali, Vittorio Morfino, and Stefano Visentin.

2   For Machiavelli's relation to Christianity and his personal religious beliefs, see de Grazia 1994; and Viroli 1998.

3   For overviews of the current debate on Machiavelli and religion, see Cutinelli-Rendina 1998; Colish 1999, pp. 597–616.

4   For discussions of civil religion in Machiavelli, see Preus 1979, pp. 171–90; Sullivan 1996; Rahe 2008; and Brown 2010a. As Brown observes, 'Machiavelli's attitude to religion presents two quite different faces, one valuing it as a form of political control, the other following Lucretius in describing religion anthropologically as the expression of deeply rooted beliefs and fears of ordinary people' (Brown 2010b, p. 79).

5   For the distinction between civil religion and political theology, see my introduction to Vatter 2010.

The relatively new claim that Machiavelli is not merely recovering an ancient conception of religion as an instrument of political rule, but is putting forth a political theology of his own has been forcefully made by Maurizio Viroli in *Machiavelli's God.* According to Viroli, Machiavelli was neither an atheist nor a pagan. 'Machiavelli's God is the God of Florentine republican Christianity'.[6] He adhered to the political theology of what Viroli calls 'republican Christianity', whose first principle is 'that a true Christian is a good citizen who serves the common good and liberty in order to implement the divine plan on earth. God participates in human history, […] created men in his own image and wishes them to become like him with their virtue, working to make the earthly city comparable to the heavenly city'.[7] Viroli argues that thinkers as diverse as Thomas of Aquinas and Ficino, Savonarola and Leonardo Bruni, Giles of Rome and Matteo Palmieri advocate one and the same 'republican Christianity'. For reasons that I outline below, I doubt that Machiavelli drew inspiration for his experiments with political theology from this 'tradition'. However, Viroli does raise the interesting question of what conception of 'divine glory' and 'divine nature' Machiavelli could have held that would serve as a foundation of his novel way of understanding love of country and republicanism.

I shall not engage the old question of Machiavelli's personal morality or the significance of his *Exhortation to Penitence*. It is clear that for him the real dimensions of the problem of religion in politics only emerge once the belief in a divinity is posed directly in relation to the most 'ferocious' and pitiless aspects of politics as illustrated by Roman historians and by the Hebrew Bible.[8] In order properly to pose the question 'Who is Machiavelli's God?' one would have to find a conception of God whose 'divine nature' is such that human 'imitation' of this nature would give rise to ferocious political actions, and, furthermore, such an 'imitation' would make a 'saint' out of whoever obeys these 'extraordinary commands' (D III.22).[9] In order to find such a God in Machiavelli's writings it is better to reconsider his other, less pious 'exhortation to seize Italy, and to set her free from the barbarians' that closes *The Prince*.[10]

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6   Viroli 2010, p. 61.

7   Viroli 2010, p. 2.

8   These aspects are treated at length by Machiavelli in D 1.11–15 as well as throughout D III; see also the advice given in P 18.

9   Quotations from Machiavelli 1996, unless otherwise noted.

10   In what follows I shall employ the following translation of *The Prince*: Machiavelli 2005. For the original, I employ Inglese's edition: Machiavelli 1995.

My hypothesis is that the God one finds therein is not to be found in the 'republican Christianity' reconstructed by Viroli, but rather in the Arabic and Jewish politico-philosophical reflections on prophets and revealed religion which Viroli omits. It is not within the *respublica Christiana*, characterised by the running 'quarrel between two different sets of people – the lay officials and the clerical, the bishops and the justices, the pope and the kings – over control of one and the same society',[11] that Machiavelli could find inspiration for his own dreams of a national State that would stand independent from the Roman Catholic Church. Much more promising was the fertile terrain of medieval Arabic and Jewish political thought concerned with the question of what kind of Church-less 'republic' God wishes to establish through his philosophers-prophets-kings.[12]

In this article I propose an indirect demonstration of this hypothesis: instead of showing that Machiavelli was influenced by these alternative, non-Christian ways of understanding the role of God in political affairs, I will assume that he was familiar with some medieval Arabic and Jewish thought, about which he could have learned from a variety of sources available to him, and show how that assumption enables the solving of two puzzles which have haunted Machiavellian scholarship. The first concerns his appeal to divine providence in order to prop the ambitions of the 'new prince' in the last chapter of *The Prince*. This reference seems to sound a discordant note with the 'irreligious' theses advanced in the rest of the book, and has led commentators since Croce and Gramsci to think that Machiavelli either added this part as a purely rhetorical afterthought, or he committed a 'sacrifice of the intellect' and took an irrational 'leap of faith' in order to jump over the shadow of his own pessimism.[13] The second puzzle is posed by Machiavelli's repeatedly claiming that if one wishes to create or maintain 'a republic in corrupt cities', then 'it would be necessary to turn it more toward a kingly State than toward a popular one' (D 1.18), despite his adoption, throughout most of his writings, of a staunchly pro–popular government stance.[14] I suggest that it is possible to give a republican reading of Machiavelli's late appeals to divine providence and 'monarchic' turn, if one reads them in their appropriate, non-Christian theologico-political context.

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11   Figgis 1911, pp. 63–88.

12   The crucial study of this theme is found in Melamed 2003.

13   See Gilbert 1965; and Sasso 1993 among many others.

14   For Machiavelli's 'populist turn' see Rahe 2008, chapter 1; and now McCormick 2011.

1   The 'Providential Logic' in Chapter 26 of *The Prince*

Any serious interpretation of chapter 26 must begin from Mario Martelli's 1982 essay 'La logica provvidenzialistica e il capitolo 26 del *Principe*', in which he argues that in the last chapter of *The Prince* Machiavelli breaks with his preceding naturalism as much as with his preceding republicanism.[15] According to Martelli, Machiavelli breaks with his naturalism because the 'providential logic' of the *Exhortation* of chapter 26 can no longer be understood within a Polybian logic of natural cycles of political forms (D I.2) or a naturalistic conception of historical necessity. In chapter 26 Machiavelli no longer speaks about politics from the plane of the natural history of mankind, but rather from the plane of its sacred history, more particularly, from what appears to be a politico-theological understanding of sacred history: 'Beyond this, see here the extraordinary things, without precedent, conducted by God: the sea has opened; a cloud has shown you the way, the stone has poured forth water; here the manna has rained down' (P 26). Likewise, Martelli argues, in chapter 26 Machiavelli also breaks with his previous republican convictions, because he finally comes to see that only a civil prince who is willing to abandon his civic status as citizen, in order to take on an absolute status, can hope to accomplish the new mission with God's favour or grace, namely, the unification of Italy under an absolute ruler who will put an end to the Church's and the pope's secular power as it had existed for centuries in Italy.

The figure of Savonarola plays a particularly important role in Martelli's interpretation. The idea that it would require an absolute rather than a civil prince to unify Italy and put an end to the worldly power of the Catholic Church had already been prefigured in Savonarola's preaching. He had argued that Florence (not Rome!) was the new Jerusalem, the Kingdom of God on earth, having as its head a 'Christ King' (*Cristo re*), and that Savonarola was his prophet. Martelli claims that Machiavelli was actually an admirer of Savonarola's politico-theological project, and that by placing Savonarola in the company of Moses, Cyrus, Theseus, and Romulus in chapter 6 of *The Prince* he was praising the Dominican friar, not making him the object of condescending irony.[16]

I agree with Martelli's suggestion that chapter 6 on armed prophets and chapter 26 on divine providence should be read together, and that these chapters lend an eschatological orientation to Machiavelli's political thought which has been obfuscated by those interpreters who, on the basis of the devastating critiques he directs against Roman Catholicism and its political form (D I.12,

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15   Martelli 1982, pp. 262–384.

16   Martelli 2009, pp. 241–6, 277. For the opposite view, see Colish 1999.

and II.2), too quickly leap to the conclusion that for Machiavelli God could only play a mystificatory role in politics. On the other hand, I disagree with Martelli's understanding of the providential logic because his interpretation reflects a prevailing prejudice according to which Machiavelli must have been referring to a *Christian* idea of providence. I think that the opposition Machiavelli draws in chapter 6 between the 'armed prophet' – represented by Moses – and the 'unarmed prophet' – represented by Savonarola – is clearly based on a distinction between the Jewish and the Christian conceptions of divine providence. If so, Machiavelli's treatment of providence in chapter 26 of *The Prince* should also be read in light of a Jewish rather than a Christian political theology.[17]

A fundamental conduit for these ideas would have been the reception of Moses Maimonides's *Guide of the Perplexed* in the culture of the Italian Renaissance, as well as the work of Yohannan Alemanno and Isaac Abravanel. In the *Guide*, Maimonides explains the double nature of God, who is composed of an essence that remains unknowable to human beings, and of an existence that consists in thirteen divine attributes of his glory. These attributes are all ethico-political in character. They are therefore the object of human imitation and they ground the possibility that the ethico-political actions of human beings may fashion them into a likeness of God, and thus make them 'saintly'.[18] Maimonides distinguishes between the pagan conception of religious-political laws (*nomoi*) and the Jewish conception of divinely revealed law (*shari'a*).[19] His awareness of a distinction between civil religion and political theology speaks in favour of seeing the same distinction also at play in Machiavelli's text. Seen from the politico-theological perspective, Maimonides argues that in Moses's prophecy God reveals himself as having divine attributes that are at the same time ethico-political attributes. This would mean that the only legitimate science or knowledge of God, that is, the only legitimate theology, would take the form of political science. With Maimonides, then, one has an example of a political theology (in distinction to a civil religion) which does not set the

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17   In this article I cannot deal with the question of the possible 'sources' that Machiavelli could have used in order to develop his interpretation of Jewish conceptions of divine providence. The reception of Jewish and Arabic political thought in Medicean and Savonarolan Florence remains an area of study that could receive more attention from Machiavelli scholars and specialists of Florentine political thought. For interesting indications I refer to the work of Moshe Idel, Fabrizio Lelli, and Brian Copenhaver among others.

18   On Maimonides and the doctrine of *imitatio Dei*, see the sober treatment in Melamed 2003, pp. 26–48. On the reception of Maimonides and Arabic medieval thought in the late medieval period and early Renaissance, see now Syros 2012.

19   See the excellent discussion found in Stroumsa 2009, pp. 79–102.

authority of the priesthood (of the Church) above the authority of the people and their representatives as happens in the *respublica Christiana*. On this reading, Maimonides makes it possible to unify politics and theology in a way that is entirely different from the unification proposed by Catholic theological and political thought since Augustine, while avoiding the crude Latin Averroist idea of religion as a noble fraud.

What is the difference between Jewish and Christian ideas of divine providence? As Agamben has recently argued, the Christian conception of divine providence is characterised by its 'economical' logic tied to the idea of divine 'dispensations' or 'mysteries'.[20] Christian providence depends on postulating a divine order in which history has a place that is neither the beginning nor the end of the divine calendar of human redemption. Because God has, from all times (*nunc stans*), established the calendar of salvation (at whose centre stands the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ), it follows that nothing can be done to accelerate the return of the Messiah. From a Christian standpoint, the Messiah will not return *in* history, but only when history itself is at an *end*. On the basis of this divine *oikonomía* or *dispensatio*, the Roman Catholic Church is the only legitimate representative of God on earth, precisely because it is that power which symbolises or stands for the non-arrival of the *éschaton* in history.

Karl Löwith has shown that with Joachim of Fiore, a twelfth-century Cistercian monk, the dispensational conception of Christian providence begins its process of 'secularisation' in order to end up as the idea that there exists a divine order *in* history rather than a divine order *of* history. In the former account, God's existence is seen in history, whereas in the latter account, history is characterised by the absence of God and this absence indicates that history itself will eventually come to an end.[21] By unfolding the dispensations of the Trinity into three ages (the age of the Father, of the Son, and – after 1260 according to Joachim's prophecy – the age of the Holy Spirit), Joachim of Fiore introduces the idea that God realises his plan *in and through* history, and this belief eventually reconnects with a Promethean vein of modernity as the age of human self-assertion, which leads to the idea of progress as the secular history of human self-redemption.[22]

The important point for my argument is that in this Christian, economical conception of providence, the prophet can *only* be unarmed. In a strict, pre-Joachine Christian conception of history, there are no more prophets after

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20   Agamben 2011.

21   Löwith 1957.

22   This metanarrative is the object of Voegelin 1952.

Christ's resurrection because God's plan simply is not to be known through a reading of history. After Joachim of Fiore's claim that history may reveal God's plan, prophets again become possible. But these new prophets must remain 'unarmed' because it is *history itself* that will bring salvation 'behind the backs' of political actors: the unarmed prophet is merely an interpreter of history; he is not a maker of history; he cannot accelerate the coming of the Messiah.

When in chapter 6 of *The Prince* Machiavelli refers to Savonarola as an 'unarmed prophet' he is identifying the essential contradiction in post-Joachine Christian providential logic, namely, the contradiction between believing that God's plan will be realised *in* history, and at the same time believing that human beings *cannot make their own history*. This tension is found in Savonarola's preaching when he acts as a prophet who proclaims for Florence the goal of becoming a biblical 'nation of saints', with Christ as its 'captain',[23] and yet remains faithful to Thomas Aquinas and is incapable of grasping tyrannical power in order to realise this goal, because he stands under the Christian prohibition on accelerating the coming of the Messiah.

In his *Trattato sul governo di Firenze* Savonarola argues for a republican form of government, rather than a monarchic one, entirely on the basis of politico-theological reasoning. Like Thomas Aquinas, Savonarola believes that monarchy is the best form of government, but that it is not always and under all conditions realisable.[24] In a people 'which is inclined to discord [...] the prince would find it necessary to become a tyrant should he wish to secure and stabilize himself'; and tyranny is the worst form of government, something to be avoided at all costs.[25] Thus Savonarola concludes that in the case of Florence the best regime is the civil one, and not a monarchy. But Savonarola's reasoning falls prey to the temptation of establishing the true form of government, that is, monarchy, in Florence under the form of a theocracy (following Josephus's understanding of the Mosaic constitution as a theocracy), since Messiah or Christ means 'the anointed one', the 'king'. The problem is that a Florentine theocracy would mean that the Kingdom of God has already been realised on earth, and that would mean history is at an end. Had Savonarola accelerated the end of history, he would have unmasked himself as the Antichrist, thus putting himself on the stake even before his enemies placed him there.[26]

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23   Savonarola, *Prediche italiane* (27 December 1494), cited in Brown 1992, p. 266.

24   Savonarola 1999, I.1–2.

25   Savonarola 1999, I.2.

26   On these motifs, and in particular on the reasons why Ficino thought Savonarola was the Antichrist, see now Ludueña Romandini 2006.

When in chapter 6 of *The Prince* Machiavelli opposes the figure of an 'armed prophet', who is favoured by God only with the right 'occasion' to display his absolute *virtù* or absolute power to shape a State out of nothing, to Savonarola, he is breaking with Christian economical providence. Instead he joins together a Jewish understanding of divine providence (an understanding for which, ironically, Savonarola's preaching had amply prepared the terrain) with a neo-Roman vocabulary of *virtus* as locked in struggle against *fortuna*, which Machiavelli had himself rediscovered from his frequentation of Roman historiography.[27]

From this thesis, there follow two important corollaries. First, Machiavelli's conception of history does not fall under Löwith's and Voegelin's thesis of secularisation of Christian *Heilsgeschichte*, and, indeed, any attempt to read Machiavelli within the paradigm of 'secularisation' is doomed to fail.[28] But, and this is equally important, Machiavelli's undoubted sympathy for certain aspects of the cosmology of ancient paganism and its belief in the 'eternity of the world' and the 'natural cycles' of history, as shown by his evident borrowings from Lucretius, cannot be simply set in abstract opposition to a politico-theological understanding of history and divine providence coming from an Arabic and Jewish understanding of their relation.[29] Alfarabi, Averroes, and Maimonides tried to harmonise the Aristotelian scientific demonstration of the eternity of the world with the prophetic revelation of a God that transcended the world: I see no reason why Machiavelli should be denied this attempt, especially if it is needed for his political science. It is by holding together both horns of the dilemma through a recovery of the Jewish doctrine of providence that Machiavelli's *The Prince* achieves a new way of understanding the relation between order and history which breaks both with Augustine's 'linear' idea of providence (premised on the belief that Jesus is the Messiah) and with the old 'circles' of pagan thinking about history.

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27 As Nederman 1999, p. 621, observes: 'Machiavelli's writings – most especially that supposedly irreligious tract, *The Prince* – embrace the medieval theological doctrine that the human will is able to defeat external circumstance and to triumph over adversity when it accepts and cooperates with God's grace'.

28 This also makes problematic the interpretation of Machiavelli offered within the grand narratives found in Milbank 2006; and Taylor 2007.

29 On Machiavelli and Lucretius see the opposing interpretations found in Rahe 2007, pp. 30–55; and Del Lucchese 2011; on Machiavelli and eternity of the world, see Sasso 1987. On Epicureanism as source of critique of Jewish religion, see Strauss 1997.

2   Military Order and Divine Providence: From Moses to Cicero and Augustine and Back

According to the Jewish conception of providence, God is present in history as the military leader of his Chosen People, leading them in their wars against other nations to regain their 'promised land' – which is a land on earth and not in a supernatural beyond.[30] Both Savonarola and Machiavelli have this kind of a God in mind, rather than the God of Christendom who is present in history only in his church and who enjoins 'idleness' and passivity in the face of injustice (D II.2). Savonarola asks us to

> consider the order of the universe which provides a leader for every genus […] the army is not well ordered without a captain. […] Likewise the city is not ordered if it is not reduced to the highest magistrate. You, Florence, have Christ as its King, who God wanted to show to be King and to rule from the beginning of his birth […] and that is why he wanted that Christ be born in an age when all the world was under the rule of a prince, Octavius, so as to show the whole world that it had to obey.[31]

In this complex passage, Savonarola mixes together an understanding of Christ as the Messiah in the Hebrew sense of the term, and the Jewish idea of God as the commander of his people constituted as an army, with the politico-theological arguments used by Eusebius to justify Constantine's Christian empire. Only recently, thanks to the debates of the 1920s and 1930s over the meaning of Christian political theology between Carl Schmitt and Erik Peterson, has the incompatibility between these different ideas of the Messiah become evident.[32]

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30   On Jewish providence see the fundamental work by Buber 1964, pp. 489–649. One needs to consider with particular care the interpretation of God in Moses and Joshua as *melekh*, commander of the army: 'ᴊʜᴡʜ is […] He who accompanies His people (*Exodus* 33:16; *Deutoronomy* 20:4; 31:6), He who leads His people (*Exodus* 13:21; *Numbers* 14:14; *Deutoronomy* 1:30–3), the commander, the *melekh*' (618). Joshua was a figure often invoked by Savonarola. The key to Buber's interpretation is the distinction he draws between *melekh* ('commander') and 'king': this allows him to explain why the Mosaic constitution is a theocracy, and not a monarchy. This distinction may also shed light on the crucial tension between the halakhic obligation for God's Chosen People to have a 'commander' and their later wish to have a 'king' (like other nations): the two are clearly distinct, for the role of the commander can be taken up by more than one person, depending upon circumstances (as taught by the doctrine of the Three Crowns).

31   Savonarola 1898 (*Salmi* 11 October 1495), my translation.

32   On Eusebius and the end of Christian 'political theology' see Peterson 2011.

One of the first scholars to make use of these insights in order to reinterpret the Mosaic constitution was Martin Buber, who applied it in his reconstruction of archaic Jewish conceptions of divine kingship.

According to Buber, the figure of the armed prophet (Moses) and the figure of the army commander were originally the same. This is a particularly crucial point because it allows me to point out with precision the second place where I depart from Martelli's reading of chapter 26. Martelli argues that Machiavelli's excursus in chapter 26 on the need for the prince to organise a popular militia that can withstand the Spanish and Swiss infantry must have been written earlier than the rest of the chapter because it expresses a 'republican' State of mind in which Machiavelli is still only concerned with stabilising a city's regime against foreign invaders, but does not yet have in mind the divine, redemptive mission to liberate and unify Italy which he voices in the rest of chapter 26.[33] Martelli's audacious interpretation is plausible only if one assumes that Machiavelli is referring to a Christian understanding of divine providence. Only on such an understanding would it make sense to oppose the order of the *ecclesia militans* intended to maintain the mystery of the economy of divine providence to the organisation of a people's army strong enough to repel any monarchy or empire. By separating the parts dedicated to the divinely anointed prince from the parts dedicated to a republican militia in chapter 26, Martelli assumes that God's grace is so powerful that it could relieve the divinely anointed king and his messianic task from the burden of organising and leading into war a people's army in order to accomplish his revolutionary goals. But Machiavelli's text does not warrant such a reading of divine grace: 'God does not want to do all things, so as not to take away our free will or any part of that glory that belongs to us' (P 26). Indeed, Martelli's assumption disregards the fact that all discourses on divine providence – including the early Christian one – rely on the analogy between a people and an army with a leader. As Peterson explains in his treatise on political theology, this analogy originally derives from the image through which Aristotle's (and neo-Aristotelian) theology illustrates the proper relation between God and the cosmos. Divine providence, understood politico-theologically, is a discourse that contains a theory of how people ought to go to war. The question is to see which variant of this theory Machiavelli appropriates and which he rejects.

In Augustine's early treatise on divine providence, entitled *On Order*, one reads:

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33   The passage that begins: 'If your illustrious house wishes to follow these excellent men who redeemed their provinces, it is necessary, before all other things, as the true foundation of every undertaking, that you provide yourself with your own arms' (P 26).

> What else do friends strive for, but to be one? [...] A people is a city for whom dissension is a danger. What else is to dissent [*dissentire*] but not to think alike [*non unum sentire*]? An army is made of many soldiers. And is not any multitude so much the less easily defeated in proportion as it is the more closely united [*coit*]? In fact, the joining [*coito*] is itself called a *cuneus* [troops in wedge formation], a co-union, as it were [*quasi couneus*]. And what about every kind of love? Does it not wish to become one with what it is loving?[34]

Augustine is reinterpreting the Aristotelian image of God leading the world as a military commander leads his troops in light of the original, archaic Roman conception of the *populus* as a military grouping of individuals. Just as in a well-ordered army, dissent is excluded in order to group a multitude into the formation of a *cuneus*, a military wedge-formation or united front which breaks open the opposing hordes, so should the Christian assembly of the people or *ecclesia* be grouped without dissent if it is going to become an *ecclesia militans*, ready to fight off sin and unbelief.

As Augustine reiterates later, in the *City of God*: 'a people is a community of a rational multitude which is associated by a communal concord of the things it loves'.[35] By claiming that love (charity), not law, unifies a people Augustine modifies Cicero's definition of the *populus* given in *De re publica* I.39 as a function of a *iuris consensus*, an agreement between people with respect to the law.[36] This modification is necessary in order to bring Cicero and Roman republicanism in line with Christianity. Viroli identifies charity and love of country in his reconstruction of 'republican Christianity' on the basis of this Augustinian conception of the well-ordered people. But, as is well known, Augustine's theory of love is characterised precisely by the order of the objects that are to be loved: first, one is to love God; second, the neighbour and the world.[37] On Christian grounds justice becomes impossible and thus also the

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34   I owe this citation from Augustine *On Order*, 2.18.48 to the excellent article by von Heyking 1999, pp. 562–64, with whose interpretation I agree for the most part.

35   *City of God*, 19.24.

36   I have discussed the significance of this distinction between Augustine and Cicero with respect to contemporary republicanism and populism in Vatter 2012. I have since become aware of the brilliant reading of *De re publica* 1.39 in medieval thought in Kempshall 2001, pp. 99–135, whose results, I believe, do not invalidate my own reading.

37   On the idea of *ordo amoris* in Augustine see Gregory 2008. Savonarola picks up this idea several times, for instance in *Predica sopra Aggeo* (in Savonarola 1965): 'l'amore di Dio sempre tende alle cose superiori e l'amor propio alle inferiori' (III, 127); and in *Predica sopra Aggeo* XIII: 'E chi ha l'amore suo retto e non distorto, amerà sempre più el ben

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republic, the true civil life, if one inverts this order, and loves the world more than God (or 'one's country more than one's soul' as Machiavelli says).[38] Thus, it is misleading for Viroli to interpret the late medieval discourse on the compatibility of Christian charity and love of country (understood as pursuit of the common good or justice)[39] as if this were a subversion of Augustine's opposition between the City of God and the city of man. These pages of Augustine on divine providence are the first moment of so-called republican Christianity, but such a synthesis is achieved at the cost of eliminating the very idea that conflict between social orders can bring about true equality under law.[40] Machiavelli can be turned into a representative of this 'tradition' of political Augustinianism only if one disregards entirely his account of the productivity of social conflict for the attainment of equal law and freedom.

One of the fundamental theses of *The Prince* is that, given the permanent dissension between people and nobles he posits in chapter 9, a civil prince should always side with the former, and proceed to arm them so as not to have to rely on mercenary armies, as he discusses in chapters 12 and 13. When Machiavelli speaks in *Discourses* 1.18 about the need for an 'absolute' commander who has to comport himself in a manner that is 'nearly regal' (*quasi regia*), he does not mean to advocate the establishment of a kingdom and the abandonment of the civil principality, as Martelli believes. Instead, Machiavelli is referring to the 'nearly regal' quality of Moses's theocratic regime according to which Moses cannot become king because God is already in command of an armed people and, for the same reason, Moses cannot permit any monarch to have absolute power over his people. The conjunction of theocracy and popular government in the Hebrew Republic prior to the period of the kings was already prefigured by Savonarola: 'Your regime, Florence, is similar to that of the Judges of the Israelites. [...] And I also want to say that this regime and government of the Hebrews, although it was democratic (*populare*), because

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commune ch'el proprio, come fa l'amore delle creature, insito da Dio in quelle, d'amare più la sua cause e l'universale che sè proprio. E se tun non fai questo, credi che l'amore tuo non è retto né *ordinato amore*' (XIII, 233, emphasis added). Savonarola has a clear notion of the *ordo amoris*: first the love for God, and only secondarily love for country: 'rettificate, dico, l'amor vostro in Dio, che è sommo bene, e non distorcete l'amor vostro in cose vane. Fatelo, prima, per onore di Dio; secondo, per non guastare l'ordine, che vuole che amiate più Dio che voi e piu el ben commune ch'el proprio. [...] L'ordine bono della città ancora darà a voi questo: che sarete amati da ciascuno' (XIII,223).

38   Letter of 16 April 1527. See now the extensive discussion of this saying in Viroli 2010.

39   See the examples given in Viroli 2012, chapter I *passim*.

40   For an overview of the debate on Machiavelli's theory of social conflict, see Geuna 2005, pp. 19–57, and Del Lucchese, 2011.

the people held power and the judge did not command but counseled, it could also be called a kingly government (*governo regale*) – because it depended on the mouth of one, that is, of God, because God was he who ruled over them, because the mouth of the judge and of the prophet was counselled by God as to what they had to do'.[41] There is no tension or contradiction in chapter 26 between Machiavelli's 'old' republican view of a people's army and his supposed 'new' turn towards monarchy: the figure of the armed prophet, just like the figure of the absolute 'civil' prince, is in fact completely consistent with a militant 'Hebraizing' republicanism.

3 The Messianic Moment in Machiavelli's Republicanism

The Mosaic theocratic regime changed once God's Chosen People decided to give itself a king like other nations which had their human kings, as recounted in 1 Samuel 8. In so doing, Mosaic theo-democracy comes to an end.[42] Machiavelli registers this constitutional change in the tension between chapter 6 and chapter 26, between the 'armed prophet' and the 'new prince', who invents 'new laws and the new orders' (P 26). This tension arises because Machiavelli does not believe that another Moses is possible in his age. Human kings already exist and have led their invading armies into Italy. Furthermore, unlike the 'enslaved and oppressed' Hebrews that Moses rescued from Egypt, the Italian people is no longer purely passive matter on which a form can simply be imposed by the will of their leader (chapter 6), because 'here there is great virtue in the limbs, provided she does not lack leaders' (P 26).

Thus, the concept of the civil or new prince that Machiavelli constructs throughout *The Prince* needs to be understood in line with the figure of Moses, but as not identical to the 'armed prophet': the new prince is the prince of redemption, something Moses never pretended to be. Of this 'redeemer' Machiavelli cannot 'express with what love he would be received in all those provinces that have suffered from these foreign floods; with what thirst for revenge, with what obstinate faith, with what piety, with what tears. What gates would be closed to him? What peoples would deny him homage? What envy would oppose him?' (P 26). Such a redemptive prince is no longer modelled after Moses (who did have to deal with the 'envy' of his people) but appeals to another crucial figure of Jewish political theology, which is in a sense the counterpart of

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41   Savonarola, *Ruth e Micae*, 18 May 1496, pp. 106–8.

42   On the importance of this transitional moment for early modern political thought, see now Nelson 2011.

Moses. This is the figure of the Messiah, who represents a rejection of human sovereigns and a 'return to beginnings', namely, to the beginning of God's Kingdom on earth, the divine democracy or republic.[43] Jewish messianism had been thematised already by Maimonides in a realistic political sense, and through the Kabbalah it was beginning to spread throughout the Jewish communities outside of Spain and Portugal, and in that way also reached Florence through Pico's and Ficino's interest in the Kabbalah.[44] It is not implausible that Machiavelli would have heard of it and the crucial tension in the Kabbalah between the messianic order and the Mosaic order.[45] With the Jewish conception of the messianic age, it is possible to think a 'return to beginnings' that coincides, in the messianic moment, with a (certain) 'end' of linear history. Indeed, one of the main differences between the Jewish and the Christian conceptions of the Messiah is that in the Christian tradition the Messiah came only once on earth, and gave history its linear form, and will return only one time again, in order to end history. According to some views found in the Jewish tradition, however, the Messiah can return an infinite number of times; unlike the Christian tradition, it need not exclude the cosmology of the eternal return associated with pagan philosophy.[46]

The messianic dimension of Machiavelli's discussion of divine providence, especially in chapter 26, has to do with the relation between divine grace, pop-

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43   The 'return to beginnings' is a formula that one finds in both Savonarola and Machiavelli and reflects the need to reform both religion and politics. For a detailed analysis of the 'return to beginnings' see Vatter 2000; on the use of the term in Savonarola, see Viroli 2012, pp. 73–88. But Viroli claims that the 'idea of *renovatio* that Machiavelli defends and sets forth as a religious and political ideal is the same as that found in the Christian tradition: it means return to the true form' (Viroli 2012, p. 87). As I show in the previously cited book, this is not entirely correct.

44   Melamed 1983, pp. 401–13, argues for a later conjunction of Machiavellism with messianism in Renaissance Jewish political thought: 'Luzzatto interprets Jewish history according to Machiavellian lines. According to the organic theory of the state, the Jews, like any other people, follow an unavoidable historical cycle of birth, rise and decline. However, the decline could be the starting point for their renewal. So, Luzzatto gives the Messianic idea a Machiavellian meaning' (Melamed 1983, p. 410). By the same token, for this Jewish messianic application of Machiavelli to work, it must have been clear to the Jewish readers of Machiavelli that his political thought was compatible with, and possibly contained, messianic strains.

45   On the opposition between Moses and the Messiah, see the studies on Jewish messianism in Scholem 1971.

46   On this point, I refer to Strauss 1963. On the sense in which Jewish messianism thinks about the 'end of history' see also Agamben 2005.

ular matter, and form of regime.[47] Machiavelli breaks with the model of the armed prophet in one crucial sense: for him it is no longer true that the Italian people is completely 'enslaved' as the Hebrews were when Moses came to lead them out of Egypt. It is true that in chapter 26, rhetorically, he paints an Italy in chains. But in reality the Italian people were not a people with a slave mentality. After all, the Roman Republic had existed (and Florentine historians since Bruni had tried to resurrect its memory), there had been a strong history of free city-States, and the Florentine and Venetian Republics still existed; in short, there was that 'memory' of past freedom that cannot be forgotten, as he says in chapter 5 of *The Prince*. As in his *Discourses on Livy*, the people are not a matter without form: they are a headless body (or multitude) whose vitality is seeking for a leader, a head.[48]

The fundamental question is: what kind of a head (*capo, capitano*) is needed for a headless body that desires freedom? This head can no longer be a Moses because the people are not a lifeless material, passively waiting for a form to be imposed on it from outside. Rather, this captain must be a messianic figure, because according to Jewish tradition, the Messiah is the last king of a people who is free and self-organised into an army. The Machiavellian Messiah is this paradoxical figure of a leader who 'heads' a headless body that desires not to be ruled. The messianic 'end' of time in Machiavelli must take a temporal shape that is compatible with the eternity of the world, and at the same time it must be a temporal shape that permits a revolutionary break in the continuum of history. My hypothesis is that in Florentine political thought at the time of Machiavelli, this messianic problematic of the 'end' of time takes the form of a 'return to beginnings', a return to the 'first nature', mentioned by Savonarola as much as by Ficino and Pico, but which only in Machiavelli comes to refer to a radical equality of all with all in a 'state of nature' where human beings are 'naked' (to use the expression of the Ciompi rebel), shorn of the acquired habits of inequality made possible by the division between rich and poor. Thus, in the end, there is after all a way in which a certain naturalism and a certain

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47   The nexus between divine grace, popular matter, and form of regime is central to Savonarola's *Predica sopra Aggeo*: 'L'esemplo tu lo hai nel Salvatore [messia] nostro, el quale ha fondato el regno suo nella grazia; vedi quanto ei fu potente da principio […] vinsono la potenzia del mondo colla debolezza, la ricchezza con la povertà, la sapienzia del mondo colla stultizia della croce. Or vedi che vale più la forza dello spirito e dell'esser spirituale che nessuna altra cosa. Vedi ancora e leggi tutte le istorie antiche, che gli uomini, quanti più erano in grazia, tanto più ottenevano e vincevano. Guardo Moisè, guarda Iosuè' (XIII, 217). Here Savonarola appeals to a decidedly messianic reading of Pauline motifs.

48   On the materialism and vitalism of Italian philosophical and political thought since Machiavelli, see now Esposito 2012.

return to beginnings do match with Machiavelli's providential logic of chapter 26: not with divine providence as represented by the grace of Moses, but rather with divine providence as read from a messianic point of view.

If in Machiavelli the Jewish and the Roman understandings of politics are never entirely separate, then to the messianic function of the new prince there must also correspond an analogous antimonarchic and redemptive aspect in the history of Roman republican thought.[49] This aspect corresponds to the Roman expulsion of the kings at the hands of Brutus[50] together with the positive role assigned to the struggle between the plebs and patricians for Roman liberty.[51] Patricians or *patres* were the heads of clans; they had exclusive access to *auctoritas* and occupied all religious functions during the monarchy. In this sense, they were the ones who created the Roman 'civil religion' and, according to Machiavelli, they used this religion for their own advantage in order to keep the plebs working for the army of the *populus* and for the senatorial class (D 1.11–13).[52] Together with the so-called *conscripti*, who were part of the Senate but lacked the authority of the *patres*, and their clients, they formed the *populus* as it is originally understood, that is, as the army of the king. The *populus* exhibited what could be called a 'class' structure, because it was composed of the *classis* which together formed the army, and which elected their commanders and approved the laws put forward by the Senate, through their centuriate assembly. The plebs were not part of these classes, that is, they were not constituted parts of the *populus*. Plebs were *infra classem*, and fell outside of the class division of Roman archaic society.[53]

The fact that the plebs was not an organised class of Roman society provided the decisive condition of possibility for a remarkable event which Machiavelli designates as a 'return to beginnings': namely, when the plebs seceded from the *civitas* and began to organise themselves, they did so by founding a *separate* assembly which stood in opposition during the entire struggle of orders to the assembly of the army. Only in the third century BC, with the equi-

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49 Savonarola also gave his idea of messianic renovation an antimonarchical formulation. See Savonarola 1965: 'Se tu vuoi renovarti, o città nuova, se tu vuoi esser nuova e se tu hai mutato nuovo stato, bisogna che tu muti nuovi modi e nuovo vivere, se tu vuoi durare, e se tu vuoi reggere e ti bisogna fare uno nuovo cantico e ricercarsi che tu abbi nuova forma. La prima cosa che tu debbia fare intra l'altre è questa: che tu facci legge, *che nessuno più per l'avvenire possa farsi capo*, altrimenti tu sarai fondata in su la rena' (Savonarola 1965).

50 It is crucial to see that Savonarola also connected Moses to Brutus; see Brown 1992, pp. 273, 278; and Lynch 2008, pp. 29–54.

51 What follows is based on parts of my article Vatter 2012.

52 On these passages, see Najemy 1999, pp. 659–81.

53 Momigliano 1984, pp. 368–77, and 1989, pp. 209–39.

paration of plebiscites and laws, did the plebs become 'integrated' into the Roman people. The important point here is that precisely this 'separation' of powers (between plebeian and centuriate assemblies, tribunes and senators, the religions of Liber and Jupiter), conditioned by the fact that the plebs were *not* part of the army of the fathers, were not the *populus*, gave the plebeian opposition to the authority of the Fathers a *political or constitutional* form, rather than the form of civil war. The plebs could not have fought and won a civil war, because they lacked weapons and an army of their own: in the early phases of the Republic, the plebs were allowed to fight in the Roman army only in times of 'national emergency', and it was precisely during one of those crises that they seceded to the Aventine and went on a 'general strike', refusing to join the Fathers in the defence of Rome until these agreed to recognise their equality 'under' law (which means: their equal capacity to make law).

The upshot of this interpretation of Roman plebeian politics is that the plebs literally invented the separation of powers not as a way to unite the State, to integrate themselves into a people as parts of an organic whole, but in a struggle of resistance against the legal and religious domination exerted by the *populus*. The plebs constituted law starting from dissensus to the *auctoritas* of the Fathers embodied in the Roman civil religion. I have argued elsewhere at length that by instituting their own assembly in opposition to the Senate, by developing a new form of power (the power to veto all commands, *imperium* of government), and lastly by founding a counter-religion of their own (centred around the temple of Ceres dedicated to the cult of Dionysus) in opposition to the patrician temple of Jupiter, the Roman plebs, on Machiavelli's interpretation, made it possible to establish a republican constitution which stood over and beyond the claim to rule of any organised social group or person. None of this would have been possible had the plebs not broken the hegemony of civil religion through the kind of 'messianic' conception of an acephalic political body I have described above. For Machiavelli, only this plebeian eschatology made it possible to conceive of the idea of a republican constitution as something that lies beyond the control of government and of those who fill its offices and authority; an idea of constitution that, far from fixing the power of some over others, is continuously dis-ordering the State and allows for its revolution, giving space to the struggles of the parts of society which aim at equality under law.

There is one last feature of Jewish messianism that is important to understand why chapter 26 takes the form of an exhortation. This is the question whether human beings can do things that 'force' or 'accelerate' the arrival of the Messiah. In *The Star of Redemption* Franz Rosenzweig calls this the problem of 'tyrannizing' God. In contrast to more conservative orthodox positions,

Rosenzweig defends the idea that human beings have a role to play in their divine redemption, and this role requires them to bring about a series of social and political revolutions. Thus, Rosenzweig opens the possibility that there exists a 'right time', a *kairós*, in which it is appropriate to 'pray' for the arrival of the Messiah. Machiavelli's exhortation in chapter 26 seems to be just this kind of 'prayer' pronounced at the 'right time'. It is a prayer that will be fulfilled only on condition that the time is right, and the criterion of rightness is whether the new prince will have enough *virtù* to arm his own people. Machiavelli suggests that only by becoming commander of an armed and free people will the Medici prince have made himself in the image of God (as commander of his people) and be deserving of God's favour. Unless the Medici are willing to repent and purify themselves of their sins, of their previous associations with the nobility and the kings of this world, by 'returning to beginnings' (which in Machiavelli recovers the Jewish concept of repentance, *teshuvah*) and embracing the side of the people, then they will not have lived up to the image of God, and as a consequence God will not grace them with the salvation of their State. With his typical sense of irony, Machiavelli closes the book he dedicates to a scion of the Medici family by advocating a messianic perspective which overturns Cosimo de' Medici's saying that 'one does not govern a State by praying nor by reciting "Our Father who art in Heaven"', while at the same time creatively appropriating to his radical republican project Savonarola's own critique of Cosimo's 'arte dello stato'.[54]

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54   See particularly Savonarola 1965, pp. 215–9, XIII.

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PART 4

Radical Democracy beyond Republicanism

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Machiavelli, Public Debt, and the Origins of Political Economy: An Introduction

Jérémie Barthas

No one can approach Machiavelli without having to face a certain number of stereotypes: Machiavelli as the incarnation of evil in politics; a plagiariser, an incoherent and opportunistic author; an inaccurate historian, a poor interpreter of his time and a superficial expert in the art of politics, because he lacked adequate analytical tools for understanding the deep functioning of social organisation. These stereotypes, which began to form almost five centuries ago, have been refashioned accordingly through the ages. Today we observe that economic discourse is being used to express and legitimate politics – as if the economic fatality were the supreme law; it comes as no surprise that we find a major emphasis on Machiavelli's supposed lack of any genuine insight into economics.

In 1989, the French historian of ideas Michel Senellart offered a positive revaluation of the early modern doctrine of the *raison d'état*, taking into account the new role devoted to economics. In his short book titled *Machiavélisme et Raison d'État,* he argues: 'Economy appears as an intrinsic component of the Raison d'État before becoming an autonomous discipline in the 18th century. Economy appears instead to be totally absent from the thought of Machiavelli, for whom, in a well constituted republic, the State ought to be rich and the citizens ought to be poor (D 1.37)'.[1] Strikingly, Senellart illustrates his uncompromising judgement with an example suggesting that Machiavelli had a distinct vision of the relationship between public and private wealth. In a note, he adds: 'Here again the comparison with Aristotle is tempting: "Impoverishing the subjects is a method that constitutes tyranny"'.[2] The evidence used to support his radical conclusion therefore has another purpose: to suggest the evil intention of an author who allegedly aspires to leave the people in a state of poverty.

This renewed evaluation of the doctrine of *raison d'état* was based on the lecture *On Governmentality* that Michel Foucault delivered at the Collège de

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* This essay is a condensed version of Barthas 2011b first chapter with added elements from the first appendix. Translated by Eugenio Pizzorno.

1 Senellart 1989, pp. 69–70.

2 Ibid.

France in 1978. It finds itself in agreement with Michael Stolleis' study on *raison d'état* and public finances in the modern age. Furthermore, it is influenced by Carl Schmitt's interpretation of political modernity, and specifically the theories on 'the successive stages of changing central domains' and 'the turning toward economics'.[3] Finally, this revaluation meets the criticism that the German jurist addressed in 1926 to *The Doctrine of Raison d'Etat and Its Place in Modern History* (1924) written by his fellow countryman Friedrich Meinecke.

Meinecke had reduced Machiavelli to Machiavellianism and to *raison d'état*. He depicted the author of *Il Principe* as the progenitor of power politics and, eventually, went as far as charging Machiavelli with responsibility for the Nazi regime: by lifting the veil of secrecy and mystery that had long shrouded the practise of power, Machiavelli had spread a poison, and in liberating this esoteric knowledge, more properly reserved to an aristocracy, he made possible a mass Machiavellianism, whose potential the German Third Reich turned into reality in the most horrible way.[4] In agreement with Meinecke, Carl Schmitt reproached Machiavelli for having reduced politics to a technique, by enervating that element of transcendence and mystery that befits authority in the ecclesial model. However, he suggested separating Machiavelli's modernity from the tradition of *raison d'état*, which is concerned instead with preserving authority. What was at stake then was freeing *raison d'état* from the moral accusation of Machiavellianism, and rediscovering the medieval roots of its 'logical-juridical' aspect, neglected by Meinecke.[5]

Reading Meinecke's book on *The Doctrine of Raison d'État*, which appeared in a French translation in 1973, brought Michel Foucault to a peculiar redefinition of his view of Machiavelli,[6] as if Claude Lefort's major piece of Machiavellian scholarship, published one year earlier, had been neutralised by Meinecke's new translation. Foucault's lesson *On Governmentality* clearly shows this. In his terms, Machiavelli is noteworthy essentially for the counter-discourse that he generated. To *Il Principe*, understood as a treatise on the prince's ability to preserve his own State through the manipulation of power relationships, this counter-discourse opposes the arts of government. As a genre within the history of political literature, the arts of government represent, according to Foucault, the constructive moment of anti-Machiavellian reaction. The genre therefore leads, through the discourse on the *raison d'état*, to the emancipation of political economy as an autonomous discipline. The

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3   Schmitt 1996, pp. 81, 74. See Senellart 1989, p. 88.
4   Meinecke 1950, pp. 51–6.
5   Schmitt 1926.
6   See Senellart 2013.

modern debate on government derives from the classic and medieval typology of the three spheres of government: the individual, the family and the State – corresponding respectively to ethics, economics and politics. Up until the eighteenth century the issue of government is mainly conceived in domestic terms: 'To govern a State will mean, therefore, to apply economy, to set up an economy at the level of the entire State, which means exercising toward its inhabitants, and the wealth and behaviour of each and all, a form of surveillance and control as attentive as that of the head of family over his household and his goods'.[7] Summing up, the characteristic of political action would therefore be reduced to the question of a well-regulated administration. The model of the pastoral and paternalistic authority of the *oikonomique* would then define the knowledge necessary for the government of States.

The core of the representation of the genesis of political economy promoted by Foucault is identified in the following question: How did political economy replace law as the instrument of political rationality? The answer given is that economy does not pose the question of government in terms of foundations, but in terms of goals.[8] In this context, political rationality would have ceased to be a matter of a speculative interest and would have become a practical concern, aiming to respond to Machiavelli's affirmation of the *verità effettuale della cosa*, understood as the acknowledgment and integration of the importance of relationships of force in the analysis of power itself. According to Foucault, 'the relationship of force' would be essentially described by Machiavelli 'as a political technique that had to be put in the hands of the sovereign'.[9] Senellart has summarised what is at stake here: 'The Machiavellian feat was to dissociate politics from ethics. Botero's originality […] was to move the political question from politics to economics'.[10] The relevance of this mutation would be confirmed by the mere existence of a *Traité de l'œconomie politique*. First of the genre, it was published in 1615 by Antoine de Montchrestien. Foucault embraced here three classical theses: the thinkers before Machiavelli, notably the normative jurists, would have looked down on practical issues; the dissociation of the political from both the ethical and the juridical would be what defines the Machiavellian coup; with Botero a new type of analysis would have appeared, namely the economic analysis.

The first thesis was accredited to juridical Humanism in opposition to the glossators and post-glossators, but the 'dismissal of the medieval authors from

7   Foucault 2001, p. 207.

8   Adorno 1997, p. 20.

9   Foucault 2003, p. 164 (18 Feb. 1976).

10   Senellart 1989, p. 86.

modernity (concerning the discourse on Power)' has also been denounced, correctly in all likelihood, as being 'an extraordinary trickery'.[11] The second thesis, also adopted by Meinecke, refers to the anti-Machiavellian literature from the *Discourse against Machiavelli* by the French Huguenot Innocent Gentillet (1576) to the classical work of the late nineteenth-century Italian historian Pasquale Villari. The third thesis, that demands our attention, began to develop mainly when political economy became an academic discipline in need of legitimacy and a proper genealogy. Montchrestien found his place in this genealogy only at a late stage. In the introduction of his *Traité d'économie politique* (1803), Jean-Baptiste Say does not mention him, not even as the possible inventor of a neologism destined to a greater development, namely 'political economy'.[12] But it is noticeable that he readily assigns a place of honour to the author of *Della ragione di Stato*.[13] The relevance assigned to Botero by the French classical liberal has repeatedly stood as a comparison with Machiavelli. This comparison is typically illustrated by two sentences from Machiavelli's *Discourses,* which would be proven wrong both by the facts and the mercantilist doctrine itself. The first sentence states that, in a well-organised government, the State has to be rich and the citizens poor; the second states that, contrary to common opinion, money is not the sinews of war.[14] But, what is the meaning of this Machiavellian doctrine? In vain would we look for an explanation within this tradition of anti-Machiavellian literature.

Instead, the legal historian Michael Stolleis contributed to the history of the reaffirmation of the common adage *Pecunia nervus belli,* referring to seventeenth-century German political literature. He took the adage as the emblem of modern political rationality, and the name of Botero serves him to make the case that 'the formulas *ragion di Stato* and *pecunia nervus rerum* had a parallel diffusion in Europe'.[15] Machiavelli's negation of the sentence appears there as a blind spot. Indeed Stolleis affirms that Machiavelli 'categorically rejects' the sentence; however, he considers this objection as 'vague', and hence not deserving of special attention. There is here at the same time a logical and a chronological inversion: it is not Machiavelli who denies a common adage, but those who repeat, after him, this adage that would 'dismiss' Machiavelli.

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11   Legendre 1974, p. 14.

12   See Barthas 2011a, p. 104.

13   Say 1841, p. 17–9.

14   See Machiavelli 1997–2005, vol. 1, pp. 276–7 (D I.37; translated in Machiavelli 1882, vol. 4, p. 175), and p. 350 (D II.10; translated in Machiavelli 1882, vol. 4, p. 251).

15   Stolleis 1984, pp. 21–3.

Thus, according to Stolleis, the revival of the ancient adage *pecunia nervus rerum* reflects the historical conditions of the appearance of economical analysis. The theory of the *raison d'état* (post- and anti-Machiavellian) would be the ideological superstructure of a 'modern State' structured by the increasing need for money. There are at least three reasons why this adage became a refrain in the early modern age: The mercenary armies, the shipping trade and the consequent maintenance of a navy, had increased the need for money; the development of capitalism, defined as the transition to a monetary economy, had brought about the separation of capital and labour; and finally, the institutional phenomenon of public centralisation and the establishment of an integrated administrative bureaucracy (financial, military) had transformed the approach to public finances. Three elements – military, economic, institutional – therefore render money the sinew and the pivot of the entire debate on the State. As Stolleis would put it, taxation certainly constituted a juridical question well before the end of the sixteenth century for both ecclesiastical and secular authorities; so that one could think that the issue, although in a different terminology, remains the same. However, the question of finances would become central only in the period when the so-called military revolution assured the rise of the western world.[16] Financial policy, a key factor in raising a large-scale and dominant army, would be the main element that allows for the distinguishing of the 'modern State' from the 'medieval State'.

This is a restatement of a paradigm of 'modernity' that might be called 'Weberian' inasmuch as it finds its roots in the concept of a 'modern form of bureaucracy' introduced by Max Weber in his posthumous work *Economy and Society* (1922). It was first developed by Federico Chabod in his book on the State of Milan at the time of Emperor Charles V (1934) and by the German sociologist Norbert Elias in *The Civilizing Process* (1939), and then within the framework of research on the *Formation of National States in Western Europe* conducted by the American sociologist Charles Tilly in the 1970s. Finally, in the two following decades, it informed the French, and eventually European, programs on the *The Origins of the Modern State in Europe (13th–18th Centuries),* supervised by the medieval historian Jean-Philippe Genet.[17] According to him, 'tax is the energy that fuels the war'; 'the war, fuelled by the State's levy' is 'the system's engine' overseeing the formation of the modern State.[18] The volume *Economic Systems and State Finance* (1995) becomes a marker for the sentence *Pecunia nervus belli*, undisputed because in itself evident and undeniable.

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16   Stolleis 1984, p. 31.

17   See Molho 1988, pp. 236–8, and Molho 1995, pp. 98–102.

18   Genet 1990, pp. 265, 262.

To the extent that the construction of the 'modern State' is theorised according to a certain preconceived idea of the relation between the State's power and financial administration, a given amount of needs entails a determined movement of the financial action. To the extent that the State is understood as an economic person, money cannot be anything but the sinews of the State's power. In this picture, Machiavelli can only be taken as a foil. This becomes an epistemological or axiological necessity inasmuch as the author of the *Discourses* is compelled to question precisely this axiology. Indeed, it is not the mercantilist affirmation *pecunia nervus belli* that invalidates Machiavelli, but quite the opposite. It is not because this Machiavellian negation would be contradicted by the facts that a certain historiography banished it, but rather, in all likelihood, because this negation could lead to a different consideration of the facts themselves, and maybe to debunk the constructions of that historiography. As this historiography rests on an axiology in contradiction with Machiavelli's theses, because he is inescapable as a giant in the history of western culture, this historiography casts him at the origin of an intellectual genealogy that allows for the considerable reduction of the significance of his analysis. Within the literature discussed so far, one finds an insistence on the anti-Machiavellian reaction; it reveals nothing to us of a certain number of thinkers, not even the minor ones, who throughout the *ancien régime* willingly and positively picked up Machiavelli's proposition.

Nevertheless, in the work that inaugurated contemporary Machiavellian scholarship, Oreste Tommasini pointed out Machiavelli's intellectual encounter with George Berkeley on this issue.[19] The circumstances that led to this encounter are particularly interesting because nothing would, *a priori,* bring this eighteenth-century Irish philosopher – known for his doctrine of 'immaterialism' and renowned for his conservative and religious spirit – close to the author of *Il Principe*. Berkeley had followed a young Englishman on his tour of Europe as a private tutor, and had been in Italy. Here, they came to read the work of the illustrious Florentine. Returning to Great Britain, Berkeley observed the momentous financial scandal that hit the South Sea Company in 1720, and the consequences of the shattering of the South Sea Bubble: bankruptcy for shareholders, but also economic chaos, growth of the unemployment rate and poverty. This scandal can be summarised as a result of the financial revolution in England: the development of a system of public debt based on a securities market offering important speculation opportunities,

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19   Tommasini 1883–1911, vol. 2, p. 183, note 2.

and the delegation of public debt management to a huge private company that would undertake all foreign trade.[20]

It is within this context that, in *An Essay towards Preventing the Ruin of Great Britain*, Berkeley takes Machiavelli's proposition seriously, and explicitly refers to it:

> Men are apt to measure national prosperity by riches. It would be righter to measure it by the use that is made of them. Where they promote an honest commerce among men, and are motives to industry and virtue, they are, without doubt, of great advantage; but where they are made (as so often happens) an instrument to luxury, they enervate and dispirit the bravest people. So just is that remark of Machiavelli that there is no truth in the common saying, money is the nerves of war; and though we may subsist tolerably for a time among corrupt neighbours, yet if ever we have to do with a hardy, temperate, religious sort of men, we shall find, to our cost, that all our riches are but a poor exchange for that simplicity of manners which we despise in our ancestors. This sole advantage hath been the main support of all republics that have made a figure in the world; and perhaps it might be no ill policy in a kingdom to form itself upon the manners of a republic.[21]

Berkeley understood that the Machiavellian critique of the common saying moved away from the point of view of public spending and cost, to that of society's organisation and specifically of its financial organisation. The Irish philosopher acknowledged that the financial system, that is to say, the imaginary wealth represented by the development of credit schemes and foreign trade on speculative grounds, had come to oppose itself to real development in the agriculture, industry and domestic trade necessary for the prosperity of the Nation. In Berkeley's view, those who had put in place such a financial set-up had operated 'in cool blood, and with open eyes, to ruin their native country'.[22] As it is not illicit to seek the medieval roots of England's financial revolution, it is also legitimate to suppose that Machiavelli had sought ways to defend society from such men. The Florentine does not mince words: he recognises the failure of certain institutional forms, specific historical circumstances having proven their weakness and their danger.

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20   See Dickson 1967.
21   Berkeley 1953, pp. 74–5.
22   Berkeley 1953, p. 80.

Machiavelli's influence on Berkeley was not as deep and systematic as on Jean-Jacques Rousseau. This influence is already visible in the article 'Political economy' published in 1755 in the *Encyclopaedia*. Sixteen years later, in the chapter on 'the economic system' in his *Considerations on the Government of Poland* (1782, posthumous), Rousseau also denies that money is the sinews of war. The truth of Machiavelli's sentence is attested by the fact that 'rich peoples have always been beaten and conquered by poor peoples'. He appeals to a distrust in modern 'financial systems', which create both intriguing and servile 'venal souls', and who make themselves necessary 'in order to keep the people in great dependence'. He suggests, as Machiavelli did, basing 'the military system' on the principle of conscription.[23] In 1789, the rebuttal of the adage *pecunia nervus belli,* one of those 'maxims invented by greed', becomes also an important aspect of the article 'Gouvernement' in the *Encyclopédie méthodique*.[24]

The place of Machiavelli's negation of the adage *pecunia nervus rerum*, in a history of *longue durée* from the Middle Ages to the revolutionary rupture, assures therefore his placement in a *longue durée* history of the category of *Liberality*. In a pioneering research, the French historian Alain Guery pointed out how the Machiavellian critique of liberality, together with that of Erasmus of Rotterdam, taken up by Montaigne and later by Louis de Jaucourt in the *Encyclopaedia*, had a major role in clarifying the difference between a theory of liberality that affirms a principle of generosity and its actual practise. Liberality, toward the few, requires usurpation and fiscal exploitation of the many. This critique, with such a strong social content – inasmuch as it underlines the connection between the poverty of the masses and the generosity of the prince towards a few people – has led to the examining of power from a financial point of view, and to considering the links among expenses, debt and taxation. It is thus a key moment in the long-term development of the 'budgetary' reflection. Furthermore, whilst the praise of liberality had worked in favour of absolutist ideals, its renunciation brought on their rejection.[25] It would be worthwhile then to consider the penetration of this critique of liberality into the debates that followed the abolition of privileges, and to examine the subsequent issue of the treatment of monarchy's liberalities: these were part of the debts inherited by nations in formation; they could not have been erased all together only because of their arbitrary origin, or because of the paradigm shift that happened on the night of the 4 August 1789. This reflection brought with

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23   Rousseau 1999, p. 224 et seq.
24   Lacretelle 1789, p. 306.
25   Guery 1984, pp. 1251–3. See also Barthas 2013.

it a new definition, a properly revolutionary and republican one, of public action in the promotion of the arts and the sciences. Analogous to the critique of liberality, the Machiavellian critique of *pecunia nervus rerum* contributed to the clarification of the distinction between the issue of expense and that of revenue, and between wealth and prosperity. Furthermore, it led to the understanding – despite the importance of laying down healthy financial foundations – that an inadequate preparation is even more dangerous in the event of war. This concerns the whole social organisation and the goals that it sets for itself.

Several aspects of the 'Weberian' paradigm of the modern State have been called into question by important critical readings that seem to point to the general collapse of the program on the genesis of the modern State. In hindsight, it appears that it was configured, within the context of the project for a liberal Europe, as a more or less concealed panegyric of the existing ruling classes, and as a negation of the innovative characteristics of revolutionary change.[26] Suffice to say here that it seems that the conception of the State as unitary, integrated and bureaucratic, actually born in the sixteenth century, will eventually be abandoned. It is not as if the definition has been invalidated. Different aspects should be anticipated, say of the renaissance of Roman law in the twelfth century and of the Gregorian revolution, and other phenomena postponed to the age of revolutions. In this sense, introducing the volume of the *Histoire de la France* dedicated to *La longue durée de l'État*, Jacques Le Goff wrote that he would have 'willingly gathered the French genesis of the State and of the nation in a long middle age, from the year 1000 to 1789', even if this goes 'against the ways of historical periodisation dating the end of the middle ages to the late fifteenth century', because 'the actual rupture […] is the revolutionary eruption'.[27]

Strikingly enough, it was during the commemoration of the bicentenary of the French Revolution – dominated by the will of discarding the revolutionary legacy – that certain aspects of the 'genesis of the modern State' programme were taken up in the history of ideas, by bringing the attention of the French public to Giovanni Botero's *Della Ragione di Stato*, the first edition of which had appeared in 1589. Botero (1544–1617), a defrocked jesuit, wrote his best works when he was at the service of Cardinal Federico Borromeo. He enjoyed great editorial success during his lifetime, but was rather neglected afterwards. In 1989 France, Botero was revived in order to overshadow Machiavelli as the figure ushering in the modern age.

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26   Descimon and Jouhaud 1996, p. 194; and Guery 1999.

27   Le Goff 2000, p. 11.

About sixty years earlier, however, the comparison between Machiavelli and Botero had aroused in Antonio Gramsci a certain perplexity: 'Chabod apparently found that the almost total absence of economic references in the Florentine's works evinced a weakness in comparison to, for example, Botero'. Pondering this statement, the Marxist thinker had formulated the following hypothesis:

> If one can show that Machiavelli's goal was to create links between the city and the country and to broaden the role of the urban classes – to the point of asking them to divest themselves of certain feudal-corporative privileges with respect to the countryside, in order to incorporate the rural classes into the State – one will also be able to show that, in theory, Machiavelli had implicitly gone beyond the mercantilist phase and evinced traits of a 'physiocratic' nature. In other words, Machiavelli was thinking of the political-social milieu presupposed by classical economics.[28]

This hypothesis was the result of Gramsci's interpretation of Machiavelli's political theory as expressing a 'giacobinismo precoce', baring the germs of the upcoming revolutionary project:

> No formation of a national popular will is possible unless the masses of peasant farmers enter *simultaneously* into political life. This was what Machiavelli wanted to happen through the reform of the militia; it is what the Jacobins achieved in the French Revolution. This is what Machiavelli's [precocious] Jacobinism consists of, the fertile germ of his conception of national revolution.[29]

This hypothesis can be explored by evaluating the model of the genesis of the modern State – and Botero's role in it – in light of the history of Renaissance Tuscany. Possibly an isolated or special case at a European level, it is doubtless essential to understand Machiavelli and the meaning of his statements.

Now, it appears from the researches presented in 1993 at the Chicago conference on the *Origins of the State in Italy 1300–1600*,[30] that, in comparison to the beginning of the fifteenth century, the means of action of the Florentine central power were more limited in the mid-sixteenth century, while the fiscal

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28   Gramsci 2007, p. 327 (notebook 8, §162), and Chabod 1967, p. 302.

29   Gramsci 2007, p. 248 (notebook 8, §21).

30   Kirshner (ed.) 1995, or Chittolini, Molho and Schiera (eds) 1994.

structures witnessed a certain stability. Without insisting on the levels of cohesion, centralisation and integration, it is well before the sixteenth century that in the Florentine city-States the mercantile corporations had come to assume State functions and participate consistently in public activities, commercial and non-commercial. These corporations determined decisions in matters of political economy and innovations in public finances, which led to the reinforcement of the prominence of a limited group of entrepreneurs, merchants and bankers that personified the State.[31] The Commune became the client of their financial activities.

From the point of view of Florentine public finance, the consolidation of the public debt around 1350, connected to the opening of a bonds market offering huge speculative opportunities, jump at the historian's eye as a crucial moment of deep changes, both on the level of institutional structures[32] and on the discursive and theoretical one.[33] The consolidation of debts possibly marks the introduction of 'modernity' in the realm of public finances. Nevertheless, if it is still worth discussing the political modernity of the State in early modern times, and if we provisionally acknowledge the validity of the definition of the State as an 'economic person', it may be, even in relativising the technical 'modernity' of certain aspects of the Florentine financial system,[34] that the world observed by Machiavelli was more 'modern' than the one observed by Botero or Montchrestien. For that matter, the latter takes the example of the Italian city-States to the king of France, to show him the risks of exposing society to the 'tricks and inventions of the financial players'.[35]

In *ancien régime* France, for the administrators as well as for the detractors of the financial system, at least up to the physiocrats, a tax was never identified or calculated in relationship to a single economic process, because they never actually thought of taxation in terms of economic analysis.[36] In Florence, however, it is sufficient to read the preamble of the provision of 5 February 1495, regarding the tax on real estate incomes (*decima*), to realise that Florentines defended and justified such-and-such a form of taxation in terms of its supposed impact on economical activity: 'This distribution should be done on immovable property, so that the activities and businesses of the city shall not be

31   See Barbadoro 1929a, pp. 651–4; Molho 1971; pp. 166–82; Jones 1974, p. 1809.

32   See Becker 1968, pp. 151–200; Barducci 1979.

33   See Kirshner 1982, 1983; Armstrong 2003, pp. 53–84.

34   See Einaudi 1931, p. 182.

35   Montchrestien 1999, pp. 260–1.

36   See Descimon and Guery 2000, p. 438.

altered'.[37] Furthermore, after the 1494 revolution, the Florentines have produced a number of studies proposing tax reforms.[38] The dissertation of Francesco Guicciardini on the *decima scalata,* where he outlines the arguments made by both the supporters and the denigrators of a progressive taxation on real estate incomes, clearly displays an articulated vision of economic and financial politics, and the existence of a political economy where the mode of taxation is evaluated against its consequences for the production and circulation of goods.[39] The *Riforma sancta e pretiosa* of Domenico Cecchi, a follower of Savonarola, puts forward a reasonably integrated analysis of a tributary, financial, military and even moral political economy.[40] The same applies to the treatises on change, public debt and dowries of Pandolfo Rucellai.[41]

Over a century and a half ahead of Giovanni Botero, before Machiavelli's rebuttal of the repeatedly wielded adage, the Dominican Bernardin of Siena (1380–1444) would give consideration to the fact 'that taxes and incomes drained constantly money from the poor to the rich, from the growers to their landlords, from the country to the city'.[42] With the consolidation of debt, there has been a development of a debt securities market and a floating debt, based on the concentration of capital in the hands of the few who were capable of advancing great sums of cash to the republic, in return for certain privileges. In his analysis of the Florentine public credit system, Bernardin reached certain results that allowed Julius Kirshner, the historian of the controversies surrounding the *Monte*, to dare the comparison with some results of classical political economy and of its critique.[43] In the fifteenth century, in Florence, the theological and juridical debates concerning public debt had reached such a mature development that in 1470, with the fiscal and financial reforms of Lorenzo il Magnifico, the transition 'from usury to public finance' may be considered accomplished.[44] Botero, for his part, discusses usury and commercial balance in terms that precede the development of such a system of public debt, and he does not seem to really perceive the link between a specific military system and a determined financial organisation. Facing the eventuality of a war, while denouncing the recourse to loans, he sticks to a very general imperative: 'It is therefore necessary that the issue of money be settled, in order

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37   Quoted in Conti 1984, p. 297.

38   See Guidi 1992, vol. 1, p. 74.

39   Guicciardini 1932, pp. 196–217; see Barthas 2006, pp. 71–82.

40   Published in Mazzone 1978, pp. 181–206.

41   Published in Fumagalli 1977, pp. 315–32.

42   Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber 1978, p. 260.

43   Kirshner 1982, p. 592.

44   Kirshner 1970.

to have nothing else to do than to gather the soldiers (*gente*). Otherwise, as we are managing to make money, in the meanwhile the rapidity of the enemies, or the trouble of war, would prevent us from gathering both money and the soldiers (*gente*)'.[45] Which aspects of Botero's economics are modern is still open to discussion, but the novelty of his contribution can no longer be overestimated when it is examined in the light of its concrete experience and of its understanding of the practical knowledge of the administrators of his time.[46]

The fourteenth-century Italian States saw the development of specialised practitioners – such as notaries, jurists or secretaries, often Doctors in Law educated in the Italian law schools – who were experts in taxation and procedural issues. They had skills in administration, finances, public relations and conflict management, and knew how to orchestrate and finalise financial and legislative strategies.[47] By the end of the fifteenth century, Florentine political jargon appeared to be completely developed and a number of intellectual tools already formed the common heritage of Machiavelli's contemporaries. To be sure, Machiavelli has provided us with yet another way of considering reality, in disagreement with those of his contemporaries. However, the government programs that these experts continuously proposed to the councils and the administration are the starting point of his reflection.[48] Because of his functions at the head of the second Chancellery and as secretary of the Ten of War, and in view of the enquiries conducted by the Florentine administration (a partial revision of the 1427 *catasto* was launched in 1494), Machiavelli knew, better than we do today, the size of the empire, its territory, its population, the number and the importance of its cities; he knew the scale of its resources and its revenues. This experience is the backbone of his writings and it pushes him to question the dogmatic presuppositions on which the ruling class bases its decisions. Consequently, the chronology does not render anachronistic the question of Machiavelli's understanding of what we have come to consider after the 'great transformation' of the industrial era – in a distinction that is both analytic and ideological – economic phenomena as opposed to merely social ones.[49] However, the compilation of Machiavellian excerpts with reference to economic matters – a not so successful task and of little interest and only of superficial inventory – could only appear deceiving and deluded to any expectations of those who employed categories taken out of nineteenth-century

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45   Botero 1599, p. 213 *verso* (VII.3).

46   See Stumpo 1992, p. 366; De Bernardi 1931; Descendre 2009.

47   See Martines 1968.

48   See Gilbert 1957.

49   See Polanyi 1944; Skinner 1969, p. 15.

manuals of political economy.[50] Certainly, the young Machiavelli had never been a banker in Rome.[51] Undoubtedly, as he wrote to Francesco Vettori (9 April 1513), 'Fortune has determined that since I don't know how to talk about the silk business or the wool business or about profits and losses, I must talk about the government; I must either make a vow of silence or discuss that'.[52] Yet this cannot be a sufficient reason to argue that the Florentine secretary was not concerned with 'economic' issues.

The *Ritratto di cose di Francia* (1510) contains Machiavelli's report to his superiors regarding France's conditions and the process of concentration of power that characterised the French monarchy. The attention he gave to the State's budget, and to its economic, financial and fiscal aspects, is clear:

> I have not been able to ascertain the ordinary or extraordinary revenues of the Crown; I have asked a great many persons, and they have all replied that it depends entirely on the will of the king. Nonetheless, someone has told me that a part of the ordinary revenue – the so-called 'king's money', and which is derived from the excises on bread, wine, meat, etc., yields about 1,700,000 scudi. The extraordinary revenue is derived from taxes, and these are fixed high or low according to the king's will; and if these revenues are insufficient, then loans are resorted to, which are, however, rarely repaid.[53]

What could be read as a lack of knowledge of France's revenues distinctly expresses the power of a king in full possession of apparently unlimited resources, which definitely made an impression on the Florentines, three generations after the 1427 *catasto*. The *Ritratto di cose della Magna*, as an inquiry on the distinctive traits of Germany's power, has no need to envy Botero's 'economic' writings. Doubtless Machiavelli and his fellow citizens were very aware of the economical and financial aspects of the State. Yet it must be said, with Tommasini, that Machiavelli, both in the *Ritratto di cose della Magna*, and in the *Ritratto di cose di Francia* that precedes it, clarifies the meaning of his own project of a militia by pointing out the advantage of not having to pay mercenaries.[54] The charge of ignorance against Machiavelli backfires against his ac-

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50   From Knies 1852 and Thevenet 1922 to Begert 1983 and Taranto 2004. Other references in Norsa 1936, pp. 150–3. There are some interesting suggestions in Lefort 2000.

51   See Najemy 1977.

52   Machiavelli 1997–2005, vol. 2, p. 241.

53   Machiavelli 1997–2005, vol. 1, p. 63 (translated in Machiavelli 1882, vol. 4, p. 411).

54   See Tommasini 1883–1911, vol. 1, p. 424.

cusers: they ignore precisely what constituted the foundations of his experience and of his thought.

The Florentine financial system, as we have seen, was based on the principle of State debt. It was firstly studied by Bernardino Barbadoro in a volume published in 1929, now a classic. According to Gramsci: 'The book is also interesting for studying the importance of public debt, which grew as a result of the expansionist wars – in other words, to secure for the bourgeoisie freedom of movement and a larger market'.[55] Barbadoro had summarised the question of debt as that of 'the financial privilege of capitalists' instituted in legal terms.[56] Further analysis has established that this privilege of exploiting the scarcity of liquid assets has contributed to 'consolidate the domination of existing ruling classes and to render them more resilient to change'.[57] Without explicit reference to the capital city of Tuscany, not well known at that time, the question of public debt had already occupied a central place in the thirty-first chapter of Karl Marx's *Capital*, where the genesis of industrial capitalism is analysed. On one side the system of public debt amounted to 'the alienation of the State – whether despotic, constitutional or republican'. On the other side, it was 'one of the most powerful levers of primitive accumulation'. A clear correlation linked the modern tax system to government borrowing:

> As the national debt finds its support in the public revenue, which must cover the yearly payments for interest, &c., the modern system of taxation was the necessary complement of the system of national loans. The loans enable the government to meet extraordinary expenses, without the tax-payers feeling it immediately, but they necessitate, as a consequence, increased taxes. On the other hand, the raising of taxation caused by the accumulation of debts contracted one after another, compels the government always to have recourse to new loans for new extraordinary expenses. Modern fiscality, whose pivot is formed by taxes on the most necessary means of subsistence (thereby increasing their price), thus contains within itself the germ of automatic progression. Overtaxation is not an incident, but rather a principle.

The consequence being that the rich families and the private investors, via the banking system, gave 'with one hand and took back more with the other'; they 'remained, even whilst receiving, the eternal creditor of the nation down to the

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55   Gramsci 2007, p. 13 (notebook 6 §13).
56   Barbadoro 1929b, p. 418.
57   See Molho 1995, p. 109.

last shilling advanced'. In short, 'the only part of the so-called national wealth that actually enters into the collective possessions of modern peoples is their national debt'.[58]

This mechanism of confiscation of public revenues within a financial system based on the principle of interest-bearing capital appeared immediately troublesome to the renaissance Tuscans. This is clear, for instance, in Francesco Guicciardini's *Discorso di Logrogno* (1512): 'public revenues, a great part of which is absorbed by the public debt (*el Monte*), are insufficient'.[59] The 115th of his *Ricordi* (1530) deserves to be quoted entirely:

> In certain old notebooks written before the year 1457, I find that a wise citizen said: 'Either Florence will undo the Monte or the Monte will undo Florence'. He fully understood that it was necessary for the city to diminish the importance of the Monte, else it would grow so much that it would become impossible to control. And yet the conflict has gone on for a long time, without producing the disorder he foresaw. Certainly its development has been much slower than he seems to have anticipated.[60]

In an earlier work, Guicciardini had already commented on the formula '*O Firenze disfarà el* Monte *o el* Monte *disfarà Firenze*' in disenchanted terms. The reimbursement of the interest-bearing capital entails oppressive forms of taxation 'that are violent and the source of many disorders, enmities, and insolvencies for the citizens, nor it is fair or useful to remove money from the purse of a man in order to pay the debts of third parties'.[61] Note that this very formula was picked up in 1752 by David Hume in his famous essay *Of Public Credit*: 'either the nation must destroy public credit, or public credit will destroy the nation'.[62]

Since the securities had been declared transferable within a market, the public had become, for a number of speculators, a source of profit. The public debt was transformed into a form of immovable property, giving rise to a rentier mentality amongst the richest families. In the *Discourses*, Book I, Chapter 55, Machiavelli indicates as the necessary condition of the entire republican project what John Maynard Keynes will call, after the 1929 crisis, 'the euthanasia of the rentier':

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58   Marx 1983, pp. 706–8.

59   Guicciardini 1932, p. 220 (Guicciardini 1998, p. 119).

60   Guicciardini 1965, p. 70.

61   Guicciardini 1945, p. 109, quoted and commented on in Molho 1987, p. 207.

62   Hume 1987, pp. 360–1. See Hont 2005, pp. 325–53.

> And to explain more clearly what is meant by the term gentlemen, I say that those are called gentlemen who live idly upon the proceeds of their extensive possessions, without devoting themselves to agriculture or any other useful pursuit to gain a living. Such men are pernicious to any country or republic; but more pernicious even than these are such as have, besides their other possessions, castles which they command, and subjects who obey them. [...] And to attempt the establishment of a republic in a country so constituted would be impossible. The only way to establish any kind of order there is to found a monarchical government; for where the body of the people is so thoroughly corrupt that the laws are powerless for restraint, it becomes necessary to establish some superior power which, with a royal hand, and with full and absolute powers, may put a curb upon the excessive ambition and corruption of the powerful. [...] We may then draw the following conclusion from what has been said: that if any one should wish to establish a republic in a country where there are many gentlemen, he will not succeed until he has destroyed them all.[63]

The conveniences of the rent led the rich families to neglect investments in the production system. However, the concentration of capital that they promote can also be seen as necessary to the development of that system, justifying the financial privileges accorded to them.[64] In this context, the passage at the end of Chapter 21 of *Il Principe,* which has been viewed, from the early nineteenth century onward, as a true but disappointing 'economic' argument,[65] becomes particularly noticeable:

> A prince must also show himself to be a lover of the virtues by supporting virtuous men, and honour all who excel in any one of the arts, and he must encourage his citizens quietly to pursue their profession, both in commerce and agriculture, and in any other industry, so that the one may not abstain from embellishing his possessions for fear of their being taken from him, and another from opening up a business for fear of taxes; but he must provide rewards for whoever wants to do these things, and for whoever strives to increase his city or his State in whatever way.[66]

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63   Machiavelli 1997–2005, vol. 1, pp. 311–12 (Machiavelli 1882, vol. 2, pp. 210–11).

64   Compare Marks 1960, p. 146; and Cammarosano 1997, p. 80.

65   Pecchio 1829, pp. 70–1.

66   Machiavelli 1997–2005, vol. 1, pp. 181–2 (Machiavelli 1882, vol. 2, p. 76).

Activity cannot be free in a system that tends to monopolisation and private concentration of wealth. Machiavelli envisions a treasury that supports the 'entrepreneurs' through advances and compensations, namely a righteously ordered liberality. Here is shown a clear understanding of the possibility of reorienting the public credit towards production. But the Florentine financial system, in its actual functioning, impoverished the general public whilst a small group of powerful citizens became even richer. This was a reason of complaint and a cause of insurgency for the subjugated population. By starting from the progressive confiscation of the *ager publicus* in Roman times, Machiavelli examines the very consequences of the accumulation and concentration of capital in the hands of the few in D 1.37. The picture is therefore quite different from the Aristotelian analysis of tyranny, unless we consider, following Machiavelli, the tyranny exercised by a narrow class on the whole of society.[67]

Within this context, the satisfaction of the common needs of every citizen – or of the entire population considered as a large family – is a merely abstract objective for the financial administration of the State. Concretely, it answers primarily the specific needs of the members of a social class, which gain prestige, power and material benefits from it. The history of public finances in Florence, from the fourteenth to the sixteenth century, supports this statement. Machiavelli himself points this out, for example, in the *History of Florence,* regarding the strengthening of Cosimo de Medici's supporters: 'And if any suspected individual still remained in Florence who had not been reached by these repressive measures, he was oppressed by new impositions which they ordered for the express purpose; so that in a little while, having expelled and impoverished the whole of the adverse party, they secured themselves firmly in the government'.[68] Accordingly, it might seem natural that the social history of public finances is centred around this 'State within the State' represented by the ruling class.

However it must be said that this trend would not appear as a satisfactory explanation of the whole history of the State, not if the State was to be reduced to the 'State within the State'. Yet this has become a common tendency. It can be agreed, writes Alain Guery, 'that the State always is, for those who have the necessary means, nothing but a way to live, get rich and reproduce themselves', recognising the temptation of a history of two or three hundred families. But the history of the State, that should be necessarily synthetical and a history 'of everybody, of every condition, occupation, of which, through its institutions,

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67   See Najemy 2007, pp. 97–108; and Barthas 2008, p. 591.
68   Machiavelli 1997–2005, vol. 3, p. 525 (Machiavelli 1882, vol. 1, p. 219).

the State affects the behaviour [...] can not be reduced to the history of those that form its apparatus, because they hold a power in its name'.[69] The major risk of a social history of finances, as it has been practised, is that of confounding an analysis of the formation and reproduction of an aristocracy with that of the whole of the State, which is hard to grasp synthetically starting from that analysis. Nevertheless, it is doubtful that the 'origins of the State' ought to define the wholeness of what is entailed by the full maturity of its concept. According to Rudolf Goldsheid, the Austrian father of financial sociology, 'in a democratic community, which is at the same time economically strong, there is no room for a State within the State. Only a State forced to live from hand to mouth deprived of sufficient funds to meet even the most urgent social needs on its own remains at the mercy of private capital'.[70] Also, the risk is that of examining a fiscal system solely under the aspect of the tax burden, and of the levy without return for those who are affected by it, without developing a dialectical conception of the relationship between social classes and the State. The ruling class does not necessarily present itself as a socially homogeneous aggregate.[71] Still, after all, the Florentine's tax system ended up weakening the State, if only because it increasingly affected both the Republic's revenue and the legitimate demands of its creditors.[72]

Machiavelli starts exactly from this situation: that of an intrinsically weak State under the threat of foreign powers. One of his late sixteenth-century readers clearly understood this. Francesco Bocchi (1548-1613?) was looking at the reasons for Italy's powerlessness. Reproaching Machiavelli for his excessive insistence on the responsibility of the Church, Bocchi actually summarises the logic of his argument: these reasons are to be found in the accumulation of wealth in the hands of few and in the poverty of the people subjected to immediate necessities, and disarmed.[73] According to Foucault, 'the relation between rural indebtedness and urban prosperity was another important topic of discussion throughout the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries'.[74] But it should be recognised that this very relationship is at the heart of the experience of the Tuscans in the *Quattrocento*.[75] It was at the heart of the issue that Machiavelli started to address by proposing to arm the population, firstly

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69   Guery 1997, p. 250.

70   Goldscheid 1958, p. 211.

71   See Cammarosano 1975, p. 901.

72   See Molho 1993, p. 214.

73   Bocchi 1969, pp. 175–9.

74   Foucault 2003, p. 170 (25 Feb. 1976).

75   Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber 1978, pp. 260–4 (Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber 1985, pp. 106–8).

the peasant masses of the *Contado*. Basically, Machiavelli's starting point is not even a situation in which Tuscany, before being a State, was already a nation constituted by a united people. In the years of the Great Council (1494–1512), the Pisan secession or the Valdichiana rebellion are clear examples of that fact. It seems that, in the age of Cosimo, a certain awareness began to emerge that the territorial State would strengthen itself both by involving, if not the subjected communities, at least their elites, and also by promoting a regional economy less subordinate to the Dominant.[76] At that time, as John Pocock observed in *The Machiavellian Moment* (1975) – albeit referring not to Machiavelli and the Tuscan *Quattrocento*, but to Charles Davenant and the end of the seventeenth century in Britain – one would already have to look 'beyond the problem of trade to that of credit [...] in the context provided by war'.[77] However, the Florentine ruling class had not turned from that diffused awareness to a concentrated reforming action.

This is why Machiavelli pretended to adopt the stance of the ruling classes, that consider power as a commodity, as something that can be bought, owned and given away, whether through a contract or coercively, that can be transferred, that circulates. In the famous letter dated 13 December 1513, where he announced his *De principatibus* to the aristocrat Francesco Vettori, he used similar conducive terms in order to seduce his direct interlocutor (with a typical confusion between public and private interests that a certain number of Florentine ruling class members maintained in the Republic).[78] After its publication in 1810, this letter has appeared in numerous editions of *Il Principe* as a key to interpreting the work's intention and significance.[79] Its tactical and provisional aspect is overlooked, which is a good way of neglecting that Machiavelli's perspective is wider. Not reducible to the analysis of mechanisms of domination, his perspective rather aims to be a project of liberation.

In Chapter 26 of *Il Principe* – with the title: *An Exhortation to Liberate Italy from the Barbarians* – this project of liberation seems to be concerned with Italy as a whole, but without specifying any constitutional arrangement whatsoever. Surely there is some hyperbole; for it may be that this project is at the same time wider and more specific. It can be observed, for instance, that Machiavelli distinguishes two zones within the Italian peninsula: on one hand Tuscany and on the other the kingdom of Naples, the lands of Rome, the Romagna, and Lombardy. Emphasis must be laid on the sociological and

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76   Epstein 1994, p. 108.

77   Pocock 2003, p. 437.

78   See Chittolini 1995.

79   See Bertelli and Innocenti 1979, p. cxlv.

geographical anchorage of Machiavelli's political analysis. Examining D I.55 leads us to understand that the 'differences observed between these two areas seem rather deep and not easy to overcome': Machiavelli 'asserts that where there are gentlemen it is usually impossible to order a republic. The task does not appear to him impossible, but certainly very difficult. It would be in fact necessary to put an end to all the gentlemen'.[80] Machiavelli's project of liberation seems therefore aimed primarily towards the Tuscan and Florentine population.[81] Nevertheless, as Machiavelli himself indicates in various passages in the three books of the *Discourses* (e.g. including the first chapter of Book III) as well as in the dedication to the young republican combatants, his horizon of hope is clearly far reaching. With his restless and immanent wisdom he was trying to reach the people in general, in other countries, in other times. More universally, Machiavelli's project of liberation is indeed conceived for the people, in general terms, for the collective defence of the whole of their goods: of what Hegel has called, strictly speaking, the 'State'.[82]

In Chapter 5 of the *Principe*, Machiavelli plays around the threat that is laid upon the princes by the populations that have experienced freedom:

> In truth there was no other safe way of keeping possession of that country but to ruin it. And whoever becomes master of a city that has been accustomed to liberty, and does not destroy it, must himself expect to be ruined by it. For they will always resort to rebellion in the name of liberty and their ancient institutions, which will never be effaced from their memory, either by the lapse of time, or by benefits bestowed by the new master.[83]

Il Principe – insofar as it is addressed, firstly, to a Medici after the demise of the republic – is clearly a desperate attempt to dissuade a *de facto* prince from putting an end to the republic. At the same time, Machiavelli clearly points out, in the way the Republic of Florence related to its territories, one of its major intrinsic weaknesses: 'No matter what he may do, or what precautions he may take, if he does not separate and disperse the inhabitants, they will on the first occasion invoke the name of liberty and the memory of their ancient institutions, as was done by Pisa after having been held over a hundred years in sub-

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80   Pincin 1980, p. 78.

81   See Gilbert 1954, p. 47; and Inglese 2013, pp. xii–xix.

82   Hegel 1999, p. 80.

83   Machiavelli 1997–2005, vol. 1, p. 130 (Machiavelli 1882, vol. 2, pp. 17–8).

jection by the Florentines'.[84] The only political project that Machiavelli presents to a prince is that of liberating an oppressed population. He clearly states it in Chapter 6: the princes, the excellent ones, those who deserve to be imitated, are the liberators. It is not a question of how to govern, because even the most excellent princes do not act differently from the villains, as is stressed in Chapter 8; it is a matter of political vision, of project, and conception. Now, this is defined at the beginning of Chapter 9: what is at stake is the liberation of the people from the oppression of the greats.[85] Still, in view of this liberation, a major stage is the constitution of a militia.

The connection between mercenarism and the development of public debt in the Florence of late *Trecento* and early *Quattrocento*, or, in other words, between military expansionism and deficit policies – as it is made by an aristocracy of merchants and bankers, drawing wealth and power from it – had been clearly identified by contemporaries: Leonardo Bruni, for example, whom Guicciardini seems to paraphrase in his *Cose fiorentine*.[86] This has already been analysed in some detail within specialised literature.[87] Insofar as the evidence of the central character of the concept of 'people in arms' is not disregarded, as well as the evidence of Machiavelli's anti-aristocratic drive that led him to take hold of the virtue of the struggle between the people and the greats, it is right to question the connection between this concept within his theory of human liberty and a comprehension of the consequences of a determinate financial system, which appears as the backbone of the political body, whilst indicating, at the same time, its structural weakness.

It might be said that, today, it is not possible to understand the Machiavellian concept of 'armed people' without having a precise idea of the logic and structure of Tuscan and Florentine society after the development of public debt in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Furthermore, it is not possible to understand the proposition 'money is not the sinews of war' without having, first, thoroughly studied and understood the work of David Herlihy and Christiane Klapisch-Zuber on the *Catasto* of 1427, which compels us to evaluate new historical circumstances, namely the 1494 revolution that instituted the Great Council within the context of the war of Italy. The relevance of the financial issue to the relationship between Machiavelli and economics is evident when we pay attention to the study of Louis Marks (1954) on the Florentine financial crisis from 1494 to 1502. If there is a principle that one has to keep in mind

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84   Ibid.

85   For an analysis of chapters 6 to 9, see Lefort 1972, pp. 362–89.

86   Guicciardini 1945, p. 109; see Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber 1978, p. 25.

87   See Molho 1971, pp. 9–21.

when considering a period of crisis, it is that the financial element 'dominates any other aspect of economics, whether industry, agriculture, or even commerce, not to say anything about more marginal sectors'.[88]

The study of the relationships between finance and politics in Florence, between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries, leads to challenging the model of the 'genesis of the modern State'. Anthony Molho, the first historian to conduct a thorough research in the *Monte* archives, proposed in the early 1990's a radical axiological change, dismissing both the promoters and the detractors of the 'Weberian' model. According to Molho's reading a new hypothesis could be considered that employed the Machiavellian notion – that contrary to common opinion, money is not the sinews of war – in view of the crisis in the historical analysis of State building: 'Public finance was not the ingredient indispensable to the centralization and strengthening of States. Instead, politics offers a more useful vantage point from which to examine the link between government and public finance in late medieval and early modern Italy'.[89] In order to examine the relationship between the State and public finances, it would be therefore more useful to identify the interests, the strategies and the composition of the dominant class, as well as the dynamics of the political and social conflicts.

This opening towards the Machiavellian proposition also denotes the importance of understanding more precisely – in its genesis, within its context and its logic – what Machiavelli meant by saying that money is not the sinew of war. According to an economic historian of the medieval period, a paradox within the history of ideas would be that 'the intellectual renaissance, economically supported by the merchants and bankers of the late Middle Ages, was not able to give birth to a Machiavelli of the political economy [...] in other words, was not ready to carry out an autonomous economic science'.[90] But this might be reversed: entering the scene at a moment characterised by financial crisis and the widening participation in political decision making, in a context of war, Machiavelli may have laid certain *foundations for the critique of political economy*. There is no significant objection, after the consolidation of the public debt and after the uprising of the workers of the textile industry in 1378 (the revolt of the *Ciompi*), against the saying that qualifies Machiavelli as the 'first great author of the capitalistic era'. The young Benedetto Croce could be surprised that, before him, 'no one has thought of calling [Marx] "the most

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88   Guery 1994, p. 229.
89   Molho 1995, p. 134.
90   Day 1988, p. 224.

notable successor of the Italian *Niccolò Machiavelli*" – a Machiavelli of the labour movement'.[91]

Now, there is in Karl Marx an indirect, unconscious and unthought integration of the Machiavellian subversion of the sentence *pecunia nervus rerum*. It is highly appealing that this takes place at the core of the theory of commodity fetishism, articulated in the first chapter of the *Capital*. According to some, 'the theory of fetishism is, *per se*, the basis of Marx's entire economic system',[92] and for other 'the phenomenon of commodity fetishism is closely tied up with the formation of money'.[93] The term 'fetish' denotes an object to which a magical conception confers the power of autonomous movement. It belongs to the register of adoration; it is almost a synonym of 'idol', a word highly connoted, in modern philosophy's vocabulary, by the *Aphorisms* 38–70 from the first book of the *Novum organum* by Francis Bacon (1620). For Bacon, idols are opposed to ideas in the way that the imagination of things is opposed to things as they really are. In 1608, Bacon already employed the term 'idolatry' in a context where he gave a positive evaluation of Machiavelli's sentence. In *Of the True Greatness of the Kingdom of Britain,* a memoir addressed to James I on how to assess the power of a State, particularly that of Britain, he wrote: 'Wherein no man can be ignorant of the idolatry that is generally committed in these degenerate times to money, as if it could do all things public and private'.[94] But Bacon is not the only author that Marx knew well, inspired by Machiavelli on this issue. He read also Berkeley on the South Sea Bubble. But particularly interesting is his reading of Ferdinando Galiani's *Della moneta* (1751).

This is a work rather neglected by Marxist criticism, that tends to ignore the weight of the pre-Hegelian culture, notably Italian, on the intellectual development of the author of *Capital*.[95] In the framework of a discussion on the utility, the necessity and the limits of money (Book II, Chapter 4), Galiani starts by dividing two kinds of men, those who despise money unjustly and those who idolise it. He states that idolaters are the more numerous and also the more dangerous, because the idolatry of money is more easily understood by the multitude, and because errors in the understanding of the role of money can bring about the ruin of the State. It is at this point that the economist from Naples, prominent figure of the Italian Enlightenment, introduces the Floren-

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91   Croce 1914, p. 118. This quote, as well as the previous one (from Antonio Labriola), in
        Tommasini 1883–1911, vol. 2, p. 506, note 2.

92   Rubin 1972, p. 4.

93   Rosdolsky 1977, p. 123.

94   Bacon 1860, p. 243. See Orsini 1936, pp. 43–53.

95   See Timpanaro 1975, p. 37.

tine into the arena of modern political economy, offering an accurate commentary of D ɪɪ.10. Without naming Machiavelli, he picks up his arguments and his historical examples:

> That the people refer to money as the sinews of war, the foundation of every power, man's second blood, and the principal sustaining force of life and happiness, could be excused on the grounds of ignorance, and because of the connection of ideas between things and their images. But that one who governs allows himself to fall into this error is something that can not be neglected, because of the dangers that might result of this. The riches of Sardanapalus, of Croesus, of Darius, and of Perseus were accumulated by such a misconception. As they failed to remember that wars are fought with men and iron, and not with gold, and as they put their faith on it, they were covetously plundered of the very thing which they had accumulated for their defence.[96]

These considerations lead Galiani to glorify the production activities of the people, specifically agricultural labour, as opposed to the market activities, those par excellence ruled by the idolatry of money, that develop the financial and rentier spirit, and lead to the conquest of the real economy by financial capitalists.

The paragraph quoted above is a faithful summary, in part, of the thesis exposed by Machiavelli in D ɪɪ.10: Money is insufficient to protect you; money makes you prey to others. Some of the historical examples used by Galiani to prove his point are also borrowed from Machiavelli. It is from here that a proposition, which constitutes an essential moment of conceptual articulation for Marx's section on commodity fetishism, is derived. This is a very controversial section of *Capital*. It has a high level of poetic and theoretical abstraction, and posed a considerable difficulty for its author. After the *Critique of Political Economy* in 1859 and its preparatory works (the *Grundrisse* of 1857–8), when Marx reasons about commodities, he draws on Galiani's analysis on the actual value of money. In a letter to Engels dated 22 June 1867, while correcting the preliminary version of *Capital* that was finally about to be published, Marx wrote: 'The economists have until now disregarded […] that the elementary form of the commodity […] contains the entire secret of the money-form'.[97] This conclusion prompted him to start *Capital* with an analysis of commodities, instead of an analysis of money. When Marx subsequently revised his major work for

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96   Galiani 1975, pp. 119–20.
97   Marx and Engels 1987, p. 383.

French translation and for its German second edition, he introduced in the first chapter the fourth section on *The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof*. He then draws on elements from his 1859 work, adding them in a footnote, the brief commentary quoting Galiani: 'When, therefore, Galiani says: Value is a relation between persons – "La Ricchezza è una ragione tra due persone" – he ought to have added: a relation between persons expressed as a relation between things'.[98] Here we have, in two sentences, synthetically the formula of the theory of commodity fetishism. This theory assigns Galiani's analysis that denounces the idolatry of money to the analysis of commodities. It is noteworthy here that we not reduce the importance of the analytical consequences of this assignation, but indicate that Marx's text refers to Galiani's which refers in turn to Machiavelli's refutation of the adage *pecunia nervus rerum*. Therefore an unexpected element comes into sight in the history of the critique of political economy. A radical move becomes necessary, which goes back to the root of the problem, and thereby to Machiavelli's text itself and to the financial crisis in Florence at the time of the Republic of the Great Council.[99]

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98   Marx 1983, p. 79, note 1.

99   See Barthas 2011b. See also Barthas 2016 (forthcoming).

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Plebeian Politics: Machiavelli and the Ciompi Uprising

Yves Winter

Of the eight books that compose Niccolò Machiavelli's *Florentine Histories*, the better part of Book III is dedicated to the uprising of the Florentine wool workers known as the 'tumult of the Ciompi' in 1378. And while this is not the only episode of social conflict chronicled in the *Florentine Histories*, the insurrection occupies a special place. During the summer months of 1378, the lowest stratum of the Florentine working class overthrew the governing elites and instituted a revolutionary regime. For the first time in its history, a radical insurgent government that included both artisans and manual labourers, drawn primarily from the textile industry, ruled Florence.[1] Even though the uprising was defeated after six short weeks, its memory cast an enduring spell on Florentine history.[2] Alarmed by the unprecedented political and economic mobilisation of the plebs, the Florentine elites developed a lasting fear of the rabble manifest in successive generations of humanist writers.

Most historians that preceded Machiavelli (and most that followed him, up until the nineteenth century) had little sympathy for the workers, describing the uprising as instigated by the devil, as a result of moral depravity, or as the work of a mob manipulated by intrigue and conspiracy.[3] Leonardo Bruni considered the insurgents a bunch of violent and 'impoverished criminals' whose 'only goal was plunder [and] slaughter'.[4] And Poggio Bracciolini thought the revolt was divine punishment for the sins of the city and of its

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1 Najemy 1981, p. 59.

2 Gene Brucker calls the Ciompi uprising 'more traumatic, and its consequences of greater significance, than the other revolutionary spasms which the city experienced'. Brucker 1983, pp. 46–7; Najemy 2006, pp. 156–87.

3 It is not until the nineteenth century that liberal historians, such as Corazzini and Falletti-Fossati began to look at the Ciompi in more sympathetic light. Corazzini 1887; Falletti-Fossati 1882. See also Bock 1990, pp. 193–4.

4 Bruni 2007, IX, 9.

citizens.[5] In all likelihood, Machiavelli was the first historian who saw the causes and motivations for the uprising in the workers' social and political conditions. Unlike Bruni and Bracciolini, both of whom he criticises for disavowing the role of civil discord in Florentine history (IF P), Machiavelli treats the Ciompi revolt as an unambiguously political movement.[6]

In this essay, I offer a fresh interpretation of how Machiavelli depicts this insurrectionary moment. Focusing on a speech attributed to a leader of the revolt, I will showcase a deeply radical and egalitarian line of thought opened up by Machiavelli's text. The wool worker's speech (reproduced in full in an appendix to this article), summons a plebeian politics and calls for a violent overthrow of oligarchic and plutocratic structures of power. Yet even though the Ciompo's speech is central to Machiavelli's narrative of the uprising, many interpreters disavow the political radicalism of this address on the grounds that it conflicts with Machiavelli's views as stated elsewhere. My essay challenges this neutralisation of political radicalism, accentuating the thesis of Machiavelli's populism that has recently been bolstered by the 'democratic turn' in Machiavelli scholarship, and extending the argument for a populist and egalitarian reading of Machiavelli from the *Discourses* and *The Prince* to the *Florentine Histories*.[7]

To read the subversive speech as a piece of serious political commentary even though it conflicts with the historical narrative in which it is set is merely to apply the interpretive circumspection exercised by scholars with respect to Machiavelli's other writings. It is by now standard practice in Machiavelli scholarship to read his political texts, above all *The Prince,* in the context of its dedications. Close attention to the addressees of these texts is necessary in order to make sense of the obvious tension between Machiavelli's commitment to popular politics and the seemingly tyrannical advice dispensed in *The Prince*. Did Machiavelli dedicate *The Prince* to Lorenzo because he wanted his old job as Florentine secretary back? Were his intentions to advise princes or to undermine them by revealing the secret mechanisms of power?[8] Is the counsel offered in *The Prince* genuine, or is it supposed to lead to the Medici's downfall?[9] Recently, similar questions have been raised with regards to the

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5 Bracciolini 1715, p. 78. The idea of a divine punishment is taken from Alamanno Acciaiuoli's chronicle. See Wilcox 1969, pp. 149–51.

6 I cite Machiavelli's works according to the following translations: Machiavelli 1988a; Machiavelli 1998; Machiavelli 1996. For Italian references or my own translations (where indicated), I have relied mostly on the following edition: Machiavelli 1998a.

7 McCormick 2011. See also de Grazia 1989; Lefort 1978.

8 See for instance Mattingly 1958; Baron 1961; Langton 1987; Rousseau 1997; Spinoza 2002.

9 Dietz 1986.

Discourses,[10] but political theorists have not paid the same kind of attention to the rhetorical situation of the *Florentine Histories*. That is surprising, because after all, the *Florentine Histories* were commissioned by and dedicated to Giulio de' Medici who by the time the work was finished had become Pope Clement VII. If we take Machiavelli's popular politics – and his ambivalent relation to the Medici – as a hermeneutic key, there are good reasons to be wary of treating the historical narrative in the *Florentine Histories* as a transparent reflection of his authorial intentions.[11]

My interpretation offers an account of Machiavelli's text that goes against the grain of the moderate republican version, but my aim is not to substitute an ostensibly more faithful rendering of Machiavelli's political beliefs for the ones currently on offer. The question of Machiavelli's 'true intentions' has no determinate answer, for the polysemy of his text makes securing a single meaning unfeasible. While every text is marked by a constitutive openness, this is especially true for Machiavelli's writings, steeped as they are in contradictions, tensions, and paradoxes. The jagged surface of Machiavelli's text opens radical and egalitarian paths of thought, lines that may not have been intended by the author or even fully discernible to him. Pursuing these lines of thought allows us to excavate a layer of political commentary and argument that is obscured by the attempts to reduce the meaning of the *Florentine Histories* to a single and uniform expression of Machiavelli's authorial intentions.

Drawing on the interpretive tradition that reads Machiavelli as a thinker of the revolutionary situation, I propose to read the subversive speech as a prescient, untimely, and not entirely self-conscious vector of historical possibility.[12] Summoning a revolutionary political subject that is historically absent, the speech has a utopian and phantasmatic character and functions as a mode of political representation that is not reducible to the immediacy of a political present. My essay is structured in five sections. Because interpretation is not a linear but a recursive pursuit, each section examines a different facet of the speech and contributes an additional layer of analysis. I begin by laying out the historical context to the uprising in some detail, as this background is indispensable for a plausible interpretation of the speech. I then introduce Machiavelli's account of the revolt, focusing on the tension between the two voices: the exhortative voice, which the *Florentine Histories* ascribes to the anonymous worker, and the narrative voice, which the text attributes to Machiavelli. The

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10   See McCormick 2011, pp. 36–46.

11   See Najemy 1982.

12   Gramsci 1971, pp. 125–205; Althusser 1999; Negri 1999, pp. 37–97; Balakrishnan 2009, pp. 265–79.

subsequent section examines the speech's principal lines of reasoning, especially its call for popular violence. I then turn to the audience and the speaker, which I approach through the fictional and anonymous dimensions of the speech. Examining the speech as a narrative device, I show that the speech interrupts and blurs the chronology of the uprising, as if to highlight the unresolved nature of the workers' political demands.

1   Who were the Ciompi?

During the summer months of 1378, Florence saw a massive popular upheaval. Leading up to the revolt was an attempted coup by the upper echelon of the Florentine elites against the guild-based government that included representatives from both the wealthy merchant patriciate as well as craftsmen and artisans. The clashes that sparked the uprising were triggered by attempts, on behalf of some of the elite's leading families, to remove non-elite guildsmen from the registers of citizens eligible to hold office. Yet the power struggle between the elites and the guilds had been a fixture of Florentine politics since the late thirteenth century and has to be seen in the context of three developments driven primarily by Florence's commercial revolution over the previous 150 years: first, the transformation of the Florentine nobility, from a warrior caste to a class of wealthy merchants and bankers; second, the rise to unprecedented political strength, through their guilds, of a coalition of artisans, shopkeepers, notaries, and local merchants; and third, the emergence of a class of low-wage textile workers with fluctuating employment and precarious livelihoods made worse by practices of outsourcing, subcontracting, and debt-bondage.[13]

Unlike other medieval economies in Europe, which were largely dominated by agrarian production, late medieval Florence – one of the largest European cities at the time – saw the emergence of a commercial capitalism based on textile production, trade, and banking.[14] The engine of Florentine growth was its wool industry, which at its height in the 1300s employed between a sixth and a third of the population and exported fabrics to the rest of Italy, France, England, and beyond.[15] As a result of the thriving trade, there was a significant accumulation of capital, which led to the emergence of a booming banking sector and the formation of an industrial and financial elite with unprece-

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13   Najemy 2006, p. 76.

14   de Roover 1942.

15   Goldthwaite 2009, p. 265.

dented power. Florentine banks lent money and dictated fiscal policy not only to the commune of Florence. As major players in European public finance, they transacted with the papal curia in Rome and Avignon as well as with the princes and kings of Naples, England, France, and Flanders.[16]

Along with the commercial expansion arose the guild system. The guilds emerged in the early thirteenth century as self-governed associations to provide the merchants and artisans with political institutions of their own, exempt from the dominance exercised by the powerful noble families.[17] Successively more formalised as channels of political representation throughout the thirteenth century, the guilds established control over Florentine politics and enforced business-friendly industrial, fiscal, and monetary policy.[18] The 1293 constitution made guild membership a condition for Florentine citizenship; the republic became 'a kind of confederation of guilds', and guilds were the political intermediaries between individuals and the State.[19]

Among the guilds, there was a clear hierarchy between the seven major guilds and the fourteen minor guilds. The major guilds represented the *grandi*, the nobility, which had successfully transformed itself from a warrior caste to a class of cloth merchants, bankers and financiers, and notaries. The minor guilds were composed of artisans and skilled craftsmen, from butchers to shoemakers, tailors, wine sellers, leather workers, and bakers. Yet the twenty-one guilds represented only a fraction of the Florentine population, for most workers, especially in the textile sector, were not eligible for guild membership.[20] Of the approximately 14,000 people working in wool manufacture in 1378, only about 200 were *padroni* who qualified for membership. The rest, including the small artisans, the skilled and the unskilled workers, were so-called *sottoposti* and not eligible for membership nor permitted to create their own association.[21]

Because the guilds exercised substantial regulatory and judicial power in the commercial sphere in addition to their political role, the workers' exclusion from guild membership contributed directly to the maintenance and reproduction of the highly unequal relations of production that fed the Florentine economic expansion. One of the reasons for the Florentine wool industry's

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16   For figures and details, see Davidsohn 1928, p. 227.

17   Najemy 2006, p. 40.

18   Becker 1960, pp. 44, 47; Mollat and Wolff 1973, p. 144.

19   Goldthwaite 2009, p. 343.

20   Mollat and Wolff 1973, p. 158. For a detailed study of the Florentine population a few decades after the Ciompi insurrection, see Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber 1985.

21   In 1345, a worker named Ciuto Brandini was sentenced to death for forming a *fratellanza* of wool carders. See Rodolico 1922, pp. 181–4.

competitiveness was its ability to market high-quality cloth at lower price points by keeping labour costs down. Cloth production was highly fragmented; merchants employed salaried labourers directly only for the initial steps in the production process – the washing, beating, oiling, carding, and combing of the wool. Subsequent manufacturing steps were contracted to artisans of varying skill levels – spinners, weavers, fullers, stretchers, menders, and dyers – who operated their own shops and were paid by piecework.[22] The guild, controlled by the *lanaiuoli*, organised and supervised the manufacturing process, monitoring the processing of textile from imported raw baled wool through the carding, spinning and weaving into final cloth. It determined wages for tens of thousands of workers, distributed production quotas, functioned as broker for raw materials and labour, and directly operated some aspects of the manufacturing process. By preventing workers from purchasing raw materials or selling finished products, the guild monopolised production in a cartel-like structure.

The wool workers, known as Ciompi, were the closest thing late medieval Florence had to an industrial proletariat.[23] A heterogeneous group consisting of workers along the various steps of cloth manufacture, the Ciompi included both skilled and unskilled workers as well as small artisans who owned their equipment and operated their own shops. What united them was their subordinate position in the production process, for all of them depended on the merchants for their often unsteady employment. The precarious living and working conditions of the clothworkers, especially during economic downturns, meant that they formed a significant portion (by some estimates up to half) of the *popolo minuto* – the Florentine poor.[24] Poverty rates of 50 to 70 percent maintained pressure on wages, especially for low-skilled workers. The guilds further ensured that wages would rarely rise beyond subsistence levels by limiting production quotas and by facilitating loans to penniless workers, which indentured them to labour under unfavorable conditions.[25] 'Even in times of high employment and cheap bread, their income was barely above the subsistence level', writes Gene Brucker.[26] In bad years, such as during the depression of the 1370s, they were destitute and suffered from famine and epidemics.

These economic and political grievances might not have led to a workers' uprising had it not been for the series of crippling crises that occasioned a

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22   Brucker 1968, p. 319; Goldthwaite 2009, pp. 300, 317–19.

23   On the condition of the woolworkers, see Franceschi 1993.

24   Brucker 1972, p. 157.

25   Najemy 1981, pp. 72–3.

26   Brucker 1972, p. 160.

rapid fall in wool production in the late fourteenth century.[27] The European economic and financial crisis as well as the outbreak of the bubonic plague hit Florence's export and financial industries especially hard.[28] As a result of the loss of markets and the disappearance of qualified labour, the production of cloth declined from 100,000 bolts of wool in 1308 to about 30,000 in 1373 and to less than 20,000 in 1381.[29] Yet while the financial industry saw a number of bankruptcies,[30] the wool firms fared better, in part because of their flexible business model, which allowed them to absorb shocks. By having relatively little capital tied up in materials or capital equipment and by relying on contract work, the *lanaiuoli* could stop production promptly while shifting the costs of work stoppages to their workers. The main victims of the economic depression were the 17,000 paupers in the city, whose livelihoods fluctuated with the business cycle of the wool industry.[31] While there is some debate among historians about the extent of the crisis, it is probable that during the 1370s and 1380s, the Florentine economy reached its lowest point since 1348.[32] An unprecedented polarisation of wealth separated the growing number of urban poor from a small plutocratic elite. As a contemporary chronicler put it, the people were hungry and angry; workshops were shut; and grain had to be rationed and publicly distributed.[33]

2   The Three Acts of the Ciompi Uprising

The Ciompi Uprising happened in three phases.[34] The first act, in June 1378, was prompted by a power struggle within the elites, which provoked riots that mobilised the wool workers. Artisans and workers from the *popolo minuto* – the 'little people' – participated in a day of protests that involved arson attacks on the *palazzi* of a dozen oligarchs and the release of inmates from the com-

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27   Goldthwaite 2009, p. 277.

28   Cipolla 1949, p. 181.

29   Davidsohn 1928, pp. 245, 250.

30   See Meltzing 1906, pp. 16–78.

31   The figure is Vilani's. See Münkler 2004, p. 165. For details on wool production in four-teenth century Florence, see Hoshino 1980. For an alternative perspective on the real income of workers, see de la Roncière 1981.

32   See Brucker 1962, p. 28.

33   Stefani, quoted in Davidsohn 1928, p. 246.

34   Brucker 1968, p. 315.

munal prisons.[35] With the help of the *popolo minuto*, the wealthy merchant patriciate managed to preempt the attempted coup by the old nobility.[36] But the elite power struggle was soon overshadowed by the wool workers, who a few weeks later – in the second act of the uprising – escalated the revolt. In late July, they overthrew the Florentine government and installed a revolutionary regime under the leadership of a wool carder, Michele di Lando. Several thousand armed workers besieged the Signoria; the Palazzo del Podesta was seized; and the public executioner was hanged by his feet in front of the Palazzo Vecchio.

Despite the bold actions, the Ciompi's political and social demands were modest. They wanted the right to form a guild and demanded production increases for the wool industry to abate unemployment.[37] On the whole, their petition remained well within the framework of the medieval corporatist system. It did not attempt to change or overthrow the regime nor to institute a more egalitarian order.[38] Yet the new Ciompi government was weak and timid and remained deferential to the political and economic elites.[39] Instead of instituting reforms, it quickly compromised with the minor guilds. Michele di Lando became a Thermidorian figure, clashing with the radical wing of the workers and thwarting their more egalitarian demands. In response to this betrayal, the Ciompi continued their revolt. In the third act of the uprising in late August, thousands of workers assembled in the Piazza San Marco. Shouting

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35   These arson attacks were instigated not by the workers but by the guilds. Green 1990, p. 78. See also Brucker 1962, p. 368.

36   See Rodolico 1980, pp. 1–27; Rutenburg 1971, pp. 163ff.

37   The petition submitted to the Signoria on July 21 had six main components: (1) abolition of the tribunal of the *arte della lana*; (2) abolition of the penalty of amputating a hand for non-payment of debts; (3) official recognition of and political representation for the *popolo minuto;* (4) two-year debt amnesty; (5) amnesty for everyone involved in the uprising; (6) change of the regressive tax system.

38   Whether these demands were radical or moderate is subject to ongoing controversy. For Rodolico, they signal the revolutionary character of the movement; Rodolico 1980, pp. 119ff. For Rutenburg, these are not revolutionary demands, merely a call for recognition under a feudal system, Rutenburg 1971, p. 198. Brucker and de Roover consider the program neither revolutionary nor egalitarian but simply an attempt to restore the ideal of the medieval corporation, Brucker 1983; see also Brucker 1968, pp. 342, 345, 353. de Roover 1968, p. 309. For Mollat and Wolff, these are relatively moderate demands, and Goldthwaite calls the event a 'popular taxpayers' revolt', Mollat and Wolff 1973; Goldthwaite 2009, p. 328. Najemy considers the program both revolutionary and sophisticated, Najemy 1981, p. 60. Stella argues that for the time, the demands were radical and would have completely transformed the political organisation of Florence. Stella 1993, pp. 62–5.

39   Stella 1993, pp. 53–9.

'Long live the *popolo minuto*', they demanded the resignation of Michele di Lando's government.[40] Pushing for a more egalitarian political and economic system, they demanded redistribution and called for a suspension of political rights for the aristocracy and for worker involvement in industrial decision-making. On August 31, they were brutally slaughtered by a coalition of major and minor guilds with the reformist forces under Michele di Lando. It was one of the bloodiest days in Florentine history.[41] In the following days, the *popolo grasso* and the minor guilds formed a government that disbarred the *sottoposti* of the wool guild. By 1382, that government had fallen and control over Florentine politics was back in the hands of the oligarchic elites.

3   Machiavelli's Two Voices

Machiavelli's depiction of the Ciompi is ambiguous. On the one hand, he describes the men who participated in the uprising in highly unflattering terms, calling them 'the lowest plebs [*infima plebe*] of the city' and a 'mob' motivated by fear and hatred (IF III.12; III.16). He chides the more radical workers for their 'ingratitude', 'extraordinary insolence', and 'arrogance' (IF III.17) and heaps praise on Michele di Lando, the man who ultimately betrayed and crushed the workers. On the other hand, Machiavelli quotes a long and rousing speech, attributed to one of the Ciompi and set at a secret workers' meeting, that makes an impassioned plea for equality and issues a piercing call for revolutionary change. The speech's social egalitarianism and its call to upend the social order sit uneasy with Machiavelli's professed criticism of the Ciompi and hint at a more radical politics.

In the secondary literature, the tension between what Machiavelli says about the Ciompi in his own voice and the words he ascribes to one of their rabble-rousers has typically been resolved in favour of the former. Largely accepting Machiavelli's self-presentation in the *Florentine Histories* as admiring compromise and moderation, scholars have advanced various arguments for why the wool worker's speech cannot be an expression of Machiavelli's true views. Schematically, these arguments can be grouped into two categories: those that dismiss the speech on the grounds of its substantive political claims and normative implications, and those that emphasise the speech's formal aspects and treat it as a literary device disconnected from the Ciompi uprising.

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40   See Stefani's chronicle in Green 1990, p. 90.
41   Mollat and Wolff 1973, p. 156.

Analyses of the speech's political claims have led a number of scholars to dismiss it on substantive grounds. Readers committed to the 'republican' Machiavelli typically concede that he was sympathetic to the moderate strand of the uprising but insist that he rejected the more radical insurgency. According to this interpretation, Machiavelli supported the workers' struggle for political representation and for equality before the law but opposed the demands for redistribution and for participatory democracy in matters of manufacturing and production.[42] Commentators have focused on the speech's ostensibly corrupt account of justice,[43] on the resentment and fear and the lack of a coherent political perspective,[44] and on the allegedly un-Machiavellian appeal to socio-economic equality[45] as reasons for why the speech is, in Hanna Pitkin's words, 'not an articulation of Machiavelli's views'.[46] This strand of interpretation sees the radicalism of the speech as a symptom of a failed political system.[47] Popular violence is the effect of pent-up grievances that have no institutional outlet; it emerges as the pathological result of the repression of voice, generated by a despotic political system that fails to provide adequate representative institutions that would allow complaints to take a discursive form. And Machiavelli is seen as an advocate of moderation and compromise whose account of the uprising has primarily pedagogical value: it functions as a historical parable, instructing the reader that the absence of representative institutions results in radicalism and violence.[48]

Scholars who treat the speech as a rhetorical exercise contend that reading the speech as an address by an uneducated wool worker to an audience of labourers constitutes a category mistake. This argument comes in two shapes: the first concerns the historical veracity of the speech. The fabricated nature of the speech has led some readers to dismiss it as an extravagant but politically meaningless ornamentation of Machiavelli's text.[49] A second version of this argument treats the speech as a skillfully crafted satire, one that is only coincidentally related to the Ciompi revolt. According to this interpretation, the speech is an instance of Machiavellian irony. In view of the numerous allusions

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42   See Pitkin 1984, pp. 310–14; Bock 1990, p. 195; Leibovici 2002, pp. 657–8.

43   Pitkin 1984, p. 313; Benner 2009, p. 304.

44   Leibovici 2002, p. 655.

45   Bock 1990, pp. 189, 195. For a competing analysis of Machiavelli's take on equality, see Lefort 1978, pp. 226–7.

46   Pitkin 1984, p. 314.

47   See for example Leibovici 2002, p. 650.

48   Maurizio Viroli goes so far as to call the speech a 'radical critique of populism' (Viroli 2010, p. 195).

49   Gilbert 1977, p. 137.

to maxims and ideas from *The Prince*, the speech should have been delivered by a prince rather than by an uneducated plebeian.[50] By treating the speech as a piece of political satire, this reading effectively disconnects the speech from the historical context of the uprising and interprets it as a mockery of the inept Florentine elites who are outshined by an illiterate wool worker.

Despite the split between substantive and formal assessments, both strands of interpretation share a common denominator. Whether it is through conceits of authorial intent, historical veracity, or ironic inversion, the major interpretations of this speech succeed in neutralising the radically egalitarian and democratic implications of the Ciompo's oration. As Mark Hulliung writes: 'political radicalism in the modern sense has nothing to do with Machiavelli's striking account of the plebeian cause'.[51] Machiavelli, we are told, may have harbored some sympathies with the demands for representation but was ultimately repulsed by the radicalism and violence of the plebs.

There are, however, good reasons to be skeptical of the portrait of Machiavelli as a moderate. For once, Machiavelli frequently deploys the rhetorical figure of dilemma and the humanist technique of argument on both sides of an issue (*in utramque partem*).[52] As Nancy Struever and Victoria Kahn have both shown, the tensions and contradictions in Machiavelli's text are rhetorical ways of problematising moral and political issues, prodding readers to consider a question from multiple angles and refusing facile answers to complex problems.[53] Thus to discount the speech in favour of Machiavelli's disparaging description of the Ciompi is to disregard half the story. Second, the neutralisation of the speech's radicalism may well be an effect of the bifurcation between the substantive and rhetorical interpretations of the speech. Most commentators tacitly rely on the premise, that what Machiavelli says about the Ciompi is more reliable than what he has them say. But why should we regard Machiavelli's narrative voice (as opposed to the orator's) as a faithful reflection of his authorial intentions? Implicit in this view is a naturalisation of narrative as a discursive form, the mythical idea that narrative – as opposed to direct speech – is a neutral medium for representing historical events.[54]

The ambiguous portrayal of the Ciompi in the *Florentine Histories* ensures that Machiavelli's 'true' authorial intentions and political beliefs remain

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50   Hulliung 1983, p. 92.

51   Hulliung 1983, p. 89.

52   Cox 2010, pp. 182–3; Chabod 1964, p. 200.

53   Kahn 1994; Struever 1992, pp. 147–81. For a dialectical analysis of *The Prince,* see also McCanles 1983.

54   See White 1987.

opaque. The *Florentine Histories* provide no resolution of the tension between the exhortative voice ascribed to the anonymous Ciompo and the narrative voice, which the text attributes to Machiavelli. To narrate is to tell a story, and to narrate history is to give historical events and processes the shape of stories. But not every event lends itself to being narrated: not every event presents itself as a linear and sequential story, with a beginning, a middle, and an end. Speeches mark interruptions in the historical chronology of the work and provide Machiavelli with the opportunity to insert a new voice into the text without completely breaking the narrative illusion. Struever has identified such modifications in narrative design as an example of Machiavelli's 'problematizing strategy', a textual strategy that refuses the ostensibly transparent and unambiguous nature of historical and political claims.[55] Registering the worker's speech as a shift in narrative mode provides us with the necessary interpretive leverage for a fresh appraisal, one that works through the interplay of the speech's formal dimensions and substantive political arguments while remaining attentive to the narrative sequence and its discontinuities. In this vein, Ramon Aguirre has proposed to read the speeches in the *Florentine Histories* as ways of directly addressing the reader, whereas Peter Bondanella sees them as 'a means of strengthening [Machiavelli's] own theoretical arguments'.[56] If we take these two ideas – that the speech is an address to the reader and that it serves to propose a theoretical argument – as interpretive starting points, we might ask how the speech functions as an address to the reader and what theoretical argument(s) it serves to strengthen.

4   A Plebeian Call to Arms

Rejecting aristocratic doctrines of natural hierarchy and inequality, the Ciompo makes the most radical claim for human equality in Machiavelli's work:

> Do not let their antiquity of blood [...] dismay you: for all men, having had the same beginning, are equally ancient and have been made by nature in one mode. Strip all of us naked, 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, for only poverty and riches make us unequal (IF III.13).

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55   Struever 1992, p. 148.
56   Aguirre 1978, p. 42; Bondanella 1973, p. 96.

If all men have the same beginning, and if only clothes differentiate us, social hierarchies do not derive from nature. The claim to equality is grounded in the shared nudity of the body, the underlying sameness that is hidden by the impermanent and artificial trappings of dress and attire. If, as a philosophical argument for equality, the trope that fine feathers make fine birds does not hold water, rhetorically, it is remarkably effective and serves as the basis for a series of arguments why political violence is a necessary and legitimate response to exploitation and disenfranchisement.

The orator counsels the workers to pursue two objectives in their deliberations: one is to avoid punishment for the riots in which they were involved and the other 'is to be able to live with more freedom and more satisfaction than we have in the past' (IF III.13). To escape their condition of poverty, workers must rise up and take what is rightfully theirs.

> It is to our advantage, therefore, as it appears to me, if we wish that our old errors be forgiven us, to make new ones, redoubling the evils, multiplying the arson and robbery – and to contrive to have many companions in this, because when many err, no one is punished, and though small faults are punished, great and grave ones are rewarded; and when many suffer, few seek for revenge, because universal injuries are borne with greater patience than particular ones. Thus in multiplying evils, we will gain pardon more easily and will open the way for us to have the things we desire to have for our freedom (IF III.13).

The recourse to violence is a matter of 'necessity', for there are no alternative courses of action available, if the workers are to free themselves from their masters. Forestalling objections to violence on moral grounds, the speaker urges his audience to refrain from evaluating violent action according to benchmarks of conscience and instead to apply a purely instrumental standard:

> We ought not to take conscience into account, for where there is, as with us, fear of hunger and prison, there cannot and should not be fear of hell. But if you will take note of the mode of proceeding of men, you will see that all those who come to great riches and great power have obtained them either by fraud or by force; and afterwards, to hide the ugliness of acquisition, they make it decent by applying the false title of earnings to things they have usurped by deceit or by violence. And those who, out of either little prudence or too much foolishness, shun these modes always

suffocate in servitude or poverty. For faithful servants are always servants and good men are always poor (IF III.13).

Painting the picture of a cannibalistic world in which 'men devour one another', the orator calls on the workers to be bold and seize the opportunity to become 'princes of all the city':

> How many times have I heard you lament the avarice of your superiors and the injustice of your magistrates! Now is the time not only to free ourselves from them but to become so much their superiors that they will have more to lament and fear from you than you from them. The opportunity brought us by the occasion is fleeting, and when it has gone, it will be vain to try to recover it (Ibid.).

The plebeian speech is a remarkable rhetorical achievement, blending sophisticated techniques of argument with emotional appeals, figures of amplification, vivid examples, and effective repetitions, substitutions, and transitions. The speech also exhibits a number of Machiavellian themes[57]: the preference for conflict over harmony; the advice to the workers to seize the opportunity and to make their own fortune; the idea of necessity as a teacher; the insight that when many transgress, they will not be punished and that whereas small misdeeds are punished, great crimes are frequently rewarded; the rejection of a Christian model of conscience as an arbiter of political action; the recognition that power and wealth often have their origins in violence and fraud and that these origins are typically shrouded in fabricated tales of merit and entitlement; the counsel that in times of crisis, boldness is prudence, and that a failure to act decisively and if necessary violently may lead to greater violence and misery down the road.

Politically, one of the key issues raised by the speech is how to interpret its call for violence. Is the inclination to violence a symptom of the plebs's political immaturity or moral corruption? Is the popular violence a consequence of the failure of the Florentine political system to provide avenues of participation? What distinguishes the people from the *grandi*, Machiavelli is fond of repeating, is that the latter desire to oppress whereas the former desire merely to avoid being oppressed (D I.5; P 9). Is the plebeian desire to subjugate their masters therefore a cue that they are *grandi* in waiting, and that they intend to merely invert relations of domination rather than transform them? Does the aspiration to crush and oppress their superiors, to dominate them and to loot

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57   Pitkin 1984, p. 311; Hulliung 1983, pp. 89–92; Bock 1990, p. 194.

their riches, signal that the workers are driven by the same impulses as the *ottimati* and that ambition is the fundamental anthropological constant that shapes social hierarchies and relations of domination?

In the Ciompo's cannibalistic world in which 'men devour one another' and in which riches and power are obtained 'either by fraud or by force', violence does indeed appear to have an anthropological rationale. Violence and fraud are what sustains the social order, an order in which the *popolo minuto* 'suffocate in servitude and poverty'. One might infer that violence here functions as a universal instrument for achieving political aims or, alternatively, that Machiavelli laments the universal human capacity 'for mindless, savage, unpredictable violence'.[58] Yet in the speech, the anthropological rationalisation of violence is complemented by a conjunctural argument: since the workers have already taken up arms, they are liable to be prosecuted unless they are victorious. The Ciompi must thus pursue a double-pronged strategy: the emancipatory struggle for 'more freedom and more satisfaction (*più libertà e più sodisfazione*)' must be combined with the immediate tactical need to avoid punishment. This double aim is best attained not by a retreat but by a multiplication of violence.

The theme of a political and social order based on violence and fraud resonates strongly with *The Prince,* where Machiavelli, among other things, lays out various types of violence and fraud necessary to acquire and maintain power. The problem for the new prince is to remake the entire social order or, as Machiavelli puts it, to lay good foundations, to eliminate his rivals, keep the nobles in check, and if necessary, to destroy entire cities (P 3). All the while, the new prince must strive to 'appear ancient' (P 24), that is, to create the 'false title of earnings' to which the wool worker alludes. And among the examples from *The Prince*, none seems as fitting to the plebeian's call to multiply violence as Cesare Borgia, the duke Valentino, described in chapter 7. Borgia turns violence into a cathartic moment by executing his universally hated deputy and by having him dismembered and displayed in the town piazza. That *spettaculo* 'left the people at once satisfied and stupefied' (P 7), converting their hatred and vengefulness into a blend of satisfaction and awe, or in Machiavellian terms, love and fear. We know that even though the duke's State-building (just like the Ciompi's) ultimately failed, Machiavelli regarded him as an example for how to found a State (P 7, 8, 13). It may not be all that far-fetched to ask whether the speech ascribed to the anonymous plebeian leader is meant to ventriloquise the duke's actions.[59]

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58   Rebhorn 1988, p. 99.
59   See Borsellino 1974, p. 323.

But ventriloquise in what sense? The plebeian politics that emerge from the speech are not merely an applied version of the advice dispensed in *The Prince*. It is true that the orator's stated ambition is for the workers to become 'princes of all the city (*principi della città*)' and at various points in the speech, he indicates that it is time for the oppressed to trade place with the oppressors. But in contrast to *The Prince*, which discusses violence and deceit as strategies ostensibly useful for aspiring princes, the worker's speech treats them as sources of domination, inequality, and destitution. To be sure, the orator sees violence as a necessary tactic for the emancipatory workers' movement; that said, the recourse to violence is framed primarily in terms of shaking off existing relations of domination rather than constituting new ones. The speech's principal objective is to pierce and expose the illusions and appearances that mask the violence that secures the social order. Above all, the workers need to unshackle themselves from the ideology that aristocratic birth renders some men superior by nature and that hereditary social hierarchies have natural underpinnings. The first step in the plebeians' emancipatory struggle is to decolonise their minds, to shed their fears and to liberate themselves from the pangs of conscience that impede their action and that render them complicit in their own subjection. The speaker, then, is significantly more concerned with addressing the fears and apprehensions of his fellow labourers and with elucidating their condition than with ruling over the elites.

The objective of plebeian violence is framed in terms of 'satisfaction' (*sodisfazione*), evoking both Borgia's assassination of his hated deputy that left the people 'satisfied' (*satisfatti*) as well as an episode from the *Discourses*, where Clearchus 'cut to pieces all the aristocrats, to the extreme satisfaction (*sodisfazione*) of the people' (D 1.16). The Ciompi pursue a 'satisfaction' unlike that provided by the duke or by Clearchus; nevertheless, the terminological convergence is not entirely coincidental. The emphasis on satisfaction in all three texts suggests that violence functions not merely an instrument of coercion but also as a way to mobilise popular support in a manner that appeals directly to popular demands for redress against oppression. It is this affective dimension of the public performance of violence that echoes through the worker's speech.

The demand for this kind of violent satisfaction may seem crude, but rather than recoil and reprimand the plebeians' vindictiveness, we should understand this demand as a phantasmatic response to social conditions. For the resentment and vengefulness fueled by the orator are not his creation; they are the psycho-social consequences of enduring oppression and exploitation. More precisely, they are an attempt to convert fear into hatred. And if popular hatred, as a political affect, is only remotely as valuable to conspirator as it is

detrimental to princes (P 10, 17, 19, 20), then that conversion makes the fear that is gripping the workers politically productive.

As Machiavelli notes in *The Prince*, the hatred against the *grandi* has a cogent political explanation: the people hate the *grandi* because they fear them and because they aspire to secure themselves against domination (P 19). To read the speech's pathos as stoking the flames of dangerous unsociable passions is to miss the point that these passions are figured not simply as depraved desires lying dormant. What emerges clearly from the speech is that it is addressed to a frightened crowd, an audience whose debilitating 'fear of hunger and prison' has to be transformed into a potential for collective action. The demand for *sodisfazione* thus indicates that the constitution of an insurrectionary political subjectivity takes place in the phantasmatic field of desire and affect, and that the strategies available to potential insurgents must take this into account. To blame the plebeians for a corrupt understanding of justice is to ignore and disavow the conditions under which the desire to inflict violence on the powerful originates and the fear to which it testifies. It is also to disregard the phantasmatic structure of this desire and of the promise that animates it. By translating fear into vengefulness, the speech produces a reorganisation of affect that is exactly the inverse of the one achieved by Borgia's *spettaculo*. Rather than reading them literally, we might thus interpret the call for revenge and the promise to become new princes as rhetorical *spettaculi*, in other words, as hyperbolic performances aimed at generating the capacity for political action among an audience debilitated by fear. But which audience? To whom is the speech ultimately addressed? In order to answer this question, we first need to examine another aspect of the speech: its fictional character.

5   How to Read an Invented Speech

The acerbic critique of the elites, the commitment to a popular cause, and the presumption that effective political action is founded on persuasion are characteristics that place this speech squarely within the tradition of popular political discourse of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.[60] Yet there is no historical record of the worker's speech in any of Machiavelli's sources or in the archival records, indicating that the speech is most certainly fabricated.[61] How

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60   Najemy 2006, p. 59.

61   See the notes by both Carli in Machiavelli 1962, p. 311 and by Fiorini in Machiavelli 1967, p. 299. As Brucker points out, the archival records of the revolutionary regime are

much weight ought scholars place on an invented speech? How does one interpret an invented speech? Even though as literary devices, fictional speeches are not untypical in ancient or Renaissance historiography, modern historians often sneer at this practice.[62] Felix Gilbert, for instance, writes that Machiavelli and other Renaissance historians were more concerned with 'style and form' than with 'facts'. According to Gilbert and other modern critics, readers should not take Machiavelli's invented speeches too seriously because they are stylistic bells and whistles humanist historians used to 'embellish their story'.[63] Pasquale Villari levies a similar charge against Bruni and Bracciolini, arguing that the speeches in their works are purely epideictic, mere displays of eloquence.[64]

Whereas the fabricated nature of the speeches in the *Florentine Histories* leads Gilbert and Villari to dismiss them, one could appeal to the very same reasons to be especially mindful of them. It is of course true – as Hegel already pointed out – that when historians try to portray the spirit of past times, it is usually the spirit of their own age that transpires.[65] But does not this make the fabricated speeches rather more than less interesting for political theory? Thus, instead of berating Machiavelli's mix of fiction and historiography, we should perhaps ask what the role and significance is of fiction in this historical text and in the moment of popular insurrection in particular. To accept the fictional moment as a rhetorical requirement of the text itself allows us to ask a different set of questions: why must the most radically egalitarian claim in Machiavelli's text be presented in fictional form? And what does the fictional (and anonymous) status of this speech reveal about Machiavelli's view of the Ciompi and of egalitarian insurrections in general?

Since Herodotus, speeches are frequently used as explanatory devices that shed light on a character's motivation and provide reasons for the character's actions. Herodotus and Polybius reserved the use of speeches for their most important characters and would not have composed a speech for an unnamed

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rudimentary and do not include minutes of worker or council meetings (Brucker 1968, p. 318). As for the narrative evidence, neither of the five contemporary chronicles collected by Gino Scaramella mentions the speech. See Green 1990.

62 Until the nineteenth century, historians seem not to have been troubled by the fabricated status of Machiavelli's speech and kept replicating it in their histories of Florence. See for instance Napier 1846, pp. 422–5. Among later historians, however, his blend of 'fact' and 'fiction' contributed to pinning on Machiavelli a reputation as a poor historian. See Bock 1990, p. 185, note 14.

63 Gilbert 1977, p. 137.

64 Villari 1892, p. 95.

65 Hegel 1975, p. 17.

worker. By attributing a speech to an unknown wool carder, Machiavelli positions himself closer to Livy, who employed speeches for a wide range of characters, including common soldiers and citizens.[66] We might thus find further interpretive clues in Machiavelli's commentary on Livy, in other words, in the *Discourses*. But whereas Livy used speeches to compose detailed psychological tableaus of his protagonists, the speech by the anonymous Ciompo sheds little light on the figure himself. If we look for examples where Machiavelli's use of speeches diverges from Livy's, we find an instructive reference to Thucydides. In book III of the *Discourses,* Machiavelli commends Thucydides for a passage in *The Peloponnesian War* that is narrated almost exclusively through a series of speeches (D III.16). Given Machiavelli's approval of the Greek historian's use of speeches, might he also have shared Thucydides' principles of composition? In the first book of *The Peloponnesian War*, Thucydides explains that he sometimes made up speeches according to what each situation required.[67] If Machiavelli's approval of Thucydides' narrative technique can be taken as an indication for his own authorial practice, we might infer that Machiavelli employs speeches as a way to reconstruct the logic of a situation.[68]

Taking the logic of the situation as the interpretive yardstick, how does the speech measure up? The speech is set at a workers' meeting, and from archival records we know that the Florentine Signoria had been concerned about such meetings, 'colloquia' and 'murmurationes' throughout the spring and early summer of 1378.[69] And indeed, in Machiavelli's account of the summer of discontent of 1378, the speech occupies a pivotal place: it marks the transformation of the dispersed and unorganised riots of 'primitive rebels' into a coordinated uprising.[70] Yet in terms of its political content, the speech overshoots its targets.

The meeting at which the speech is purportedly delivered takes place prior to the second act of the uprising that installs Michele di Lando as *gonfaloniere*. Nonetheless, the demands of the July insurrection, while unprecedented, remained within the terms of the corporatist regime: a widening of the franchise, freedom of association*,* a revision of the tax code, and some emergency provisions for the starving unemployed workers – a far cry from the revolutionary call for equality and violence presented in the speech. The demands did

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66   See Aguirre 1978.

67   Whether Thucydides abides by his own rules is of course another question. See Wilson 1982.

68   See for instance Brucker 1968, p. 318; Goldthwaite 2009, p. 327.

69   Najemy 1981, p. 62.

70   Hobsbawm 1959.

not challenge the premises of the regime; they were wholly within the logic of corporatism, calling for the extension of guild representation to a wider range of social groups. The July uprising was, as John Najemy puts it, a 'guild revolution', for the Ciompi framed their demands entirely within the corporatist discourse, even as they gave the guild ideology a 'radical twist'.[71] Yet as historians have noted, even these limited demands went unfulfilled by the Ciompi government. The new members of the commission or *balìa* that took power in June and July were largely drawn from small shopkeepers not from the propertyless wage labourers. Their political instincts were moderate, perhaps even conservative; and their immediate goal was not to implement a revolutionary program but to restore order and reestablish legitimacy.[72] With the exception of creating three new guilds and filling some political offices, the *balìa* of the Ciompi failed to use its extraordinary powers to advance the workers' agenda. The new petition, submitted on 27 August by the radical wing of the Ciompi, demanded that most *balìa* members be excluded from office for ten years for the 'mistakes' they had committed.[73]

The demands in the speech and the arguments for an overthrow of the oligarchic regime thus seem out of place. The incongruity is accentuated by the speech's call for a multiplication of violence, for the popular violence in July remained remarkably controlled and low-impact. According to Michel Mollat and Philippe Wolff, the only recorded murder of the tumultuous days in July was the hanging of the public executioner, which would mark this as one of the least bloody revolutionary moments in late medieval European history.[74] The fourteenth century chronicler Stefani further reports that the rioters were careful not to loot the palaces before burning them down, because they did not want to create the impression that they were after the wealth of the *grandi*.[75] The demands articulated in the speech seem geared not toward the second act of the uprising but toward a more radical social revolution that would have involved a profound reorganisation of the relations of production. The assembled workers at the July meeting are thus unlikely to be the intended audience. The speech would have been more fitting as an appeal to the radicals who revolt in the third act of the uprising and who, a few weeks after the July events, confront Michele di Lando, the Ciompi-turned-*gonfaloniere*, to demand real

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71 Najemy 1979, p. 66, and 1981, p. 65.

72 Brucker 1968, pp. 330–3.

73 Rubinstein 1981, pp. 105–6.

74 Mollat and Wolff 1973, p. 149.

75 Stefani, *Cronaca Fiorentina*, in Green 1990, p. 82. Stefani further relates how he saw someone 'with a hen and a piece of salted meat in his hand' forced to throw both into the fire.

change. Contemporary chronicles attest that such a meeting indeed took place on August 28, 1378, in the church of Santa Maria Novella, where the *popolo minuto* discussed their demands and strategies.[76]

Placing the speech in that context could have been read as betraying sympathies with the radical faction of the Ciompi, a potentially risky move. As the Medici's court historian, it would hardly have behooved Machiavelli to champion a radically democratic and redistributionist social agenda. From his correspondence at the time, we know that Machiavelli was concerned not to offend the Medici, and it would be unsurprising, if he had censored his *Florentine Histories* so as to avoid displeasing his patrons.[77] To his young friend Donato Giannotti, Machiavelli said that 'I cannot write this history […] just as I would write it if I were free from all reasons for caution'. If the reader wishes to fully understand a historical character, 'let him observe well what I shall have his opponents say, because what I am not willing to say as coming from myself, I shall have his opponents say'.[78] If we can trust Giannotti's pen, then Machiavelli not only censored his *Florentine Histories* but also planted 'opponents' to whom he attributes his own criticisms of the oligarchs.[79] If Machiavelli ascribed his own criticism of the Medici to their (real or fictional) opponents, it is not improbable that he would chalk up his controversial commentary on the oligarchs and their allies to an anonymous Ciompo.

6   Interpreting the Anonymous Voice

As readers have pointed out, it is remarkable for such a carefully crafted speech to be attributed to an uneducated wool worker, raising the question of whether the attribution is intended to challenge the oligarchic presumption about the political incompetence of the plebs.[80] But the matter of the speech's attribution is not just a question of the speaker's lack of a humanist education. Of crucial importance is also his anonymity. The anonymous agitator appears

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76   Stefani, *Cronaca Fiorentina*, in Green 1990, p. 92.

77   Machiavelli wrote to Francesco Guicciardini that he would pay ten *soldi* to have Guicciardini look over his shoulder to ensure he does not offend his sponsors. Letter to Francesco Guicciardini, August 30, 1524. Machiavelli 1988, p. 206.

78   Letter from Donato Giannotti to Antonio Michieli, 30 June 1533, in Machiavelli 1989, p. 1028. For the original letter, see Ferrai 1884, p. 1582.

79   Cohn quotes the passage but fails to attend to the implications of the planted 'opponents' (Cohn 1981, p. 201).

80   Benner 2009, p. 306. See also Hulliung 1983, p. 89.

only briefly in the *Florentine Histories*.[81] He occupies the space of a single chapter, yet this chapter is critical both in the narratological sense of plot development and in the theoretical elaboration of the revolt.[82] How are we to interpret the fact that the nocturnal speech's author, even though he is a protagonist of Machiavelli's narrative, remains unnamed? Machiavelli did not (or could not?) endow him with a story and a biography and thus make him a historical character. What is the significance of this nameless, mysterious voice, of the absence of a determinate historical identity?

Since the *Florentine Histories* were a commissioned work, the ambiguousness of this voice may be strategic: if an explicit endorsement of a proletarian uprising would have been incompatible with Machiavelli's role as the official Medici historian, the indeterminacy provides him with a measure of plausible deniability. It is, however, also possible that the anonymity of this speaker is significant in a different sense.[83] What I would like to suggest is that, in addition to the strategic objective of avoiding the suspicions of the Medici, there may be good theoretical reasons for this enigmatic attribution.

Perhaps the lack of a name and historical identity of the speech's author emphasises the ephemeral and indeterminate status of a popular politics. In the *Discourses,* anonymous voices often designate supernatural and extraordinary accidents, raising the question of whether this voice has an equivalent status (D 1.56). The revolutionary voice remains indeterminate and thus sidesteps the tendency to particularise the call to arms by attributing it to a specific individual with a determinate biography. By refusing to credit the pivotal moment in the revolutionary mobilisation to a specific individual (whether fictional or historical), Machiavelli's text de-subjectifies and thus demystifies the logic of popular violence. Instead of creating a dramatic hero, Machiavelli leaves the place of the author – of the speech and perhaps also the subject of popular violence – vacant. Popular violence is thus figured as an event without a subject, evoking what Miguel Vatter has called the event of no-rule.[84] The

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81   In addition to the nocturnal address by the Ciompo, there are five other anonymous direct speeches in the *Florentine Histories*: an address to Duke Walter by a delegate from the Signoria in 1342, IF II.34; an address of a citizen to the Signori demanding reform in 1371, IF III.5; inhabitants from the Seravezze valley addressing the Ten of War in 1429, IF IV.21; supporters of the Lucchese in 1437, IF V.11, 198–9; ambassadors of the Milanese to Francesco Sforza in 1448, IF VI.20.

82   See Borsellino 1974.

83   Harvey Mansfield speculates that the anonymous speaker could actually be Michele di Lando, but in the context of Michele's collaboration with the *popolo grasso,* this identification is not persuasive. Mansfield 1996, p. 17.

84   Vatter 2000.

event itself remains historically underdetermined, as if to gesture to a gap that cannot be captured by the conventional norms of historical narrative and agency. The anonymous subversive who ventriloquises duke Valentino does not himself become the duke of the uprising. By avoiding the narrative genre of tragedy, Machiavelli refuses to generate a hero with whom his readers empathise and identify. There is pathos in the speech, but the pathos is not tied to the character's fate, to the biography of a specific individual.

In contrast to the Florentine elites, whose privileges and estates are tied to birth, this Ciompo is detached from his biological ancestry; he has neither pedigree nor patrimony. His political claim, authority, and appeal rests not on oligarchic birthright but on its absence. In a class society fundamentally shaped by patrilineal inheritance and thus by the name of the father, this worker's voice flouts the principles of succession. The rejection of naturalised social hierarchies articulated in the speech is performatively enacted in this failure to conform to the patronymic terms that sustain the social hierarchies and make possible their reproduction.

What authorises these terms, among other things, are the stories we tell ourselves about the origins and justifications of relations of domination, including accounts prepared by historians. By interrupting the narrative sequence, this anonymous speech thus quite literally gives pause to the chain of events and to the mythical premises of heroic historiography. To claim that the anonymous Ciompo is proof of Machiavelli's hostility toward heroic historiography, such as that advanced by oligarchic historians such as Bruni would be to overstate the case. As Mark Phillips has shown, Machiavelli's account of the uprising owes too much to the narrative schema of the heroic drama, which was first grafted onto the Ciompi revolt by Bruni.[85] In Bruni's script, the revolutionary moment is figured in terms of a moralised melodrama, pitting a righteous and fearless Michele di Lando against the vile and contemptible plebs. But if my interpretation of the anonymous speech is right, then Machiavelli inserts, at a key dramatic juncture, a figure that is incongruous with the norms of both heroic historiography and oligarchic order.

Perhaps we ought to interpret this anonymous worker along the lines proposed by Antonio Gramsci in his essay 'The Modern Prince'. Gramsci argues that Machiavelli's prince is a rhetorical figure that stands for the collective will:

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85   In contrast to the fourteenth century chroniclers, who described the unfolding of the revolt as a sequence of collective actions taken by highly volatile crowds, Bruni recounts the episode by inflating the roles of two key figures: Salvestro de'Medici and Michele di Lando. Phillips contends that Machiavelli retains Bruni's narrative pattern but privileges Michele over Salvestro (Phillips 1984, pp. 598–603).

it represents the process whereby a collective political will is formed through the characteristics and traits of a prince.[86] Taking *The Prince*'s last chapter as a point of departure, Gramsci draws our attention to the historical absence of the political subject that could carry out the revolutionary political act of uniting Italy. The absence of the political subject the book seeks to summon lends *The Prince* a utopian quality and registers the untimeliness of Machiavelli's thought. For Gramsci, *The Prince* is a political manifesto, creating a 'concrete fantasy which acts on a dispersed and shattered people to arouse and organize its collective will'.[87] The figure of the prince is this fantasy. It functions as a cipher, a relay for the people to reflect on their political conditions, just as the anonymous Ciompo's speech provokes the reader to contemplate radical political action in the face of domination and inequality.

The woolworker's speech resembles *The Prince* insofar as it lacks a pre-defined addressee.[88] Incongruous with the timeline of the Ciompi revolt and undermining the heroic norms of historical narrative and agency, the revolutionary address has no determinate recipient. By calling for popular violence and for an overthrow of the political and social order while rejecting the oligarchic logic of privilege, the speech conjures a political subject that does not exist in late medieval or early modern Florence. If the speech addresses an audience that is yet to come into being, we must read it as generating a political imaginary that travels and that is confined neither to the particulars of the late fourteenth-century context of the Ciompi revolt nor to the early sixteenth-century context of the time of its composition.

Conclusion

For Renaissance humanists, the alleged excesses of the Ciompi and the threat of plebeian politics frequently served as a motif to legitimate the oligarchic restoration and subsequent Medici rule.[89] By depicting the Ciompi as pursuing a radical political project, Machiavelli challenges this oligarchic narrative and outlines the contours of a plebeian politics. At the center of this insurrectionary project is the *popolo minuto*'s claim to equality and the defense of violence as a means to overthrow their oppressors. Yet despite the naïve image of reversing political fortunes and becoming 'princes of the city', the speech does not

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86   Gramsci 1971, pp. 125ff.
87   Gramsci 1971, p. 126, spelling adapted.
88   See Balakrishnan 2009, p. 267.
89   Najemy 2000, pp. 83–5.

reduce the revolt to the fantasy of trading places with the powerful. For the speech challenges not only the *popolo minuto*'s oppression but also the symbolic conditions that organise that oppression. In late medieval Florence, where having a last name was a measure of social mobility, the anonymity of the plebeian voice signals the rejection of the terms that structure social inequality and status.

The repudiation of oligarchic privilege does not, however, make this speech any more subsumable under the mantle of civic republicanism. For the plebeian politics that emerge from Machiavelli's account of the Ciompi revolt are a politics of struggle and of antagonism. It is no accident that this antagonism is preserved despite the plebeian assertion of equality in the worker's speech and that even this claim to equality is articulated in terms of the fundamental opposition between the plebeians and their *superiori*. By insisting on that opposition, the speech tacitly dismisses the republican pieties of order, social peace, and patriotic unity. At no point in the speech does the *popolo minuto* constitute itself as a universal and make the claim to represent the people as a whole. At no point is the conflict between *popolani* and *plebe* resolved, nor does the orator give any indication that such a resolution may be on the horizon of emancipatory political action. Dismissing the promise of social harmony as myth, the speech urges the reader to consider insurrectionary politics as continuous and recurrent struggles with no guarantee for redemption. Just like Gramsci's prince, the anonymous Ciompo is engaged in the production of an untimely historical fantasy; yet unlike the prince, the anonymous worker performs this phantasmatic work not through anthropomorphic qualities or character traits but by preventing the appropriation of the woolworkers' uprising by a republican discourse of unity. By depicting the Ciompi's struggle as unavailable both to assimilation into the oligarchic idiom of privilege and to the republican credo of order and social peace, Machiavelli summons a revolutionary subject that is not only historically absent but also not susceptible to absorption into available institutional political forms.

Appendix: Full Text of the Speech

If we had to deliberate now whether to take up arms, to burn and to rob the homes of the citizens, to despoil churches, I would be one of those who would judge it was a course to think over, and perhaps I would agree to put quiet poverty ahead of perilous gain. But because arms have been taken up and many evils have been done, it appears to me that one must reason that arms must not be put aside and that we must consider how we can secure ourselves from the evils that have been committed. Certainly

I believe that if others do not teach us, necessity does. You see this whole city full of grievance and hatred against us: the citizens meet together; the Signoria is always on the side of the magistrates. You should believe that traps are being set for us and that new forces are being prepared against our strongholds. We must therefore seek two things, and we must have two ends in our deliberations: one is to make it impossible for us to be punished for the things we have done in recent days, and the other is to be able to live with more freedom and more satisfaction than we have in the past. *It is to our advantage, therefore, as it appears to me, if we wish that our old errors be forgiven us, to make new ones, redoubling the evils, multiplying the arson and robbery – and to contrive to have many companions in this, because when many err, no one is punished, and though small faults are punished, great and grave ones are rewarded; and when many suffer, few seek for revenge, because universal injuries are borne with greater patience than particular ones.* Thus in multiplying evils, we will gain pardon more easily and will open the way for us to have the things we desire to have for our freedom. And it appears to me that we are on the way to a sure acquisition, because those who could hinder us are disunited and rich: their disunion will therefore give us victory, and their riches, when they have become ours, will maintain it for us. *Do not let their antiquity of blood, with which they will reproach us, dismay you; for all men, having had the same beginning, are equally ancient and have been made by nature in one mode. Strip all of us naked, 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, for only poverty and riches make us unequal.* It pains me much when I hear that out of conscience many of you repent the deeds that have been done and that you wish to abstain from new deeds; and certainly, if this is true, you are not the men I believed you to be, for neither conscience nor infamy should dismay you, because those who win, in whatever mode they win, never receive shame from it. And *we ought not to take conscience into account, for where there is, as with us, fear of hunger and prison, there cannot and should not be fear of hell.* But if you will take note of the mode of proceeding of men, you will see that *all those who come to great riches and great power have obtained them either by fraud or by force; and afterwards, to hide the ugliness of acquisition, they make it decent by applying the false title of earnings to things they have usurped by deceit or by violence.* And those who, out of either little prudence or too much foolishness, shun these modes always suffocate in servitude or poverty. For *faithful servants are always servants and good men are always poor; nor do they ever rise out of servitude unless they are unfaithful and bold, nor out of poverty unless they are rapacious and fraudulent.* For God and nature have put all the fortunes of men in their midst, where they are exposed more to rapine than to industry and more to wicked than to good arts, from which it arises that *men devour one another and that those who can do less are always the worst off. Therefore, one should use force whenever the occasion for it is given to us*; nor can a greater occasion be offered us by fortune than this one, when citizens are still disunited, the Signoria irresolute, and

the magistrates dismayed so that they can easily be crushed before they unite and steady their spirits. As a result, either *we shall be left princes of all the city*, or we shall have so large a part of it that not only will our past errors be pardoned but we shall even have authority enabling us to threaten them with new injuries. I confess this course is bold and dangerous, but *when necessity presses, boldness is judged prudence*; and spirited men never take account of the danger in great things, for those enterprises that are begun with danger always end with reward, and one never escapes a danger without danger. Moreover, I believe that when one sees the prisons, tortures, and deaths being prepared, *standing still is more to be feared than seeking to secure ourselves against them, for in the first case the evils are certain and in the other, doubtful. How many times have I heard you lament the avarice of your superiors and the injustice of your magistrates! Now is the time not only to free ourselves from them but to become so much their superiors that they will have more to lament and fear from you than you from them. The opportunity brought us by the occasion is fleeting, and when it has gone, it will be vain to try to recover it*. You see the preparations of your adversaries. Let us be ahead of their thoughts; and *whichever of us is first to take up arms again will without doubt be the conqueror*, with ruin for the enemy and exaltation for himself. From this will come honor for many of us and security for all. (IF, III.13, emphasis added)

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Machiavelli's Greek Tyrant as Republican Reformer

John P. McCormick

The extent to which Niccolò Machiavelli is or is not a 'Renaissance civic humanist' remains a controversial issue.[1] In this essay, I argue that Machiavelli's political thought does not easily conform to the paradigm of Renaissance civic Humanism in at least one fundamental respect: Machiavelli intimates rather strongly that corrupt republics must be reformed by princely figures reminiscent of ancient Greek tyrants.[2] On the contrary, the civic republicans of Machiavelli's day, following Cicero, hoped that more conservative princely figures would assume the task of 'setting right' republics that were beset by corruption and social strife: for example, so-called 'fathers of their country', like Furius Camillus, Caesar Augustus and Cosimo de' Medici; or, the *rector rei publicae* of Cicero's literary imagination, Scipio Africanus the Younger.[3] Most civic humanists hoped that a patrician, 'first citizen' would step forth to settle the social crises of their cities; anticipating that such an individual would do so with either equanimity toward all classes, or, more preferably, in ways that advantaged their republic's nobilities.

Machiavelli is the only 'republican' who offers the ancient Greek tyrant as a model reformer of corrupt civic orders: figures like Hiero of Syracuse; Agathocles the Sicilian; the Spartans, Cleomenes and Nabis; and Clearchus of Heraclea.[4] If one were to draw an ideal type based on historical accounts of such individuals, and on Machiavelli's own description of them, the perfect republican reformer would do all of the following: crush the nobility and distribute its wealth to the common people; eliminate all reliance on mercenary arms; greatly expand the ranks of citizen soldiers – especially by freeing slaves to do so; and, finally, manipulate diplomatic alliances so as to reduce external threats posed by more powerful foreign empires. In Machiavelli's estimation, the con-

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1 See, paradigmatically, Baron 1961, pp. 217–53.

2 For a thorough investigation of Machiavelli's notion of tyranny, see Giorgini 2008, pp. 230–56. See also Giorgini 1993.

3 See *De re publica* and *De legibus*.

4 Machiavelli 1995, (*Il Principe* (*De Principatibus*)), composed circa 1513 and published in 1532, edited by Giorgio Inglese; Machiavelli 1997a, (*Discorsi* [1513–19]), edited by Corrado Vivanti.

servative, Ciceronian-humanist type of republican reformer – typified, in his day, by the Medici – usually takes the opposite course: he disarms common citizens, exacerbates their status as mere clients of their city's nobles or senators, and leaves their polity vulnerable to domination by foreign powers.

1   Humanism and Tyranny

Quentin Skinner is, of course, the most famous exponent of the idea that Machiavelli is, first and foremost, a civic humanist. Skinner – and formidable students, such as Peter Stacey, and others, like Maurizio Viroli – insist that Machiavelli is a faithful civic humanist because he devotes his most important work, the *Discourses*, exclusively to the cause of promoting republics over principalities.[5] In particular, Skinnerians attempt to confine Machiavelli's endorsement of unilateral, often violent and criminal, behaviour to *The Prince*, and they work strenuously to cast the *Discourses* as a work in which political action – including action tending toward violence and coercion – occurs exclusively within legally circumscribed bounds.

In contrast to Skinner, Eric Nelson and Jim Hankins have located the rise of 'exclusivist republicanism' to eras much later than the Italian Renaissance. Nelson and Hankins have shown that there was greater fluidity than Skinner acknowledges between understandings of principalities and republics in virtually all traditional republican thinkers: for Nelson, it emerged in Dutch and English appropriations of Hebraic republicanism, and, for Hankins, it reached its apotheosis in the dogmatic anti-monarchism of the French revolutionaries.[6] In any case, history aside, the very text of Machiavelli's *Discourses* would seem to pose an insurmountable problem for advocates of the civic humanist interpretation: the *Discourses* offers advice, not only to princes, but, quite explicitly, to *tyrants*.[7]

For instance, in D 1.16, Machiavelli advises individuals who wish to pursue 'the way of freedom' to emulate Lucius Brutus, and those who desire to pursue the way of tyranny to imitate Clearchus of Heraclea. Brutus, quite famously, oversaw the trial and execution of his sons who conspired to overthrow the fledgling Roman republic, reinstate the Tarquin monarchy and reassert aristocratic privilege in the city. But Machiavelli invokes the far less well-known

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5   See, for example, Skinner 2002, pp. 10–38. See, also, Stacey 2007, and Stacey 2013. See, also, Viroli 1998.
6   See Nelson 2007, pp. 809–35; and Hankins 2010, pp. 452–82.
7   See Strauss 1958, pp. 26, 28, 273.

example of Clearchus to instruct would-be tyrants on the best means of achieving their ends: Clearchus murders the entire nobility of Heraclea after they made him prince.

Machiavelli reiterates this lesson in book III of the *Discourses*, where he writes: 'Whoever establishes a tyranny and does not kill Brutus, and whoever establishes a free State and does not kill the sons of Brutus, maintains himself only for a very short time' (D III.3). Lucius Brutus' republic was long-lived because he killed his treacherous sons, who could not endure conditions of civic equality; Julius Caesar's tyranny was short-lived because he did not do the same to *Marcus* Brutus and the latter's co-conspirators among the Roman nobility. This fateful, indeed fatal, oversight on Caesar's part exemplifies one of the chief differences, in Machiavelli's estimation, between Rome's largely ineffectual tyrannical reformers and the more successful ones, like Clearchus, who characterise the ancient Greek political world.

2   The Civil Tyranny

It may not be entirely outlandish to suggest that Machiavelli harbours some sympathy for a very specific kind of tyrant; that is, one who suppresses nobles, the *grandi*, and who economically and militarily empowers plebeians, the *popolo*. This is, basically, the essence of Machiavelli's advice to new princes in *Il Principe*. Princes should no more rely on nobles, than they should depend on fortresses, cavalry or artillery; they ought to rely exclusively on their heavily armed populaces. However, more counter-intuitive, I think, is the notion that this type of prince or tyrant may serve as Machiavelli's model of a republican reformer. To make this case, I argue that the figures of Cleomenes and Clearchus in the *Discourses* complete the lessons offered by Machiavelli's examples of Hiero, Agathocles and Nabis in *The Prince*.

These individuals – civil princes, as Machiavelli somewhat ambiguously refers to them in the one book; 'tyrants' as he more frankly calls them in the other – do not invariably establish monarchical dynasties: more intriguingly, several of them actually lay the foundations for republics more healthy and vigorous – that is, more egalitarian and martial – than the oligarchic and weak republics that they initially usurped. In words that Machiavelli uses in a related context, such princes 'keep the public rich and the citizens poor' at home (D I.37), and they strike fear in the hearts of enemies abroad (P 8, 9).

Machiavelli's most overt praise for a Greek tyrant in *The Prince* occurs in chapter 9, the well-known chapter devoted to the topic of 'civil principalities'. There, Machiavelli extols the political achievements of Nabis the Spartan; but

he demurs from specifying the precise means that Nabis used to successfully attain his ends. According to Machiavelli, Nabis satisfied the Spartan people to such an extent that he successfully managed to withstand military assaults by 'all of Greece', and even by the Roman Republic. Yet, somewhat curiously, Machiavelli declares that he cannot provide any details of how Nabis gained the people to himself, and how he fought-off superiorly numbered foreign enemies. Machiavelli protests that there are simply too many means available in comparable cases; and, even more unhelpfully, he declares that there are no 'fixed rules' that apply to such circumstances – this in the world's most famous how-to book on politics.

Machiavelli's hesitance to stipulate precise measures in this passage from *The Prince* echoes his unwillingness to elaborate, in the *Discourses*, on the 'many dangers and much blood' that a reformer of a corrupt republic must, respectively, endure and spill (D 1.17–18). The only way, Machiavelli writes, that a corrupt city may be reformed is if one very long-lived virtuous individual or two successively virtuous individuals of normal lifespans provide a republic 'new life' through such dangers and blood. Machiavelli declares, 'it is almost impossible to provide rules' for this topic since corruption is a matter of degree, for which remedies too must vary (D 1.18).

How can we compensate for Machiavelli's reticence in these two instances? What is, in Machiavelli estimation, the secret of Nabis's domestic and military success? And what, more specifically, are the dangerous and bloody means that the Florentine deems necessary for reforming a corrupt republic? If we consult Polybius and Livy,[8] Nabis, Machiavelli's exemplar of a civil prince in chapter 9, behaves in very much the same way as two Syracusan princes whose morally questionable actions Machiavelli recounts in chapters immediately preceding chapter 9: Hiero and Agathocles. In chapter 6, Machiavelli describes how Hiero rose from private to princely status through Syracuse's civic military; and, later, he relates how Hiero ended his city's dependence on mercenary soldiers – 'cutting to pieces' the latter, and thus further winning over Syracuse's citizen-soldiers to himself (P 13). In command of a now exclusively civil military, Hiero prevents the ever-voracious Roman Republic from conquering all of Sicily.

In chapter 8, Machiavelli describes how Agathocles rose from even humbler beginnings than Hiero to become prince of Syracuse; winning the city's citizen-soldiers to himself through arduous military exploits, and by murdering all of Syracuse's senators and wealthiest citizens. With such hardships and bloodshed behind him, Machiavelli tells us, Agathocles then audaciously invades

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8   See *Histories* 13.6–8; *Rome and the Mediterranean* 34.27.

Africa to impose a truce on the mighty Carthaginian republic; a truce that leaves the entire island of Sicily under Syracusan hegemony. Quite pointedly, Machiavelli notes that Agathocles's subjects neither rebel nor even conspire against him, during his long reign – even when he was far away from the city, waging war on another continent.

If we reconsider Nabis, the primary example from chapter 9, in light of the historical sources, and mindful of Machiavelli's accounts of Hiero and Agathocles in two preceding chapters, we observe that all three Greek princes liberate their peoples from both domestic and external oppression in similar ways. All three enhance the civic quality of their cities' militaries: Hiero slaughters unreliable foreign mercenaries (P 7), and both Agathocles and Nabis make fighting subjects out of former slaves to expand their military forces.[9] All three resort to fraud in foreign affairs: Agathocles revokes an unfavourable alliance with Carthage (P 8); Hiero switches alliances, at his convenience, between the Romans and Carthaginians; and Nabis betrays the Macedonian monarchy to the diplomatic and military advantage of his fatherland[10] – a word, *patria*, by the way, that Machiavelli directly, intimately associates with both Nabis and Agathocles. Indeed, all three princes – often treated as petty tyrants by ancient writers – impose advantageous truces upon, arguably, the greatest military powers in history, Macedonia, Carthage and Rome.

But what about domestic affairs? In chapter 8, Machiavelli expresses grave reservations over the criminal means employed by Agathocles in winning over his citizen-soldiers. In the very next chapter, he deems Nabis a civil prince for successfully gaining to himself, Sparta's armed populace, even if he does not specify the means that Nabis employed to do so. If we examine the examples more closely, Machiavelli's initial indictment of Agathocles's criminality proves to be, at best, provisional: Agathocles ultimately earns Machiavelli's praise as a practitioner of 'cruelty well-used' because he perpetrates his crimes – that is, he murders his city's nobles – 'at a stroke' (P 8). Agathocles confines his cruel and violent behaviour exclusively to the start of his reign; and when he resorts to such behaviour subsequently, it is only for 'the utility of his subjects'.

By contrast, according to Polybius, Nabis takes a much less expeditious route toward similar ends: Nabis intermittently, and over a much longer period of time, kills, tortures and exiles the richest and most powerful Spartans in order to redistribute their wealth to the people.[11] Upon closer inspections there

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9   See Pompeius Trogus 22.4; *Rome and the Mediterranean* 34.27.

10   On Hiero's and Nabis's foreign policies, see, respectively: *Histories* 1.8–16, *Rome and the Mediterranean* 21.49–51, 22.37, 23.21; *The War with Hannibal* 29.12, 34.25, 34.31, 34.41, 35.35.

11   See *Histories* 13.6–8.

does not seem to be much of a difference between a criminal prince and a civil prince. The only pertinent difference between the two seems to be that Agathocles, the so-called criminal prince, uses cruelty much more effectively than does Nabis, the so-called civil prince.

Thus, setting aside whatever ethical misgivings Machiavelli may profess regarding the behaviour of these figures, individually, we may conclude the following: Hiero, Agathocles and Nabis all resort to cruel and criminal means to achieve political ends that Machiavelli emphatically condones. Each of these Greek princes incur massive hardships and shed copious amounts of blood to improve their cities, both domestically and internationally: they either murder mercenaries or kill rich, prominent citizens; they all betray powerful foreign allies; and they all successfully enlist their enlarged civil militaries to defend their fatherlands from external domination.

Indeed, Machiavelli's apparently lesser examples, Hiero and Agathocles, prove more successful than Nabis, his explicit model of a civil prince, at laying the groundwork for the future reestablishment of republics in their cities: Diodorus and Justin report that Agathocles restores Syracuse's democracy from his deathbed;[12] and, in the *Discourses*, Machiavelli suggests that Hiero kept Syracuse sufficiently well ordered that its citizens and soldiers reinstituted 'a free way of life' after killing his corrupt grandson, Hieronymous (D ii.2). Ultimately, the princely interregnums of Agathocles and Hiero initiate and guide the transformation of formerly oligarchic republics into more democratic ones. Two of these three so-called tyrants left their republics, by important Machiavellian standards, in better civic and military conditions than when they first usurped them.

3   Corrupt Republics and Tyrannical Reformers

In the *Discourses*, Machiavelli embeds his discussion of Greek tyrants within a broader account of the unavoidable corruption to which all republics must succumb. It is inevitable, Machiavelli insists throughout the book, that inequality will rise in republics over time (D i.17–20, i.55). At first, Machiavelli describes pernicious inequality in purely civil terms – all republics, even Rome, he suggests, are destined to suffer a serious decline in equality before the law (D i.18). But, much more subtly, Machiavelli also intimates that this rise in civil inequality can be traced to an underlying expansion of economic inequality (see D i.17–18, i.55, and iii.24).

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12   See *Bibliotheca Historica* 21.16, 7.

As Machiavelli ultimately demonstrates in his chapter on Rome's Agrarian Laws (D I.37), economic inequality is a republican disease not readily amenable to a strictly republican cure. Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus exhibited good 'intentions', Machiavelli suggests, when they sought to address the economic inequality that was corrupting Rome's civic-military virtue after the Punic Wars; but, he concludes, they exhibited mortally woeful 'prudence' when they expected the Roman Senate to sit-by quietly while they tried to pass legislation that would stem this economic inequality. The Gracchi basically asked the Senate permission to legally distribute to the increasingly impoverished Roman plebs, the vast wealth controlled by the senate. The Roman Senate, as we know, responded by murdering one Gracchus brother and compelling the suicide of the other.[13]

In a different section of the *Discourses*, Machiavelli recounts how the Greek prince, Agis, suffered a fate similar to the Gracchi's: at the behest of the Spartan nobility, the chief magistrates, the Ephors, killed Agis before he could reinstitute Lycurgus's laws, and so restore economic equality to the republic (D I.9). Knowing this, a subsequent Spartan prince, Cleomenes – 'using his authority well', Machiavelli writes – took the initiative in murdering the Ephors, rather than, like Agis, be eliminated by them (D I.19). Unimpeded by aristocratic obstruction, he then set about re-establishing equality in Sparta. Cleomenes, however, proves less adept than Agathocles or Nabis in both pursuing redistribution at home *and* exerting military power abroad, as he was eventually overcome by Macedonia.

This was a lesson apparently lost on *all* potential Roman reformers, not just the Gracchi, who set about trying to ameliorate the economic inequality that would eventually destroy the republic for good. Machiavelli frequently rehearses and pays homage to traditional civic-humanist criticisms of the likes of Scipio Africanus, Gaius Marius and Julius Caesar for seeking to exert undue, even tyrannical, influence over the Roman Republic. That this is Machiavelli's ultimate judgment on these individuals is one of the few points of agreement among scholars associated with both the Cambridge and Straussian schools of Machiavelli-interpretation. However, the implicit contrast that Machiavelli poses between Greek and Roman tyrannical reformers suggests an altogether

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13   See *Vitae*. Machiavelli notes elsewhere that the Gracchi's great uncle Tiberius Sempronius Gracchus once imposed the threat of capital punishment upon any soldiers that ridiculed former slaves who had been enrolled into Roman legions (D II.26). Tiberius the nephew (whom Machiavelli does not expressly distinguish from his uncle, calling the latter simply 'Tiberius Gracchus') apparently was unwilling to enlist similar severity against those, namely Roman senators, who would make slaves out of citizen-soldiers.

different conclusion: Machiavelli seems to indicate that the Roman reformers, from the Gracchi through Caesar, wielded not excessive authority over the republic, but rather, that they exhibited excessive deference to the Roman Senate. Consequently, by either exiling or murdering each so-called tyrant, Rome's senators effectively scuttled every *populare* attempt to reform the Roman Republic.

But let us return to Machiavelli's less deferential and, hence, more successful Greek princes: Machiavelli's example of Cleomenes better specifies, in the *Discourses*, the role that redistribution must play in the tyrannical reformation of a republic where corrupting inequality has taken hold, an idea that Machiavelli only intimates in *The Prince*. Similarly, the example of Clearchus, in the *Discourses*, completes a lesson concerning class allegiances that Machiavelli leaves only partially taught in *The Prince*. In chapter 9 of that book, Machiavelli defines the 'civil principality' as a regime where an individual is elevated to princely reputation by either one or the other competing social classes of every city: either by the nobles, who are driven by the humour to oppress the people, or by the people, who are motivated by the humour to avoid aristocratic oppression.

Machiavelli provides reasons, both strategic and moral, why a prince should establish his civil principality on a popular rather than an aristocratic basis (P 9). But he also opens the possibility that a civil prince who was elevated by the nobility to oppress the people might improve this disadvantaged position by simply switching sides once in power. In fact, Machiavelli suggests, the people will show even greater affection and devotion to a prince who defies their expectations of intensified oppression, and delivers, instead, complete alleviation of aristocratic domination.

Leo Strauss astutely notes that Machiavelli, uncharacteristically, provides no historical example in chapter 9 of a modern civil prince. Indeed, he suggests that Machiavelli need not do so because the most proximate example of such a prince is the very addressee of the book: Lorenzo de'Medici.[14] But Strauss misses the more specific point that Machiavelli is making through this notable omission. The Medici are not only modern princes who came to power through the support of fellow citizens; they are princes who, quite recently, came to power through the support of the nobility; that is, Lorenzo is an example of a defective civil prince. The Medici, of course, were brought back from exile by an aristocratic coup that overthrew the democratic republic, the *governo largo*, presided over by Piero Soderini, and faithfully served by Machiavelli. Machiavelli had made himself an enemy of the Florentine nobles by encouraging

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14   See Strauss 1958, p. 306, note 9.

Soderini, on the one hand, to maintain a close domestic alliance with the people assembled in the *Consiglio Grande*, and, on the other, to establish a large citizen military within the city.[15]

As we know, the Florentine nobles watered down Machiavelli's plans for a large-scale civil militia, and they eventually enlisted a foreign power, the Spanish army, to reinstall the Medici in the city to help them disempower the Florentine people.[16] Less discussed is the fact that Machiavelli's first act upon the Medici's return was to pen a memorandum to the new princes, 'ai Palleschi'; a memo imploring them to switch sides and make the people, rather than the nobles, the foundation of their regime.[17] The Medici responded by shutting down the *Consiglio Grande*, and, eventually, by arresting and torturing Machiavelli. The Medici never instituted a civic military in Florence, and so the city remained at the mercy of foreign powers, namely, the French and Spanish monarchies and the German emperor.

I suggest that we should read Machiavelli's account of Clearchus, in the *Discourses*, in light of these circumstances. Machiavelli describes how the nobles of ancient Heraclea, fed up with the people contesting their authority, recalled Clearchus from exile to help them oppress the city's common citizens (D 1.16). However, upon his return, Clearchus behaves in a decidedly un-Medicean fashion: Machiavelli describes how Clearchus cuts to pieces the entire Heraclean nobility 'to the extreme delight of the people'. We might wonder whether the metaphor of cutting the rich into pieces signifies nothing less than the partitioning, parcelling and redistribution of their wealth to the people. In any case, Clearchus clearly 'got the memo' that the Medici ignored roughly eighteen centuries later.[18]

To sum up: the amalgam of these examples of Greek tyrants from both *The Prince* and the *Discourses*, I argue, illustrate what Machiavelli demands from a republican reformer: a tyrant cum civil prince must eliminate the nobility, whose desire to oppress and excessive authority eventually make healthy civic and economic equality impossible within a republic; and he must deploy a citizen army large enough to keep at bay expansive military powers like the

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15   See Najemy in Barthas 2007; Barthas 2011.

16   See Ridolfi 1963, pp. 80–8.

17   See Machiavelli 1997b, pp. 87–9.

18   Clearchus, like his fellow Greek tyrant in the *Discourses*, Cleomenes, was less successful militarily than their counterparts, Hiero, Agathocles and Nabis, in *The Prince*. This is not an unfamiliar pattern: Machiavelli emphasises domestic issues in the former work and military ones in the latter (never one to the complete exclusion of the other, of course). Compare, for instance, his criticisms of both Savonarola and Scipio on military grounds in *The Prince* (P 6 and 17) and on civic grounds in the *Discourses* (D 1.45 and 29).

Macedonian, Carthaginian and Roman empires. The Medici, by contrast, follow the less preferable examples of earlier pro-aristocratic tyrants discussed by Machiavelli: Appius Claudius, Sulla, Augustus and Walter, the Duke of Athens. The Medici, deeply defective civil princes, effectively coddle the oppressive 'sons of Brutus' at home, and facilitate continued foreign domination by the likes of France, Spain and Germany – foreign powers, whom, incidentally, Machiavelli considers vastly inferior to ancient Macedonia, Carthage and Rome.

Conclusion

Now, an aristocratic republican of Ciceronian, Skinnerian or Straussian stripe might raise the following objection to my account of Machiavelli's Greek Tyrant: having removed the principal check on his own power – i.e., the nobility or senate of his republic – will not this so-called civil prince simply become an unaccountably oppressive tyrant? The answer implied by Machiavelli is: not necessarily.

Machiavelli's civil prince is always both enabled *and* constrained by his subject-citizens. (It is worth noting that Machiavelli uses the terms 'subjects' and 'citizens' interchangeably when discussing several of these examples). Citizen-subjects who are fully and extensively armed, and who enjoy relatively equal socio-economic status with each other, may rather easily convert a civil principality into a republic – *especially*, should their tyrant ever fail to observe 'cruelty well-used', and, instead, begins to engage in cruelty, as such. This, I believe, is one of the most important implications of Machiavelli's assertion: 'where there are good arms there are always good laws' (P 12).

In point of fact, the princely individual who empowers his people both civically and militarily is a tyrant in name only. Machiavelli's ideal civil prince is sufficiently prudent to abide by a statement attributed to the so-called tyrant, Agathocles: 'I require no bodyguards because the *people* are my bodyguards'.[19] Given the central lessons imparted by Machiavelli's infamous 'piccolo libro', this statement could have served as a fitting epigram for the book known as *Il Principe*, *The Prince*.

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19   See *Bibliotheca Historica*, X, 315.

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Essere Principe, Essere Populare: The Principle of Antagonism in Machiavelli's Epistemology

Etienne Balibar

1 Knowledge, Conflict, Truth

Obviously, while assigning to Machiavelli an 'epistemology', we should try to avoid the sheer anachronism of retrospectively projecting onto his work a category which acquired validity only much later, in completely different circumstances and with respect to a rather heterogeneous kind of discourse. However, drawing my inspiration from Claude Lefort's famous title: *Le travail de l'oeuvre Machiavel*, I want to argue that we may do this by fully acknowledging the *postponed effects* of Machiavelli's *oeuvre*, which both reveal it and transform it through a ceaseless 'mobilization' of its words and propositions.[1] They involve in particular a continuous 'quarrel' about the uneasy relationship between *knowledge* and political *partisanship*, which overdetermine more specific debates about realism (or pragmatism, depending how one interprets the motto of *andare dreto alla verità effettuale della cosa*) and utopianism (of which, paradoxically, the author of *De principatibus* is certainly not immune himself). In a line of commentaries which traces back to Spinoza, to Rousseau and Hegel, and continues in such modern readers as Leo Strauss, Carl Schmitt, Gramsci, and Althusser, this quarrel has been associated as well with a debate about Machiavelli's *position* in a defining conflict of his time between republicanism and monarchism, for which analogies could always be found in other times. It can be aptly summarised (or symbolised) by the difficulty of relating his own position to the dilemma that seems to be delineated in the 'Dedicatory Epistle' of *The Prince*, between the 'point of view' of the Princes and the 'point of view' of the people, which are also political and social standpoints: does he himself adopt one of these standpoints in his construction of a science of politics? And if yes, which one? It would seem that, more generally, this question – which also divides the readers – crucially matters to the understanding of a 'conflictual epistemology', by which, provisionally, I mean a concept of knowledge

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1   Lefort 1972.

that does not only address conflict as an object of description, but views it as its own condition of possibility.

2   The Prince and the People: Knowing Each Other's Nature

Here is a translation of the relevant passage of the 'Dedicatory Epistle':

> Neither do I wish that it be thought presumptuous if a man of low and inferior social condition (*basso e infimo stato*) dares to examine and lay down rules for the governance of princes. For just as those who paint landscapes place themselves in a low position on the plain in order to consider (*considerare*) the nature of the mountains and the heights, and place themselves high on top of mountains in order to study (*considerare*) the plains, in like manner, to know (*conoscere bene*) the nature of the people (*populo*) well one must be a prince (*essere principe*), and to know the nature of princes well one must be of the people (*essere populare*).[2]

Among the readers who were interested in commenting on this formulation without reducing it to a mere tactical or rhetorical gesture towards the final dedicatee of the book, Prince Lorenzo de' Medici, Duke of Urbino (1492–1519), but granted it the value of an 'address' which is not really separable from the 'analysis' or 'theory' that it foregrounds, therefore acknowledged the illocutionary status of the book's writing, we may first single out Leo Strauss and Althusser.

In his *Thoughts on Machiavelli* (1958)[3] Leo Strauss asks a convoluted question. At 'first glance', he writes, *The Prince* 'belongs to a traditional genre: the *mirrors of Princes*', written for legitimate princes by their counsellors or courtiers about the art of governing. Hence the question that we can raise: *who* is it that holds the 'mirror' (*speculum*) for the Prince? In fact, explains Strauss, Machiavelli's book is not really 'impartial' or 'scientific'; it is a 'militant' book or a 'fighting libel' clothed in the form of a Treatise. What (or whom) then is it fighting for? A *surprise* would await us in the last chapter, with the lifting of the mask worn by the author: but this revelation involves in fact again a torsion, because the apparent symmetry of the two conditions of knowledge (*essere principe*, *essere populare*) in the framework of such an 'address' means that Machiavelli himself is 'representing' or 'impersonating' the people, while the

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2   Machiavelli 2005 (Kindle Locations 798–802).
3   I retranslate from the French edition, Strauss 1982.

prince whom he addresses (presumably Lorenzo) is representing or impersonating the general figure of 'The Prince'. Far from their two complementary viewpoints epitomising political wisdom, the consequence would be that Machiavelli's intervention would help the Prince to cover his intentions for the people. In a word, it is the opposite of Rousseau's thesis (which itself reversed the anti-Machiavellian discourse). But then a surprise arises within the surprise: any opposition between prince and people (compared to that of mountain and plain), says Strauss, is absurd, because in fact Machiavelli's aim is to *intellectually dominate the Prince*, to become his master or the Prince's Prince. Read this way, the allegory in the 'Dedicatory Epistle' is a repetition 'hidden in plain view' of the strategy displayed in the whole text; it epitomises the tradition of 'double truth', which is the law of political writing.

In his posthumously published book, *Machiavelli and Us* (written *ca.* 1976), Althusser proposes a different reading, if perhaps not entirely incompatible.[4] For Althusser, Machiavelli's discourse of 'political science' is not *theoretical* in the universalist sense (as the discourse of Montesquieu is, or wants to be, for example, Althusser's other great example): because it is neither 'without a subject' nor 'without an addressee'.[5] Machiavelli writes *from within* a conflictual situation – what Althusser calls writing 'under' the constraint of the political conjuncture, in order to influence or change it, i.e. *produce an effect* (or be 'effective').

Does this simply amount to the fact that Machiavelli is *taking sides*, rallying a 'party' in the conflict where he finds himself? Apparently it is more complicated: the alternative of two positions or viewpoints (*essere principe vs. essere populare*) creates a 'topological space' where the 'places' (*tópoi*) of the Prince and the author-writer-scientist are localised at the same time in social, political, and epistemological terms. For Althusser, what Machiavelli is mainly saying, is that in order to 'know' the function or 'nature' of the Prince in history (in the strong sense of a cognition that dissipates the mis-recognition, or the illusion intrinsic to political hierarchies), one has to adopt the people's 'place' or perspective (since what the allegory of the mountain and the plain shows is that the notion of 'place' is *relational*: it is a viewpoint on another place, or even better: it is *a viewpoint on another viewpoint*, a possibility of perceiving the point from where one is seen). And it is possible for Machiavelli to adopt

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4 Althusser 2009. I recommend in particular the extensive commentary and original development of Althusser's Machiavelli-interpretation by Lahtinen 2009 who, however, does not directly examine the interpretation of Machiavelli's 'Dedicatory Epistle'.

5 Althusser 1959.

the perspective from which the Princes are observed, because he is himself 'of humble origin', i.e. 'of the people'.

This quite naturally leads to the question: why does Machiavelli add a symmetric sentence, advising *essere principe* in order to 'know the people'? For Althusser (clearly inspired here by Rousseau, more than, for instance, Spinoza, but nevertheless adopting something of Strauss's reasoning), this is a textual ruse, a literary *trompe l'oeil*. Evidence is given by the fact that Machiavelli only writes one book, *The Prince*, and not the other one, which could have been called *The People*.[6] In Marxian terms he is in fact adopting and developing a 'class position', which is a 'class perspective'. This is a strong and clever way to articulate the doublet of *popolo* (class) and *populare* (position). It indicates also cleverly that the dichotomy of *essere principe vs. esser populare* covers not only a *duality* but also a *conflict*, which has to be 'resolved' one way or another if a politics is to emerge historically. But, it seems to me, there are two (related) difficulties here. First, to adopt the people's 'viewpoint' or 'place' does not involve that Machiavelli is addressing the people. In fact he could be rather writing *in its place* or 'replacing' it, meaning that in politics the people has no say, no voice of its own, except that of a theoretical substitute. Second, the argument that produces the dissymmetry ('Machiavelli does not write *The People*') is either tautological or teleological. Given Althusser's standard references, what it does in fact suggest is that Machiavelli does not write *The People* because he is not yet Marx, who will rename it the *proletariat*. Through the intervention of a theorist like Machiavelli, the Prince himself must somehow (in his politics) become 'popular', but the people are not yet called to become 'prince' (as Gramsci will try to establish). The prince makes history from the people's point of view, but the people are *not yet* the subject of history. Hence it is important for the people to *know* the prince (if only to understand and accept that his politics is in the people's interests), but the people must remain *unknown*, if not *unthought*. Machiavelli thus would be 'unthinking' the very place where he stands.

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6   It will be left for later writers to 'add' the counterpart (or substitute it). Of course many commentators explicitly or implicitly assume that Machiavelli's *The People* does in fact exist: it is the 'republican' work called *Discorsi*. And the fact that, apparently, the composition of the two works was in fact simultaneous or intertwined provides another argument for this chiasmatic articulation. But other configurations are possible. For Gramsci, clearly, *Il Principe* is *also* a book about 'the People' – or it could become such if transformed into a 'new' *Prince* (i.e. a new 'new Prince'), theoretically as well as historically. For Althusser, the question of 'the People' remains aporetic, because it cannot refer to a bourgeois 'republican' polity, only to a proletarian political subject (or agent), which is active in history, but remains (as yet) theoretically unidentified.

Here we must pause and return to the text. Althusser's idea of the *topography of conflict* certainly asks a good question, but answers it with a symptomatic reduction of its own implications that Strauss's reference to the allegory of the *mirror* may help identify: how does a specular combination of *partial* viewpoints, involving at the same time recognition and misrecognition, produce a cognition or *knowledge*, and for whom? Why is it necessarily bound to the situation of the 'knowing subject' within a conflict, and the transformations of the conflict? I shall try to resolve these questions in two successive steps.

3 Embodying Political Antagonism into Knowledge

First, let us return to the letter. It is impossible not to refer the *names* used in the Epistle to their elucidation in the *theory* proposed by the book (since the address and the theory circumscribe each other: this is the typical 'trope' of the book). *Principe* and *popolo* are clearly interdependent, or mirroring each other, but interpreting their names lead to different places in the development of the theory.

Principe is everywhere, of course, but the key passage for our purpose is at the end (chapter 26) of the book, calling for a 'redemptor' of Italy (and arousing Strauss's surprise). This is confirmed by Gramsci's interpretation, which brings in the important dynamic notion of a 'becoming': to become 'popular' is to be able to understand *what the Prince must become* (namely a 'new' Prince who is also a 'new type of Prince').[7] What Strauss reads as a surprise and Gramsci as a conversion in the last chapter is indicative of the *interest of the people* in the becoming of the Prince, but also explains why it is from the 'popular' point of view that the 'nature' of the Prince is revealed. The word 'nature' here does not so much refer to an essence than a criterion to identify the *differences* between the princes who bear the same name, but have different modes of governance and aim at different political goals. If the Princes themselves do

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7 'Nell'intero volumetto Machiavelli tratta di come deve essere il Principe per condurre un popolo alla fondazione del nuovo Stato, e la trattazione è condotta con rigore logico, con distacco scientifico: nella conclusione, il Machiavelli stesso si fa popolo, si confonde con il popolo, ma non con un popolo "genericamente" inteso, ma col popolo che il Machiavelli ha convinto con la sua trattazione precedente […] Ecco perché l'epilogo del *Principe* non è qualcosa di estrinseco, di "appiccicato" dall'esterno, di retorico, ma deve essere spiegato come elemento necessario dell'opera' (Gramsci 1932–34, p. 1556). Gramsci's reading is opposed by Negri, who thinks that this final exhortation is ridiculous: it shows how inconsistent a book *The Prince* is with respect to the *Discorsi*, where the viewpoint of the constituent power or the multitude remains consistently asserted (Negri 1992).

not 'know' or 'recognise' (*conoscere*) their own nature, it is because they do not perceive *differences* among themselves or within their own behaviour, they merely see themselves as particular incarnations of a universal figure or function, that of the generic 'Prince', or that of *power*. Therefore a relationship to exteriority (and in fact a latent conflict, to be 'resolved' from outside) is needed to make a distinction among the various realisations of the same function.

How about the other side now – the side of the *people?* A textual reference is not difficult to find in chapter 9 on 'the civil principate' (*De principatu civili*). But it leads to a problematic content. As indicated by Fournel and Zancarini, commentators are puzzled by this oxymoronic formula, since 'civil' in fact means *republican*.[8] The formula, they tell us, is 'loaded with utopia', but also indicates in which paradoxical manner the aims of a republican government could be obtained: through its apparent opposite, a principate (not to say a dictatorship). What is especially meaningful, however, is the quotation (or mention) of the doctrine of the two *umori* (a term notoriously difficult to translate in modern languages, since it refers at the same time to classes, interests, and regimes of passions) that 'divide' the city. The 'people' qua ensemble of its citizens (*démos*) is composed of/decomposed into *popolo minuto* (i.e. the *popular* element: *il volgo*, *tò pléthos*, *plebs* or *multitudo* in ancient languages) and *popolo grasso* (i.e. the patricians or grandees). Hence *popolo* is a synecdochic term: it names at the same time the whole and the part. To understand this composition-decomposition is precisely to *know* what the 'people' is: again a 'nature' that is a *difference* – albeit not a conjunctural or strategic one (as among the different princes, or their respective politics), but a permanent or structural one.

It is also to know *what to make of that difference* politically. The key passage is in §4 of chapter 9:

> He who attains the principality with the help of the nobility maintains it with more difficulty than he who becomes prince with the help of the common people, for he finds himself a prince amidst many who feel themselves to be his equals, and because of this he can neither govern nor manage them as he wishes. But he who attains the principality through popular favor finds himself alone, and has around him either no one or very few who are not ready to obey him [...] The worst that a prince can expect from a hostile people is to be abandoned by them; but with a hostile nobility, not only does he have to fear being abandoned, but also that they will oppose him [...] Furthermore, a prince must always live

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8   Machiavelli 2000, pp. 320–21 ('Fondements de la politique').

> with the same common people, but he can easily do without the same
> nobles [...].[9]

The Prince must *dissimilate* from the patricians (who are his rivals, if not his
equals), and *isolate* himself in order to rise to a superior power with respect to
his likes, while not *assimilating* to the Plebeians: therefore it is not a question
for him to exactly 'represent' them but rather to forge a 'friendship' or an alli-
ance with them. But such an alliance makes sense only if it is directed against
a common enemy (inside the city). It is here, of course, that the 'antithetic
epistemology' is brought to the fore: we have to do with a combination of *es-
sere* and *conoscere*, and it is from the prince's perspective that the nature of the
antagonism that 'structures' the people (hence its typical effects) is revealed as
a *constitutive dissymmetry* (on the one side, a will to dominate, on the other
side a will not to be oppressed).[10]

So, in a sense, Althusser has perfectly seen this structure. His thesis that the
Prince demonstrates a capacity of allying with the people through 'suppress-
ing' the grandees, or aiming his cruelty *more* (and more visibly) at the grandees
than the people, expresses just that in political terms. But (following Gramsci)
he neutralises his own thesis by extrapolating from the final chapter (where
the Italian people in distress and awaiting a saviour is allegorically compared
to the Hebrew people) an idea that 'people' here practically means the *nation*
of a 'nation-State' to come (first in a monarchic, then in a republican form),
which encompasses all the social differences or teleologically identifies the
whole and the part – the interest of the exploited class with the interest of the
nation as such.

We may conclude with a first clarification of the idea of an antithetic or
conflictual epistemology. It is based on the incorporation of political antago-
nism into the quasi-transcendental (or empirical-transcendental) conditions
of possibility of *knowledge*, which forms the reverse side of an 'ontological' lo-
cation of knowledge (qua knowledge of the situation, knowledge of the other,
or the adversary, and knowledge of the conflict as such) within antagonism.

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9   Machiavelli 2005 (Kindle Locations 1265–8).
10   The difference with the *Discorsi* where the idea of the two constitutive *umori* is more fully
      explained (D I.4–6) lies not so much in the formal definition than in the function of the
      argument: in *The Prince*, it is not a 'civic' interest (aiming at the stability, the power, the
      expansion of the city) but a *prince's interest* that commands the evaluation of different
      outcomes for the class struggle. This also affects the final doctrine, of course: the privi-
      leged outcome is not a regulation of the conflict through the 'representation' of the peo-
      ple qua *plebs* within the State, which contributes to the imperial power of Rome, but the
      capacity of the prince to govern and retain his power.

Antagonism becomes the intrinsic condition of knowledge because knowledge is aiming at 'handling' or *practicing conflict* (making use of it, transforming its configuration). Machiavelli's 'epistemology' in his time appears thus as the exact antithesis of the future bourgeois and positivist epistemology of the 'axiological neutrality of science' – perhaps in fact because that 'positivist' epistemology was itself a *rejection* of the Machiavellian and post-Machiavellian conception of knowledge.[11]

I submit now two interesting implications of this pattern of a reciprocal 'conditioning' of antagonism and knowledge:

(a) It is *anti-utopian* – and in that sense realistic or materialist – in a precise sense: 'utopia' (as Spinoza reminded us in his commentary in the *Political Treatise*) begins with the illusion of a *transcendent* or *synoptic* viewpoint: to stand *neither* on the mountain *nor* in the plain. But *where* could that be? Where to find this 'Archimedean point' which makes it possible to rise above the conflict and become liberated from its partiality (if also to think or explain it)?[12] The synoptic viewpoint must be located *out of the* (*Platonic*) *Cave*: in God or in the Light of the Good, a place either ascribed to the Sovereign or to the Philosopher or their couple. Or it must be located in a *transcendental faculty* of rational knowledge that, in fact, begs the question (because – as shown by Foucault

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11   This interpretation also clearly differs from Pocock's view of the 'position' of Machiavelli in *Il Principe*: 'he identifies himself neither with the *ottimati* [...] nor with those [...] who demanded the restoration of the Council and widespread *participazione. Il Principe* is not a work of ideology, in the sense that it cannot be identified as expressing the outlook of a group [...] in proportion as the political system ceases to be a universal and is seen as a particular, it becomes difficult for it to do this. The republic can dominate *fortuna* only by integrating its citizens in a self-sufficient *universitas*' (Pocock 1975, p. 156). This view is linked to the fact that Pocock's 'republicanism' is constantly *anticipating* the neutralisation of antagonisms in 'citizenship', whereas, in agreement with Lefort, I think that Machiavelli does just the opposite: he is 'indefinitely' asserting conflictual patterns of the division of the 'city', which for him are indeed the real object of a *concrete analysis* of the present state of affairs. Paradoxically, Negri – for whom *Il Principe* remains an 'aporetic' treatise, as opposed to the 'constructive' capacity of the *Discorsi* – tends more in the direction of Pocock: the constituent power is obscured and blocked in a work which 'is interested in the crisis, not its resolution' (Negri 1997, p. 71).

12   An important question of epistemology and topology at the same time is involved here: from which viewpoint or angle is a conflict 'visible' *as conflict*? Is it from 'inside' (where what is perceived is *either* one position *or* the other), or from 'outside' (where both positions are perceptible, but separated)? This was of course a crucial object of Hegel and Marx's dialectics, who tended to explain that *one side* only perceives itself and its relationship to the adversary, hence the conflict as such, but in the perspective of its 'overcoming'.

in particular – it presupposes an anthropological subject already *isolated* from the 'pathological' dimensions of experience).[13]

(b) If one further asks the question: what is the 'place' of the theorist in relation to the Prince, or the relation of the knowing function to the ruling function, the only possible answer is that it is *a change of place*, or a 'displacement', because it is immanent to the conflict, but also essentially unstable. Such a displacement could well be described as a kind of 'supplement': in order to make use of the conflict, the Prince must appear as a 'third party', he must *dissimilate* from the patricians while *not assimilating* to the Plebeians, thus differentiating himself from both, producing a dynamic 'difference within the difference' which *transforms* the relationship of the conflicting parts, in order to produce a political *power effect*. But this is also a displacement in the 'topological' sense: the Prince as it were 'migrates' across the board, from one side to the other (or to support the other) in a modality that can be explained only from the 'people's point of view', or from the point of view of the *interests of the people*. And this is the reason why the political writer needs to occupy this 'popular' place, which otherwise would remain obscure and cancelled, not only in an intellectual manner, but also in a passionate manner. Not so much 'Occupy Wall Street', then, than 'Occupy Main Street'...

4   Partiality, Truth and the Displacement of the Prince

I want now to attempt *a second reading*, taking into account at the same time the *latent problems* of the 'topography' which was identified as a matrix of Machiavelli's antithetic epistemology, and the *conflicting effects* that it produces among its readers and interpreters, especially those who *push the idea to the extreme*, because they identify the very possibility of understanding politics with the adoption of a 'partisan viewpoint'.

What are the latent difficulties? They arise from the fact that a double bind, at the same time logical and political, is involved in this notion of immanent or quasi-transcendental *division* of the knowing subject (which in fact is rather something like a practical agency whose action would be the understanding of the political 'matters'). We do not know yet, or really, what the opposite of a 'synoptic' or *comprehensive* and *totalising* discourse could be, if it is to perform an epistemic function. A formal indication can be derived from Deleuze's notion of a 'disjunctive synthesis', however enigmatic it first appears, since in a whole it holds the heterogeneous 'parts' together while maintaining their

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13   See Terray 1990; and Foucault 1966.

separation, even their incompatibility, or it forces them to enter the same discursive 'place'. In other terms it *stages a place* within discourse for the 'presentation' of conflict as such.[14] We can discuss this double bind at two successive levels, one that is purely formal, and another that is more 'historical', or involves history as a narrative.

Formally, my suggestion is that we relate the fluidity or uncertainty of Machiavelli's *counting* of the social and political 'places' (or positions) to the issue of a constitutive *dissymmetry* within the epistemic 'topography' itself, without which there would be no 'knowledge effect'.[15] Instead of seeing the Machiavellian *dispositif* of 'power-knowledge' as a *static* description, a topography of *given* places where agents or subjects are called to 'locate' themselves (as, in the old discourse of class and party politics, individuals and groups were compelled to 'assume' a class-position and a party-position), we can interpret it as a *mobile* and even (to some extent) *reversible* relationship, affecting *both* power and knowledge. The 'places' undoubtedly are always at the same time positions of power and positions of knowledge. Hence it is important here to keep the double meaning of *power* in English with respect to French or Latin (*potentia* and *potestas*, hence *puissance* and *pouvoir*), which is also there in the Italian word *potere* (at least in its current use).[16] But where does the dissymmetry ultimately lie? The 'new Prince' will not be able to exercise a *power* over the people (and the people's *umori*, meaning its conflicts of passions and interests) if he does not *know the structure* or 'nature' of the people. In this sense knowledge is an instrument of the prince's empowerment. The reverse is also true, but on a *minor key*: in Book I, chapter 4 of the *Discourses* (i.e. the chapter on *civil conflict* as the source of the imperial power of Rome), Machiavelli writes, quoting from Cicero: 'albeit ignorant, the *peoples* are capable of understanding truth'. But the latent idea in *Il Principe* is stronger than this: the people (or, rather, the 'popular' element within the people, i.e. the part, not the whole) do support the politics of the Prince, inasmuch as it actively knows the Prince's *nature*. In practice this means that the people can *discriminate* among types of principalities and modes of princely government: first, by experiencing them,

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14   See Deleuze 1969.

15   In Althusser's epistemology, 'knowledge effect' is a key formula: see Althusser et al 1996, p. 69 ('Du "Capital" à la philosophie de Marx').

16   Antonio Negri, incidentally, has a tendency to always attribute *potentia* to the people or the multitude, *qua* 'constituent power', whereas the State, and more generally the rulers only exercise *potestas*. As a consequence he deprives himself of the possibility of thinking a strategic circulation or a historical displacement of the various aspects of power among the various actors of politics, and in fact he makes *politics* as a practice unthinkable, just as Rancière albeit for different reasons.

and second by anticipating or 'calculating' their consequences. Notwithstanding, it is the *political writer* (Machiavelli himself, and perhaps some others before him) who will become empowered, capable of producing an effect in the historical distribution and redistribution of power, however aleatory or uncertain it remains, through the knowledge that he acquires and divulgates in an accessible manner to the 'parts' involved in the conflict – not exactly speaking a double truth, but aiming at *two* readerships at the same time. Who are then the readers anticipated by Machiavelli? My suggestion is: they are *all the parts in all places*, but in a differentiated manner (whereas Rousseau was suggesting that Machiavelli *seemingly* writes for the Princes, but *really* writes for the peoples). Machiavelli the writer is one who can compose a *single text* with *two different meanings* for *two different readerships*.

This leads to interpreting the relationship between the uncertain 'counting' of places and the dissymmetry of the social 'positions' in a more dynamic way, as implications of the idea of a *displacement*, already mentioned, which involves a temporary 'mediation' (or a vanishing mediator):[17] the *basic* structure or distribution of places is *dualistic*, it refers to the distinction of patricians (*popolo grasso*) and plebeians (*popolo minuto*), whose interests as we know are dissymmetric (on one side, to wage power or domination, on the other side, not to be dominated). But this structure is supplemented twice in a row: with the adjunction of the prince who 'isolates' himself from his class (becoming a 'public' figure in the strong sense, not merely a stronger patrician),[18] and with the adjunction of the writer who writes a book called 'The Prince' (making the public figure a 'historic' figure). As it were, *two becomes three* and *three becomes four*. But the virtual tendency is a return to the situation of duality, albeit *transformed* with respect to its initial quality or its political 'composition'.

We can see that a transformation took place, which the writing of the book asserts performatively. But perhaps there will remain an uncertainty, because we are not sure to have completely arrested Machiavelli's elusive theoretical strategy and politically fixed its results... We could say: the result is a *regulated conflict* between the Prince and the people, with the Prince acting as mediator and regulator of the passions of the people. Or we could say: the result is a more or less *stable ruling* of the Prince over the people, in the 'objective interest' of the people, i.e. through the *neutralisation* of the patricians (grandees), or their (relative) disempowerment. In any case one has to pass from an apparent symmetry to a real dissymmetry, which nevertheless incorporates or integrates the 'dominated' viewpoint *within* the 'dominant' viewpoint, i.e. the

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17   Jameson 1988, vol. 2, pp. 3–34.
18   'Ma perché di privato si diventa principe...' (P 8).

exercise of domination. And this can be done only through the 'vanishing' mediation of the writer who, at the same time, *exhibits* (in discourse) the heterogeneity of discourse, and 'migrates' from one place to the other, thus *reversing the place of the enunciation of truth on power*, and disrupting the *illusion of a self-knowing power* – in that sense a 'sovereign' discourse, forming an 'absolute knowledge' of power.[19]

It is useful here to compare with the Aristotelian notion of the reciprocity of places in the definition of the political realm, because *citizenship* in its Aristotelian definition also involved both *power and knowledge*. In *Politics*, Book III, Aristotle proposed three successive 'definitions' of the citizen, which are in fact moments in the construction of the complete concept of the *polítes* as active member of the *pólis* (or political constituency, polity). The second moment (1277b7–15) reads as follows:

> But there exists a form of authority by which a man rules over persons of the same race as himself, and free men (for that is how we describe political authority), and this the ruler should learn by being ruled, just as a man should command cavalry after having served as a trooper, command a regiment after having served in a regiment and been in command of a company and of a platoon. Hence there is much truth in the saying that it is impossible to become a good ruler without having been a subject. And although the goodness of a ruler and that of a subject are different, the good citizen must have the knowledge and the ability both to be ruled and to rule, and the merit of the good citizen consists in having a knowledge of the government of free men on both sides. And therefore both these virtues are characteristic of a good man, even if temperance and justice in a ruler are of a different kind from temperance and justice in a subject; for clearly a good man's virtue, for example his justice, will not be one and the same when he is under government and when he is free, but it will be of different kinds, one fitting him to rule and one to be ruled, just as temperance and courage are different in a man and in a woman.[20]

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19   This is an extremely strong element of 'secularisation' in Machiavelli's discourse: not in the sense of transferring to a 'secular' or profane sovereign the qualities defining God theologically (especially His *self-knowledge*), but on the contrary, in the sense of *cutting* any real prince or ruler from this mythical representation of sovereignty, through the simple adjunction of a writer who *knows the Prince's nature from outside.*

20   Aristotle 1959, p. 193.

The key idea is, therefore, that in order to *learn* how to rule (or give orders) (*árchein*), one has to experience obedience, and possibly as well in order to learn how (and why) to obey (or take orders) (*árchesthai*), one has to experience the art of ruling. This is indeed purely symmetric, and is meant to institute equality (in the form of reciprocity). The 'power' (*arché*) of which it is a question here involves no real antagonism (or it presupposes that antagonism has been bracketed *ex ante* – reason why Aristotle sets limitations on the spread of wealth as a condition of *actual* citizenship). Conversely, in Machiavelli's scheme, a *distance*, allegorised by the model of the 'landscape', has to be created or, rather, it has to be *revealed* (because it always already existed). This distance is not to be abolished, but it is to be used by the writer who *takes one side* (or occupies one place) in order to 'teach' the Prince (but also the people) how to incorporate the consideration of their 'other' into their own political strategy, which then can aim at reducing the distance, or moderating its effects.[21] Division leads to distanciation, which leads to productive inequality, of which 'equality' is but a historical modality.

5   Back to the Present: Machiavelli's Challenge to Universalism

From this formal discussion, we may now jump to a different kind of consideration, which tries to read the 'trace' of such topographic patterns of power-knowledge in contemporary thinkers who identify the possibility of political 'science' (or 'theory') with a *partisan discourse*: something that is execrated by liberal political theorists, who are also most of the time uneasy with Machiavelli and especially with *Il Principe* (even in the case of 'republican' theorists, as illustrated by Pocock). But it is insistent in critical political theory.

Althusser is an especially interesting case, because of his continuous evolution with respect to the idea of 'class struggle in theory' (which, for him, defines *philosophy*).[22] I find it however more interesting to read Althusser not in

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21   And even better, more dialectically: how to incorporate *the other's image of oneself* into one's politics. This is the core of Althusser's interpretation of the politics of the Prince as a 'politics of ideology', whereby the Prince becomes able to calibrate, use, and transform the 'opinion of the Prince (= himself) in the imagination of the People'. But, following his one sided reading of the topography (or his bracketing of the reciprocal, if not symmetric, question: why is it also necessary to *essere Principe* to 'know the People'?), he does not discuss the issue of the image (opinion) of the People (or *the idea of People*) after which a Prince (ruler, government, political organisation) is modelling his 'popular' (or populist) politics.

22   Althusser 1976.

isolation, but in comparison, especially with Schmitt and Tronti. Together with Gramsci, the three of them of course heavily rely on the image of Lenin as the great 'Machiavellian' figure in the twentieth century, who would embody the combination of a political actor and a political theorist in a single individual.[23]

What I want to briefly consider first is not the 'mature' Schmitt, made famous by his *Concept of the Political* (*Der Begriff des Politischen*, first published as a lengthy article in 1927, then modified and published in book form in 1932), but an earlier Schmitt, who was an avid reader of Lenin's theory of the dictatorship of the proletariat, which he wanted to turn against the communist revolution, creating a sort of 'Leninism on the right' (hence powerfully contributing to the constitution of the idea of *conservative revolution*).[24] Among the writings of the early period, which include *Die Diktatur* (1921), with an interpretation of Machiavelli and a missing chapter on Lenin and Trotsky, I think that *Die geistesgeschichtliche Lage des heutigen Parlamentarismus*, 1923 (second edition in 1926)[25] is the most interesting for us here. This is because it does not only describe a political conflict *of the first order* among classes or parties with whom to side (as 'friend') or whom to oppose (as 'enemy'), but also a *conflict of the second order*, among the two ideologies (or, as Schmitt calls them, the two rival 'myths', the myth of *class* leading to the communist theory of the dictatorship of the proletariat, and the *national myth*, which underpins fascism), which is more decisive for the definition of the political field. Of course, the source of this terminology is Sorel (as was also the case for Gramsci at the time). Schmitt's idea is that the rival myths express distinct ways of describing the political antagonism, hierarchising its terms and anticipating its effects. The historical sequence leading from the Soviet revolution to the advent of Italian fascism (with Mussolini's 'March on Rome' in October 1922 forming the moment when its hegemony is made visible), with its rapid succession of revolutions and counter-revolutions across Europe, would form an experimental demonstration of the superiority of the national myth over the proletarian myth – a superiority which does not only express a relationship of material forces, but also a greater capacity to provide historical intelligibility. What is indeed interesting here is a possibility (perhaps a temptation) to reverse the argument in favour

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23   Preparing for Gramsci's invention of the 'Modern Prince' who is at the same time a 'collective intellectual' and a capacity of 'direction' for the transformation of the society. A typical vacillation of this model takes place between the representation of this fusion in a *collective* body, a party or an 'organised' class, and the representation of the same fusion in the figure of a *leader*. I must leave this question aside for now.

24   See Breuer 1993.

25   Schmitt 1988.

of the proletarian myth/ideology, or even add a '*meta-conflict' of the third order*, by showing that the proletarian myth becomes in fact stronger, when it rises to the quality of a 'counter-counter-revolutionary' strategy.[26] This is indeed what communism desperately tried to achieve in the twentieth century, especially when passing from the 'class against class' strategy to the 'popular front' strategy, on the condition that it remained rooted in the idea of proletarian hegemony, or did not simply shift from a 'class standpoint' to a 'democratic' or 'popular' standpoint, where the political subject is shifted from a part to the whole – minus the 'anti-popular' elements, but incorporated an understanding of the tendencies and 'contradictions within the people' in the construction of the class standpoint itself.[27]

From Schmitt we pass quite naturally to Tronti's notion of the 'one-sidedness' of class politics (*parzialità, unilateralità*), which combines the two meanings of 'part', establishing an intrinsic correspondence between the fact that the working class is a *part of the society*, and the fact that it immediately acts as a *party* in the class struggle (because, as Marx had asserted in the *Communist Manifesto*, 'the struggle of the proletariat begins with its very existence', it is a condition of survival for the proletarians themselves).[28] Tronti pushed to the extreme the idea that no 'totalisation' is possible, neither as political consensus nor as synthetic representation of the whole, because radical disjunction is the law of modern history. To which he added the idea that a (proletarian) class can practically know itself (not only as a situation in society, but as a historic power) only through the critical reversal of the enemy's perception of oneself

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26 It was largely exploited by twentieth century 'left Schmittianism', which also often returned to Machiavelli, explicitly or allegorically: see the anthology of the journal *Il Centauro* in Accarino *et alii* 2007.

27 I take it that this is the core of Gramsci's unfinished theory of the 'war of position' as a reversal of hegemony with respect to the on-going 'passive revolution', which in that sense is truly post-Machiavellian.

28 In this theorisation, which he believed to be vindicated by the experience of class struggles in Fordist America as well as Italian industrial revolution in the 60's, Tronti was in a sense *reversing* the theory of 'class-consciousness' which he had borrowed from Lukács: it was no longer the access to an understanding of the *whole* that was verifying the dialectical superiority of proletarian class-consciousness over bourgeois ideology, but, on the contrary, its decided partiality or one-sidedness, excluding every 'synthesis' of the divided social relationship in capitalism. In this commentary, I am relying on Tronti's classic masterwork, *Operai e capitale* (1966/1972), still untranslated as a whole into English (however, the essay on *class and party* is available on the web: http://operaismoinenglish.wordpress.com/category/mario-tronti/page/2/).

(which in practice, for the working class, is the capitalist's economic theory).[29] He assumed a distinction of 'science' and 'ideology' where science is entirely on the side of the revolutionary class and ideology entirely on the side of the dominant conservative class, but the *truth effect* that he was describing lay in the practical reversal of the epistemic relation between both classes, where the theorist can play a role only through his incorporation in the struggle of the class.

It would be interesting to compare this 'proletarian' understanding of the autonomy of the political with Jacques Rancière's notion of a 'politics of equality', based on the idea of the recognition of the 'part of no-parts'. Rancière is certainly no Machiavellian, but both theorists work more radically than others with the idea that there is no *partisanship* that is not also *partiality*, and the idea that extreme partiality is 'exclusion' from the existing distribution of power and knowledge. But for Tronti the excluded part remains more than ever a *substantial class*, the class of industrial workers (a category which he tends to substitute to that of the 'proletariat' in Marxism), whereas for Rancière it has to be an 'empty' class, however filled with real people and real experiences, thus having no essential link to the workers (who can only *occupy that place* historically, by virtue of their political exclusion from representation), but keeping much of Marx's original idea of the proletariat as a *universal class* by virtue of its radical negativity.[30]

On this background, Althusser's evolution becomes more interesting. It was initiated in the essay from 1968, *Lenin and Philosophy*, with the idea that 'philosophy represents politics for science and represents science for politics', which left a possibility of *mediating* between the extremes. However, it did not lead to stabilising or institutionalising the position of the 'philosopher': Althusser would famously write that the philosopher's vocation was to 'vanish in his intervention', *disparaître dans son intervention*.[31] Further, it led to the idea that philosophy is the discourse which makes explicit the class dimension of the political discourse or 'science', i.e. reveals and enacts the 'class struggle within theory', thus transforming a latent structural determination of parts/classes into a 'partisan' position with an epistemological function. As the *Reply*

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29   See the recent account of the history of Italian *operaismo* in Tronti 2009 (a partial English translation was published in Tronti 2012).

30   See Balibar 2011 ('Le moment messianique de Marx'). There seems to be, however, a significant shift in Rancière's definition of the 'part of no parts', between his early works (*La Nuit des Prolétaires* 1981, *Aux bords du politique* 1990), and his more recent defence of democracy (*La Haine de la démocratie* 2005).

31   Althusser 1971.

to John Lewis from 1972 was keen to explain, it is this philosophical 'class struggle within theory', which only makes it possible for theory to *migrate* out of its 'ideological' embeddedness and achieve a *scientific status* in the field of politics.[32] And finally (although of course this was an interrupted evolution), it leads to the most *dialectical* (although not Hegelian) formulation, which involves the notion of a 'schismatic science' (for Althusser, a property that applies in an analogous manner to Marxism and psychoanalysis).[33] A protracted 'schism' or 'scission' does not only form the external condition of knowledge, but its internal pattern of development. Not only in such disciplines or 'knowledges' are there permanent conflicts of interpretation of the same principles, but the 'struggle' between tendencies is the only possibility for them to explore an object and increase their cognitive value. This takes place, however, at the risk of the opposite effect: sterile antagonism. Therefore it is an *ambivalent* character of 'knowledge' (or in Althusserian terms it *lacks a guaranty* of progress or success).

The Machiavellian model of *split location* for the knowing subject becomes here overdetermined by a Pascalian notion of the 'point of heresy', whereby there is no 'orthodoxy' except as an empty place from which the antithetic 'deviations' are departing. Truth or adequate knowledge therefore only exists as a permanent oscillation, a conflict of 'tendencies' or deviations that have a class determination in the last instance (or, in the case of psychoanalysis, an unconscious determination). But the last 'instance' remains as such inaccessible: it is determining, but not determined. This is, in a sense, where the most interesting analogies with a Schmittian pattern of the meta-level of conflict could arise, whereas the initial formula on the 'double representation' of science for politics, and politics for science (in *Lenin and Philosophy*), was closest to the Machiavellian topography as proposed in the 'Dedicatory Epistle' of *The Prince*. In fact, what I am tempted to conclude is that Machiavelli's *equivocal* dispositive could never really be used (or retrieved) by the posterity without some *simplification*, while forming an ideal of political discursivity whenever the synoptic models of 'political science' became unacceptable or irrelevant. They remain interesting for us inasmuch as we look for a critical methodology to hold in check the dominant positivistic or abstract universalistic notion of science based on the separation of facts and values.

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32   See Althusser 1973.

33   See Althusser 1991 (*On Marx and Freud*). Althusser literally speaks of a science that is always 'split'. The German translators of Althusser, Rolf Löper and Peter Schöttler, introduced the formula 'schismatic science', which I take to express the idea even better.

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The Different Faces of the People: On Machiavelli's Political Topography

Stefano Visentin

1   The Apparition of the People

The aim of this paper is to extract from Machiavelli's discussion of the 'nature' of the people (*popolo*) several important theoretical elements, which haunted and continue to haunt modern political thought, and in particular every political theory meant to project the building of a unitary political form (the State) which, as Weber stated, possesses the legitimate monopoly of the legitimate monopoly of violence.[1] This attempt is determined by the conviction that Machiavelli's reflection on the idea of the people does not only create a radical discontinuity with medieval tradition, but also presents a radical alternative to mainstream modern political theory, whose birth can be traced back to the Hobbesian theory of sovereignty.[2]

I will try to demonstrate that a very relevant part of Machiavelli's thought is focused on the strategies by which the people reveals itself within a historical framework, determined by a specific conjuncture, and by doing this it contributes to the construction of a new political order, although permanently unstable. As a point of departure, we could say that Machiavelli describes the people as a precarious and changeable union of different singularities, occupying a common space and often sharing the same passions – or, at least, being intertwined by strong emotional ties, even if at times conflictual. Therefore, the people can strengthen its internal connections by the acquisition of a

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1   A previous attempt to examine this issue has been made in Visentin 2012.

2   This interpretation is shared by other scholars, e.g. by Marco Geuna, who writes: 'Machiavelli succeeds in developing a totally new and peculiar consideration on conflicts, which places him in a position of radical discontinuity with the ancient and medieval tradition of western political thought; but, at the same time, also in a marginal position within the modern political project, from Bodin to Hobbes and onwards, centred on the role of sovereign power and on the neutralisation of conflict' (Geuna 2012, p. 109; my translation). What Geuna says about Machiavelli's reflection on conflicts can also be said about his analysis of the nature of the people, which is to be considered an exception within political modernity. On Machiavelli's solitude in the history of modern political thought see Althusser 1998.

shared imagination and a collective practise, which is expressed through different figures, but never gives birth to an artificial unity. In other words, we can say that Machiavelli's people – just like the new prince (*principe nuovo*) – has no substantial reality, since it only exists insofar as it appears on the political scene: it is exactly what it seems to be, and its modality of actions is completely determined by the specific image it assumes while coming into view.[3]

First I will take into account *The Prince* and the *Discourses on the First Decade of Livy*, concluding with a reference to book III of the *Florentine Histories*, whose analysis will allow a more in depth discussion of the conceptual frame previously sketched out; in fact, whereas the 'faces' of the people emerging from *The Prince* and the *Discourses* are positive (even with an ambivalent character), the face presented by the *Florentine Histories* is negative (although also ambivalent), and this gives us the opportunity to re-examine the entire topic in a different light.[4] Many scholars already noticed that the Machiavellian discussion on the nature of the people has no historical dimension (and certainly not a sociological one), but is eminently a political issue, since the people, as Fabio Frosini recently wrote, occupies a political space which is 'structurally disputable (and thus not yet decided), homogeneous (and thus egalitarian) and common'.[5] In other words, the people owns an identity and a substance only insofar as it presents itself – making itself visible – on the political scene: in strict analogy with the new prince, also the people is what it appears to be – and acts insofar as it appears with a definite figure; we could also say that there is nothing like an idea of the people – or a people like an ideal). To become visible means to have the possibility of occupying a political space, thus producing effects which can influence other political actors – and on the contrary, the possibility to be influenced and modified by them. This emergence of the people, i.e. its becoming visible, can essentially happen in different ways, depending on the historical and political circumstances.

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3 Pedullà 2011, p. 339: 'a people does not exist in abstract sense' (my translation). See also Inglese. 2006, p. 90: 'it is impossible to give a univocal face, from a social-historical perspective, to what Machiavelli calls "the people"' (my translation).

4 Another relevant topic could be the analysis of the people in arms – or better: the people as army – discussed by Machiavelli in *The Art of War*, where the importance of discipline as a political tool is clearly highlighted.

5 Frosini 2010, p. 104 (my translation).

2   The People as Plebs

The first figure I will take into account is the figure of the people as plebs
(*plebe*). As we know, Machiavelli introduces this figure in his 'doctrine of hu-
mours' (*dottrina degli umori*), which is present both in *The Prince* and in the
Discourses, and is explained in the two books with the following words:

> In every city these two different humours are found, whence it arises that
> the people desire to be neither commanded nor oppressed by the greats,
> and the greats desire both to command and to oppress the people. From
> these two different appetites there arises in the city one of three effects:
> principality, or liberty, or license.[6]

> In every republic there are two different humours, that of the people and
> that of the greats, and that all legislation favourable to liberty is brought
> about by the clash between them.[7]

The Machiavellian overthrow of the Medieval and then Humanistic principle
of concord (*concordia*), contained in the famous Sallustian maxim that '*con-
cordia parvae res crescunt, discordia maximae dilabuntur* (with concord small
things increase, with discord the greatest things go to ruin)', is exemplified by
the historical genesis in Rome of the Tribunes of the Plebs, which are the insti-
tutional result of popular tumults, in order to contrast 'the ambition of the
nobility', which 'would in that case have corrupted the republic long before
they did'.[8] Here the people appears within the context of a struggle against
another part of the republic, but its position is not symmetrical with the posi-
tion of the nobles (or 'the greats'), because the popular desire to be neither
commanded, nor oppressed is potentially universal, since it can be expanded,
at least theoretically, to all citizens; while, on the contrary, the aristocratic de-
sire to command and oppress is always hierarchical and exclusive, as it con-
tinuously needs to maintain the inequality among the parts of the city; that is
the reason why aristocratic governments tend to become oligarchies, that is
'government by the few'.[9]

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6   Machiavelli 2005, p. 69 (P 9).
7   Machiavelli 1998, p. 113 (D I.4).
8   Machiavelli 1998, pp. 437–8 (D III.11). Regarding this see Raimondi 2013, p. 22, note 5: 'The
    tumult is a collective encounter, or a collective collision, which marks the beginning of every
    form of life [and therefore] it expands life beyond itself, even by means of destruction. It is
    the place where men's virtue reveals itself, where they risk their own life' (my translation).
9   Machiavelli 1998, p. 106 (D I.2).

In other words, the humour of nobles causes the corruption of common good, whereas the humour of the people reinforces everyone's freedom; therefore the people's desires are 'very seldom harmful to liberty'.[10] The people, fighting against the nobility, plays the role of a part – a part of the city against another part –, nevertheless, by doing so, it protects the freedom of everyone; as Machiavelli writes in *Discourses* I.5, it

> [is] keen on liberty since [its] hope of usurping dominion over others will be less than in the case of the upper class. So that if the populace (*populari*) be made guardians of liberty, it is reasonable to suppose that they will take more care of it, and that, since it is impossible for them to usurp power, they will not permit others to do so.[11]

This paradoxical union of partiality and universality is thus the peculiarity of the plebs both in the reconstruction of the genesis of the Roman republic in the *Discourses*,[12] and in the analysis of the civil principality in *The Prince*: if the opposition against the nobles clearly expresses a specific political perspective of a part of the citizenry, on the contrary the outcome of the fight is the building of a free republic, although unstable and frail, since the desire to be neither commanded, nor oppressed is present in every citizen, without exclusion (even within the nobility).[13] The reason why the people fights for freedom comes from the position it occupies within the space of the city, that is a posi-

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10   Machiavelli 1998, pp. 114–15 (D I.4).

11   Machiavelli 1998, p. 116.

12   It must be remembered that the word 'universale' is often used by Machiavelli to indicate the people, sometimes opposed to 'the greats' (see Machiavelli 1998, p. 110 (D I.2)): 'many constitutions were made whereby to restrain the arrogance of the Greats and the licentiousness of the universality'), sometimes to 'the few' (see Machiavelli 1998, p. 155 (D I.16): 'he who has but the few as his enemies, can easily [...] make himself secure, but he who has the universality for his enemy can never make himself secure').

13   See Ames 2103, p. 230: 'The people and the Greats confront each other from an asymmetric perspective [...] How is this asymmetry to be understood? The possible alternatives seem to be the following. The first one is that the people does not want to be commanded, because the Greats always seek to make the most of their oppression; the second one is that the Greats' command is considered by the people as a form of oppression in itself, therefore it does not want to be commanded in any way. If we consider the first alternative [...], the creation of a political order is surely possible; but if the truth is in the second alternative, then the people's desire is simply not compatible with any political form' (my translation). The simultaneous presence of these two reasons in the people's humour is the cause of the unavoidable instability of every republican order. On the humour of the people as a demand for no-rule see also Vatter 2000.

tion of subalternity, and from its attempt to be rid of it – an attempt that cannot obtain the result of conquering the dominion, and thus must be content to limit the aristocracy's power. In fact popular tumults do not have the aim of a revolutionary overturning of the social and political situation,[14] but rather aim to create a concrete possibility for the regulation of social conflicts. This is the reason why the tribunes of the plebs can also be defined as 'institutions of non-dominion', as Fabio Raimondi writes, since they serve not only in bridling the ambition of the powerful against the plebs, but also in bridling the ambition which the members of the plebs could demonstrate towards each other.[15] We shall see that the *Florentine Histories* deal exactly with the latter problem.

So, by passing from invisibility to visibility on the political scene, the people on the one hand upsets the presumed naturalness of the previous order and the relationship of domination which supported it; on the other, it forces the other political actors to modify their behaviours, due to the confrontation with its active presence: by doing so, the people resists the attempt to be considered merely a passive matter to be moulded. The emergence of the people does not create absolute disorder – and for this reason Machiavelli writes that the Roman republic was neither 'divided', nor 'disordered' –, but on the contrary it establishes a new political order,[16] which takes its strength from the social division, and which nonetheless must be regulated by laws:

> nothing does so much to stabilize and strengthen a republic as some institutions whereby the changeable humours which agitate it are afforded a proper outlet by way of the laws.[17]

As a consequence, the laws are both the outcome of tumults, since they originate from the struggle between the humours, and the instrument to turn this struggle into a quest for freedom, since they avoid the risk that the partiality of the people becomes sectarian. In any case, tumults can never be completely neutralised, not even by a perfect or a mixed constitution, as they always arise again and again, and must be uninterruptedly dealt with by whomever is in charge of the republic. In Machiavelli's view, the divisions within the political body are a constituent element, and neither just laws, nor virtuous govern-

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14   See Illuminati and Rispoli 2011, p. 55.

15   See Raimondi 2013, pp. 147–8. On the role of the people's tribunate ('the institution that earns Machiavelli's highest praise') as an instrument of 'constitutional check' see McCormick 2011.

16   Machiavelli 1998, p. 114 (D I.4).

17   Machiavelli 1998, p. 124 (D I.7).

ment can unify them permanently: laws can introduce a truce or an amnesty in the city,[18] but they can never neutralise the conflict between the people and the nobility; even because, as we shall see by considering the *Florentine Histories*, the complete defeat of one part causes the creation of a new division within the victorious part, as if the desire of the people also needs to be contained within well-defined limits, since all men 'seek first to be free from apprehension, then make other apprehensive [...] as if it were necessary either to treat others ill or to be ill-treated'.[19] In chapter 5 of the first book of the *Discourses* Machiavelli does not only underline the relationship between the position of subalternity of the people and its desire for freedom, but also asserts that such a desire comes from a genuine impossibility to dominate: as we have seen, the people is more concentrated on liberty, because it has no possibility to gain power. Nevertheless, nothing prevents, as a matter of principle, that the people could transform its negative desire into a positive one:

> yet again their [of the greats] corrupt and grasping deportment arouses in the minds of the 'have-nots' the desire to have, either to revenge themselves by desporting them, or that they may again share in those riches and honours in regard to which they deem themselves to have been used by the other party.[20]

In fact, human desire is nothing but an indefinite accumulation of power, in order to 'hold securely' what every individual owns.[21] Moreover, this statement seems to exhibit the absolute instability of the conflictual model, since the Roman plebs, once they gained a safe position against the threats of the nobles, 'at once began to quarrel with the nobles out of ambition, and to demand also

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18 See Torres 2012 about the importance of the political amnesty (and its etymological proximity with 'amnesia') in the *Discourses*.

19 Machiavelli 1998, p. 224 (D 1.46).

20 Machiavelli 1998, p. 118 (D 1.5).

21 'Men are inclined to think that they cannot hold securely what they possess unless they get more at others' expenses' (ibid). See also Machiavelli 2005, p. 49 (P 3): 'It is a thing truly very natural and ordinary to desire to acquire', and above all Machiavelli 1998, p. 200 (D 1.37): 'whenever there is no need for men to fight, they fight for ambition's sake; and so powerful is the sway that ambition exercises over the human heart that it never relinquishes them, no matter how high they have risen'. Such unlimited ambition, which can never be satisfied, makes men 'ill content with what they possess' (ibid.)., and this develops a negative anthropology that Machiavelli shares with other modern thinkers, especially with Thomas Hobbes. See on this subject Borrelli 2009, especially chapter 1: *Contentezza/contenzioni: antropologia e politica in Machiavelli*.

to share in the distribution of honours and of property'.[22] Even tyranny often arises because of 'the excessive demand of the people for freedom and […] the excessive demand to dominate on the part of the nobles',[23] as if the freedom of the people had to face too difficult a task, that is to find in every historical conjuncture its own self-determination, since it must be contained within a limit, otherwise it is always at risk to revert into slavery. The famous Tacitian maxim, that the people 'must either be terrorized or instils terror (*terrere ni paveant*)' seems to be accepted also by the Florentine writer; but to be sure of such a conclusion, we must also consider a second face of the people.

3　　　　The People as Multitude

This second face or figure is the people as multitude, i.e. as a constituent multiplicity. It appears in the last chapters of the first book of the *Discourses*, starting from chapter 44, even if already announced in chapter 4: 'though […] the people may be ignorant, it is capable of grasping the truth'.[24] In chapter 58, whose title is: 'The multitude is more knowing and more constant than is a prince', Machiavelli at first describes the main characteristics of the anti-popular ideology, culminating in the famous maxim from Livy: 'It is the nature of the multitude, either servilely to obey, or arrogantly to domineer (*Haec natura multitudinis est: aut humiliter servit, aut superbe dominatur*)';[25] then he overturns this criticism, by accusing the princes of having the same vices of the multitude, even in a much more dangerous form. Finally, he concludes that

> if […] it be a question of a prince subservient to the laws and of a people chained up by laws, more virtue will be found in the people than in the prince; and if it be a question of either of them loosed from the control by the law, there will be found fewer errors in the people than in the prince.[26]

Nevertheless, also the multitude must be 'regulated', to avoid the danger of it becoming 'loosed', that is, a serial sequence of individuals separated one from another, as the multitude described by Thomas Hobbes in the *Leviathan*: such

22　　Machiavelli 1998, p. 201 (D I.37). A thorough analysis of the different kinds of conflicts in Machiavelli's works is in Del Lucchese 2009.

23　　Machiavelli 1998, p. 214 (D I.40).

24　　Machiavelli 1998, p. 115.

25　　Machiavelli 1998, p. 252.

26　　Machiavelli 1998, p. 256.

a multitude can hardly act in common, since it is a pure amount of different individuals;[27] while, when a loosed multitude acts as a single body, its action is at the complete mercy of unreasonable forces, which push it to destroy every limit, and at the end to be subjected to a tyrant.[28] Therefore Machiavelli emphasises that laws and political institutions should define – that is, create a common frame, valid for all – the behaviours of the multitude, in order to defeat personal ambitions, and to improve the force of collective affects in the direction of cooperation. In any case, these institutions do not arise from a power external to the multitude itself, since they are rooted in its body. Machiavelli states that a free life means

> the possibility of enjoying what one has, freely and without incurring suspicion for instance, the assurance that one's wife and children will be respected, the absence of fear for oneself.[29]

But a free republic is also meant to build a space of common education, in order to select and reinforce the passions that keep the multitude together, while fighting those passions that disrupt it. Actually, the affects and the desires of the multitude cause the superiority of a republican constitution over a princely government, because of its variety and its capacity to change together with changing times:

> a republic has a fuller life and enjoys good fortune for a longer time than a principality, since it is better able to adapt itself to diverse circumstances owing to the diversity found among its citizens than a prince can do.[30]

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27   As it is well known, Hobbes states that 'the multitude naturally is not one, but many', therefore it can be understood as one only when it is represented 'by one man, or one person' (Hobbes 1994, p. 95).

28   Also in the *Florentine Histories*, Machiavelli, describing the plebeian revolt in the 1378, uses the definition of 'sciolta moltitudine' (loosed multitude), to express that the multitude acts as a single body, but lacking any rational plan. These two different examples of a loosed multitude have in common the unstable and contradictory character of its behaviour, which exposes it to the risk of becoming an easy prey for demagogues and tyrants (IF III.14).

29   Machiavelli 1998, p. 154 (D I.16).

30   Machiavelli 1998, p. 431 (D III.9); but see also Machiavelli 2005, p. 54 (P 5): 'in the republics there is greater life, greater hatred, more desire for revenge', since 'in rebellion it always takes refuge the name of liberty and its ancient constitution'.

Thus, the face of the people as multitude expresses the constituent primacy of multiplicity over unity – just as the emergence of the people as plebs was the expression of its transforming power, which could lead in either a positive or a negative direction. This means that the multitude is not necessarily opposed to unity, but rather that it is always superior to the power of one: so, political authority can be held by a single man, only if he is strictly controlled by public laws and institutions, that is, by the power of many.[31] On the contrary, Machiavelli states that 'absolute power will very soon corrupt it by making friends and partisans'.[32]

Nevertheless, Machiavelli highlights the ambivalence of the multitude's power, since the individuals that constitute it are 'often bold'

> in criticizing the decisions of their ruler [...] but when they see before their eyes the penalty attached, each mistrusts the other, and they hasten to obey.[33]

Once again, fear seems to play a decisive role in transforming the multitude from a cohesive and strong subject into a feeble and disintegrated mass; and especially when fear is associated with distrust, that is the lack of an affective tie among men, passive obedience easily follows. For this reason the Florentine notes that men 'when together all are strong, but when each begins to consider the danger he is in, they become cowardly and weak',[34] since the powerful feeling of cohesion created by 'being together' is challenged by the anxiety of 'considering the danger', which pits one individual against another – and everyone against his own weakness, that is the weakness of his (imaginary) independence.

However, fear does not only represent a danger for political unification, as many examples taken from Machiavelli's works can testify. For instance, when the plebs frighten the Senate, the result is that the arrogance of the latter is restrained;[35] or, when fear comes from the threat of an external enemy, it pro-

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31   See Machiavelli 1998, p. 193 (D I.34), whose title is: 'Dictatorial authority did good, not harm, to the Republic of Rome: it is the authority which citizens arrogate to themselves, not that granted by free suffrage, that is harmful to civic life'.

32   Machiavelli 1998, p. 198 (D I.35).

33   Machiavelli 1998, p. 250 (D I.57).

34   Machiavelli 1998, p. 251 (D I.57).

35   See Machiavelli 1998, p. 112 (D I.3), where Machiavelli connects 'the utmost harmony between the plebs and the senate' to the fear of the nobles that, 'if they treated the plebs badly, it would not be friendly towards them, but would make common cause with the Tarquins'.

duces a moralising effect within the people, by strengthening its virtue;[36] and finally, the reverence generated by religion, as in the case of the ceremonies introduced in Rome by king Numa Pompilius,[37] unifies and civilises the population, defeating its savagery and creating a patriotic sentiment. The image of a divinity helps the laws maintain the unity of the collective body, as the pages of the *Discourses* concerning the role of religious rituals and premonitions show,[38] and 'where the fear of God is wanting, it comes about either that a kingdom is ruined, or that it is kept going by the fear of a prince, which makes up for the lack of religion'.[39] As a consequence, it is more useful for the safety and the freedom of the city to fear a divinity – a common image of a perfect being, with which the people can identify – than to fear a prince, whose ambition inevitably tends to turn this fear into hate, and thus into a danger – the danger of tyranny – for the life of the political community.[40]

Despite the clear assumption within the *Discourses* of the political pre-eminence of a multitude over a prince, Machiavelli does not simply remove the princely figure from the frame of his reasoning on the republican system, since he is aware that the building of a 'republic of the multitude' is not an easy task, especially if the people is 'accustomed to live under a prince', since in this case, 'should it by some eventuality become free, will with difficulty maintain its freedom'.[41] In these pages Machiavelli introduces the image – a reversed copy of the multitude 'knowing' and 'constant' – of a people as a 'wild animal [...], brought up in captivity and servitude', where the desire not to be dominated seems to be replaced by the habit to live as slave; even more, it is the multitude itself which places the yoke on its neck,[42] seeking 'its own ruin' – in a kind of

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36 Concerning the corruption which grew in Rome because of the absence of enemies see Machiavelli 1998, p. 162 (D I.18): 'This sense of security and this weakness on the part of their enemies caused the Roman people in appointing to the consulate to consider not a man's virtue, but his popularity [...] Thus owing to the defectiveness of this institution it came about that good men were wholly excluded from consular rank'.

37 See Machiavelli 1998, pp. 139–42 (D I.11). On the political role of Roman religion in relationship with Machiavellian theory of conflicts see Geuna 2012.

38 See Machiavelli 1998, p. 150 especially the conclusions (D I.14): 'Nor did this custom of consulting the auspices tend to produce any result save to cause troops to go confidently into battle, [...] confidence almost always leads to victory'.

39 Machiavelli 1998, p. 141 (D I.11).

40 Regarding this issue, Raimondi 2013, p. 140, rightly writes about 'a mobilizing fear, differently from the Hobbesian one, which immobilizes the individuals, driving them to trust in the representative sovereign'.

41 Machiavelli 1998, p. 153 (D I.16).

42 Machiavelli 1998, p. 158 (D I.17).

voluntary servitude –, insofar as it is 'misled by the false appearance of good'.[43] The main cause of the overturning of this desire to live free into a desire to serve stems from men's inability to contain their own hopes:

> there are men who make this mistake, in that to their hopes they set no bound, and are ruined because they rely on such hopes and take no account of other things.[44]

Once again, it is the absence of a (common) measure, i.e. the lack of self-determination of the desire, that prevents the people from adapting itself to the political conjuncture; as a consequence, the multitude is always at risk of being fragmented, and of becoming easy prey to the power of a single man, thus reversing the hierarchy between the many and the one.

4   The Tie between the People and Its Prince

In such a situation, the people seems to be unable to express its will autonomously; the historical example Machiavelli proposes comes from the Roman plebs, which, when they retreated to *Mons Sacer*, could not reply to the Senate because

> so great was the respect which the plebs had for the authority of the senate that, since they had none of their leaders with them, no one ventured to reply. Not, says Titus Livy, that they lacked the material for a reply, but that they lacked the men to make it. This shows at once how useless a multitude is without a head.[45]

Machiavelli concludes that 'a multitude is useless without a head', and this makes the emergence of a new figure of the people necessary. This apparition is probably the most paradoxical and problematic one: the people revealing itself by means of a prince, who assumes the role of reorganising (or

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43   Machiavelli 1998, p. 238 (D I.53). The topic of voluntary servitude has been directly afforded, in the early-modern political literature, by Etienne De la Boétie in his *Discours sur la servitude volontaire* (De la Boétie 1553–4), but it is somehow implicitly present also in many other authors, for example in Baruch Spinoza, as a theoretical instrument to develop a radical criticism of absolute sovereignty. See on this issue Visentin 2010 and Albiac 2011.

44   Machiavelli 1998, p. 366 (D II.27).

45   Machiavelli 1998, p. 219 (D I.44).

re-founding) the political community: in fact, within a specific historical con-juncture only the prince can make the people talk and act.

It must be noted that Machiavelli does not confer any representative value – neither from a juridical, nor from an existential point of view – to the prince-ly power, which cannot absorb the plurality and the variety of popular desires into a unique form: there is nothing like a 'king's two bodies' doctrine in Ma-chiavelli's thought.[46] Rather, the prince's authority establishes a set of relation-ships, in different ways and with different gradations of intensity, with the emotional and imaginative horizon of the people. As a consequence, the princely deeds are always determined by a restless dialectic with the passions and the imaginations of *his* people. This is also the case of the new prince, to whom *The Prince* is dedicated. The paradigmatic history of Cesare Borgia re-veals how he establishes his authority over his new subjects, following a two-fold strategy: on the one side, the use of an unhesitating violence, devoid of any self-satisfaction and entirely concentrated on its purpose; on the other side, a communicative skill that cannot be simply reduced either to a manipu-lation of people's affects, or to a creation of a regime of fear, but is rather the ability to construct an empathetic link with the imaginative and emotional dimensions of the people. From this point of view, the prince's authority coin-cides with the effectiveness of his acts, lacking in any *a priori* guarantee, since the eyes of the subjects are all turned to him: as Machiavelli writes,

> all men, when they are spoken about, and especially princes, because they are placed higher, are noted for some of the following qualities, which bring them either blame or praise,[47]

> so that they must be able to 'to flee the infamy of those vices that take the State away' from them.[48]

Since the prince is placed higher, like the head of a collective body, he does not only observe everything, but he is also observed by everyone; the relationship between him and his people can not be reduced to a mono-directional action of the first over the latter, as in an Aristotelian dualism of creative form and inertial matter, because the desires of the people possess a relative autonomy, which can not be moulded as wax: it is the encounter between a virtuous prince and a not-completely corrupted people which generates a change in the

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46   The reference is obviously to the famous book from Ernst H. Kantorowicz.

47   Machiavelli 2005, pp. 87–8 (P 15).

48   Ibid.

political form of a city. Therefore we can say that there is neither a prince without a (his) people, nor a new and stable political order without the alliance of a single virtuous man with a collective body.[49] Therefore the prince must be able to weave a complex net of shared passions and imaginations with his subjects, and in order to reach this end, he must continuously change his own behaviour, to satisfy, from time to time, the necessity 'to retain among men the name of a liberal man',[50] 'to be believed compassionate and not cruel',[51] 'to avoid those things that could make him hateful and contemptible'.[52] A good example of such a bidirectional emotional relationship between the prince and his people (or the people and its prince) is offered by the passion of fear: actually, if sometimes a prince can usefully frighten his subjects, nevertheless he must also pay attention to not become their enemy, since

> a prince must have two fears: one inside, on account of his subjects, the other outside, on account of external powers [...] But as to his subjects, if external things are not in motion, he has to fear that they may conspire secretly, against which the prince secures himself very well if he avoids being hated and despised and keeps the people satisfied with him.[53]

To assure his own position, the prince must act in order 'to make the people his friend':[54] his security necessarily depends on that of the multitude, and vice versa, in a fragile, but at the same time insurmountable connection. That is why, when discussing the civil principality, Machiavelli exhorts the prince

> with his spirit and his orders to keep the universality inspired, [so that] he will never find himself deceived by the people and he will judge that he has built good foundations.[55]

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49   See Ames 2013, p. 238, who indicates as an elementary political truth the fact that 'no one can keep the power without establishing alliances. However, every alliance is an exchange: in return for the support his allies give to him, the prince is "bound" to them' (my translation).

50   Machiavelli 2005, p. 88 (P 16).

51   Machiavelli 2005, p. 90 (P 17).

52   Machiavelli 2005, p. 96 (P 19). A masterly interpretation of the Machiavellian politics of imagination is in Lefort 2012.

53   Ibid.

54   Machiavelli 1998, p. 155 (D I.16).

55   Machiavelli 2005, p. 71 (P 9).

'To keep the universality inspired' means neither to provide a soul to someone who has none, nor to give life to an inert body; it means rather to reactivate those desires the people already possess, but that for conjunctural reasons have been weakened by corruption. Thus we can say that the prince's voice originates not only from the head, but from the entire body of the people, from the humours and passions of a collectivity; moreover, since the order of the city is never assured once and for all, it is necessary for the prince to work continuously on the production of affects and imaginations of the multitude, letting the virtue circulate within its body: the princely actions, like the republican laws, should just define the frame of this circulation, so that the political body would not suffer from excessive tension. This also means that between the image of himself that the prince projects on the political scene and the desires of the people there must always be a slight difference, a small distance which allows the two subjects – prince and people – to 'have a dialogue' and to influence each other. Therefore the paradoxical figure of the 'people bound to his prince', which can be portrayed as a sort of monstrous body with two heads talking to each other, expresses the partial autonomy of the princely actions from the popular power supporting them: the prince's strength, that is his capacity to 'make the reply' (i.e. to take a rapid decision), is based upon the maintenance of this proper distance between him and the people, which avoids both a total dependence and an absolute independence. But, at the same time, the relationship with his people allows the prince to be free of any other tie, above all any traditional dependence from feudal nobility, in order to create a brand new organisation of civic institutions.[56]

5   The People Internally Divided

We have seen that the creation of a new prince is necessary to defeat the corruption that sometimes emerges within the people, weakening its immanent power and cohesion. In the last figure I will consider – that is, the figure of the people internally divided, described in the *Florentine Histories* – Machiavelli shows a different outcome from the tensions crossing the popular body. In Machiavelli's interpretation Florence had a very particular historical development, from its genesis to its greatness, which is comparable neither with the history of Rome, nor with any other 'example' in ancient and modern history. Therefore the reason this city could never find an institutional balance between its humours must be traced back to its origins: it is an original division

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56   See again Althusser 1998, especially pp. 315–16.

– the division between natives and Roman settlers – which left a permanent sign on consequent events of Florence. So the Florentine history is a testament to the risk of a transformation of the people's humour in sectarianism, when political institutions do not succeed in constructing a frame to bind the strength of ambitions:

> The enmities in Florence were always accompanied by sects and therefore always harmful; never did a winning sect remain united except when the hostile sect was active, but as soon as the one conquered was eliminated, the ruling one, no longer having fear to restrain it or order within itself to check it, would become divided again.[57]

The material condition of 'modern' Florence is quite different from that of ancient Rome: the citizens of Florence are directly involved in the development of the commercial and economical growth of the city, especially the so-called 'popolo grasso' (higher people), therefore the passion of ambition – together with its 'political' equivalent: insolence – flows through the entire body of the city. This is why

> if in any republic there were ever notable divisions, those of Florence are most notable. For most other republics about which we have any information have been content with one division by which, depending on accidents, they have sometimes expanded and sometimes ruined their city; but Florence, not content with one, made many. [...] In Florence the nobles were, first, divided among themselves: then the nobles and the people; and in the end the people and the plebs.[58]

The division between the people and the plebs, which is the main topic of the third book of the *Histories*, is caused by the different outcome, compared with Rome, of the struggle between the nobles and the people: whereas the Roman laws and institutions were able to transform this conflict into positive energy, which kept the city free, in Florence, because of the institutions of the city 'which were not good (*i non buoni ordini suoi*)',[59] the people's desire soon became 'injurious and unjust', since it 'fought to be alone in the government without the participation of the nobles'.[60] And when the people occupies the place

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57   Machiavelli 1988, p. 277 (IF VII.1).
58   Machiavelli 1988, pp. 6–7 (IF Preface).
59   Machiavelli 1988, p. 106 (IF III.2).
60   Machiavelli 1988, p. 105 (IF III.1).

of the nobles in ruling the city, its desire changes from negative (to be neither commanded, nor oppressed) to positive (to command and oppress).[61] Making reference to the words pronounced by a Florentine citizen before the 'Signori', Machiavelli makes clear the difference between 'humour' and 'sect', or better the transformation of the popular humour in sectarianism, which cannot find a limitation by means of laws:

> The common corruption of all Italian cities, magnificent Signori, has cor-rupted and still corrupts your city, for ever since this province extricated itself from under the forces of the empire, its cities have had no powerful check to restrain them and have ordered their States and governments so as not to be free but divided into sects.[62]

The conclusion is quite evident: 'in a city that prefers to maintain itself with sects rather than with laws, as soon as one sect is left there without opposition, it must of necessity be divided within itself';[63] in other words, since the people (in particular the 'powerful people') assumes the humour of the nobles,[64] that is, the desire to command and to oppress, it needs to separate from itself a part, which must be commanded and oppressed: the lowest people, i.e. the plebs. Thus, while the people is trying to unify the city under its sole authority, the consequences are in fact the production of a new internal division, as if the division of the city could never be overcome, but only governed by (just) laws. The rigid division between 'useful' conflicts (i.e. the struggle for freedom and honours) and 'harmful' conflicts (the struggle for material goods) which had been developed in the *Discourses*, is now substituted by a single category of struggle, that is, the struggle to take possession of '*la roba*': the goods and the wealth. As Filippo Del Lucchese pointed out, this radical change in Machia-velli's thought alters the concept of crisis which was already present in the

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61   This demonstrates that the humours have no moral character, but originate from a spe-cific position within the division of the political space.

62   Machiavelli 1988, pp. 109–10 (IF III.5). See also book VII, chapter 1, p. 276: 'And therefore it is to be known that citizens in cities acquire reputation in two modes: either by public ways or by private modes', and from the latter 'sects and partisans arise'.

63   Machiavelli 1988, p. 111 (IF III.5).

64   Therefore the 'powerful people' appears to be an intermediate class between the nobility and the lower class of artisans and waged workers – the so-called 'low people'; but, unlike the nobles, its exponents had 'more credit with the people [i.e. the low people]', so that 'when they were united, it seemed to them that the time had come to take the form of a free way of life and an order that would enable them to defend themselves, before the new emperor should acquire forces' (Machiavelli 1988, p. 57 (IF II.4)).

previous works: the crisis is no longer the sign of the weakening of the republic, as it was in the analysis of Rome, but rather is the main agent of the entire history of Florence, both of its strength and of its vulnerability.[65]

The bursting on the scene of the 'infima plebe', whose tumults devastate the city,[66] dramatically transforms the face of Florence, by introducing an element of political instability that creates an ungovernable disorder. The famous 'discorso del Ciompo' (the speech of a Wool guildsman), that Machiavelli reproduces (and most likely partially reinvents) in chapter 13 of the III book, is not only a further reasoning on human equality,[67] nor just a rhetorical repetition of Machiavellian teaching on the strength of necessity, compared to any moral principle,[68] but is also and above all a profound lesson on the impossibility to stop the fight among the city's parts, if the institutions which should keep the humours within their limits are lacking.[69] The absence of any form of self-containment of the plebeian desire explains why in these pages Machiavelli's judgement on the nature of the multitude is so negative: 'impatient and fickle',[70] driven by 'indecency' and subjugated by the 'malignity or fear' of those 'who could have checked or crushed it';[71] however, the tragic history of these tumults also makes clear that freedom is not an original state of men, but is always a very difficult task to conquer, and that, on the contrary, servitude is the outcome not only of the wickedness of powerful rulers, but also of the weakness and the self-deceit of the ruled. Finally, the revolt of the 'Ciompi' testifies

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65   See Del Lucchese 2001.

66   'The greater part of the arson and robbery that took place in the preceding days had been done by the lowest plebs of the city […] Added to this was the hatred that the lesser people had for the rich citizens and princes of the Guilds, since it did not appear to them that they had been satisfied for their labor as they believed they justly deserved' (Machiavelli 1988, p. 121 (IF III.12)). Borrelli 2012, p. 49 comments: 'the plebs live outside the frameworks of the law and of the useful: however, although are deprived of any wealth, they do not ignore the importance of the institutions, and seek to conquer a closer position to the social classes which hold the most considerable part of public powers' (my translation).

67   'All men, having had the same beginning, are equally ancient and have been made by nature in one mode. Strip all of us naked, 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, for only poverty and riches make us unequal' (Machiavelli 1988, pp. 122–3).

68   'And we ought not to take conscience into account, for where there is, as with us, fear of hunger and prison, there cannot and should not be fear of hell' (Machiavelli 1988, p. 123).

69   'Now is the time not only to free ourselves from them but to become so much their superiors that they will have more to lament and fear from you than you from them' (Machiavelli 1988, p. 123).

70   Machiavelli 1988, p. 126 (IF III.15).

71   Machiavelli 1988, p. 127 (IF III.15).

that division is the sole fundamental constant in politics, a division which exhibits its most dangerous effects – that is, the corruption of the political community and civil war – as soon as a part of the city tries to monopolise the entire space of politics, i.e. to represent itself as the one and only holder of the political power. On the contrary, as we have already seen, it is only the maintenance of a separation, or of a proper distance, between the ruler and the ruled – the people – by means of a conflict regulated by the institutions, that makes the division a vital force.[72] In effect, it is only this distance, based on a correct mixture of struggle and cooperation, that creates the possibilities for the circulation of virtue within the body of the city, and therefore allows the different parts to live free from fear and domination.[73]

6   The Place of the People, the Place of Machiavelli

In the *Florentine Histories* Machiavelli clearly demonstrates what in the previous works was only implied: the people does not possess any anthropological or ethical superiority compared to the nobles; as Fabio Raimondi writes, there is no motive to consider the people as intrinsically good or just, as if it possessed a moral imperative to fight for everyone's freedom (and this is especially valid for the people of Florence throughout the emergence of commercial capitalism).[74] On the contrary, it is the existence of a political and hierarchical division within the space of the city that allows the people (or any part which occupies the lower level), under determinate conditions, to act as the defender of everyone's freedom. This is why

> those who hope that a republic can be united are very much deceived in this hope. It is true that some divisions are harmful to republics and some are helpful. Those are harmful that are accompanied by sects and partisans; those are helpful that are maintained without sects and partisans. Thus, since a founder of a republic cannot provide that there be no enmities in it, he has to provide at least that there not be sects.[75]

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72   On the division as an original element of politics since ancient times see Loraux 2002.

73   For a stimulating presentation of political liberty as non-domination, within the conceptual context of republicanism, see Pettit 1997, which I discussed, as far as it concerns Machiavelli, in Visentin 2009.

74   'No one, not even the people, possesses the monopoly of the desire to be not dominated, whose existence seems to be seriously threatened by the capitalistic development' (Raimondi 2013, p. 151 (my translation)).

75   Machiavelli 1988, p. 276 (IF VII.1).

Politics coincides with the impossibility of a stable unity: there is no politics but the breaking of the spatial uniformity within the community, and any attempt to build a new unity by means of the neutralisation of the struggles just causes a new division. The only possible union is the paradoxical cohabitation – deeply rooted in the institutions of non-dominion – of two opposite desires, through which the division becomes productive.

In any case, the desire to not be dominated and to live free is not a natural one, not even for the people, and Machiavelli repeatedly emphasises 'how dangerous it is to want to free a people who want in every mode to be enslaved':[76] the struggle for freedom is the result of a complex interrelation between humours and laws, desires and institutions, tendency to unification and preservation of a distance between the parts of the city. Such a process always follows different paths, depending on the historical conjunctures, which demands from time to time the emergence of a determined figure of the people and its hegemony. So Machiavelli transforms the classical topic of the different forms of government (monarchy, aristocracy and democracy) into the analysis of the specific historical and political conditions under which the people acquires a determined face. The structural unsteadiness of every government is traced back to the original unsteadiness of human nature: 'since human affairs are ever in a state of flux, [so that] they move either upwards or downwards';[77] therefore

> it is impossible for a republic to remain for ever in the peaceful enjoyment of its liberties and its narrow confines; for, though it may not molest other States, it will be molested by them, and, when thus molested, there will arise in it the desire, and the need, for conquest.[78]

On the one hand such an unsteadiness is the fate of every political order, but on the other it is also a clear sign of the vitality of a people, since – as the *Discourses*, III.1 points out – 'those [republics] are better constituted and have a longer life, whose institutions make frequent renovations possible':[79] the continuous renovation of political institutions shows the partial autonomy of people's constituent power, i.e. its strength and its limits simultaneously – better: its strength as a limit, as a precise determination.

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76 Machiavelli 1988, p. 143 (IF III.27).
77 Machiavelli 1998, p. 266 (D II Preface).
78 Machiavelli 1998, pp. 335–6 (D II.19).
79 Machiavelli 1998, p. 385.

Last but not least, Machiavelli highlights that political discourse (which is always a discourse of the politics and about the politics) is repeatedly decomposed and recomposed by the irruption of the historical contingency (of the *fortuna*), so that political order always emerges from an unsettled time and an undetermined space: both unitary and plural, united and divided, closed and expansive. The polymorphous nature of the people, its fluid and magmatic character, continuously reshapes the spatial coordinates which determines the framework of political actions: the political space is always modified by the emergence of new figures and by the relationships they establish with other pre-existing collective actors. If the division and the distance among these subjects are not maintained through just laws, any *reductio ad unum* (reduction to unity), i.e. any construction of a uniform and pacified space, is at risk of being overturned into a Hobbesian state of war. Thus there is no politics without this continuous breaking of a spatial uniformity and the subsequent attempt to recreate a dynamic balance of the different forces in play, and which express themselves through different actors from time to time. Humours and passions transmigrate and reproduce themselves, so that the division always recreates itself, whenever one seeks to construct a political unity by means of their neutralisation.

In conclusion, the transformation of the different forms of government into the conditions of visibility of the people testifies to the strategic nature of Machiavelli's thought, i.e. to the deep link between his work, never reducible to a transparent scientific theory, and political struggle;[80] a strategy which is rooted in the experience of politics as a permanent repetition of 'affirmation' and 'resistance',[81] – an effort to impose one's desire over that of others, and an opposite effort to keep one's desire free. Such an 'experience' is possibly one of the most decisive aspects of Machiavellian modernity, still so difficult to recognise and so hard to accept.

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80   Althusser 1999 emphasises the declaration made by Machiavelli 'of his class position, his class viewpoint', by which the Florentine writer, in Gramsci's words, 'becomes the people' (Althusser 1999, p. 25).

81   I take this definition of 'strategy' from Bove 1996.

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Machiavelli and Marxism

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Machiavelli was Not a Republicanist – or Monarchist: On Louis Althusser's 'Aleatory' Interpretation of *The Prince*

Mikko Lahtinen

1　The State and the Law

Even though neither Althusser nor Gramsci dispute that Machiavelli's thinking contains obvious *republican tendencies or dimensions*, they both nevertheless emphasise the historically *utopian* nature of the republican moment. The historical situation on the Apennine peninsula during Machiavelli's time was such that a move towards the collective moment of the republic, and the collective will it required, was not *possible*. There was not the *occasione* for a republic. Before it could occur, it was *necessary* to go through the 'moment of solitude' of the new.

In other words, the organisation or thorough reformation of a republic based on the law necessarily requires as a form of transition a prince or legislator who, by means of power, persuasion and cunning, leads the people towards the republican collective moment. Such an interpretation can also be applied to the following passage from *The Discourses* – Machiavelli's most 'republican' work:

> [W]e must assume, as a general rule, that it never or rarely happens that a republic or monarchy is well constituted, or its old institutions entirely reformed, unless it is done by only one individual; it is even necessary that he whose mind has conceived such a constitution should be alone in carrying it into effect. A sagacious legislator of a republic, therefore, whose object is to promote the public good, and not his private interests, and who prefers his country to his own successors, should concentrate all authority in himself.[1]

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[1]　Machiavelli 1949, p. 119, and 1950, p. 138 (D I.9), see 1949, p. 220, and 1950, p. 265 (D I.58). Also the title of Chapter 55 of Book One of *The Discourses* is in this sense very illustrative: 'Public affairs are easily managed in a city where the body of the people is not corrupt; and where

In this quote there are indications that, in the case of Machiavelli, what is most essential is not necessarily the differentiation between monarchist (*regno*) and republican (*republica*) forms of government. However, it is essential to note the difference between the individual moment of founding a republic *or* monarchy and the collective moment – based on the law – as well as whether the individual founder of the republic or monarchy acts for the benefit of himself and his family or for the common good (at this point Machiavelli is not necessarily far away from the differentiation between the forms of State proposed by Aristotle in the *Politics*, based on the criterion of whether they work for the individual or common good).

What this means is that, particularly in the 'moment of solitude', the new prince is alone also in the sense that *only* he can interpret the real interests of the people, whereas with the 'collective moment' the people gradually learn to understand what their own interests are. They *become a people (devenir-peuple)* as a political actor in a new kind of State.[2]

According to Althusser, the interests of 'a people' are imprinted in the constitution of the State. It is in the constitution that the interests of 'a people' are institutionalised in relation to its 'class enemy', the powerful nobility. The law is also the absolute condition for the State's durability and its capacity to expand, because then the State is no longer dependent upon the practice of the prince. In other words, the prince has made himself superfluous:

> To the second moment corresponds the metaphor of taking root: this is the concrete, organic moment either of the penetration of the laws thus decreed into the antagonistic social classes, or of the production of laws by popular struggle against the nobles. This rooting of the Prince's power in the people by the mechanism of laws is the absolute condition for the State's *duration* and *power* – that is to say, its capacity to *expand*.[3]

According to Althusser, one should not think, on the basis of the second moment, that Machiavelli was a republican like the majority of the encyclopaedists, Rousseau, Foscolo or the many ideologists of the *Risorgimento*. Even though the second moment described in *The Discourses* could be defined as a republican moment, Machiavelli's *position* there is the same as in the first mo-

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equality exists, there no principality can be established; nor can a republic be established where there is no equality'.

2   Althusser 1995, p. 160, and 1999, p. 102.

3   Althusser 1995, pp. 115–16, and 1999, p. 65 (original emphasis).

ment described in *The Prince*. In both works, Machiavelli discusses the same issue, the conditions for the founding of a durable State.[4]

After discussing this, Althusser returns to his viewpoint that Machiavelli's political problem arises from his own conjuncture. As mentioned earlier, even though Machiavelli does present in the first twelve chapters of *The Prince* examples from antiquity, their purpose is only to support the lessons of the Italian examples of his own time.[5]

In these chapters, Machiavelli carries out an analysis of his own conjuncture by utilising the analysis of past cases. His central objective is to assess, in the light of existing and past examples, what kind of a new principality would not only be possible but also a good one. According to Althusser's interpretation, the only suitable alternative in founding a principality is a completely new one acquired by means of the new prince's own weapons of *virtù* and/or *fortuna*. Old principalities simply do not work: they are expressions of feudal power structures and ways of thinking, oriented towards the past, as Althusser indeed states.[6] In this context, Machiavelli's historical utopianism and thinking reaching for the 'limits of the possible' – with the metaphor of skilful archers, who, when their target seems too distant, 'aim a good deal higher than their objective'[7] – come into the picture, because such a new principality and new prince who acts by relying on his own weapons and *fortuna* do not exist:

> ... to aim above all existing principalities, beyond their *limits*. [...] The Prince does not pre-exist the New Principality; the New Principality does not precede the New Prince. They must begin together, and this beginning is what Machiavelli calls an 'adventure': 'this adventure of passing from private citizen to ruler'.[8]

Following Althusser's reasoning, one could think that Machiavelli's viewpoint is 'completely utopian', particularly when he rejects all the existing alternatives. But it is important to note that Machiavelli's utopianism is defined from the starting point of the existing political conditions, with regard to which no kind of compromise is possible. Furthermore, when Machiavelli speaks about

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4   Althusser 1995, p. 117, and 1999, p. 66.

5   Althusser 1995, pp. 120–1, and 1999, p. 69.

6   Althusser 1995, p. 130, and 1999, p. 77. In connection with this, Althusser refers to Renaudet's book *Machiavel* (Renaudet 1956).

7   Machiavelli 1949, p. 17, and 2004, p. 22.

8   Althusser 1995, pp. 125–6, and 1999, p. 73 (original emphasis). At the end of this quotation Althusser is freely citing from a French translation of Machiavelli, referring to *The Prince*, chapter 4.

the new prince without actually naming him – instead presenting an abstract theory about the encounter of *virtù* and *fortuna* in the prince-subject – the anonymity of the prince is not the result of a theoretical process of abstraction (from the specific to the general) but 'the *abstract* form of the theory is the index and effect of a *concrete* political stance'.[9]

Machiavelli left the new prince and principality unidentified or simply loosely defined not because these would have stood for anonymous 'generalisations' of existing princes and principalities, but rather because the existing princes and principalities could not offer the components for the definition and identification of the new prince and new principality. As Althusser puts it: '[Machiavelli] rejects them all on account of their historical impotence'.[10]

Machiavelli's silence has indeed a *positive* political meaning. It shows that the future of Italy cannot be built on existing powers but rather one must reach beyond the borders ('to aim above all existing principalities, beyond their *limits*').[11] Thus Machiavelli's utopianism is based on the existing 'effective truth' (*verità effettuale della cosa*), which he at the same time takes as the object of his subversive critique.

Pope Alexander VI's son, count Valentino Cesare Borgia, was, for Machiavelli, the only example or model for the historic 'new prince'.[12] According to Machiavelli, Borgia could have united Italy, if an 'extraordinary and inordinate malice of fortune (*una estraordinaria ed estrema malignità di fortuna*)' had not befallen him.[13]

The advantage of emphasising the two moments in the foundation of the State is also that the *processual* and *aleatory* nature of founding and maintaining a State emerge. Althusser's interpretation emphasises that the State is not a static organisation, but rather a complex *process*, where the renewal of even the most stable State requires its simultaneous production. In other words, in Machiavelli's view, the most central factor is not the State as a *fait accompli* but the aleatory nature of the founding and renewal of the State.[14] In this interpre-

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9   Althusser 1995, p. 129, and 1999, p. 76 (original emphasis).

10   Althusser 1995, p. 130, and 1999, p. 77.

11   Althusser 1995, p. 125, and 1999, p. 73 (original emphasis).

12   For a thorough presentation of the different stages of the Borgia family, see Mallet 1987.

13   Machiavelli 1949, p. 22, and 2004, p. 28.

14   The difference between republicanist and aleatory interpretations of Machiavelli can also be defined as follows: in the former interpretation the emphasis is on issues sustaining peace and harmony, whereas the latter interpretation discusses the elements of chance that lie behind peace and harmony, as well as the struggles and conflicts characterised by this, which Althusser refers to with the expression 'l'accumulation primitive politique' (Althusser 1990, p. 35, and 1988, p. 475). Emphasising peace, expansion and the 'moment

tation Machiavelli shows himself mainly as the theoretician of the aleatory game between change and durability (*durée*). In this context, the threat to the State comes from changes to existing laws, which become invalid and lead to chaos (*alla rovina*).[15]

With the collective moment of the law and the republic, the State is no longer merely dependent on the *virtù* of the prince and the 'fortunate' aleatory encounters, but can itself 'endure'. However, not even this can guarantee that some surprising event occurring at the wrong moment would still not destroy the State – and, at the same time, also open up new possibilities for action for those who do not approve of the existing State. The State is not a self-evident fact: '[N]othing guarantees that *the reality of the accomplished fact* is *the guarantee of its durability*'.[16] History is 'the permanent revocation of the accomplished fact',[17] where one never knows where or how the revocation will occur. Althusser encapsulates this in the statement that 'one day new hands will have to be dealt out, and the dice thrown again on to the empty table (*un jour*

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of passivity' at the cost of the struggles and conflicts that preceded them was a central methodological solution for which Gramsci criticised Croce's writings *Storia d'Italia dal 1871 al 1915* (1928) and *Storia d'Europa nel secolo decimonono* (1932): 'With respect to these two works [*Storia d'Europa* and *Storia d'Italia*], the questions at once arise: is it possible to write (conceive of) a history of Europe in the nineteenth century without an organic treatment of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars? And is it possible to write a history of Italy in modern times without a treatment of the struggles of the Risorgimento? In other words: is it by accident, or is it for a tendentious motive, that Croce begins his narratives from 1815 and 1871? That is, that he excludes the moment of struggle; the moment in which the conflicting forces are formed, are assembled and take up their positions; the moment in which one ethical-political system dissolves and another is formed by fire and by steel; the moment in which one system of social relations disintegrates and falls and another arises and asserts itself? And instead to assume to take up placidly as history the moment of cultural or ethical-political expansion?' (Gramsci 1975, p. 1227; after the quote there follows Gramsci's own preliminary outline for a history of Europe; see Gramsci 1975, pp. 1228–9).

15   Althusser 1994, p. 567, and 2006, p. 194. Also of interest here is the use of the word '*stato*' in reference to the *maintenance of a position*, as evident in Machiavelli's expression 'mantenere lo stato', to maintain a position'. Yet another similar type of expression in Machiavelli's texts is 'avere molto stato' in reference to the prince (see, for example, Machiavelli 1949, p. 617). Maintaining a position requires the continuous reproduction of its conditions; in other words, the reproduction of the duration of the state against the ever-looming 'Polybian' process of corruption.

16   Althusser 1994, p. 547, and 2006, p. 174 (original emphasis).

17   Ibid.

viendra où les jeux seront à redistribuer, et les dés de nouveau à jeter sur la table vide)'.[18]

The central instrument of the taking hold and rooting of the State is the *military*. Apart from the apparatus of violence, the military is also the political-ideological 'crucible', the central task of which is to unite the unorganised multitude into 'a people', to uphold the process of their 'becoming people':

> In these conditions we can appreciate why the army is the quintessential instrument of State power – not only of the exercise of State power, but of the State's very existence; and why it is assigned the not only military, but also political and ideological – since it is the crucible of the people's political and ideological unity, the training school of the people, the becoming-people of the people.[19]

With regard to the 'becoming-people of the people', one must keep in mind that in the ideological-political practice of the prince the question is not only about governing a 'ready' people and the reproduction of this control, *but also about the production of a people*, which Althusser describes with the term '*devenir-peuple*'. The prince and his new principality are a 'tool' or instrument by means of which the people as a *multitude* (*molti*) can be taken hold of as a durable 'people' – and ultimately a 'nation', in the formation of nation-States in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Machiavelli does not propose any formalistic or generally applicable 'theory of the State', 'State philosophy' or a classification of the forms of government, but discusses with regard to his own case those historical opportunities and necessities which are required in order to produce a nation and take hold of a durable State.

2   Philosopher of the Effective Truth

If one wishes to pick out some generally applicable theoretical points from Machiavelli, the 'general theory of the State' would not be it: rather, it would be the way in which he sets out questions and political problems to be solved by the political actor-subjects of each historical situation. According to Althusser, Hegel understood this in Machiavelli's works. Machiavelli did not 'speak' to Hegel as a philosopher of the State but as a writer who laid out the political problematics of the unification of Italy. Hegel also 'identifies' with Machiavelli,

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18   Ibid.

19   Althusser 1995, p. 160, and 1999, p. 102.

not as a philosopher but as an intellectual or man of action who was occupied by the future of his own political conjuncture – in Hegel's case, that of early nineteenth-century Germany.[20]

What the interpretations of Hegel, Gramsci and Althusser have in common is an emphasis on the 'effective truth', rather than the general truth about practical matters. In their interpretations, the often-quoted expression from chapter 15 of *The Prince* – 'to represent things as they are in an effective truth, rather than as they are imagined' – is applied to Machiavelli's own writings. *The 'truth' lies in things, in historical practices, not outside them* – not *post-festum* or *a priori*, as in a philosophical truth, which, for instance, some philosophical system would promise to reveal or to show to the practical actors.

When Machiavelli says that he does not wish to present a fantasy image of a State this means, assessed in the light of the interpretations of Hegel, Gramsci and Althusser, that he does not even attempt to propose, for instance, what kind of form the unified Italian State should have. In fact, he has no existing models that would provide the necessary and sufficient conditions for solving this issue. Unlike the subjects of the ideological State apparatuses of nation-States, Machiavelli did not have at his disposal an existing 'nation-State' or 'representative democracy' for which he could have striven with his writings. An extensive and durable State was for him an aleatory possibility but, like the new prince, Machiavelli could not know in what kind of development and justification processes of the historical national States of future centuries his theories would be possibly positioned:

> Machiavelli casts a harsh light on the beginnings of our era: that of bourgeois societies. He casts a harsh light, too, by his very utopianism, by the simultaneously necessary and unthinkable hypothesis that the new State could begin anywhere, *on the aleatory character of the formation of nation-States*. For us they are drawn on the map, as if for ever fixed in a destiny that always preceded them. For him, on the contrary, they are largely aleatory, their frontiers are not fixed, there have to be conquests, but how far? To the boundaries of languages or beyond? To the limits of their forces? We have forgotten all this. When we read him, we are gripped by him as by what we have forgotten, by that strange familiarity, as Freud called it, that of something repressed.[21]

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20 Althusser 1995, p. 49, and 1999, p. 9.
21 Althusser 1990, p. 36, and 1988, pp. 475–6 (original emphasis).

3   Aleatory Dynamics

Althusser manages to open up Machiavelli's 'dynamic' conception of political
practice as I like to call it. The picture that emerges of Machiavelli's thinking is
rather different from that found, for instance, in Quentin Skinner's interpreta-
tion, which has received much attention in recent decades. According to Skin-
ner, Machiavelli's 'political dynamics', circling around the notions of *virtù* and
fortuna, remain in the shadow of a sort of 'political statics' concerning 'repub-
licanism', which in itself is meritorious but formalistic.[22] Even though Skinner
pays attention to Machiavelli's notion that it is not possible to found a republic
in a state of advanced corruption but, rather, being liberated from corruption
requires the autocratic action of a single person, he does not analyse the logic
of political practice linked with the problematics of corruption and liberation.
Instead, he concentrates mainly on the 'end result' of the process, namely, the
republic (and in Machiavelli's republican ideas), which, according to Skinner,
is Machiavelli's preferred form of government.[23]

Althusser manages better than Skinner in coming to grips with the *dynam-
ics* of political action. This critique may seem strange in relation to Skinner's
emphasis on concepts and concept changes in political struggles. However,
I agree with Palonen, who shows how 'Skinner's interest, even in concept
changes, is primarily on the rhetorical level, in other words, concerned with
the legitimisation rather than the explication of conceptual novelties and con-
flicts, and rather on the level of established language use than the construction
of profiled conceptions'.[24] To this I would add that Skinner's interest is directed
at the conceptual-rhetorical manifestations of political conflicts and not other
kinds of 'less rhetorical' functional dimensions of conflicts and their logic. By
this, I do not mean that rhetoric would not be an essential part of political ac-
tivity or that rhetoric would not also exist 'materially', but rather that political
action is not merely a question of rhetoric, nor must the history of political
thinking be analysed only by means of a research method concerned with
rhetoric or conceptual history.

In Althusser's interpretation, the most essential question does not concern,
for instance, whether or not Machiavelli supported 'republican' or 'monarchist'
forms of government or perhaps a combination of the two. It is more impor-
tant to analyse the logic of the actions of political actors and groups of actors
than such already 'fixed' forms, because they try to use the aleatory situations

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22   For Skinner's interpretation of Machiavelli, see Skinner 1978, and 1979.

23   Skinner 1978, especially p. 124, see also 1979, pp. 64–79.

24   Palonen 1997, p. 140.

to their advantage and cope with them. As I try to show in my book on Althusser's Machiavelli, this aim to govern the aleatory reality can be characterised as 'taming chance'.[25] One historical response to a highly aleatory situation has been to found a republic or, alternatively, a monarchy or a mixed form of government. Even though not even Althusser denies that Machiavelli's thinking would not include republican elements and preferences (for example, the viewpoint of the people in *The Prince*), it is more important to pay attention to the conditions of each historical conjuncture (see the necessity of the arrival of the new prince in *The Prince*), during which the political action occurs and becomes possible.

For Althusser, the point is to elaborate the aleatory and case-specific nature of political practice, for instance, in the founding of a new State or form of government. In Althusser's interpretation, Machiavelli's *The Prince* and his other works are theoretical analyses of aleatory situations and series of events. Understood this way, the problematics of *virtù* and *fortuna* refer to political action with no guarantee of success (it is in this sense that we can understand aleatoriness as adventure). Even though the republican form of government would be the ultimate political goal, the conjuncture does not necessarily offer realistic opportunities for such an 'attachment'. For instance, in Machiavelli's own historical context, the new prince and the principality led by him – the foundation of a kind of monarchy – were also a weak aleatory possibility. Not a single existing city-State, prince or principality had what it took to be a model for the new principality, and there was no new prince looming on the Italian horizon. One opportunity had opened and closed, namely Cesare Borgia and his troops. But even his aleatory adventure, which had begun successfully, culminated in disaster due to the fateful whims of *fortuna*.

4   'Verità effettuale della cosa' – The Effective Truth

According to Althusser, one of the main reasons why Machiavelli can be defined as a *theoretician of the conjuncture* is that he studied the conjunctures of both the past and his own time from the point of view of the 'verità effettuale

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25   The expression the 'taming of chance', comes from Ian Hacking (see, for example, Hacking 1990, and 1991). His central argument is that the erosion of classical Laplacian determinism in the nineteenth century did not lead to an emphasis on freedom, but rather to the taming of chance, which was evident in both theory and social practice. This meant, for instance, an alliance between statistics and the control of the population (see Hacking 1991, p. 185). See also Lahtinen 2009, pp. 302–305.

della cosa', that is, the effective truth. As already mentioned, according to Althusser, Machiavelli presents *empirical-factual* descriptions of conjunctures. This is an important observation because it enables the critique and surpassing of antagonistic dualisms such as real-imaginary, authentic-artificial or moral-political. The problematic of the effective truth of Althusser's materialistic interpretation is evident, for instance, in relation to the prince and the people. Althusser characterises the prince as 'the first ideological State apparatus',[26] which functions by means of the effective truth. The prince's apparatus materialises in his institutions and practices as well as in the strategies through which he influences such materially existing institutions (such as the Church) that produce and renew moral-religious beliefs and fantasies.

As is well known, Machiavelli argued that there are two ways of fighting, by law or by force, and that the first way is natural to men and the second to beasts. This led to his well-known argument that a prince must understand how to make use of both the beast and the man. In terms of beasts, he gives the specific examples of the fox and the lion: one must be a fox in order to recognise traps and a lion in order to frighten off wolves.[27] According to Althusser, the prince requires the 'instinct of a fox' in order to realise when to appear honest in the eyes of the people and when to appear cruel, when to appear virtuous or whatever.[28] He emphasises that Machiavelli's prince has no 'essence'; he *is* not 'good' or 'bad', but, rather, his 'essence' lies in the notion that he can appear the way that he should in each situation in order to achieve what he wants.

It follows from the above argument that the thesis repeated in the standard textbooks of politics, namely that 'Machiavelli separated politics from morals', is problematic.[29] In the light of Althusser's interpretation of the practice of the prince, one can see that Machiavelli by no means separated politics from morals but rather, on the contrary, he 'politicised' morals. In other words, he studied morals, as well as religion and justice, from the point of view of the effective truth. He assesses and teaches others to assess moral, religious and juridical principles, discourses or doctrines according to their effective truth. It becomes evident from Machiavelli's correspondence, for example, that he was

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26   Althusser 1993, p. 106.

27   Machiavelli 2004, p. xviii.

28   Althusser 1993, p. 93.

29   The thesis goes back at least to Benedetto Croce in his writings about Machiavelli from the end of the 1920s (Croce 1981, p. 205; for other examples see Cochrane 1961, pp. 113–36).

deeply interested in what makes people believe that there are 'deeper' moral-religious principles behind the existing world.

Seen in this light, Skinner's interpretation – according to which Machiavelli only abandons Christian morals and virtue ethics but not morality as such – remains incomplete. According to Skinner, the question is not about the contrast between 'a moral view of politics' and 'a view of politics as divorced from morality', but 'the essential contrast is rather between two different moralities'. Machiavelli is not without morality, that is, 'immoral', but his morality is contained within the admonition that the prince must by any means available 'maintain his State' (*mantenere lo stato*).[30] However, Skinner does not take into account the other side of the matter, namely, in what way Machiavelli is specifically interested in the Christian morals of his time as the effective truth. The problem with Skinner's viewpoint – apart from being anachronistic – is that he understands morality, like philosophy itself, as a question about good and evil, and not as an essential dimension of the *political* practice established from the viewpoint of the effective truth, as does the object of his research – namely, Machiavelli.

Conclusion: Materialist Political Theory

Althusser's interpretations of Machiavelli and Althusser's concept of the aleatory are significant contributions to political theory. He outlines his notion of an 'aleatory Machiavelli' and, with the help of the Epicurean tradition, a theory of materialist politics that opens up a view of politics as an action occurring in a conjuncture where each actor aims to organise and govern the *effective truth*, but where no single party can ever be certain about their victory. And each victory can only be temporary. Even every 'fixed' political form of organisation rests on an uncertain aleatory foundation. Aleatory logic, indeed, refers to the fact that there is a struggle at the centre of politics, whereas a state of peace is a displaced form of struggle. Therefore, the Althusserian theory of politics is the theory of struggles and conflicts characterised by displacements and condensations within the effective truth.

This does not mean, however, that political action could not strive for a world better than the existing one. On the contrary, Althusser was interested in how the revolutionary political movement should operate in order for its strategy to be both effective and 'utopian'. As he shows in the case of Machiavelli, 'utopia' does not, however, refer to the construction of an abstract ideal society

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30   Skinner 1978, pp. 134–5.

but to a political goal, the attainment of which requires a theoretical analysis of the historical conjuncture and the political action that effectively utilises and adapts the conditions of the conjuncture.

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Lectures machiavéliennes d'Althusser

Mohamed Moulfi

Je me propose de parler d'une œuvre d'un philosophe en mouvement, loin de toute mansuétude que justifierait une quelconque solitude ou une écrasante tourmente.[1] Pour ce faire, j'aborderai trois points.

1 Résurgence de Machiavel

Dès 1962, Louis Althusser s'intéresse à Machiavel. Ses cours l'attestent. Mais c'est entre *Lénine et la philosophie*,[2] *Réponse à John Lewis*[3] et *Éléments d'autocritique*,[4] qu'il élabore *Machiavel et nous*.[5] Dans la *Soutenance d'Amiens* (1975),[6] il cite explicitement la règle de méthode de Machiavel: 'penser *aux extrêmes,* entendons dans une position où l'on énonce des thèses-limites, où, pour rendre la pensée possible, on occupe la place de l'impossible'.[7] On a assez épilogué sur une prétendue réflexion parallèle. Cela pourrait être évidemment une approche pour entendre son œuvre. Cependant, il n'était sans doute pas le seul à vivre cette expérience de méditations et d'écriture. *Mutatis mutandis*, F. Engels l'avait déjà vécu. Il avait produit l'*Anti-Dühring* alors qu'il recueillait toujours et encore des notes pour sa *Dialectique de la nature*.[8] Machiavel, lui-

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1 Voir De Ipola 2012.

2 Althusser 1969.

3 Althusser 1972. Publié en juin 1972 en anglais dans *Marxism Today.*

4 Althusser 1974. Voir aussi in Althusser 1998.

5 Althusser 2009. François Matheron, éditeur averti des manuscrits de Althusser pense que cette 'première version a été rédigée en 1971–2 (Althusser 2009, p. 32). En évoquant le projet de préface de 1975, il cite l'auteur qui écrit 'Ces pages, qui reproduisent les notes d'un cours de 1965, repris en 1972, ne sauraient prétendre proposer, après tant d'autres, une 'une interprétation' de l'œuvre de Machiavel (Althusser 2009, p. 31). Ce texte, datant de 1972, est remis sur le métier par l'auteur jusqu'en 1986. N.B.: Sauf indication expresse, les citations sont extraites de cette édition. On trouvera le même texte in Althusser, 1995–7.

6 Voir dans Althusser 1998.

7 Althusser 1998, p. 205.

8 Ses premières esquisses datent de 1875–6 et se continuent jusqu'en fin 1882, sans que ce projet ne voit le jour. L'*Anti-Dühring* est achevé en juin 1878.

même, interrompit *Les discours sur les dix premiers livres de l'Histoire de Tite-Live* pour rédiger *Le Prince*.[9] N'est-ce pas ainsi que s'effectue un frayage nouveau? N'est-ce pas là le propre d'une pensée en mouvement et en déplacement?

Aussi si l'œuvre de L. Althusser enregistre-t-elle des piétinements pour dire, chaque fois pour la première fois, ce qu'il a toujours dit, avec Machiavel, il ne saurait y avoir une dénégation, un tournant ou des mises en cause destructrices, comme cela est parfois affirmé. De Machiavel, il tente de donner à nouveaux frais une autre vue que celles de ses prédécesseurs, Claude Lefort et Maurice Merleau-Ponty notamment.[10] C'est parce que Machiavel l'intéresse aussi.[11] Loin de la lecture 'machiavélique' où, dans le meilleur des cas, on voit l'œuvre de Machiavel dans le registre d'un 'livre des Miroirs', miroir des princes, comme *La Monarchie espagnole – 1604* de Tommaso Campanella,[12] nourrissant cette tradition qui 'tout en étant travaillé[e] par un idéal gouvernemental fondé sur l'assimilation des expériences des grands souverains de l'Antiquité (Alexandre le Grand, les Rois perses),[13] demeure tout de même fortement attentive aux contingences du réel.

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9   Il travaille *Les discours*, commencés en février 1513, jusqu'en 1520, lorsque *Le Prince* fut achevé l'été 1513, voir Mounin 1966, p. 117 et seq. S'appuyant sur des éditions savantes, M. Gaille-Nikodimov (Gaille-Nikodimov 2011, p. 6) dit que la rédaction du *Prince* 'pourrait s'étendre jusqu'en mai 1514, voire jusqu'en 1518'.

10   Lefort 1972, s'est intéressé à la problématique de la division du social et de l'institution du politique. Il y examine la pensée de Dante, La Boétie, Sade, Guizot, Tocqueville, Marx, Weber, Arendt, Michaux, Leo Strauss, Orwell, Clastres, Merleau-Ponty. Quant à Merleau-Ponty (Merleau-Ponty 1983, p. 376), il voit chez Machiavel la formulation de 'quelques conditions de tout humanisme sérieux'.

11   Althusser 1969, p. 12 écrit que Machiavel, Spinoza, Hobbes, Grotius, Locke et même Rousseau étaient 'abandonnés aux littéraires et aux juristes, comme des restes'.

12   Voir Stegmann, 1978, pp. 195–211.

13   Abbès 2009, p. 14 et seq. Voilà ce qu'en dit Abbès (Abbès 2009, p. 193 et seq.): 'les philosophes partagent avec les auteurs des Miroirs un certain intérêt porté à la culture du gouvernement de soi, et à la détermination éthique de la politique. Cependant, malgré la présence d'éléments aristotéliciens (le naturalisme) ou stoïciens (le gouvernement de soi et des autres) chez les auteurs de Miroirs, ils ne peuvent être considérés comme représentatifs de la tradition de philosophie politique'. Par ailleurs, Nietzsche (Nietzsche 1986, tome 11 [54], pp. 225–6) évoque un *tractatus politicus:* 'il traite de la politique de la vertu, de ses moyens et de ses voies qui l'amènent au pouvoir [...] Or aucun philosophe ne révoquera en doute ce qui constitue le type de la perfection en politique: à savoir le machiavélisme. Mais le machiavélisme *pur, sans mélange, cru, vert, dans toute son âpreté* est surhumain, divin, transcendant, il n'est jamais atteint par l'homme, tout juste effleuré [...]

Machiavel parle donc à Louis Althusser. Il est une ressource actuelle qui avait déjà parlé à Gramsci et à Hegel. Mais le plus important, c'est qu'il parle surtout au futur. C'est d'ailleurs à ce titre qu'il veut l'"enrôler … *dans ses rangs*'[14] de philosophe pour proposer une interprétation alternative, nouvelle. En étudiant, à la fois parallèlement et presque simultanément, Marx et Machiavel, l'un par l'autre, tout en mettant au point son projet théorique *propre* au prix, cela va de soi, d'autocritiques, de remises en question et de remaniements de l'œuvre et du projet, il relève 'le caractère insolite' du *Prince*.[15]

Pourtant, son intérêt pour Machiavel ne s'explique pas seulement par le fait qu'il sert de pré-texte pour Marx et vice versa. Dans une certaine mesure, il s'explique aussi, cela est admis, de par la *forma mentis* du théoricien, par l'orientation personnelle de ses élaborations théorico-philosophiques: dépasser, entre autres questions et problématiques connexes, l'historicisme, mais aussi combler le 'manque' d'un concept de la politique et de l'État dans le marxisme. S'il en est ainsi, Machiavel serait-il alors une autre source d'inspiration occultée pour le marxisme et, par conséquent, une tentative de mise à jour de la théorie de la révolution? S'il est difficile de penser la confirmation à rebours du marxisme par le texte machiavélien marqué, cela est évident, par une conjoncture révolue, on est tenté de croire que si une théorie de la révolution se profile à peine chez Marx, c'est qu'elle était déjà chez Machiavel. L'affirmer, c'est admettre plus généralement avec Etienne Balibar que, dans les travaux de L. Althusser, le 'texte machiavélien est aussi, toujours encore, une confrontation continuée – à la fois emprise et déprise - avec le texte marxien, mais, ajoute-t-il, comme source de la difficulté.[16]

2   Pour une théorie politique

Le lecteur a affaire non pas à un échange mais à la capture et l'appropriation de Marx par/avec Machiavel. La pensée de L. Althusser n'est-elle pas habitée par cette tension redoutable et permanente que commande l'intervention de la politique dans son appréhension et son interprétation de l'œuvre de Marx? Machiavel en porte pour une part le projet. L. Althusser s'y efforce de problé-

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Dans cette espèce plus étroite de la politique de la vertu, il semble que pas plus qu'ailleurs l'idéal n'ait jamais atteint. Platon lui aussi n'a fait que l'effleurer'.

14   Althusser 2009, p. 37.
15   Althusser 2009, p. 69.
16   Préface à Althusser 2009, p. 30.

matiser le rapport entre le texte et l'espace, le lieu de la pratique politique, la politique qu'il ouvre.[17]

Or précisément, toute sa démonstration consiste à faire admettre que *Le Prince* n'est pas un texte hors espace. Qu'est-ce à dire? Il arrache en effet Machiavel à la tentation de l'*Aufklärung* de penser que 'la vérité n'a pas de lieu', et qu'elle 'agit par l'efficace du vrai dont l'essence est d'agir en éclairant'.[18] Pour Machiavel, 'il n'y a de vérité, ou plutôt de vrai qu'*effectif*, c'est-à-dire porté par ses effets, inexistant en dehors d'eux, et que l'effectivité du vrai se confond toujours avec l'activité des hommes'.[19] À l'instar du *Manifeste* de Marx, *Le Prince* n'est pas qu'un simple texte. Il s'inscrit dans le dispositif de la politique.

Quant au dispositif général de Marx, il est ainsi structuré. Outre l'efficace de la politique, l'autre élément du dispositif qu'il met en évidence est la 'moyenne idéale', objet de Marx, qui est 'défini[e] en termes de connaissances, dans l'abstraction du concept'.[20] Ce n'est donc pas un objet *idéal* opposé à un objet réel. Or cette distinction est comme 'le devoir être de l'être, la norme du fait'.[21] Elle n'est pas 'devoir être de l'être'. Et de ne pas l'être, l''idéalité est la connotation non pas du non-réel, ou de la norme idéale, mais du *concept* du réel',[22] non pas une moyenne empiriste du non-singulier, mais le concept de la différence spécifique. L'Angleterre est le pays dont Marx a emprunté seulement, rappelons-le, 'les faits et exemples principaux qui servent d'*illustration* au développement de [s]es théories'.[23] La différence spécifique suppose que dans *son* œuvre, Marx a proposé sinon des ressources du moins des éléments suffisants d'une théorie de la transition, éléments qui peuvent parfois être équivoques, car à 'résonance historiciste'.[24] L'approche historiciste s'appuie, il est vrai, sur un ordre de rapports et de structures qui autorise l'anticipation de l'avenir et la transformation de l'ordre établi. Mais pourra-t-on raisonnablement établir une césure radicale

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17   Althusser 2009, p. 40. Althusser souligne que Machiavel semble avoir perçu l''étrange *vacillement* dans le statut, philosophiquement traditionnel, de ces propositions théoriques: comme si elles étaient minées par une instance autre que celle qui les produit, par l'instance de la pratique politique' (Althusser 2009, p. 57). D'autant plus que pour lui, l''espace de la politique n'a pas de points et n'est pas espace sinon par figure', (et qu') 'il n'y a pas qu'une place vide dans cet espace, mais *deux*' (Althusser 2009, p. 59).

18   Althusser 2009, p. 61.

19   Ibid.

20   Althusser 1968 *et alii*, tome II, p. 75.

21   Althusser 1968 *et alii*, tome II, p. 75 et *passim*.

22   Althusser 1968 *et alii*, tome II, p. 75.

23   Althusser 1968 *et alii*, tome II, p. 74 et seq.

24   Voir Althusser 1968 *et alii*, tome II, p. 78. N.B.: La théorie est définie comme 'un système rigoureux de concepts scientifiques de base' (Althusser 1969a, p. 9 et seq.).

entre la transition que détermine l'ordre de la structure, et la conjoncture d'où pourrait surgir l'urgence imprévue de la transformation, alors que toute la démarche de Marx et d'Engels est de tenir les deux? Les exigences propédeutiques laissent en effet exhiber un Marx des structures séparé d'avec celui des moments. Or Marx est le penseur de la transition et de la révolution pensée comme 'une présentation de l'infini dans *l'ici-maintenant*, qui ne comporte rien de rationnel ou même de raisonnable'.[25] Tout le problème est donc celui du moment de la rencontre entre l'*ici* et le *maintenant*. N'est-ce pas là le moment de la *Verbindung* comme moment de la conjonction et de l'association? C'est là que se situe, pour une part, la nouveauté de l'approche de Machiavel. Elle est dans le caractère singulier du *Prince*. Dépassés, périmés, ces textes restent saisissants.[26]

Autrement dit, si l'on peut considérer des éléments d'une théorie générale de la transition (*Übergang*) chez Marx, on pourra enregistrer au moins que, du traité de Machiavel, L. Althusser capte les éléments de rupture par la révolution, qui heurtent la pertinence d'un unique schème de transition. Certes, si pour *Les luttes de classes en France,* la révolution et les changements sont déterminés selon 'chaque peuple suivant sa situation', la problématique générale de la transition ne fut à vrai dire contrariée que par la situation particulière de la Russie. Marx se devait en effet de s'expliquer sur son analyse de la genèse du capital, nuancée du reste dans l'édition française faite à partir de la deuxième traduction de l'original. Or les Russes ont disposé de la première traduction de la 1ère édition du *Capital* traduit en russe avant la 2ème édition corrigée. La modification portait sur la restriction du champ d'analyse de la genèse et du développement du capital à l'Europe occidentale.

Par rapport à cette problématique, que trouve-t-il donc chez Machiavel? Qu'y trouvons-'*nous*', nous aussi? Le '*Je*' de L. Althusser est aussi un '*Nous* collectif, *i.e.* ces 'contemporains de ses premiers lecteurs anonymes'[27] qui trouvent de quoi 'penser la politique, non pour elle-même, mais sous la forme de la position d'un problème et de la définition d'une tâche historique'.[28] L'actualité de Machiavel, c'est donc l'actualité de son accueil contemporain.[29] Il est à ce point 'saisissant' qu'il 'se saisit de nous' tout en étant 'insaisissable';[30] il est

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25   Deleuze et Guattari 1991, p. 97.

26   Althusser 2009, p. 42.

27   Althusser 2009, p. 29.

28   Althusser 2009, p. 44.

29   Nietzsche (Nietzsche 1986, tome 9 [77], p. 47) situe Machiavel parmi les hommes posthumes dont il dit qu'ils 'sont plus mal compris mais mieux écoutés que les actuels. Ou plus rigoureusement: ils ne sont jamais compris; et de là leur autorité'.

30   Althusser 2009, p. 36. Voir également p. 69.

'étonnant, stupéfiant'.[31] Comme *Le Manifeste*. Et 'ce simple rapprochement, où de nouveau recommence un commencement, peut nous mettre sur la voie de comprendre un peu mieux pourquoi, aujourd'hui même, Machiavel nous touche et nous saisit d'une force déconcertante'.[32] Un 'déjà-pensé' va se saisir du pensable de l'impensable de Machiavel. Ainsi, 'apprendre en sachant déjà et à l'avance ce qu'on apprend, c'est brusquement savoir d'un savoir vécu'.[33] Qu'est-ce à dire? Que le 'déjà-pensé' est le saisissement. Un surgissement.

Le surgissement, c'est celui du 'discours objectif et universel' exposant, selon un dispositif singulier, l'énoncé de thèses contradictoires et, paradoxalement comme dans le discours de Montesquieu, un énoncé 'objectif *car* universel, énonçant les lois de son objet, le concret de l'objet n'étant qu'un cas particulier de cet universel'.[34] C'est donc l''exposition, dans un ordre contrôlé, de concepts abstraits et universels, dont la corrélation dégage les invariants (peut-on dire les lois?) sous lesquels se subsument les variations particulières d'un objet concret qui s'appelle la politique'.[35]

Il faudra pourtant bien recueillir cette théorie diffuse, la mettre en évidence, la configurer, pour 'l'énoncer sous forme systématique, dans la forme de l'universalité du concept'.[36] La difficulté est encore considérable; il en va ainsi de toute théorie en gestation, car 'paradoxalement [...] le point central, où théoriquement tout se noue, échappe interminablement à la recherche'.[37] En effet, tout en confirmant l'idée de Croce, il souligne cet aspect paradoxal du texte de Machiavel, à la fois, intéressant et 'inachevé', fragmenté comme ce 'quelque chose qui échappe aux règles de la convention'.[38] Ce quelque chose qui jaillit se trouve dans la pratique politique,[39] car

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31   Althusser 2009, p. 38.

32   Althusser 2009, p. 49.

33   Jankélévich 2008, p. 17

34   Althusser 2009, p. 51.

35   Althusser 2009, p. 50.

36   Althusser 2009, p. 51 et passim.

37   Ibid.

38   Ibid. Voir Proust 1994, p. 254): 'Le fragment, en effet, dans la première version du romantisme, tout au moins (mais y en a-t-il une autre?), est la mise en forme de l'œuvre de la *subjectivité*. La brièveté et la densité fulgurantes du fragment [...] veut renfermer la totalité objective du monde dans la forme parfaite et close d'une expression spirituelle objective'. Elle dira encore: 'Faire en sorte qu'une vérité, collecter des éclats de vérité, telle est la tâche de celui qui cherche, aujourd'hui, à philosopher, c'est-à-dire à présenter une vérité' (Proust 1994, p. 252).

39   Voir Althusser 2009, p. 52.

ce qui l'intéresse, ce n'est pas 'la nature *des* choses' en général (Montesquieu) mais, pour donner à son mot toute sa force, *'la verità effettuale della cosa'*, de *la* chose dans son côté singulier, *i.e.* la singularité de son '*cas*'.[40]

3   Machiavel comme philosophe[41]

C'est dire que Machiavel, théoricien de la philosophie politique,[42] est le penseur du jaillissement, de l'avènement du surgissement du *cas*. Faut-il cependant corréler l'inattendu, l'inouï des situations avec la politique, laquelle politique a partie liée avec l'utopie? Pour L. Althusser, l'utopie théorique 'se produit et produit ses effets *dans la théorie*. Elle se confond en effet avec l'effort de Machiavel pour penser les conditions de possibilités d'une tâche impossible, en somme 'penser l'impensable', ces 'formes de pensée à peu près sans précédent'.[43] Si telle est sa fonction, il est un autre rapport, celui du rapport de la théorie et de la pratique politique. C'est là que se trouve la complexité des choses. La pratique politique fait appel à des éléments de théorie politique, on le sait. Mieux, elle 'seule [...] fixe la modalité du rapport aux éléments de la théorie politique'.[44]

On ne se laissera pourtant pas glisser vers une apparente homologie entre utopie et politique. L'utopie est une construction imaginaire, la politique est la créativité et la création de nouvelles institutions, de nouvelles manières de vivre et de formes de pouvoir. Cette créativité justifie-t-elle 'l'insituable de la politique', selon la formule de François Matheron,[45] comme un sans-précédent, à la fois, attendu et inattendu. Comme la promesse. N'est-ce pas justement cette caractéristique qui rend une théorie politique impossible, si elle n'est que surgissement et concrétisation de formes sans précédent, non précédée de 'concept d[u] concept'?[46]

Il y aurait peut-être un *situable* de la politique. L. Althusser ne l'entrevoit-il pas dans une ontologie du 'vide' qui tient toutes les autres catégories: la contingence, la situation concrète, le rapport des forces, la pratique de l'idéologie ou

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40   Ibid. Voir à propos de Montesquieu, p. 50.
41   Althusser reconnaît qu''il serait trop court d'avancer que Machiavel est l'antiphilosophe, l'autre de la philosophie' (Althusser 2009, p. 38).
42   Althusser 1972, p. 12.
43   Althusser 2009, p. 104 et passim.
44   Althusser 2009, p. 54.
45   Voir Althusser 2009, p. 192.
46   Matheron, dans Althusser 2009, p. 202.

la 'ruse' de l'histoire? Le vide serait ainsi l'espace possible de la politique, de sa mise en œuvre comme l'acte inattendu qui pourrait réaliser l'utopie. En va-t-il de même pour le philosophique? Dans *Lénine et la philosophie*, encore une fois, il met déjà en chantier sa théorie de la philosophie: 'Tout ce qui touche à la politique peut être mortel à la philosophie, car elle en vit'.[47]

Mais avec le texte machiavélien, il voit une tout autre articulation entre le politique et le philosophique. Le 'vide'[48] semble les concerner tous les deux. Il constitue l'étrange nœud où ils se croisent et se déterminent, car 'au sens large toute philosophie est donc *politique* ou pratique: "Ethique".[49] Là, on est loin de la prétendue menace de mort de la politique sur la philosophie. Pourtant leur rapport est à tel point problématique que plusieurs tropismes sont à enregistrer. Le vide est espace à remplir de contenus et de changements concrets, et non pas espace à créer pour faire justement place au nouveau, *i.e.* les transformations historiques. C'est pourquoi, tout compte fait, s'agissant du champ du politique mais aussi celui du philosophique, l''aléatoire' ou plutôt le 'vide aléatoire'[50] lui permet, tout en évitant un matérialisme déterministe réducteur, de recourir à l'idée d''écart'.

C'est à croire qu'il entrevoit un destin commun entre le politique et le philosophique que scelle le moment unique de leur surgissement respectif. Il rappelle avec force le problème du commencement *de/dans* la philosophie:

> À la question, qui n'a cessé de hanter et ne va cesser de hanter la philosophie: par quoi faut-il *commencer*?, Machiavel répond, en dehors de toute philosophie, mais par des thèses qui ne sont pas sans écho philosophique: il faut commencer par le commencement,[51] décidément non par le 'néant', mais par le vide,[52] condition de possibilité du 'devenir nouveau, du commencement',[53]

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47   Althusser 1972, p. 12. Voir l'idée de la philosophie et son refoulé, la politique (Althusser 1972, p. 16); 'la philosophie serait la politique continuée d'une certaine manière' (Althusser 1972, p. 42).

48   Legendre 2001, p. 103 écrit que 'L'esthétique nous enseigne encore ceci: la vérité est un lieu, par hypothèse le lieu vide où il n'y a rien, si ce n'est des textes'.

49   Cité par Matheron, dans Althusser 2009, p. 25. N.B.: S'agissant de l'intérêt pour le rapport universel/concret et objectif, l'allusion pourrait concerner aussi Montesquieu. L'objectivité de cet ordre en fait un 'discours "sans sujet" comme tout discours scientifique, sans sujet, sans destinataire' (voir Althusser 2009, p. 51).

50   Althusser 2009, p. 142.

51   Althusser 2009, p. 125.

52   Ibid.

53   Althusser 2009, p. 133.

comme 'aventure', *i.e.* comme événement imprévu, extraordinaire, surprenant, comme 'avenir aléatoire'.[54] Cela ne rappelle-t-il pas le temps de la 'solitude du commencement',[55] la 'solitude du réformateur'?[56]

Ainsi L. Althusser pourrait-il envisager ce qu'il appelle le nécessaire impossible qui gît ou échappe dans le décalage, cet écart qui n'est pas celui entre un contenu politique et un idéal illusoire, mais celui 'entre une tâche politique *nécessaire*, et ses conditions de réalisation à la fois possibles et pensables, mais en même temps *impossibles* et *impensables*, car aléatoires'.[57] D'où l'impératif de 'penser à la limite du possible pour penser le réel',[58] et non pas de penser le virtuel, penser le 'pur possible-impossible aléatoire'.[59]

Le nécessaire impossible-possible s'origine paradoxalement dans l'insaisissable vide. Le vide est l'absolu commencement, l'inaugural. Mais si l'impossible est déjà inaugural commencement, il n'est plus impossible; il est le possible nécessaire, le nouveau. Aussi bien dans le *Prince* que dans les *Discours*,[60]

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54   Althusser 2009, p. 56.

55   Althusser 2009, p. 125. Pourtant les philosophes ont des avis différents. Deleuze et Guettari 1991, p. 21, pensent qu''il n'y a pas de concept à une seule composante: même le premier concept, celui par lequel une philosophie "commence", a plusieurs composantes, puisqu'il n'est pas évident que la philosophie doive avoir un commencement, et que, si elle en détermine un, elle doit y joindre un point de vue ou une raison. Descartes, Hegel, Feuerbach non seulement ne commencement pas par le même concept, mais n'ont pas le même concept de commencement'. Tandis que Nietzsche 2008, p. 27 (*Crépuscule des Idoles* §4) pose que 'Tout ce qui est de premier ordre doit être *causa sui.* [...] C'est l'ultime, le plus mince, le plus vide, qu'on place à l'origine, comme cause en soi, comme *ens realissimum*'.

56   Althusser 2009, p. 120 et seq.

57   Althusser 2009, p. 104.

58   Althusser 2009, p. 109.

59   Althusser 2009, p. 67. Il serait intéressant de rapprocher cette thèse avec l'argument *Dominateur* de Diodore Chronos rapporté par Épictète ('Toute proposition vraie concernant le passé est nécessaire. L'impossible ne suit pas logiquement du possible. Est possible ce qui n'est pas actuellement vrai et ne le sera pas'), E. Zeller propose cette interprétation: 'Si quelque chose était possible qui n'est ni ne sera, un impossible résulterait d'un possible. Or un impossible ne peut résulter d'un possible. Donc rien n'est possible qui n'est ni ne sera' (voir Vuillemin, 1984, pp. 15–6). Jankélévitch 2008, p. 107, donne quelques indications à propos d'une figure de ce paradoxe: 'Le devenir *possibilise* l'impossible coexistence en desserrant la symbiose des incompossibles: il est donc un modus vivendi avec le tragique [...] L'impossible-nécessaire'.

60   Althusser montre que 'les *Discours* ne parlent pas d'autre chose que le *Prince:* ils parlent de la *même chose*, ils aboutissent au même point, mais par des comparaisons générales, qui ont pour fonction de définir l'espace théorique de l'objet du *Prince*, pour permettre d'y situer avec précision cet objet même' (Althusser 2009, p. 123). D'où l'idée de leur non-

Machiavel croit que 'ce qui surprend les hommes par excellence, c'est la nouveauté: le jamais vu'.[61] Voilà ce que L. Althusser retient:

> Machiavel n'est le théoricien de la nouveauté que parce qu'il est [...] le théoricien des commencements, du *commencement*:[62] il est *commencement*, fondement 'd'une théorie sans précédent',[63]

nouvelle parce qu'inconnue.

D'autre part, la nouveauté est dans la conjoncture singulière avec toutes ses déterminations et dont le recensement ne suffit pas pour le penseur. La contingence des événements et les données concrètes imposent à Machiavel de penser *sous* la catégorie de la conjoncture pour 'littéralement se soumettre au problème que produit et impose son cas: le problème politique de l'unité nationale, de la constitution de l'Italie en Etat national'.[64] La conjoncture possibilise 'l'impossible-possible' ouvert par la singularité du cas. C'est là que se trouve la complexité du rapport de la théorie et de la pratique politique, rapport que tentera d'approcher le 'matérialisme aléatoire'[65] ou, d'un autre mot, du 'matérialisme de la rencontre'.[66]

Pour son argumentation, Althusser s'appuie sur Platon, Descartes et Spinoza. Il enregistre, chez Machiavel,

1. une typologie des gouvernements qui résulte d'une 'opération cartésienne des "démembrements entiers" et qui aboutit à une revue spécula-

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différence, leur unité profonde (voir Althusser 2009, p. 122). Si le *Prince* représente la forme absolue du commencement, l'instauration du pouvoir absolu, la monarchie absolue, les *Discours* représentent le second moment, 'celui des formes qui permettent l'enracinement du pouvoir d'Etat dans le peuple, par l'intermédiaire des lois, et font de l'Etat un Etat capable à la fois de *durer* et de *s'étendre*' (Althusser 2009, p. 122). Voir également Althusser 2009, p. 56.

61 Althusser 2009, p. 39. Voir également à propos de l'importance du thème de la nouveauté, Althusser 2009, pp. 48 et 109.

62 Ibid. Voir Arendt 2007, p. 45. Elle parle, en termes augustiniens, de 'commencement d'un commencement' (voir Arendt 2007, p. 21). Quant à Platon VI.775 e, il l'évoque comme 'le commencement qui, lorsqu'on s'y installe à la façon d'une Divinité, est le salut de tout le reste'.

63 Althusser 2009, p. 41.

64 Althusser 2009, p. 55.

65 Althusser 2009, pp. 55, 80, 88, 104.

66 Voir Althusser 2001, pp. 553–94.

tive. Cette 'méthode de division qui fait penser à la méthode platonicienne du *Sophiste*', [67] la *diairesis.*

2. Quant à l'allusion à Spinoza, elle renvoie à la négation: non pas une contradiction pure et simple *in terminus:* elle constitue plutôt une articulation, un jeu, une *détermination* positive de la négation.[68]

3. D'où la 'régression théorique méthodique',[69]

4. et la métaphore du *déplacement*.[70]

Aussi conclut-il que le mode de raisonnement de Machiavel s'appuie sur le dilemme[71] et la 'réduction théorique'.[72] Le déplacement suppose l'existence du vide, ce vide particulier qui est l'espace nécessaire au 'saut dans le vide théorique',[73] *e.g.* une anticipation ou, clin d'œil à Hegel, la 'négation de la négation de la négation'.[74] C'est bien la condition d'existence 'd'une œuvre, d'une innovation politique'.[75] C'est la négation déterminante:

> Cette fois [...] elle contient un écart. Ainsi devient-elle une contre-position positive, où le terme nouveau n'est pas déterminé par une simple négation formelle, mais par un contenu différent, introduit sous la forme de la négation.[76]

C'est le devoir-être de la politique[77]: 'voici le point crucial de cette théorie, où la politique se présente en personne: *sous la forme de l'absence déterminée*'.[78]

Cependant, l'idée de décalage peut être heurtée chez Machiavel car il y a 'une théorie de l'histoire', *'une théorie générale des lois de l'histoire'*, et ce malgré la 'route nouvelle' et la 'méthode nouvelle: *expérimentale*'. L. Althusser s'interroge: 'La théorie générale de l'histoire est-elle le résultat des comparaisons ex-

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67   Althusser 2009, p. 126 et seq.

68   Althusser 2009, p. 87.

69   Althusser 2009, p. 124 et seq.

70   Althusser 2009, p. 57.

71   Althusser 2009, pp. 110, 115.

72   Althusser 2009, pp. 115, 142.

73   Althusser 2009, p. 89.

74   Althusser 2009, p. 90

75   Althusser 2009, p. 91.

76   Althusser 2009, p. 89.

77   Voir Althusser 2009, pp. 59–60.

78   Althusser 2009, p. 137.

périmentales ou les "lois de l'histoire"[79] sont-elles la condition de possibilité des comparaisons expérimentales'?[80]

Certes, il envisage cette dialectique en parlant de *thèses* sur l'histoire universelle plutôt que de *lois*. Cette thèse philosophique propose que le monde est immuable, donc pas de révolution. Elle est considérée comme une thèse d'objectivité et d'universalité. Elle fonde la possibilité des comparaisons expérimentales des cas. Mais il est une deuxième thèse, dite thèse 'dialectique', ou plutôt 'aléatoire', après une thèse matérialiste, qui propose que si tout est donc dans un mouvement perpétuel (*fortune*), alors la révolution est possible. Cette thèse est dite thèse matérialiste, 'dialectique', ou plutôt 'aléatoire', mais d'une 'nécessité imprévisible'.[81]

Au-delà de ces deux thèses *a priori* contradictoires, coextensives des développements de Machiavel, L. Althusser voit, dans la théorie *cyclique de l'histoire*[82] (théorie reprise directement de Polybe, dans ses variantes: 'même cercle infini' ou encore 'le mouvement immobile, l'immuable mouvement de la répétition des mêmes changements'),[83] une synthèse des deux thèses. C'est ainsi qu'il met en évidence la théorie politique des sociétés, laquelle théorie met en perspective l'origine des sociétés et des gouvernements (le hasard-la *Fortune*). Il s'appuie sur la 'dispersion congénitale' au hasard depuis Démocrite et Epicure, jusqu'à Rousseau (*Deuxième discours*) pour évidemment rejeter toute ontologie anthropologique de la société et de la politique. C'est en particulier refuser la théorie d'Aristote,[84] ce grand absent de la pensée de Machiavel, de l'homme animal politique par nature. Mais c'est aussi refuser, à la différence d'Epicure, toute théorie contractuelle de l'origine de la société et du gouvernement.

Autrement dit, pour lui, et selon Machiavel, le politique se mesure par rapport aux orientations et aux sens que dispose une philosophie de l'histoire, selon le principe du pensable possible, mais aussi selon le principe de la rencontre, l''invariant aléatoire'[85] pouvant accoucher d'un commencement: 'Machiavel affirme par là cette proposition remarquable que les moyens propres à résoudre un problème doivent déjà être *en soi*, réaliser en soi, la solution de ce

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79   Althusser 2009, p. 77. Voir également p. 93.

80   Althusser 2009, pp. 78–9.

81   Althusser 2009, p. 80.

82   Althusser 2009, p. 81.

83   Althusser 2009, p. 84. Cela ressort de la typologie polybienne, tradition elle-même issue d'Aristote, qui parle de la 'durée de l'Etat' (Althusser 2009, p. 86), et de cette 'forme de gouvernement tout à fait *inédite*' (Althusser 2009, p. 87).

84   Althusser 2009, p. 82.

85   Althusser 2009, p. 104.

problème'.[86] Ce qu'illustre l'exemple de César Borgia, fils du pape Alexandre VI, comme nouveau Prince, commencement absolu, nécessaire.

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86   Althusser 2009*,* p. 156.

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Machiavelli after Althusser

Banu Bargu

At the end of *Machiavelli and Us*, Louis Althusser salutes Machiavelli as 'the greatest materialist philosopher in history'.[1] Machiavelli, he posits, is the 'equal of Spinoza, who declared him "*acutissimus*", most acute'.[2] But he quickly adds: 'Spinoza considered him *acutissimus* in politics. He would appear not to have suspected that Machiavelli was also most incisive in materialist philosophy'.[3] Formulated thus, what appears as an assertion of the parity of importance of both figures turns out to affirm Machiavelli's indisputable, though unrecognised place in the history of philosophy. In positing Machiavelli on par with Spinoza, Althusser redefines him as a *materialist* philosopher. Further, by evoking the inadequacy of Spinoza's appreciation of Machiavelli (limited, as it was, only to politics), Althusser also insinuates that Machiavelli is not only 'most incisive in *materialist philosophy*', but, in effect, *the* 'most incisive' materialist philosopher, whose importance went unsuspected or unrecognised or, at least, not fully recognised, by the greatest minds that came after him.

This is a claim not to be taken lightly, if only because the same Althusser, rejecting the charge of structuralism, confesses to being 'guilty of an equally powerful and compromising passion' – that of being *Spinozist*.[4] Explaining this passion, Althusser clarifies: 'we made a detour *via* Spinoza in order to improve our understanding of Marx's philosophy. To be precise: since Marx's materialism forced us to *think out* the meaning of the necessary detour *via* Hegel, *we made the detour via Spinoza in order to clarify our understanding of Marx's detour via Hegel*'.[5] While the Spinozist road traversed a significant distance toward understanding the 'mystification of the Hegelian dialectic', such as the telos inherent in the 'negation of the negation', contributed to a theory of ideology, and helped construct a conception of 'immanent causality' to account for the relation between the parts and the whole, Althusser nevertheless questioned the sufficiency of the effort: 'is it enough to get rid of them [the

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1 Althusser 1999, p. 103.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 Althusser 1976, p. 132.

5 Althusser 1976, p. 134.

mystifications of the Hegelian dialectic] in order to introduce the materialist dialectic of Marxism, by a simple process of subtraction and inversion? That is not at all sure, because, freed of these fetters, the new dialectic can revolve endlessly in the void of idealism, unless it is rooted in *new forms*, unknown to Hegel, and which can confer on it the status of materialism'.[6]

If the incessant search for the new forms of the dialectic that would ensure its materialist character paved the path to Machiavelli, the journey was propelled by Althusser's admission that the Spinozist road had failed to reach the desired destination: this road was a path burdened by a shortcoming; namely, the absence of contradiction in Spinoza's thought, whose effect was the neglect of class struggle in ideology and a certain theoreticism. Not a false path, but a detour, or perhaps a swerve that, in retrospect, turned out to be necessary but not sufficient. Regardless of whether or not Althusser's self-critique regarding the ultimate inadequacy of the Spinozist road in the attempt to rethink materialism is a fair estimation, it would be fair to note that this critique is nevertheless the driving force that seems to have taken Althusser to Machiavelli.[7] In Machiavelli, Althusser wants to recover the elements of a materialism that neither had been inflected by the Hegelian dialectic nor would be prone to lose sight of contradiction. It will be recalled that the same search had previously led Althusser to propose the concept of *overdetermination*, as a principle of the properly materialist dialectic, which he contrasted with that of Hegel, a dialectic that he indicted not only for being inherently teleological but also, and relatedly, for having a simple notion of contradiction.[8] 'The simplicity of the Hegelian contradiction is made possible *only* by the simplicity of the *internal principle* that constitutes the essence of any historical period', Althusser wrote, a principle to which the whole of a society is reduced.[9] The contradiction is simple because simplistic and reductive: 'the reduction of all the elements that make up the concrete life of a historical epoch (economic, social, political and legal institutions, customs, ethics, art, religion, philosophy, and even historical events: wars, battles, defeats, and so on) to *one* principle of internal unity, is itself only possible on the *absolute condition* of taking the whole concrete life of a people for the externalization-alienation (*Entäusse-*

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6   Althusser 1976, p. 138.

7   For an evaluation of Spinoza's role in Althusser's thought (and in the thought of his close collaborators), see Montag 1998, pp. vii–xx, and 1993, pp. 51–8; Goshgarian 2013, pp. 89–111; Williams 2013, pp. 153–63.

8   For the concept of overdetermination, see Althusser 1969, pp. 87–128. For the concept of underdetermination, see Althusser 1975, pp. 163–207.

9   Althusser 1969, p. 103.

rung-Entfremdung) of an *internal spiritual principle*, which can *never definitely be anything but the most abstract form of that epoch's consciousness of itself: its religious or philosophical consciousness, that is, its own ideology*'.[10]

According to Althusser, the simplicity of the Hegelian contradiction has devastating theoretical consequences: not only does it render the peoples in real history embodiments of different moments of the Idea, whose fortunes rise and fall as the result of an arbitrary 'play' of dialectics driven by this simple contradiction, but, more importantly, it eliminates the possibility of a real 'rupture' in history and, therefore, 'any radical beginning'.[11] In this light, it is possible to say that it was not only the search for a form of contradiction, absent in Spinoza and reductively present in Hegel, that led Althusser to Machiavelli, in order to work out the new forms in which the dialectic can be 'rooted' or anchored so that it would not 'revolve endlessly in the void of idealism'. It was also the search for the theorisation of rupture and the possibility of a new beginning.[12] However, this swerve from Spinoza to Machiavelli, which rerouted Althusser's path in search of materialist philosophy in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and which left behind the posthumously published manuscript, *Machiavelli and Us*, was at once an advance, a stop on the way, and a return home – an *anabasis* of sorts, considering that Althusser's encounter with Machiavelli dates back to 1961.[13] 'Ever since I have tried to read Machiavelli, to understand him, I have ceaselessly returned to him', Althusser wrote.[14]

Althusser's keen interest in *new forms* seems to have found a strong resonance in Machiavelli's thought, both in Machiavelli's self-proclamations about the originality of his own work, when he declares in the preface of the *Discourses*, 'I have decided to enter upon a new way as yet untrodden by anyone else', for example, and, should we hesitate to take Machiavelli at his word, in the discoveries he makes on that path, which even if it had been trodden by others, did not seem to lead anyone, according to Althusser, to the same 'unknown lands and seas'.[15] This resonance finds expression in Althusser's strong assertion that highlights Machiavelli's novelty in the form of a *solitude* that re-

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10   Ibid.

11   Ibid.

12   In this line, Terray argues: 'Machiavelli appears to him [Althusser] to be a theoretician of the revolution' (Terray 1996, p. 264).

13   Xenophon 2008. According to Elliott, Althusser's 'discovery' of Machiavelli goes back to the summer of 1961, and his first lecture course on Machiavelli was held in 1962. The manuscript was first published in 1995 (Elliott 1999, pp. xiv, xi).

14   Althusser 1997, p. 14.

15   Machiavelli 2003, p. 97.

mains unperturbed, not simply because he 'was alone in stating a new truth',[16] but also, and more importantly, because, no one has followed him, even imperfectly, despite Machiavelli's own statement in chapter 6 of the *Prince* that 'men almost always walk on paths beaten by others and proceed in their actions by imitation'.[17] On the contrary, Althusser contends, Machiavelli has not been followed; he remains alone because '*no one has thought in his thought*',[18] either with him or more devastatingly, of course, ever since.

It is this dual quality that Althusser attributes to Machiavelli that I would like to extrapolate and attempt to sharpen further, as encapsulating the specificity of Althusser's interpretation among the vast literature that Machiavelli has inspired: Machiavelli as a theorist of the *new* and Machiavelli as a *new* theorist. On the one hand, Machiavelli puts forth a theory of beginnings, of the foundations of the modern State – a new political form; on the other hand, Machiavelli begins a new 'mode of thinking', a new method of theorisation, which if not inaugurates then at least sanctions a materialist philosophy, or a materialist position in philosophy, with important political implications. Before I move to take up these two qualities in turn, let me elucidate briefly what 'new' entails, since it is doing much of the theoretical work in distinguishing Althusser's discourse on Machiavelli. Althusser contends:

> Novelty can only repose on the surface of things; it can only affect an aspect of things, and fades with the moment that induced it. In contrast, the beginning is, so to speak, rooted in the essence of a thing, since it is the beginning of *this* thing. It affects all its determinations, and does not fade with the moment, but *endures* with the thing itself. If one considers the thing which begins, and is novel because it begins, before it there was something else, but nothing of it.[19]

Thus, newness qua beginning is not a superficial feature, one among others, that is bound to the fleeting temporal moment in which it arises. It is a constituent characteristic that travels in time with the thing it marks, imbuing it with permanence. What Althusser therefore posits as new, he quickly qualifies: the new is both what stands in distinction from the old and what ruptures from it, what stands in opposition to it by its difference. In other words, the new points to a diachronic shift and a synchronic opposition, one that endures with

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16   Althusser 1999, p. 123.
17   Machiavelli 1998, p. 22.
18   Althusser 1999, p. 123.
19   Althusser 1999, p. 6.

the thing and contrasts with the already existing, or the old. Thus, the new is not simply what is novel; it is an inauguration, an emergence (*surgissement*), already antagonistically structured and structuring both what precedes it retroactively and itself as unprecedented. The new is Janus-faced: it is an advent, an arrival, which is, at the same time, the starting point; it is what marks a passage but without passing; it arises as a departure but is carried along as part of what departs and differentiates; it has an originary positivity but is already striated by antagonism. With these connotations in mind, I would now propose to turn to Althusser's interpretation of Machiavelli as a theorist of the new and a new theorist to explore the implications of this dual quality.

1   Primitive Political Accumulation

According to Althusser, Machiavelli advances a theory of founding, of the foundation of a unified national State in Italy. Such a reading is not completely unfamiliar to scholars of Machiavelli, who have encountered it most forcefully in Antonio Gramsci, through whose prism Althusser approaches Machiavelli.[20] As Gregory Elliott also notes, a similar argument that positions Machiavelli as the theorist of Italian unity is '[a]nticipated by Hegel in 1802, elaborated by De Sanctis in 1870, and adopted by Gramsci in the 1930s'.[21] As a result, interpreters have argued that Althusser resumes an already existing tradition of interpretation of Machiavelli's thought, without much originality. Timothy O'Hagan, for example, notes: '[I]f Althusser's Machiavelli is solitary, his reading of Machiavelli is not'.[22] Similarly, Filippo Del Lucchese argues that Althusser's reading is 'a matter of an often ambivalent or fragmentary and, in many cases, not very original reading',[23] which gains its power only when situated within the tradition of aleatory materialism. By contrast, according to Mikko Lahtinen, Althusser's interpretation of Machiavelli is an important contribution not only to Machiavelli scholarship but also to political theory, which is only further pronounced in light of aleatory materialism.[24]

However, what tends to go unacknowledged in these commentaries is that the conventional interpretation of Machiavelli as the theorist of the founding

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20   Gramsci 1971, pp. 123–205.

21   Elliott 1999, p. xvii.

22   O'Hagan 1988, p. 466. Also quoted by Elliott 1999, p. xvii.

23   Del Lucchese 2010, p. 2.

24   For an in-depth exposition of aleatory materialism in light of the Machiavelli connection, see Lahtinen 2009.

is qualified soon after it is adopted by Althusser: on the one hand, Machiavelli not only theorises the founding of the national-popular State but does so by disclosing its violent and conflictual nature, i.e., he expounds a theory of 'primitive political accumulation';[25] on the other hand, Machiavelli is also a theorist of the functioning and reproduction of such a State once founded, for which he articulates in broad strokes the complex relationship between force and consent that will crucially inform Gramsci's theory of hegemony as well as Althusser's theory of ideology, though in different ways.[26] As such, Althusser argues against the artificial polarity between the absolutist and republican interpretations of Machiavelli's political theory, subsuming both as different moments in the problematic that concerns the *founding of a State that endures*.[27] This founding, moreover, is one that must take place in the void, as it were, in which favourable conditions are absent.[28] As Antonio Negri has convincingly stated, '[a]fter recuperating the traditional interpretation of Machiavelli, Althusser, in fact turns it upside down: it is no longer the project that counts, but, rather, the radicalism expressed by Machiavelli's thought when it clashes against the impossibility of realizing the project: the thought of the new, therefore, in the absence of its conditions'.[29] This iteration of the argument transforms Machiavelli into a theorist of rupture – a break from the political forms of the past, which are not commensurate to the task of creating national unity, as well as a break from the ideologies of the past: Christian theology, ancient political philosophy and the Humanism of Machiavelli's own times.[30] According to Emmanuel Terray, Althusser's Machiavelli is 'the first

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25   Althusser 1999, p. 125.

26   On the relationship between Gramsci and Althusser, see Thomas 2009, pp. 1–39.

27   Althusser 1999, p. 47, and 2006, p. 175.

28   Althusser 1999, p. 64, and 2006, p. 171. According to Ichida, the void is that of a Schmittian decision that is groundless (*ex nihilo*) but grounding of the form (see Ichida 2005). However, according to Morfino, 'Althusser's interpretation in reality has nothing to do with this problematic, which is fundamentally a juridical one' (Morfino 2013, pp. 69–70).

29   Negri 1996, p. 54. For Negri (though not necessarily for Althusser), this is to argue that Machiavelli is the theorist of *constituent power* (see Negri 1999, pp. 37–97). For a similar interpretation of the 'new prince' as a constituent actor, see Kalyvas 2000, pp. 343–76.

30   In this vein, Hannah Arendt is accurate to suggest that Machiavelli is 'the spiritual father of revolution', where revolution is understood as both the desire for liberation and the foundation of the new. Even though Machiavelli never uses the concept of revolution in this sense, the idea of *founding* a body politic, Arendt contends, is 'central, if not paramount' in his thought (Arendt 1965, pp. 36, 38–9). Arendt also posits a more or less direct line of descent between Machiavelli and Robespierre, especially in terms of the centrality of violence: 'When Robespierre justifies terror, "the despotism of liberty against tyranny", he sounds at times as if he were repeating almost word for word Machiavelli's famous

modern theoretician of politics. The first, in all senses of the term: from a chronological point of view but also from the point of view of importance and historical role'.[31]

Althusser's interpretation is important in several respects. First, it acts as a corrective against readings of Machiavelli that posit him as a figure of *transition*: between feudalism and capitalism, according to a reductive Marxist reading, between theological politics and modern theories of sovereignty or a political theology, between Florentine Humanism and the Enlightenment. For Althusser, Machiavelli appears as the theorist of the new State-form, not as the antecedent of modern sovereignty but its *pioneer*, both its starting point and already its arrival, in antagonistic relation to the political forms that precede it. He comes forth not as a transitional figure between the medieval, moral tradition of political thought and the philosophy of natural law, in which the bourgeoisie as the ascending class found its self-representation. Rather, he stands as an *exception*, one that cannot be subsumed into what comes before, nor can be eradicated by what comes after. 'Machiavelli's solitude', says Althusser, 'lay in his having freed himself from the first tradition before the second submerged everything',[32] that is, in commanding the ability to articulate the violent birth throes of the modern State without reference to either an ontological predisposition of human beings as *zôon politikòn*, which tends to *naturalise* the State, or the bourgeois myth of the State's natural and lawful emergence from a 'state of nature', which tends to *neutralise* the State.

Althusser restores Machiavelli's originality, without losing sight of his historicity, both in terms of his innovative ability to capture his own temporality in theory and his ability to do so without recourse to the philosophical traditions inherited from the past; indeed, by breaking with them. He does so, moreover, in a way whose newness does not fade or cannot be erased by what comes after: in a sense, Machiavelli is even more 'ahead' or 'advanced' than his historical successors, as he presents a critique of liberalism's erasure or neutralisation of the violent origins of the modern State even before liberalism. Machiavelli anticipates Marx in the field of politics: what Marx's work does to the 'ideologists of capitalism' (though after capitalism is already in place, after the accom-

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statements on the necessity of violence for the founding of new political bodies and for the reforming of corrupt ones' (Arendt 1961, p. 139). Althusser does not venture such a link between Machiavelli and Robespierre (a link which is rather tenuous, in my opinion), but even if it were to be demonstrated, Althusser would hardly share Arendt's deep distrust toward the continental revolutionary tradition.

31   Terray 1996, p. 267 (emphasis added). But see Lahtinen 2009, pp. 177, 309.

32   Althusser 1999, p. 124.

plished fact), by disclosing the process of enclosures and dispossession, or the 'story of pillage, theft, exaction' that underwrites their origin-narrative which consists in 'labor, thrift, and generosity', Machiavelli's thought does to the 'ideologists' of the modern State (and as a critique articulated before it becomes fact).[33] Put another way, Machiavelli's originality lies in the resistance of his thought to being subsumed into the liberal-humanist ideology that rises to dominance after him even as the phenomenon he theorises, and which liberal humanism sanctifies, i.e., the modern State, becomes the prevalent and hegemonic political form. Consequently, Machiavelli does not only theorise a rupture, he *is* himself the rupture: his thought is the advent of a *new* era to which he causes embarrassment with his audacity by disclosing the real story of its founding.

2   Machiavelli, the Materialist

But this is only part of the picture. Althusser asserts that Machiavelli does not only theorise the *new* in politics. He also reconfigures the endeavor of theorisation itself. This brings me to the second element of Althusser's interpretation: Machiavelli as a new theorist, whose uniqueness lies in his ability to grasp the role of contingency in history and to theorise the singularity of each conjuncture, bringing political practise into the domain of philosophy. Being a new theorist is also being a materialist, analysing politics in a materialist way, and occupying a materialist position within philosophy. Althusser finds Machiavelli to be in the company of Marx in that they were the only thinkers who 'never entertained any illusions about the "omnipotence of ideas", including [their] own'.[34] Machiavelli also figures prominently in the tradition of aleatory materialism Althusser constructs.[35] His is a 'curious *philosophy which is a "materialism of the encounter" thought by way of politics*, and which, as such, does not take anything for granted'.[36] The political void in which the *virtù* of the prince must encounter *fortuna* so that a State can 'congeal' or 'take hold' points to a starting point of nothingness, of contingent origin, without any original cause, fundamental principle, or *telos*.

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33   Althusser 1999, p. 125.
34   Althusser 2006, p. 47.
35   Althusser 2006, p. 167.
36   Althusser 2006, p. 173.

Machiavelli's new 'mode of thinking',[37] according to Althusser, is revealed by a *theoretical dispositive*, which 'establishes particular relations between the discourse and its "object", the discourse and its "subject"'.[38] Such a formulation, of course, signals that we are entering a different terrain, no longer that of history and politics as such, but of philosophy, or of the philosophical inquiry on the status of Machiavelli's historical and political analysis. This move is an evocation of *Reading Capital* where Althusser puts forth a practise of reading that involves putting into question the relation of the discourse to its object (though not to its subject – I will return to this),[39] and through this relation, articulating the procedures and epistemology of analysis appropriate to that object and elaborating its relation to truth. What are the distinguishing features of Machiavelli's dispositive?

First is its epistemological status. Machiavelli's discourse is not scientific. True, it appears as a science of politics because of Machiavelli's explicit distanciation from 'imagined republics' and commitment to go to the 'actual truth of the thing' (*verità effettuale della cosa*). However, Althusser insists, Machiavelli's thought escapes the systematicity of a scientific discourse; his reflections remain fragmentary, contradictory, and without a unifying focus. In contrast to the definition of science advanced in *Reading Capital*, where there is no constitutive subject (science does not depend on a subject),[40] or what is at stake is no longer the 'subject which sees' but a field 'that sees itself in the objects or problems it defines',[41] Machiavelli's discourse retains a subject, or rather, *subjects*. At first, these subjects are doubled and antagonistically posited, in the metaphor of the mountain and the plain, and thus the meaning of everything

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37   Althusser 1999, p. 53.

38   Althusser 1999, p. 14.

39   Althusser and Balibar 1997, p. 14.

40   Accordingly, '[a]ny object or problem situated on the terrain and within the horizon, i.e., in the definite structured field of the theoretical problematic of a given theoretical discipline, is visible. We must take these words literally. The sighting is thus no longer the act of an individual subject, endowed with the faculty of "vision" which he exercises either attentively or distractedly; the sighting is the act of its structural conditions, it is the relation of immanent reflection between the field of the problematic and *its* objects and *its* problems. Vision then loses the religious privileges of divine reading: It is no more than a reflection of the immanent necessity that ties an object or problem to its conditions of existence, which lie in the conditions of its production. It is literally no longer the eye (the mind's eye) of a subject which *sees* what exists in the field defined by a theoretical problematic: it is this field itself which *sees itself* in the objects or problems it defines – sighting being merely the necessary reflection of the field on its objects' (Althusser and Balibar 1997, p. 25).

41   Ibid.

that Machiavelli says *depends* – on whether one is of the mountain or of the plain.[42] Moreover, however, this duality is multiplied into an infinite possibility of subjects who may become the prince – undefined, unspecified subjects who are invited or, better, incited to occupy the 'empty place' of political practise awaiting to be filled.[43] This multiplicity is further compounded by the infinite possibilities of the encounter between *virtù* and *fortuna*, whose unspecifiable and unpredictable quality is inscribed in its very definition.[44]

But Machiavelli's discourse also differs from science, especially its empiricist form, because the concept of the thing does not dominate or subsume its concrete manifestations.[45] A *case* is not taken up by Machiavelli as a particular instantiation of the universal; rather, the exposition of each case drives what fragments of the universal will be called upon in order to shed light on that case. This is a strategic appeal to the universal, much like the way history is selectively utilised in the service of the present. Althusser maintains that Machiavelli's examples from the past are not applied to the present when they are invoked for comparisons but *juxtaposed* instead. Each time, it is the specific case that determines what of the universal and what of the historical will be marshalled, strategically, in order to illuminate it.[46] At stake in this illumination is not an illustration or a demonstration, but by way of comparison, a *distanciation* – in other words, Machiavelli holds on to and actively cultivates an irreducible tension between the concept and the reality it is purported to capture. In this light, I would submit that in considering Machiavelli's epistemology as an *antithetical* one, we should take into consideration not only the conflictual reality that he conceptualises as the precondition of knowledge, with a remarkable fidelity to the reality that is neutralised by many who came after him, as Etienne Balibar has proposed, but also the antagonism that Machiavelli preserves in the relation between the concept and its referent.[47] Each concept in Machiavelli, viewed through Althusser's analysis of his dispositive, has the paradoxical effect of deferring a final definition of or statement

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42   It is worth quoting the 'Dedicatory Letter' to *The Prince* as the original and much discussed site for these metaphors (though not the only such site): 'For just as those who sketch landscapes place themselves down in the plain to consider the nature of mountains and high places and to consider the nature of low places place themselves high atop mountains, similarly, to know well the nature of peoples one needs to be prince, and to know well the nature of princes one needs to be of the people' (Machiavelli 1998 p.4).

43   Althusser 1999, p. 20.

44   Althusser 1999, p. 76, and 2006, p. 172.

45   For Althusser's critique of empiricism, see Althusser and Balibar 1997, pp. 35–41.

46   Althusser 1999, pp. 47–8.

47   Balibar 2015, p. 355.

on reality, as a consequence of which the ineradicable singularity of reality is privileged over the generality of the concept to which reality always remains at a certain distance. Viewed thus, we are already closer to a new answer to the question of the relationship between the concept and the real, a relationship which had plagued Althusser's former claims about the distinction between scientific and non-scientific knowledges and cast doubt on the science-ideology dichotomy that undergirded the well-known thesis of the 'epistemological break' because it remained an unresolved problem of his materialist epistemology.

The second attribute of this dispositive, and, to my mind, the key to what situates Machiavelli's reflections in the domain of materialist knowledge, as separate from either science or ideology, lies in the *ordering* of his reflections for Althusser. It will be recalled that Althusser put a great emphasis on the ordering of concepts in a hierarchical structure visible only in its effects as the materialist claim to objectivity. This concern also imbues his reading of Machiavelli. Althusser argues that the relation between different elements in the sequence of Machiavelli's apparently contradictory theses is what uniquely constitutes Machiavelli's new 'mode of thinking'.

Althusser demonstrates that the arrangement of Machiavelli's theses on history is such that, by way of consecutive contradictions, it proceeds to produce concepts that are not deducible from these theses themselves.[48] Let us review this arrangement briefly by recapitulating Althusser's analysis: first, a general thesis on knowledge (the immutability of the world) is posited, in order to establish the possibility of objectivity as well as the grounds of conducting comparisons across space and time. However, this thesis is negated in its very positing (and further determined in the process of negation) by the thesis of contingency (the continual motion of the world), which founds the basis of variations and variability. Afterwards, the contradiction between the two is putatively resolved by reference to an apparent 'synthesis', which adds further determinacy: this is the cyclical theory of history, which combines the immutability of the world with change, but now according to different forms of government. This is the third thesis. So far, one can only express surprise at this proto-Hegelian reading that Althusser has grafted upon Machiavelli. However, and this is the real mark of the Machiavellian procedure, the Polybian 'synthesis' is posited only to be completely rejected in the fourth thesis (all governmental forms in the Polybian cycle are defective because they are either bad or transient) and by a new negation, which Althusser calls a *displacement*, we arrive at something completely new: a shift in the definition of the *object* of

48   Althusser 1999, pp. 34–44.

knowledge (from *temporary* forms of government to a *State that endures*). This
is an object, Althusser remarks, which is also a political objective and which
requires a practical solution (escaping the Polybian cycle by a mixed govern-
mental form that promotes the longevity and grandeur of the State).

To appreciate this operation, let us recall Althusser's *exhortation* in *Reading
Capital*: 'We must completely reorganize the idea we have of knowledge, we
must abandon the mirror myths of immediate vision and reading, and con-
ceive knowledge as a production'.[49] But, Althusser notes, in Marx's *Capital*, this
operation remains trapped within a certain circularity: 'it is therefore a ques-
tion of producing, in the precise sense of the word, which seems to signify
making manifest what is latent, but which really means transforming (in order
to give a pre-existing raw material the form of an object adapted to an end),
something which in a sense already exists'.[50] It is worth noting in passing how
this passage on the necessity and method of a materialist epistemology evokes
and alludes to Machiavelli's characterisation of the 'most excellent princes'
(Moses, Cyrus, Romulus, Theseus) in chapter 6 of *The Prince*, princes to whom
fortune provided 'the matter enabling them to introduce any form they
pleased'.[51]

What Althusser does not make explicit in his analysis of Machiavelli's dis-
positive but which we can appreciate in light of his reflections on Marx's mate-
rialism is this: that the dispositive in Machiavelli breaks the epistemological
circularity in Marx's *Capital*, and does so in two ways: first, by the sequentiality
that produces a *new* concept that cannot be found even in latent form in the
discourse that pre-exists it, and second, by opening the final step of the knowl-
edge operation to 'contamination' by the real – where the theoretical object
and the political objective, and therefore theoretical and political practise,
converge, preventing the closure of the movement of thought. Machiavelli's
method, Althusser contends, is the 'negation of the negation of the negation':
in contrast to the Hegelian dialectic where the supersession (*Aufhebung*) pre-
serves the 'truth' of the elements that are negated in the higher 'synthesis', Ma-
chiavelli posits the 'synthesis' only to be refuted and redirects the negation
toward the production of something that did not exist before – a concept that
can only arise or be produced by such sequentiality but is ultimately irreduc-
ible to is anteriority. But Machiavelli does not stop there; he also opens the
concept up to the challenge of its practical singularity, with which it always
retains its antagonistic tension, its distance.

49   Althusser and Balibar 1997, p. 24.
50   Althusser and Balibar 1997, p. 34.
51   Machiavelli 1998, p. 22.

The *formal* structure of this sequentiality that leads to the production of a new concept is a possible new form of the materialist dialectic, a structure without which it might, as Althusser feared, 'revolve endlessly in the void of idealism' when severed from its Hegelian features.[52] This structure, as the most important feature of the materialist dialectic in Machiavelli's thought, is the reason why I disagree with Vittorio Morfino's interpretation of Machiavelli's materialism through a reformulation of Machiavelli's theses (in contradistinction to their formulation in Althusser's account).[53] Briefly, Morfino keeps the first two theses of immutability and contingency, but then introduces three different theses: the primacy of the encounter over form, the interweaving of temporalities, and the disarticulation of history and memory. While each of these theses may indeed have their place in Machiavelli's thought, the lack of linearity in their presentation or the underspecified relationality in their ordering tends to disrupt and occlude the movement of thought that produces the new concept, which it then opens to the challenge of the real. To elaborate, in Morfino's formulation, neither do we find that the thesis on the primacy of the encounter (thesis 3) follows from the thesis of contingency (thesis 2) as a negation, nor can we specify the relation between the ensuing theses on temporality and those that preceded them. By contrast, it is the very structure of this movement that characterises Althusser's interpretation of Machiavelli's materialism.

Allow me to emphasise this sequentiality, which Morfino tends to overlook, with a different example. It is a curious fact that *Machiavelli and Us* concentrates almost exclusively on *The Prince* and *The Discourses* and, except for a brief reference to *The Art of War*, largely omits Machiavelli's other works.[54] The reasons for this decision are unclear, especially since the *Florentine Histories* lends much support to Althusser's analysis of theoretical dispositive as the mark of Machiavelli's new method of thinking.[55] In fact, a similar series of

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52   According to Ichida and Matheron, the aleatory in aleatory materialism signifies 'non-dialectical'. Similarly, Sotiris affirms this position by positing the encounter and the materialist dialectic in opposing, mutually exclusive terms. In light of my reading of Althusser's Machiavelli, I take distance from their view. Instead of being non- or anti-dialectical, aleatory materialism, it seems to me, is a search for the really materialist dialectic. See Ichida and Matheron 2005, pp. 167–78; and Sotiris 2008, pp. 172–3.

53   Morfino 2015, p. 147.

54   *The Art of War* is mentioned in Althusser 1999, p. 5.

55   Machiavelli 1988. It might be that the *Florentine Histories* is less revealing of Machiavelli's overarching project of the foundation of a national popular state. At the same time, however, it serves as a firm demonstration of many of Machiavelli's arguments regarding politics in the thickness, conflictuality, and irreducible contingency of Florence's history.

theses (similar in the order of exposition), this time not (only) on history but also on politics, could be extrapolated from the *Florentine Histories*:

> Thesis 1: Conflict/antagonism as the self-generating and driving force of politics.[56] Such that the periods without conflict are omitted from the narrative of Florence's history. At the same time, this conflict is not singular or homogenous, but plural and heterogeneous – their constituents are different actors, just as the content of antagonism is extremely variable – hatred, jealousy, interest, revenge, inequality, even amorous passion. On the one hand, there is the conflict between different noble families. On the other hand, there is the struggle between classes: the nobles, the people (the middle class), the plebeians (artisans and the workers, and the 'lesser people'). But this is not exhaustive. Then, there is the conflict between factions, sects, guilds, and individuals. Finally, there is the conflict between Florence and other cities, its external enemies. These types of conflict, or what we may call contradictions, are dynamic, interwoven, overlapping, at odds, mutually reinforcing, and so on, in so many ways, providing a stark contrast with the contradiction of Hegel's dialectic, which, as Althusser has argued, boils down to a *single* principle that is supposed to account for the irreducible plurality and complexity of a society.

> Thesis 2: The unity of Florence as the political objective, the performative horizon of Florentine politics: The city is at once a unity and simultaneously a force field crisscrossed by a multitude of antagonisms between individuals, groups, classes. But Florence is also a performance because it is assumed and created, with the explicit intention to forge unity, through multiple conflicts.

> So we have a negation – conflict with unity. Thesis 3: Liberty is the unity of the conflicted, contentious city.[57] The fear of outside enemies, or the fear of losing the liberty of the city, is what ultimately forges unity with, in, and through conflicts and divisions.[58] The history of Florence can also

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56   On this note, Vatter has convincingly argued that, in Machiavelli, Althusser identifies 'the self-constitution of the political out of the abyssal "basis" of an irreconcilable social antagonism' (Vatter 2004 par. 19).

57   According to Del Lucchese, 'sedition – and conflict in general – is at the root of liberty' (Del Lucchese 2007, par. 13).

58   Del Lucchese 2007, par. 17.

be read as the successive attempts to externalise the internal antago-
nisms upon a foreign enemy in order to protect the liberty of the city and
add to its grandeur, while forging its unity, especially as laws and institu-
tions prove insufficient in managing the same conflicts. Thus, the contra-
diction between the first two theses is resolved by an apparent 'synthesis'.

Thesis 4: But this seeming resolution is quickly undermined by a forth
thesis: the unity of the city (read, liberty) is becoming more and more
difficult to maintain. The history of Florence is also a series of mostly
failed attempts to forge and maintain unity. There is a tragic element in
the narrative of the *Florentine Histories*: despite best efforts, there emerges
a negative arc of corruption and decline, dispersion and dissolution,
which culminates at the end of the book in the death of Lorenzo de'
Medici. This moment puts the *Florentine Histories* much closer to Machi-
avelli's other works: in terms not as explicit as in *The Prince*, though still
present, the book terminates with a narrative invoking the threat of ruin
that beckons Italy – the impossibility to maintain Florentine liberty in
the current conjuncture and the need to unite Italy, even in light of its
very impossibility. At the background, there is once again the Polybian
thesis of the cyclical view of governments, against which Machiavelli
casts the fluctuating history of Florentine constitutions, struggles, revolu-
tions, and reconstitutions. Recall how, according to Althusser, Machia-
velli's thesis of immutability stands in tension with the subsequent thesis
of the contingency in history: the constant irruption of unforeseen events
and conflicts. If Machiavelli's solution to the discrepancy between these
two theses in *The Discourses* is mixed government, as the form suitable
for States that endure (since Polybian forms are all defective), the Floren-
tine case goes even further and reveals the precarity of this solution: how
it is constantly subject to contestation and remaking and how its security
is ultimately tied to the project of national unification. It therefore pro-
duces a negation, which is at the same time a displacement, of the appar-
ent 'synthesis', thus arriving at Machiavelli's new theoretical object – a
State that endures.

An unexpected result of this procedure, and this brings me to the third distin-
guishing feature of Machiavelli's new 'mode of thinking', is its temporal orien-
tation. This discourse is ultimately marked by futurity – the 'fact to be
accomplished' instead of the 'accomplished fact'. In other words, instead of
past forms, arguments, concepts dominating the understanding of the present,
Machiavelli's discourse is oriented to what is to come. Neither as a teleological

movement, nor as a prognostic device, but as a discourse that precludes clo-sure and termination. Because Machiavelli's thought is driven by politics, by a political problem, the sequentiality of the discourse cannot be halted until the solution to that problem in the form of a political objective is formulated. But its formulation is not sufficient – it must be enacted. Since the introduction of a political objective into the space of theory already inflects that space, it is only the realisation of the theoretical solution in the world of politics that can bring closure. However, since the problem is not simply the founding of a na-tional popular State but also making it endure, the problem is not open to a final resolution, either political or theoretical. Hence, the porosity, open-end-edness, and uncanny 'contemporaneity' of Machiavelli. Thus, the materialist dialectic necessitates a complex analysis of time (as it requires a complex prin-ciple of contradiction). Here, despite my disagreement with Morfino's theses on the grounds of the necessity to emphasise the formal sequentiality of the contradictions, I would concede the importance of his substantive point re-garding the plurality of temporalities within Machiavelli's discourse (his theses 4 and 5) – namely, that the openness to futurity in Machiavelli's discourse does not mean that the past is wiped clean each time the new emerges, irrupts as a natural catastrophe or revolution, or is introduced; on the contrary, the traces of the past are retained in language, in memory, sometimes only in name. Par-allel to the way these traces become the substratum upon which the new is erected, so we can think of Machiavelli's rupture from the past as not com-pletely annihilating what came before him but retaining as a substratum a plu-rality of temporalities whose conjuncture can be generative of new encounters.[59]

Finally, Machiavelli's theoretical dispositive is also distinguished by its im-mense political implications. It undermines any claim to neutrality by openly adopting a partisan function, rallying the claim to truth ('going directly to the effectual truth of the thing') as the very performance of truth itself. Truth is not an external point of view, outside the conflictual field of forces, but rather shaped in and through them, and it becomes true to its name only by advocat-ing for one side in the conflict, by lending itself to the service of political strug-gle as a weapon in that struggle. Let us note, then, the concept of truth, too, retains a certain distance from the conflictual reality that it denotes in a parti-san way. What Althusser designates as the 'text that is an impassioned appeal for the political solution it heralds' simply obliterates the possibility of a purely philosophical discourse, by advocating and indeed practising, the performativ-ity of theory.[60] On the one hand, Machiavelli's text interpellates an agent to

59   Morfino 2015, pp. 161-71.
60   Althusser 1999, p. 23.

occupy the empty space of political practise, rendering itself a tool of that agent. On the other hand, situating itself within the field of forces that it theorises, the text that argues for political practise, and in fact stages an intervention that is a form of political practise, is constantly threatened by the political practise that penetrates, intrudes, makes incursions into, and drives the text, opening it up to the proliferation of its interpretations and the impossibility of completely enlisting the text to one's own forces, or what Althusser calls the difficulty 'to enroll Machiavelli in [one's] own ranks'.[61] It is the analysis of this dispositive, which Althusser calls 'thinking *in* the conjuncture', but what I would further qualify as thinking by and through a *distanciation* (epistemological, dialectical, and political), that I think really marks the originality of Althusser's interpretation of Machiavelli.

3   An Aleatory Materialist Dialectic?

By way of conclusion, I would like to suggest that Althusser's interest in casting Machiavelli as a materialist philosopher cannot be considered in isolation from the attempt to rethink historical materialism in ways that break with the latter's teleological conception of history, flirtation with the moral ideology of Humanism, and reductionist renditions of determinacy. In Machiavelli, Althusser found the contingency of history, the ineradicability of conflict, partisanship in philosophy, and a brave expression of the 'aleatory foundations of the current world' we take for granted. Through his analysis of Machiavelli, Althusser put forth the possibility of an epistemology which does not assume an immediate and transparent identity between the object of thought and the real object but one that rather retains the distance between the concept and the real and thus contributes to the concept's ability to represent a conflictual social and political reality. Moreover, in Machiavelli's theoretical dispositive, Althusser discovered a dialectical structure ('negation of the negation of the negation', which is a displacement and the emergence of something new) that could overcome the idealist dialectic of Hegel, whose idealism, Althusser thought, was not only in the use to which it was put (teleological Universal History), but also inscribed in its very structure, through a simplistic definition of contradiction and the mechanism of supersession (*Aufhebung*), which eliminated the possibility of a real rupture. In this sense, I submit, Althusser's aleatory reading of Machiavelli was hardly hostile to dialectical thought as such,

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61   Althusser 1999, p. 5.

but rather, an effort to rethink the *materialist* dialectic, to find those '*new forms*, unknown to Hegel, and which can confer on it the status of materialism'.[62]

When confronted with a question regarding the relationship between Machiavelli and the Marxist tradition, in the beginning of his lecture on 'Machiavelli's Solitude', (and if we are to take what Althusser says about beginnings seriously, we should infer that this beginning is not a superficial feature that vanishes but one that remains and continues to determine the vector of his reflections), Althusser qualified this relationship as 'one of coincidence and repetition, rather than one of direct descent'.[63] I have tried to show that Althusser's attempt was to recover what was lost in this aleatory repetition by *a retreat*, by going to the beginnings, following the path that took him from Spinoza to Machiavelli. If Machiavelli used his examples of antiquity to create a distanciation from his own present, may we not consider Althusser's reading of Machiavelli as a similar attempt for us: recovering Machiavelli's memory and inviting us to re-inhabit his position in philosophy? If Machiavelli's discourse hails the future concealed in the past, perhaps Althusser, speaking to us from the past and from a path less taken, may still have something to say about the future of materialist philosophy – 'the future inherent in the past and the present'.[64]

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62   Althusser 1975, p. 138.
63   Althusser 1999, p. 116.
64   Althusser 1999, p. 13.

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Gramsci's Machiavellian Metaphor: Restaging *The Prince*

Peter Thomas

In early 1932, over 2 years after beginning his carceral writing project, Gramsci wrote what were to become some of the most famous lines of the *Prison Notebooks*. 'The Modern Prince', he argued,

> the myth-Prince, cannot be a real person, a concrete individual. It can be only an organism, a social element in which the becoming concrete of a collective will, partially recognised and affirmed in action, has already begun. This organism is already given by historical development; it is the political party, the modern form in which the partial, collective wills that tend to become universal and total are gathered together. [...] The Modern Prince, as it develops, overturns the whole system of intellectual and moral relations, in that its development means precisely that any given act is useful or harmful, virtuous or wicked, in so far as it has as its concrete point of reference the Modern Prince itself, and helps to strengthen or to oppose it. In people's consciences, the Prince takes the place of the divinity or the categorical imperative, and becomes the basis for a modern laicism and for a complete laicisation of all aspects of life and of all customary relationships. [1]

It is on the basis of citations such as this that it has often been argued, from the early years of the reception of the *Prison Notebooks* until today, that the metaphor of the Modern Prince should be understood as a merely a 'codeword' for a Communist Party, conceived either in continuation with a supposedly 'Leninist', democratic-centralist conception of the party, or as a 'Western Marxist'

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1 *Q* 8, §21, pp. 951–3 (January–February 1932). References to Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* [*Quaderni del carcere*] follow the internationally established standard of notebook number (*Q*), number of note (§), followed by page reference to the Italian critical edition (Gramsci 1975).

alternative to it, depending upon the particular interpreters' predispositions.[2] Sometimes the Modern Prince has been 'deciphered' in a more expansive sense, as a generic description of the modern political party as such, representing a distinctive synthesis of the normative, motivational and executive sources of the democratic ethos that underwrites modern mass societies.[3] More recently, and increasingly, it has been suggested that the Modern Prince should be understood as representing a paradigmatic embodiment of the novel conception of political power as self-foundational that emerged in the twentieth century, from Weber's theorisation of charismatic domination to its formalisation in the Schmittian notion of the self-referential decision.[4] Just as Machiavelli called for his new prince to be the 'redeemer' of the 'leaderless, lawless, crushed, despoiled, torn, overrun' Italian nation,[5] Gramsci's Modern Prince is conceived as a proletarian *kairós*, uniquely capable of resolving the antinomies of political modernity.

The *Prison Notebooks* do indeed contain extensive notes on the political party as a necessary protagonist of modern political life. Gramsci develops a novel tripartite theory of the 'fundamental elements' required for the existence of a political party: 'a mass element'; a 'principal cohesive element'; and 'an intermediate element, which articulates the first [mass] element with the second [cohesive element] and maintains contact between them, not only physically but also morally and intellectually'.[6] He distinguishes between democratic and bureaucratic centralism, in a polemic against not only the anti-Stalinist Bordiga's programmism, but against the consolidating Stalinist orthodoxy itself.[7] He also identifies the specific nature of the type of leadership of the Modern Prince, which tends to puts itself out of business, progressively reducing the distance between leaders and the led, in a relation of 'dialectical pedagogy'. It is in this dynamic that we find the distinctiveness of Gramsci's theory of hegemony (that is, of leadership) translated into the terms of a theory of political organisation.

Such is the richness of Gramsci's reflections on theme of political organisation that there is a great temptation to synthesise his disparate notes on the art

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2   See Althusser 1999, p. 13: 'Gramsci's Modern Prince is the Marxist-Leninist proletarian party'; Holden and Elden 2005. For a survey of interpretations, see Fontana 1993.

3   See White and Ypi 2010.

4   For representative readings that tend in this direction, see Kalyvas 2000 and Morfino 2099, p. 99. See Farris 2013 for a suggestive discussion of the novelty of Weber's conception of the foundations of political power.

5   Machiavelli 1961, p. 81

6   *Q* 14, §70, p. 1733 (February 1933); see Sassoon 1987, pp. 150–79.

7   *Q* 13, §36, pp. 1632–5; see Cospito 2011, pp. 228–44.

and science of politics scattered throughout the *Prison Notebooks* into a systematic presentation. This is precisely what was done by Gramsci's first editors, Platone and Togliatti, when they assembled some of Gramsci's writings on Machiavelli and politics as the third volume in the post-war thematic edition of the *Prison Notebooks*.[8] The particular emphasis of this organisation of notes, and perhaps even more so, its exclusions, established the coordinates for Gramsci's early reception in the Anglophone world in particular. *The Modern Prince and Other Essays* was the title of the first presentation of Gramsci's carceral writings in English in 1957.[9] Platone and Togliatti's selection and organisation of these notes also formed the basis for the section dedicated to 'the Modern Prince' in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, the publication more responsible that any other for the international diffusion of Gramsci's thought.[10] Thus was created the image of a Machiavellian 'political' Gramsci, related to but distinct from the many other images of Gramsci that have been derived by different disciplinary interests: a Crocean 'philosophical', a Desanctian 'literary' Gramsci, and so forth.

Gramsci himself seems to propose such a project of systematisation of his political reflections, in *Q* 4, §10 (written in the summer of 1930), when he projects a 'book which would derive from Marxist doctrines an ordered system of contemporary politics like *The Prince*. The argument would be the political party, in its relations with classes and the State: not the party as a sociological category, but the party that seeks to found the State'.[11] Immediately, however, he specifies that the decisive feature of Machiavelli's *The Prince*, which any modern rewriting of it must also embody, is its dramatic form. 'It would thus be a case, not of compiling an organic repertory of political maxims, but of writing a "dramatic" book in a certain sense, an historical drama in action, in which the political maxims would be presented as individualised necessity and not as

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8   Published in 1949, the volume was entitled *Notes on Machiavelli, Politics and the Modern State* (*Note sul Machiavelli, sulla politica e sullo stato moderno*).

9   Gramsci 1957.

10   Gramsci 1971, pp. 123–204.

11   *Q* 4, §10, p. 432. Gramsci repeats the identification of 'the notion of the "Prince"', 'translated into modern political language', with the political party in *Q* 5, §127, pp. 661–2, written in November–December 1930. His reference to 'certain States' in which the political party functions de facto as the 'head of state' indicates that here he has in mind the recent experiences in Soviet Russia. He further specifies that the type of state that such a political party aims to found is not determined by 'constitutional Right, of a traditional type', but according to a 'system of principles that affirm the end of the State as its own end, its own vanishing, that is, the re-absorption of political society in civil society'.

scientific principles'.[12] In early 1932 Gramsci returns to this theme and deepens it. Rather than a possible template for an ordered system of political principles or doctrines, *The Prince* is now valorised entirely in terms of its dynamic structure. Gramsci argues that 'the fundamental character of the *Prince* is that it is not a systematic treatment, but a "living" book, in which ideology becomes "myth", that is, fantastic and artistic "image" between utopia and scholarly treatise in which the doctrinal and rational element is personified by the "condottiere", the "anthropomorphic" and plastic symbol of the "collective will"'.[13] Machiavelli did not have recourse to 'pedantic disquisitions of principles and criteria for a method of action'. Instead, he represented the process of the formation of a collective will in terms of the 'qualities and duties' of a concrete person.[14]

Time and time again, the former theatre critic and professional revolutionary Gramsci emphasises the dramatic form of the playwright and politician Machiavelli's *Darstellungsweise*. This in fact seems to Gramsci to have been Machiavelli's great innovation, of much greater importance than the identification of an 'autonomy of the political' (which was Croce's reading of the historico-theoretical significance of Machiavelli, a position which Gramsci initially considers but ultimately rejects, in favour of a theory not of the autonomy of politics, but of its 'translatability').[15] Machiavelli, according to Gramsci, literally created the modern 'political manifesto', in the dramatic epilogue of *The Prince*, where the prince, that 'concrete phantasy', merges with the people whose dispersed and pulverised lives it has organised into a collective will.[16] Machiavelli's 'new Prince' for Gramsci is not the prophet who has created his own people, according to a decisionistic reading of Machiavelli's thought that has only grown stronger throughout the twentieth century. Rath-

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12   *Q* 4, §10, p. 432.

13   *Q* 8, §21, p. 951 (January–February 1932). Gramsci's reference to *The Prince* as a 'living' (*vivente*) book should be understood in strict relation to his use of the term 'living philology' to describe the formation of the political party as a 'collective man'. See *Q* 7, §6, p. 857 (November 1930); *Q* 11, §25, p. 1430 (July–August 1932).

14   *Q* 8, §21, p. 951.

15   For Gramsci's (already critical) consideration of the Crocean thesis of an autonomy of the political in Machiavelli, see *Q* 4, §4 p. 425 (May 1930); *Q* 4, §8, pp. 430–1 (May 1930). *Q* 8, §61, pp. 977–8 (February 1932), with the notion of political activity linked to a re-elaborated conception of superstructures, marks an important step towards Gramsci's notion of the translatability of history-politics-philosophy, most intensely developed in Notebook 11.

16   *Q* 13, §1, p. 1556 (May 1932).

er, it is the prophetic figure created by Machiavelli's dramatic enactment of the 'qualities, characteristics, duties and needs' of the people itself.[17]

I would like to suggest that Gramsci's Machiavellian metaphor of the Modern Prince needs to be understood in a similar sense; namely, not as a systematic presentation, codified in a series of directly political maxims or organisational proposals, which were or even could be contained within one special notebook, and which could then be presented as a merely 'mythical' – in a illusory sense – euphemism for an actually existing political party (the Italian Communist Party), or even for the concept of the political party as such. Rather, the Modern Prince should be understood in the first instance as a dramatic development that unfolds throughout the discourse itself of the *Prison Notebooks*, alchemically transforming the dispersed and pulverised lives of the subaltern social groups. In other words, with the distinctive notion of the *Modern Prince*, Gramsci set himself the task, not of repeating or reproducing the Machiavellian figure of the 'new Prince', but of 'actualising' or 'restaging' Machiavelli's strategic gesture in the very changed political conditions of Gramsci's own time. In so doing, Gramsci not only transforms the concept of the political party, but also the concept of the political itself. Finally, it is in the incessantly traversed distance between Gramsci's two proposals – between the early proposal of a treatise of an ordered doctrine, and later emphasis upon an unfolding dramatic development – that we can see the emergence of the Modern Prince as fundamental change of terrain of the research project of the *Prison Notebooks*, which becomes a laboratory for experimentation in this new principle and practice of socio-political organisation. In order to understand the terms and the significance of this transformation, we need to consider the role of Machiavelli in Gramsci's overall project, and its relation to other central elements of it.

Gramsci's had a long interest in Machiavelli dating back at least to his university years.[18] While a functionary of the Comintern traveling through Berlin in May 1922, he encountered his old Professor Umberto Cosmo, who urged him to write the book on Machiavelli that he had long awaited from him.[19] Mussolini would soon write his own 'Prelude' to *The Prince* in 1924, as would Lev Kamenev a decade later, an editorial 'indiscretion' later used against him by the Stalinist prosecution at his show trial.[20] Before and upon imprisonment

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17   *Q* 13, §1, p. 1555.

18   As Paggi notes, Machiavelli was not simply a metaphor for Gramsci, or exterior analogue, but 'a concrete point of reference for his entire political evolution' (Paggi 1969, p. 834).

19   Gramsci 1996, p. 399.

20   Mussolini 1979; Kamenev 1962.

Gramsci took a keen interest in the debate then underway in Italy and Europe between liberal and Fascist returns to the Florentine secretary, including contributions from Mosca, Ercole, Gobetti, Russo, Chabod and Croce.[21] He even undertook a detailed survey of studies that emerged in the wake of the commemorations of the fourth century of Machiavelli's death in June 1927, as he later recalled in a letter to his sister-in-law Tania.[22]

It is therefore notable that Machiavelli is absent from Gramsci's first work plans, in a letter to Tania of 19 March 1927 and at the beginning of his first notebook on 8 February 1929.[23] When Machiavelli does appear in the early notebooks, in 1929–30, it is largely as an historically important figure in early European modernity and Italian State formation. This was not, however, a renewal of the reading of Machiavelli as precursor of national unification valorised during the Italian Risorgimento, as a number of Gramsci's readers have hastily supposed.[24] Rather, Gramsci was primarily reacting against the *machiavellistica* of his time that had emerged from this story of national redemption – *in primis*, Croce – which presented the Florentine Secretary as a 'classic' political theorist, good 'for all times'.[25] Instead, Gramsci emphasised the need to comprehend the specificity of the political conditions under which Machiavelli operated, in the exceptional case of a still fragmented Italy surrounded by the emerging absolutist national monarchies of early modern Europe.[26]

Gramsci's 'contextualisation' of Machiavelli's thought, however, does not lead him to consign *The Prince* to a previous political conceptuality, which the present could reconstruct and contemplate, but not 'actualise'. On the contrary, it is on the basis of the historicisation of Machiavelli's thought that he

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21 For a survey of the Italian debate on Machiavelli in the 1920s, see Paggi 1984, p. 404 et seq. and Fiorillo 2007.

22 Gramsci 1996, pp. 132–3.

23 Gramsci 1996, pp. 54–7; *Q* 1, 'Argomenti principali', p. 5.

24 Elements of such a reading are present in Lefort 1986, which may have led Althusser also to overestimate Gramsci's indebtedness to this tradition at times. Althusser's emphasis elsewhere upon Machiavelli's 'solitude', and particularly the notion of 'primitive political accumulation', however, displays a deeper appreciation of the novelty of Gramsci's position (1999, pp. 10–11; 121). For a recent overview of interpretations of Machiavelli that emerged from the Risorgimento, see Sartorello 2009. For a study of Althusser's reading of Machiavelli, see Lahtinen 2009.

25 *Q* 1, §10, p. 8 (June–July 1929); *Q* 13, §13, p. 1572 (Spring–Summer 1932).

26 See Gramsci's letter to Tania of 14 November 1927 (Gramsci 1996, p. 133). Gramsci's reading in this sense shares something with Hegel's assessment of Machiavelli's 'untimeliness' in *Die Verfassung Deutschlands*, as Althusser discerned. See Hegel 1971, particularly pp. 553–8 and Althusser 1999, p. 10.

proposes to understand its potential theoretical significance in his own present. Steadily but surely, Gramsci begins to explore the theme of Machiavelli as a theoretician and even as a philosopher, with tentative suggestions regarding his decisive role in a genealogy of the philosophy of praxis, in Notebook 4 and 5, in 1930–1.[27] By the time of the beginning of Notebook 8, in late 1931 and early 1932, this interest begins to solidify into a distinctively new research project, already intuited in late 1930. Machiavelli figures twice among the topics at beginning of Notebook 8, in the seventh and twentieth places in the list of 'principle essays' written at the end of 1930. In the 'grouping of materials' that Gramsci composes in April 1932 on the following page (prefiguring in part the structure of subsequent thematic special notebooks), however, 'Machiavelli' is the second topic.[28] Gramsci had provided this new research project with a name in the title of the decisive note *Q* 8, §21, written in January–February 1932: 'the Modern Prince'. 'Under this title can be gathered all those ideas of political science that can be assembled into a work of political science that would be conceived and organized along the lines of Machiavelli's *Prince*'.[29] From this point forward, it will be the exploration of this qualitatively new conception of the *Modern Prince*, rather than the mere 'actualisation' of Machiavelli's 'new Prince', that constitutes the focus of Gramsci's attention throughout Notebook 8 and above all in Notebook 13, begun soon after (in May 1932), and which opens with transcriptions (with significant modifications and developments) of the notes from Notebook 8 written only a few months earlier.[30]

It is precisely in this same period that Gramsci begins works on his so–called special notebooks, in which he transcribes, sometimes with significant amendments, notes previously written in earlier notebooks, alongside new notes. Notebook 13, entitled 'Notes on the Politics of Machiavelli' (written between May 1932 to early 1934), seems to come closest to the plan for a systematic book on political theory. But this re-organisation of his research soon spills over into a significant number of entirely new notes in other, 'miscellaneous' notebooks

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27   See, e.g., *Q* 4, §8, pp. 430–1 (May 1930); *Q* 5, §127, p. 657 (November–December 1930).

28   *Q* 8, pp. 935–6.

29   *Q* 8, §21, p. 951 (January–February 1932).

30   Gramsci does refer to the 'new Prince' at least once more after the emergence of the notion of the Modern Prince in January–February 1932, in *Q* 13, §21, p. 1601 (presumably written in Summer–Autumn 1932). This note, however, entitled 'Continuation of the "New Prince"', is a transcription, with significant revisions, of the arguments developed in *Q* 4, §10, p. 432 in Summer 1930 in relation to recent experiences in Soviet Russia.

(Notebooks 14, 15, 17).[31] From his marginal status in earlier notebooks, Machiavelli has now become an ether that pervades almost all of Gramsci's notes, arguably present even in his absence, in the most unexpected ways, a touchstone against which so many of Gramsci's seemingly unrelated interests will be measured. Thus, Gramsci not only emphasises in increasingly detailed terms that Machiavelli is an almost singular forerunner of the philosophy of praxis;[32] he also deepens his argument that Machiavelli represents Italy's first 'precocious' Jacobin, insofar as Machiavelli's concern with a popular or 'patriotic' reform of the army was linked to the question of forging a stable basis for relations between the country and the city – a Jacobinism 'of content' that thus turns out also to be effectively a 'precocious' 'Leninism'.[33] The concept of hegemony itself is rethought through the lenses of interpretations of *The Prince* and the *Discourses*, particularly those of Croce and above all of Luigi Russo.[34] Not even Gramsci's economic reflections are spared from this obsession with the Florentine secretary. Thus, he poses questions, via Tania, to Piero Sraffa, with whom he discussed economic theory regularly throughout his imprisonment, about Machiavelli's possible relationship to mercantilism.[35]

Why this turn to Machiavelli, which exceeds its own boundaries? At least two reasons seem to me to be decisive: the first, 'internal' to the development of the text of the *Prison Notebooks* project and in fact decisive for its 'refoundation' in 1932; the second, the political context that overdetermines Gramsci's project in all of its stages. Taken together, they enable us to see that the Modern Prince is something more than simply a form of political organisation, however novel, but is instead a proposal for a new theorisation and practice of politics, or, to use a Leninist phrase, a politics 'of another type'.

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31   Cospito and Francioni 2009, p. 154 provides an overview of the dissemination of Machiavelli throughout the 'special' and 'miscellaneous' notebooks.

32   Q 8, §237, p. 1090 (May 1932); *Q* 11, §52, pp. 1480–1 (Autumn 1932).

33   *Q* 13, §1, p. 1560 (May 1932). There is a striking parallel between Gramsci changing assessment of both Machiavelli (or more precisely, 'Machiavellianism') and Jacobinism, from his early writings to the *Prison Notebooks*, whereby an initially aggressively negative reading of popular stereotypes gives way to a sustained substantial engagement and revaluation. See La Porta 2009a and 2009b.

34   See *Q* 13, §5, p. 1564 (presumably May 1932), which contains important revisions to *Q* 8, §48, p. 970 (February 1932). See also *Q* 1011, §41x, p. 1315 (August–December 1932). On the importance of Gramsci's reading of Luigi Russo's *Prolegomeni a Machiavelli* (1931) for the emergence of the notion of the Modern Prince, see Frosini 2013.

35   Gramsci 1996, pp. 548–9 (14 March 1932); see *Q* 8, §78, p. 985 (March 1932). For an important study of Machiavelli's thought in relation to Florentine economic history, see Barthas 2011.

On the one hand, in terms of the 'internal' reasons for this development, Gramsci turns to Machiavelli intensively at a moment when his previous organising perspectives have reached an impasse. In the early phases of the *Prison Notebooks*, when Machiavelli played a predominantly historical rather than theoretical role, Gramsci had been primarily concerned to analyse the emergence of the forms of bourgeois political modernity.[36] This line of research is encapsulated in his distinctive notion of 'passive revolution', a concept that undergoes at least three phases of expansion: in a first moment, from 1930 to early 1932, Gramsci used the concept of passive revolution in order to describe the formation of the modern Italian State in the *Risorgimento*, particularly the exclusion of the popular classes from autonomous and organised participation in the process of modernisation.[37] In a second moment, partially contemporaneous with the first, beginning in late 1930, Gramsci extended the concept in order to analyse other social formations, such as Germany, which seemed to have gone through a similar contradictory process of (economic) modernisation without (political) modernisation, lacking a radical Jacobin moment such as had accompanied the French Revolution.[38] Finally, in a third moment, from 1932 onwards, it seems as if Gramsci thought that the notion of passive revolution could have a international and even epochal meaning, almost as if political modernity has descended into a rationalised and bureaucratic Weberian iron cage of a permanent 'organic crisis' that could only be managed, but not resolved, by administrative deformations of political practice.[39] By early 1933 at the latest, however, Gramsci began to argue that the concept of passive revolution needed to be cleansed of 'every trace of fatalism'.[40] The concept of passive revolution could have a concrete political sense not by positing it as a political 'programme', but only if it 'assumes, or postulates as necessary, a vigorous antithesis', which autonomously and intransigently sets all its forces in motion.[41] In other words, the concept of passive revolution needed to be confronted by the potential for a process of de-pacification and active revolution by and within the action of the popular classes. The emergence of the notion of the Modern Prince in early 1932 is the name of this new research project into the political potential of the subaltern classes, a dramatic metaphor that vividly captures its necessarily vibrant forms.

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36   See Burgio 2002.

37   *Q* 1, §44, pp. 40–54 (February–March 1930); *Q* 8, §25, p. 957 (January 1932).

38   *Q* 4, §57, p. 504 (November 1930).

39   *Q* 8, §236, pp. 1088–9 (April 1932); *Q* 10I, §9, pp. 1226–9 (April–May 1932).

40   *Q* 15, §17, pp. 1774–5 (April–May 1933).

41   *Q* 15, §62, p. 1827 (June–July 1933).

As with so many elements of Gramsci's carceral researches, the year 1932, which I have elsewhere defined as Gramsci's veritable *annus mirabilis*, also witnesses a singularly intense and rapid development of his engagement with Machiavelli.[42] In fact, no sooner has Gramsci nominated the new figure of the Modern Prince in early 1932, than he proposes, only a few months later at the beginning of Spring, a significant precision regarding its distinctive features, and in particular, regarding the distinctive Machiavellian dramatic gesture that Gramsci proposes to inherit and to actualise with the Modern Prince. In January–February 1932, with the first appearance of the Modern Prince, Gramsci writes that

> Machiavelli's *Prince* could be studied as a historical exemplification of the Sorelian 'myth', that is, of a political ideology that is not presented as a cold utopia or as a rationalised doctrine but as a concrete 'fantasy' that works on a dispersed and pulverised people to arouse and organize its collective will. The utopian character of the *Prince* comes from the fact that the 'prince' did not really exist historically and did not appear before the Italian people in a historically immediate form, but was himself a 'doctrinaire abstraction', the symbol of the generic leader, of the 'ideal condottiere'. One can study how Sorel never advanced from the conception of 'myth' to the conception of the political party [...].[43]

As a 'text of transition', this note displays strong continuities with Gramsci's previously announced 'translation' of Machiavelli's prince into modern political language with the notion of the political party. At this stage, Gramsci can argue that Machiavelli's *The Prince* is neither 'a cold utopia' or 'a rationalised doctrine', but rather, 'a concrete "fantasy"'; indeed, utopia and doctrine are argued to be two signs of the same coin that defines the 'concrete fantasy' in its antithesis. However, when it comes to specifying the nature of *The Prince* as a 'concrete "fantasy"' capable of arousing the collective will of a pulverised people – that is, precisely the element that would make of it an 'historical exemplification' and therefore non-speculative translation of Sorel's notion of political myth, rather than simply its equally utopian and doctrinaire forerunner – Gramsci can do no more than invoke the necessity of advancing as quickly as possible to the concept of the political party.

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42   See Thomas 2009, xix.

43   *Q* 8, §21, p. 951.

This situation is fundamentally transformed only a few months later, when Gramsci transcribes and revises this note at the beginning of Notebook 13 in May 1932.[44] He repeats that

> The utopian character of the *Prince* comes from the fact that the 'prince' did not really exist historically and did not appear before the Italian people in a historically immediate form, but was a pure doctrinaire abstraction, the symbol of the leader, of the ideal condottiere.

Now, however, seemingly strongly influenced by his reading of Luigi Russo's *Prolegomeni a Machiavelli* in the intervening months,[45] Gramsci is in a position to specify the precise sense in which *The Prince* constitutes a 'a concrete "fantasy"', even before the political party is proposed as a potential 'modern form' that could embody it. Previously, Gramsci had defined *The Prince* as a 'living' book because it anthropomorphically represented the process of formation of a collective will in a 'concrete personality', arousing passion through the use of 'artistic fantasy'. In *Q* 13, §1, however, he emphasises not the representative power of *The Prince*'s content, but the power of retrospective reconfiguration that lies in its distinctively dramatic form:

> However, with a dramatic movement of great effect, the mythical, passional elements contained in the entire little volume are drawn together and become alive in the conclusion, in the invocation of a prince who 'really exists'. Throughout the book, Machiavelli discusses what the Prince must be like if he is to lead a people to found a new State; the argument is developed with rigorous logic, with scientific detachment. In the conclusion, Machiavelli merges with the people, becomes the people, but not with some 'generic' people, but the people whom he, Machiavelli, has convinced by the preceding argument, the people of whom he becomes and feels himself to be the conscience and expression, with whom he feels himself to be one (*si sente medesimezza*). It now seems that the

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44   Significantly, *Q* 13, §1 begins directly by discussing the fundamental character of *The Prince* as a 'living' book, thus dispensing with the opening line of *Q* 8, §21 that had continued to project a 'work of political science' conceived and organised like Machiavelli's work, with the title of the 'Modern Prince'.

45   Frosini 2013 reconstructs in detail the decisive impact of Gramsci's reading of Russo *Prolegomeni a Machiavelli* (from which it seems that Gramsci's emphasis on the epilogue of *The Prince* at least in part derives; see Russo 1931, p. 32) upon the development of the notion of the Modern Prince, including the features that make it irreducible to a purely Sorelian notion of myth.

entire 'logical' argument is nothing other than an auto-reflection of the people, an inner reasoning worked out in the popular conscience, which has its conclusion in an impassioned, urgent cry. Passion, reasoning on itself, becomes once again 'affect', fever, fanaticism of action. This is why the epilogue of *The Prince* is not something extrinsic, 'tacked on' from the outside, rhetorical, but has to be understood as a necessary element of the work – indeed, as the element that reflects its true light on the entire work and makes it a kind of 'political manifesto'.

Herein lies Gramsci's 'little' discovery in Machiavellian scholarship.[46] *The Prince* constitutes a 'concrete fantasy' because Machiavelli's impassioned advocacy in the epilogue that the time has come for Italy's redemption from enslavement, oppression and scattering reacts back upon the entire preceding argument.[47] The figure of the prince is revealed as but an auto-reflection of the people itself upon its own 'qualities, characteristics, duties and needs', which it has until then observed only 'as if in a dream', in a resonant Shakespearean phrase – or more precisely, *as if in a drama*. The epilogue is the moment of *peripeteia* rapidly following upon *anagnorisis* in the audience, in a transformation of the Aristotelian order and object of address, as the people suddenly realise that all along throughout the book it has only been observing itself, that is, the dramatic staging of its 'qualities, characteristics, duties and needs', which it can only now recognise as its own. The epilogue of *The Prince* thus makes the book a kind of 'political manifesto' because it performs in its very structure the process of liberation that the protagonist of the book has been called upon to enact. The people thereby discover that the Prince has been no mere 'utopian' or 'doctrinaire' description, but the 'concrete fantasy' of its own really existing capacities, above all, for self-liberation and self-governance. Gramsci thereby establishes not only a novel approach to *The Prince* that will be progressively explored throughout an important strand of subsequent Machiavelli scholarship in the twentieth century, particularly in Althusser's reading, and whose suggestiveness and fecundity have not yet been exhausted. It also determines the rest of his own carceral project, not only in his notes on Machiavelli but in

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46   The reference is to Gramsci's description of his contribution to Dante scholarship, in his reading of Canto X of the *Inferno* and polemic against Croce's separation of poetry and structure. See *Q* 4, §78–§87, pp. 516–30 (May 1930); Rosengarten 1986. Just as Gramsci focuses on the performative dimensions of Dante's representation of Cavalcanti ('The structural passage is not only structure [...] it is also poetry, it is a necessary element of the drama that has occurred'; *Q* 4, §78, pp. 516–18), so too does his reading of *The Prince* emphasise the significance of its structure for comprehending its 'poetry'.

47   Machiavelli 1961, pp. 80–1.

the very fundamental concepts of the philosophy of praxis, particularly in the qualitatively new concept that Gramsci will develop of the political party in 1932, as 'compassionality' and a 'collective-man'.[48]

This distinctive Machiavellian moment within the *Prison Notebooks* coincides with – reinforces and is reinforced by – a very precise overdetermination by the political context, whose consistent traces throughout the notes make this context something internal to Gramsci's discourse itself: the deepening of Gramsci's repeated calls throughout the 1930s for a *Costituente* of anti-fascist forces. This was not simply a reproposal of the Republican Assembly of 1924–6, or a suggestion of the possibility of a post-fascist Constituent Assembly, as later occurred in the pre-constitutional phase of what became the post-war Italian Republic.[49] Rather, in both carceral colloquia and in communications via Sraffa to his party, Gramsci was arguing for a deeper process of unification of the anti-fascist forces already within and against the Fascist regime. It was an argument for the re-activation of the politics of the United Front, against the madness of the sectarian third period, encapsulated in the accusation that social democracy was merely the left wing of fascism. Gramsci's position was founded upon an active memory of the decisive debates in which he had participated in Moscow in 1922–3, and the implementation of which marked his own tenure as head of the Italian Communist Party soon after. What could be the forms of such a constituent process of political struggle?

I would argue that the projects of the special and even later miscellaneous notebooks, from 1932 until 1935 when Gramsci can effectively no longer write, were designed, in part, as the attempt to conduct the rigorous reconnaissance of the intertwining of the national and international terrains that Lenin had recommended in the debates in the 1920s, in order to discover the conditions of and potentials for communist transformation in each national tradition. These include the 19 notebooks (Notebooks 10–29) that Gramsci compiles, for the most part, from 1932 onwards, including notebooks of both revised texts and new departures – that is, the majority of the 29 *Prison Notebooks* (excluding the 4 notebooks of translations). The form of these later notebooks have often struck even the most attentive readers as signs of exhaustion, elevating Gramsci's normal 'incompletions' into a structuring principle. Indeed, at first glance it seems that they often do not speak of political organisation at all, but rather cultural, socio-economic or historical themes (e.g., culture,

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48   *Q* 11, § 25, p. 1430 (July–August 1932).

49   On the centrality of the notion of an 'offensive' anti-fascist 'constituentism', see Frosini 2013. The classic account of Gramsci's positions in the early 1930s is Lisa 1973. The most recent historical research is synthesised in Vacca 2012, particularly pp. 153–9.

Risorgimento, catholic action, popular literature, literary criticism, journalism, folklore, Fordism, the development of subaltern groups, historical linguistics and grammar). Taken together, however, these special notebooks should be regarded as constituting an articulated 'cognitive map' of the many different 'terrains' of the Modern Prince. Out of the diversity and richness of the themes in these notebooks Gramsci slowly composes a sketch, or many sketches, of the forms of popular practice and organisation that might be capable of defeating the passive revolution of bourgeois modernity itself. Far from a mess of broken pottage or fragments that Gramsci shored up against his impending ruin, or an effective retreat from politics, the special notebooks need to be understood as a process of the dramatic and concrete working out of the possible forms of a proletarian hegemonic apparatus. They were, in short, the forms of 'staging' of the Modern Prince, itself conceived as a 'restaging' of Machiavelli's critical gesture: the forms of 'concrete fantasy' in which the subaltern classes could recognise themselves, in order finally to realise the secret of their own constituent power.

Gramsci's concept of the Modern Prince is thus not a mere codeword for an existing political party, whether of a Communist or other persuasion; it reconfigures the concept of the political party itself as the institutional summation of a 'concrete fantasy' that constitutively exceeds any attempt to formalise its expansive dynamic. Nor can this dramatic metaphor be restricted to Gramsci's notes that explicitly refer to Machiavelli, as extensive as they may be; emerging from a decisively intense development in Gramsci's reflections on Machiavelli in Spring 1932, the Modern Prince is immediately 'disseminated' throughout the *Prison Notebooks*,[50] constituting the dramatic technique and strategic logic that overdetermines all of Gramsci's subsequent writings, in both selection of theme and mode of presentation. Not repetition, nor translation, still less imitation; but a restaging, which borders on re-creation, of the terms and conditions that accompanied Machiavelli's original strategic gesture, the immanence of a specific, passionate urgent cry to the conditions that necessarily call it forth. It is precisely this element of Gramsci's Machiavellian technique of the dramatic enactment of the 'qualities, characteristics, duties and needs' of the people itself that makes the *Prison Notebooks* also a sort of 'political manifesto', a concrete fantasy whose 'impassioned, urgent cry' continues to rouse us today.

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50   In a precise Derridean sense (1981).

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