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The primary cause of republican liberty in Machiavelli's discorsi

"Io dico che coloro che dannono i tumulti intra i Nobili e la Plebe, mi pare che biasimino quelle cose che furono prima causa del tenere libera Roma; e che considerino più a' romori ed alle grida che di tali tumulti nascevano, che a' buoni effetti che quelli partorivano; e che e' non considerino come e' sono in ogni republica due umori diversi, quello del popolo, e quello de' grandi; e come tutte le leggi che si fanno in favore della libertà, nascano dalla disunione tra loro".

(Machiavelli, Discorsi I. 4)

Introduction

'To me, those who condemn the quarrels between the nobles and the plebs, seem to be cavilling at the very things that were the primary cause of Rome's retaining her freedom, and that they pay more attention to the noise and clamour resulting from such commotion than to what resulted from them, i.e. to the good effects which they produced. Nor do they realize that in every republic there are two different dispositions, that of the populace and that of the upper class and that all legislation favourable to liberty is brought about by the clash between them.'

Since Baron's epoch-making work Machiavelli's idea of liberty has been the most important scholars' main focus, especially thanks to the members of the so-called Cambridge School of history of political thought. Nevertheless, in my opinion, these scholars have not concentrated their attention enough on Machiavelli's interest in the primary cause of Roman liberty. In other words, I believe that the question of why Machiavelli praised Roman tumults is both a crucial one for understanding his writings, and one that has been poorly answered.

Even if, for instance, Quentin Skinner recognises the striking originality of Machiavelli's praise of popular tumults, he seemingly falls short of appreciating what are considered by Machiavelli the most valuable results of those tumults, namely plebeian tribunes' veto and powers of appeal.

The latter constitute the focus of the very recent *Machiavellian Democracy* by John P. McCormick, who is keen on countering the Cambridge-inspired interpretation of Machiavelli as a republican with his own democrat Machiavelli. McCormick points out that Machiavelli, by advocating popularly inclusive institutional checks on the wealthy rulers, clearly went beyond

the representative regimes – either the more elitist *governo stretto* or the less aristocratic *governo largo*, which constituted the core concept of his contemporary republican theorists.
Although my analysis of Machiavelli's work is mostly compatible with McCormick's, I firmly disagree with him on two main points. Firstly, McCormick's Machiavelli praises the plebs without any reservation, as if they were unable to usurp liberty. Secondly and consequently, McCormick underestimates the importance of Machiavelli's commendation of mixed government, which balances the power of the one, the few and the many.
In this paper, I wish to focus on Machiavelli's own words on this topic, namely on the relation between civic discord and republican liberty. I shall do it more than McCormick did, in order to understand why, for Machiavelli, discord is essential to preserve liberty. The claim might, indeed, seem counterintuitive, and, to see the reasons behind it, we should understand Machiavelli's views on the Roman political system. Firstly, we should ask if he judges the conflict between the nobles and plebeians to be a form of factionalism, and if *plebe* and *senato* are not factions, what they then are. Secondly, we should ask what the difference is between factions and these social groupings and tendencies, *umori*, whose dynamic relationship produces the best effects in a republic. Only then will we be in a position to see why Machiavelli considers popular tumults as essential to preserving liberty.

These questions need to be put in a twofold context if a plausible answer is to be found.
Firstly, I shall analyse the first seven Chapters of Book I of the *Discourses*. In those extraordinarily pregnant pages, not only does Machiavelli illustrate the essential characteristics of Roman free *ordini,* but also, and more importantly, he presents the importance of the people's role in the contemporary Italian city-states' life. In the *Discourses* the three following principles are openly asserted. No greatness is possible without arming people; no state is safe without expanding itself; and, finally, no safeguarding of freedom can be guaranteed but by the populace.
The second, broader context consists in three more texts and will be treated in the second part of this dissertation.
First of all, I will take into consideration Machiavelli's *Istorie Fiorentine*, particularly those passages which express his political thinking on civic discord, and in which he draws a clear distinction between Rome's internal struggles and modern Florentine factional conflicts. The story of the revolt of the *Ciompi* will also be mentioned as a significant Machiavellian historical account. It will be shown that Machiavelli does not confine himself to sharing the conventional condemnation of the tumult, but he also endeavours to understand both its political and economic reasons and even to sympathize with Florentine plebeian requests for their own representatives.
The second additional text will be Machiavelli's *Discursus Florentinarum Rerum Post Mortem Iunioris Laurentii Medices*, a constitutional project submitted to the two senior members of the

Medici family, Pope Leo X and Cardinal Giulio (later to become Pope Clement VII), after the death of the last legitimate lay descendant in 1519. It will be shown that Roman *ordini*, especially the tribunate, are considered by Machiavelli as inspiring models from which Florence could learn much.

The last text to be examined is Guicciardini's *Considerazioni sui 'Discorsi' del Machiavelli*, focusing on the previously mentioned pivotal *Discourse* I.4. It will be demonstrated that, by arguing on ancient Roman *ordini*, Machiavelli and Guiccciardini turn out to depict the essential patterns of two opposite concepts of equality, namely substantial and formal equality. In fact, Machiavelli firmly believes that people need their own magistracies to defend liberty from the arrogance of the few, or, in other words, to guarantee the governing elite's accountability. By contrast, according to Guicciardini, the many should take part in politics only by appointing magistrates – who are supposed to come from the few – and approving laws, already proposed and discussed by the few.

PART ONE

DISCORSI SOPRA LA PRIMA DECA DI TITO LIVIO

Preface to Book One

In the Preface to Book I we are told the purpose of Machiavelli's work. In his commentary on Titus Livy's *History of Rome,* Machiavelli aims at showing that men can learn from history how to deal with their present issues. According to him, ancient virtues can and should be imitated in his own times, since man has not changed from what he used to be. Machiavelli claims that his enterprise is original and difficult. In his opinion, his contemporaries are used to admiring the ancients but not to emulating them, since modern men would be embarrassed by comparing their own actions with their ancestors'. However, this comparison is exactly what he dares to attempt.

By encouraging his contemporaries to imitate the Romans, Machiavelli seems to contradict himself, for such imitation could be invoked only on the assumption that historical occurrences are expected to be essentially the same. However, this assumption is inconsistent with his famous belief that men have to adapt themselves to the actual circumstances of their own times.

In other words: how can it be possible to reconcile the principle of imitation with Machiavelli's well-known realism, which compels both writers and politicians to take into consideration their contemporary contingencies as opposed to abstractly universal ideas?

A clue to solving this dilemma can be found in the very same text we are analysing, namely the Preface to Book One, in which Machiavelli contends that both civil law and medicine are grounded on the ancients' knowledge and experience. Evidently, both jurists and doctors have to adapt the ways of by-gone days to their own times. Moreover, both examples clearly refer to fields of actions in which universal theories must be adapted to particular circumstances.

Indeed, it is reasonable to assume that Machiavelli's well-known appeal to 'the truth of the matters as facts', *la verità effettuale della cosa*, in Chapter XV of *The Prince* is not incompatible with his invitation to imitate the ancients, and with the underlying idea that some unchanged principles can be found in political history. The first *Discourse* of Book One leads us to determine the nature of these principles.

1. *Concerning the Origin of Cities in General and of Rome in Particular*

'Those who read of the origin of the city of Rome, of its legislators and of its constitution, will not be surprised that in this city such great virtue was maintained for so many centuries, and that later on there came into being the empire into which that republic developed.'

At the very beginning, Machiavelli sketches the framework of his whole commentary. Firstly, we are told about the two main characteristics of Rome: virtue and greatness. According to Machiavelli, this very pair constitutes the appeal of Roman history. Secondly, both these features are based on historical grounds. Roman legislators gave the city such *ordini* as to preserve *tanta virtù* for many centuries, and this long-lasting and impressive result is the reason why Machiavelli's *Discourses* focus on these *ordini*.

The more so as we are reminded of the fact that unity and industriousness are much better maintained in naturally troubled places and, consequently, poor economic conditions. In other words, Machiavelli argues that necessity is more effective than choice in prompting *maggior virtù*. Nonetheless, the fertility of the considered sites and the consequent wealth and power of the city must be important factors in the choice of territory. Indeed fertile land is needed in order to defend and expand the city. If both wealth and power lead to discord and idleness, the *ordini*'s task consists precisely in compelling men to be good citizens even when coordination does not spontaneously arise, namely when environmental conditions are not particularly challenging.

It can then be inferred that the before-mentioned unchanged principles Machiavelli is looking for are the following two. Firstly, men refrain more from vices, especially idleness and avarice when natural conditions leave them no option but to work together in order to survive, so out of necessity for cooperation. Secondly, men are not 'content to earn their own living' and are 'anxious to lord it over others.' As a result, a city needs expansion in order to survive, that is to

defend itself from its greedy neighbours. Thus, greatness seems to be a necessity more than a choice. However, the richer a city is, the more corrupted its citizens are likely to become.
To summarize, the *ordini* of a city are claimed to be valuable if, notwithstanding the size of the city, they effectively protect citizens from corruption.

2. *How many Kinds of State there are and of what Kind was that of Rome*

Machiavelli, in this chapter, is leading us to another principle: civic orders must be as stable as possible, because whenever a state needs to be reorganised then it is in danger. In fact, if there were no troubles in a state, there would be no call for a change. Moreover, the new order itself, at least at the beginning, is at risk of weakening the institutions. Therefore, the more prudent is the legislator, the longer its constitution is likely to last and the happier the city is to be considered.
The statement echoes the conventional praise of the Roman mixed constitution. In fact, Machiavelli bases his comments on the three pure constitutional forms on a renowned Roman political theory. Famously, 'there are six types of government, of which three are very bad, and three are good in themselves but easily become corrupt, so that they must be classed as pernicious. […] For *Principality* easily becomes *Tyranny*. From *Aristocracy* the transition to *Oligarchy* is an easy one. *Democracy* is without difficulty converted into *Anarchy*.'
However, Machiavelli does not seem interested in investigating the nature of the slippery passage from the good forms to the bad forms. He confines his remarks on this matter to a conventional and vague suggestion that tyrants and oligarchs are vicious and avaricious as opposed to virtuous princes and aristocrats. On the contrary, he is keen on determining the cause of the passage from virtue towards vice: hereditary princes and nobles lack the ability to adjust themselves in accordance with the changeability of fortune as they are never presented with such a necessity. According to Machiavelli, men – no matter if one, a few, or many– learn the vital skills of taking into consideration their fellow-citizens and conforming themselves to their environment by going through bad times. By contrast, those who have experienced only good fortune are more in danger of losing respect either for the individual or for the official.
Let us now turn to mixed government, whose stability and strength is given by the fact that in one and the same state, principality, aristocracy and democracy balance each other. In Rome, these are represented by, respectively, the royal power of the consuls, the aristocratic senate and, finally, the tribunes of the plebeians.
In this *Discourse* Machiavelli concerns himself only with the first two elements, as he is significantly going to dedicate much more ink and emphasis to the third in the next chapters.

'In spite of the fact that Rome had no Lycurgus to give it at the outset such a constitution as would ensure to it a long life of freedom, yet owing to friction between the plebs and the senate, so many things happened that chance effected what had not been provided by a law-giver.'

At the beginning of Book 2 of Cicero's *De Republica*, Cato's words are recalled in order to put forward a similar argument about the nature as well as the superiority of the Roman constitution. In other states, Cato says, the great men were mere isolated individuals, who, like Lycurgus in Sparta, regulated their constitutions according to their own ordinances. Machiavelli would probably agree with Cato on the idea that the practical experience afforded by the passage of time is of greater value than the genius of an individual, in order to give stable orders to the commonwealth. However, according to Cato and Cicero, it was the contribution given by many good men in the course of centuries that made the excellence of Rome, whereas in Machiavelli's opinion its 'long life of freedom' was due to the 'friction between the plebs and the senate'.

Having said that, it remains true that Machiavelli expresses admiration for at least one individual for his crucial role in Roman history. In fact, not only is Romulus praised, but his murders are justified – as said in *Discourses* I. 9 – by the end he was pursuing in committing them: the common good of Rome. An extraordinary end may require extraordinary means, which, in turn, require an individual alone in his responsibility. According to Machiavelli, the legislator who is organizing a state *ex novo* has to be alone in his authority. If violent deeds can be allowed, what really matters is the effect of these extraordinary actions, 'for it is the man who uses violence to spoil things, not the man who uses it to mend them, that is blameworthy.'

Hitherto, Machiavelli is not asserting anything more than what has been said in *The Prince*. What is of major interest both in the *Discourses*' argument and for my topic, is that Machiavelli judges the institution of a senate to be Romulus's best achievement; and this is because the senate had the authority to limit the future kings' power. That is, Romulus's policy gave way to a civil and free way of life, *uno vivere civile e libero*, as opposed to a tyranny. His 'genius' apparently knew Machiavelli's maxim that while one alone has to be the founder, many are required to maintain the commonwealth.

Thus, as we have seen, a prince's *virtù* has to be assessed essentially by examining the *ordini* left behind by him. The more stable they are, the greater his virtue is. Their stability depends on the fact that, through them, many may participate in some way or another in the government.

3. *What Kind of Events gave rise in Rome to the Creation of Tribunes of the Plebs, whereby that Republic was made more Perfect*

At this point a question arises: why did the creation of tribunes make the Roman Republic 'more perfect'?

Let us follow Machiavelli's argument, from the very beginning of this *Discourse*.

'All writers on politics have pointed out, and throughout history there are plenty of examples which indicate, that in constituting and legislating for a commonwealth it must needs be taken for granted that all men are wicked and that they will always give vent to the malignity that is in their minds when opportunity offers.'

On the one hand, this statement could be read as a plain identification of the most important task of political institutions, namely the control of men's evil instincts. In fact, it might be claimed that Machiavelli meant to argue that if men were not wicked, they would not need to be governed. On the other hand, these very lines should be read in context, namely within a political discourse as opposed to both ethical and anthropological discourses. Machiavelli's contention is that legislators have to consider realistically the matter they want to order, he is not interested in stating any eternal moral truth. In other words, Machiavelli is not preaching to any religiously committed audience from any altar. More humbly, he is merely setting down all he has learnt from his long experience of political affairs. This experience has apparently taught him that the checking and balancing of *ordini* are vital functions of a good constitution. Thus, as the Roman senate's task consisted in limiting the king's power, in a similar way tribunes of plebs are expected to keep in check the authority wielded by the nobles. In fact, their arrogance used to be restrained during the Tarquins' era by the fear that the plebs could ally themselves with the monarch at the aristocrats' expense, which is the reason why, after the Tarquins collapsed, tumults broke out between the plebs and the senate and led to the re-appointment of the former tribunes.

Both fear and institutional devices are considered by Machiavelli, from a kind of pre-Hobbesian point of view, as essential in order to prevent men from insolent and overbearing behaviours – which are most likely as well as more effectively coming from the upper-classes. Machiavelli's contention that 'all men are wicked' has been interpreted by McCormick as an attack only directed towards the magnates as opposed to all men. I wish to argue that his point of view is superficial because Machiavelli is not targeting only one form of power. The evil human disposition implies that whoever is in charge, no matter if one, few or all the citizens, has to be limited and checked by others. My claim is supported by the fact that in *Discourses* I. 2 Machiavelli openly criticises Solon, the founder of democratic Athens. Democracy, Machiavelli asserts, is a short-lived form of government, as well as monarchy and aristocracy, for the rulers are not restrained from abusing their own power. Moreover, tribunes of plebs are only said to make the Roman Republic 'more perfect', because they constitute its third constituent element, so it is in the plurality of governing institutions that merit is to be found, more than in their characteristics. Not only does Machiavelli never claim to be in favour of maintaining only democratic magistrates, but he also criticises plebs' deplorable behaviour in ancient Roman history. In conclusion, he manifestly supports the balanced nature of mixed governments.

4. *That discord between the Plebs and the Senate of Rome made this Republic both Free and Powerful*

By praising discord, *disunione*, Machiavelli is not only straightforwardly opposing the general trend of the conventional humanist point of view, but also taking the risk of seeming favourable to the most pernicious poison of Florentine civic life, namely factionalism.

How does he argue for this original and scandalous contention?

Once again, Machiavelli claims to be considering the *verità effettuale*, as opposed to abstract idealizations. To him, 'those who condemn the quarrels between the nobles and the plebs' seem not to realize 'that in every republic there are two different dispositions, that of the populace and that of the upper class and that all legislation favourable to liberty is brought about by the clash between them'.

At this point it might be noted that Machiavelli distinguishes between a universally valid human disposition – 'all men are wicked' – and several socially determined characteristics, inevitably in conflict with each other. Apparently, both elements are relevant in politics. It might be stated that pure democrats do not take human wickedness into account. As a result, they might mistakenly believe that the plebs could reach the perfect form of government. By contrast, aristocrats of all sorts ignore – or pretend not to notice – the clash between their own interests and the concerns of the lower class in claiming themselves fit for governing for the sake of all citizens.

Not only does Machiavelli claim that discord is a fact, he praises it because of its good effects.

'Critics, therefore, should be more sparing in finding fault with the government of Rome, and should reflect that the excellent results which this republic obtained could have been brought about only by excellent causes. Hence if tumults led to the creation of the tribunes, tumults deserve the highest praise, since, besides giving the populace a share in the administration, they served as the guardians of Roman liberties'.

Once again, we are drawn into Machiavelli's ends-means rationale, which is valid both for princes' and legislators' actions and for the masses' behaviour.

However, in describing plebeian tumults, Machiavelli is keen on showing that the means were not barbaric, by presenting three reasons for believing so.

Firstly, Machiavelli points out the *verità effettuale:* 'tumults in Rome seldom led to banishment, and very seldom to executions.'

Secondly, he argues that if Rome had been a disordered republic there could not have been such great examples of virtue. Moreover, in *Discourses* I. 17 Machiavelli argues that tumults cannot harm a republic as long as corruption has not yet penetrated it. Tumults can be instigated either by men of good intention or by corrupted men. In the first case, they lead to legislations and institutions favourable to liberty. In Rome, for example, plebeian tumults were inspired by good intentions, namely by a thirst for liberty. In the second case, however, social troubles are stirred up by factious men in order to seize their power over the state. Machiavelli asserts that

when a commonwealth is already on the decline due to the corruption of its citizens, the only hope of renaissance is in the hands of a virtuous reformer.

Thirdly, Machiavelli claims that 'every city should provide ways and means whereby the ambitions of the populace may find an outlet, especially a city which proposes to avail itself of the populace in important undertakings.' The main Machiavellian argument in support of this statement is that the populace necessarily demands freedom. Since the lower classes are usually oppressed by the wealthy, what stirs the former up is their desire for liberty. Machiavelli cannot avoid conceding that sometimes the populace can be mistaken. However, he adds that, as Cicero too recognises, the ignorant people have an instinctive sense of truth through which they can easily be corrected by a virtuous individual.

Let us learn from Machiavelli not to dismiss the facts. What did the people actually do, in ancient Rome, during their disturbances? Were they harmful to the state? They assembled and clamoured against the senate, ran headlong about the streets, closed the shops, they even left the city, in order to make the nobles feel how important the people's contribution to the republic was.

According to Machiavelli, whenever the people manage to show that their contribution really is of great import, an ounce of common sense should suffice to understand the expediency of giving the people an outlet for their own demands, which are generally harmless and even helpful in the defence of citizens' liberties. As will be shown later in *Discourses* I. 6, this is particularly true in the Roman Empire, whose greatness was grounded on the *virtù* of its citizen-soldiers.

5. *Whether the Safeguarding of Liberty can be more safely entrusted to the Populace or to the Upper Class; and which was the Stronger Reason for creating Disturbances, the 'Have-nots' or the 'Haves'*

In this *Discourse* Machiavelli asks a question which is, in my opinion, absolutely crucial to his political thought. Namely, he asks which of the two, the populace or the aristocrats, should be entrusted with the role of safeguarding liberty. To provide a clear answer, Machiavelli is to analyse and compare the nature of the two different dispositions, that of the have-nots and that of the haves, which, as we already know, always determine republican civic life. The long analysis of this *Discourse* requires us to consider *Discourses* I. 40 and 44 as well.

Let us enter the pivotal issue.

The claim that the populace's demands 'are very seldom harmful to liberty' apparently means that they sometimes can be noxious. Indeed, all mundane things are imperfect and inconstant. However, virtuous men have to strive to make them as good as possible.

Thus, the realistic political question is about 'which of the two dispositions we find in men is more harmful in a republic, that which seeks to maintain an established position or that which has none but seeks to acquire it.'

Certainly the aristocrats have two good arguments in their favour. Firstly, because of the very fact that the populace has got nothing, it is restlessly demanding more and more. Secondly, since the better off concern themselves with maintaining their own privileged position, they constitute the best guarantee of political stability.

However, Machiavelli supplies his readers with some very effective counter-arguments.

To begin with, the *umore* of the wealthy is at least as dangerous as the *umore* of the plebs, 'since the fear of losing what they have arouses in them the same inclination we find in those who want to get more, for men are inclined to think that they cannot hold securely what they possess unless they get more at others' expense.' Machiavelli is running counter to the very core of conservative political thought, which relies on the steadiness of the middle and upper classes. Once more Machiavelli is looking at human dispositions from a kind of pre-Hobbesian point of view. Men can by no means trust their fellow-citizens. Therefore, the more they possess the more they have to fear from others. However, men delude themselves in thinking that being wealthy constitutes the best guarantee of their own possessions and liberties. Thus, those who have plenty already, restlessly want to increase their means, both in terms of riches and of power, in order to enlarge the gap between themselves and the populace.

Secondly, 'those who have great possessions can bring about changes with greater effect and greater speed.' In fact, most of the times the disturbances caused by the populace are easily suppressed, that is they are not actually pernicious to the republic. By contrast, if uprisings are led by wealthy people for their own interests, they are likely to be massively destructive. It may be noted that the latter case is precisely the case of Florentine factions.

Thirdly, the corruption of the wealthy is the most effective engine of popular tumults. That is, the more the rich are restrained from their own ambitions, the less the lower class has reasons to rebel.

As a consequence, Machiavelli believes that the haves' disposition is more harmful to a republic than the have-nots'. I shall argue that, as shown in his noteworthy account of the Decemvirate's tyranny and plebeian secession in the *Discourses* I. 40 and I. 44, Machiavelli nonetheless refrains from attributing the whole responsibility for popular tumults to the nobles' overbearing manners.

He explains that when the Decemvirs were appointed as legislators and rulers for a year, every other magistrate was suspended, including the tribunes of the plebs and the senatorial consuls. The populace was happy to re-appoint them for another year because they believed they were better off without either consuls or tribunes. The more so as the Ten had attributed directly to the people the power of appeal, which used to be one of the tribunes' most important

prerogatives. For its part, the senate also refrained from putting an end to the Decemvirate when the chance arose in order to avoid the appointment of tribunes.

Clearly, and repeatedly, Machiavelli points out the two crucial lessons that should be learnt from those events. The first one is that the only way to avoid a tyrannical government is to grant power to at least two different magistracies. This is because every social *umore* has to be represented by its own magistracy. Machiavelli's second point is that this division is necessary both in order to forestall the excessive demands of the parties and to reach an agreement conducive to general liberties.

Indeed, he claims that most tyrannies are due 'to the excessive demand of the people for freedom and to the excessive demand to dominate on the part of the nobles. For, when they fail to agree in making a law conducive to liberty, and, instead, one or other of the parties uses its weight to support a particular person, tyranny at once arises. The populace and the nobility in Rome agreed to appoint the Ten, and invest them with such great authority, owing to the desire which each party had, one to get rid of consular rank and the other to get rid of the tribunate.'

In *Discourses* I. 44 the plebeian secession of 449B.C. is described. Some details are noteworthy. To begin with, the need for leadership is boldly affirmed in the very heading: 'A Crowd is useless without a Head'. Not only did the plebeians lack leaders able to argue with the senate, but also, and more importantly, they needed their tribunes in order to avoid being deceived by demagogue-tyrants such as Appius Claudius and the rest of the Ten.

Secondly, the senators Valerius and Horatius gave the plebs a lesson in political wisdom by rejecting their demand to have the Ten hanged. Apparently, they knew, as Machiavelli knows, that revenge was useless – if not harmful – for the plebs' liberty could only be re-established by recovering their former magistrates and prerogatives.

Furthermore, according to Machiavelli, the lesson that a would-be tyrant could learn is by no means less interesting. In analysing Appius's alleged mistakes, Machiavelli points out a few more permanent principles. Tyrannies spring when the people wrongly bestow authority upon a demagogue who commits himself to the elimination of the people's enemies, namely the nobles. The obvious outcome, which the plebs failed to predict, is that the demagogue, once freed from the nobility's control, will be able to get rid of the people as well. Indeed, the tyrant who wants to maintain his power has to keep the people's friendship by carrying on his demagogical policy; whereas, as soon as he tries to befriend nobles, as Apppius did, he is doomed to fall.

'For though nobles desire to tyrannise, that part of the nobility which finds itself left out in a tyrannical regime, is always the tyrant's enemy. Nor can he win them all over, for so great is the ambition and the avarice with which they are imbued, that no tyrant can have enough riches and enough honours to satisfy all.'

To summarize, Machiavelli is, in this section of his work, once again emphasizing the general – almost universal – importance of a balance of powers and of a healthy dialectical conflict between the sides in order to achieve a politically stable state of affairs. The conflict between

the plebs and the senate is indeed deemed to be both necessary and beneficial, at least as long as it does not become fruitless reciprocal hate; or, in other words, as long as it has some properly institutional outlets.

At this very point, the question may arise whether Machiavelli's contention that the nobility, or at least a part of it, always is tyranny's enemy, is historically grounded.

After Cosimo de' Medici came to power in 1434, Florentine aristocracy, which used to hold sway over the city, had to compromise with the Medici's order. Even if republican institutions outwardly remained in force and the Medici formally remained *primi inter pares*, the nobility no longer had real control over the city. A few families were banned or marginalised, whereas most nobles were forced to accept Medici's rules against the democratic republicans. However, some nobles did not want to completely lose their former influence, so some *Ottimati* did not support Medici's tyranny. In fact, they openly opposed it under Piero de' Medici and later on during the first reinstatement of the Medici (1512-1527). In particular, some *Ottimati* were strongly disappointed by the supervening authoritarian attitudes of Lorenzo de' Medici's government (1513-1519), during the same period in which Machiavelli was writing the *Discourses*.

It is thus true, and Machiavelli was justified in thinking that at least some of the nobility apparently disliked the tyranny. However, the nobility had a twofold approach towards the tyranny, because the latter did not represent the worst threat they were facing. Indeed, the more the *Grandi* felt threatened by the alternative of a democratic government, the more they considered supporting the Medici as the most effective way to guard their own privileges. As a matter of fact, in 1527 the Medici underwent a second expulsion and the democratic republic rose again, driven by a much more revolutionary spirit than in 1494. The crucial years from 1527 to 1530 saw the magnates' gradual change of heart from opponents to supporters of the Medici, since their restoration and the subsequent princedom were expected to fit the nobles' vital needs.

Having said that, there remains a twofold interpretation of *Discourses* I. 40.

On the one hand, Machiavelli might intend to support the anti-Medicean aristocratic party, represented by his dedicatees, Zanobi Buondelmonte and Cosimo Rucellai, and, more broadly, by the young Republican nobles gathering at the Rucellai Gardens, the Orti Oricellari.

On the other hand, Machiavelli is arguing that tyrants not only have to seize power through the people's friendship, but that they also have to keep it in order to remain securely in control of the state. 'But in the alternative case in which one has but few friends at home, internal forces do not suffice, and one has to seek outside help. This has to be of three kinds: first, foreign satellites to protect your person; secondly, the arming of the countryside to do what should be done by the plebs; and thirdly, a defensive alliance with powerful neighbours.' Even the tyrants, namely even the Medici, were expected to be interested in defending the liberty of the city from foreign sovereigns as well as the internal peace. At the very least, they were undoubtedly concerned for the security and stability of their own authority. Therefore,

Machiavelli is probably also warning the Medici about the risk they run in a stubborn refusal to concede more sensible policies in favour of the people.

6. *Whether in Rome such a Form of Government could have been set up as would have removed the Hostility between the Populace and the Senate*

Machiavelli is perfectly aware of the fact that his praise of civic conflict must sound absurd and paradoxical in a city, like Florence, which has been worn out by internal factions for ages. Therefore, he cannot avoid considering whether Rome could have had any chance of achieving such good orders without suffering the hostility, *inimicizia*, between the populace and the senate. The best way to answer this question is to compare the Roman state with 'those republics which have been free from such animosities and tumults and yet have enjoyed a long spell of liberty', like ancient Sparta and contemporary Venice.

In examining the case of Sparta, Machiavelli finds three features which explain its lasting social concord. Firstly, the small size of its population. Secondly, the prohibition against foreigners dwelling in Sparta, which helped the few to retain power. Thirdly, and most importantly, the equality of property prescribed by Lycurgus's laws.

I will argue that, notwithstanding their conciseness, Machiavelli's considerations about Sparta are crucial in order to understand a pivotal point in his political thought. In fact, in the analysis of Spartan society Machiavelli asserts that to maintain political union between the plebeians and the senate, equality of property was more important than equality in rank. In Sparta, the authority exercised by those who took offices did not bring about either overbearing manners on the side of the few or ambition on the side of the plebs. That is because the rulers were motivated to govern by the expectation of attaining honour instead of richness, while, on their part, the plebeians were not envious, since they could not understand how notability could be a prize. Sparta is the exemplification of an ideal work allocation based on a shared poverty and in which no rivalry or disturbance could arise between the plebs and the nobility. It might then be deduced that, if – as Guicciardini claimed – honour had really been the only thing at stake in the Florentine aristocrats' desire for power, there would not have been such a pernicious civic conflict.

Let us turn to Venice, a city in which geographic conditions played the most important role. In fact, when the quantity of the people dwelling in Venice was sufficient to build a body politic, it was decided that all future newcomers had to be excluded from the government. This was possible because Venice was built on sandbanks which were not able to accommodate a huge inflow of foreigners. Indeed, the founders, who called themselves gentry, *Gentiluomini*, could maintain their authority for a long time without disruption. However, since Venetian gentry were getting increasingly unsatisfied with their sandbanks and rich enough to occupy a large

part of Italy, when their strength was put to the test, they 'lost everything in a single battle'. In fact, in the battle of Agnadello or Vailate (14 May 1509) the Venetian army was defeated by the League of Cambrai, constituted amongst others by France, the Empire and the Papacy.

Machiavelli draws a parallel between Sparta and Venice, which were both doomed because of the inability to prepare their institutions for such a great expansion. Sparta, after defeating Athens in 404B.C., had been dominating the whole of Greece until it was defeated by Thebes in 371B.C.; Venice, on the other hand, committed suicide by retiring from maritime undertakings in order to direct its enterprises to the land.

By contrast, Roman greatness would not have been possible without arming the people and therefore giving them enough strength to riot and compete for power with the senate.

Machiavelli invites his readers to take a realistic look at this issue, by submitting to them the following alternatives.

'So in all human affairs one notices, if one examines them closely, that it is impossible to remove one inconvenience without another emerging. If, then, you want to have a large population and to provide it with arms so as to establish a great empire, you will have made your population such that you cannot now handle it as you please. While, if you keep it either small or unarmed so as to be able to manage it, and then acquire dominions, either you will lose your hold on it or it will become so debased that you will be at the mercy of anyone who attacks you. Hence in all discussions one should consider which alternative involves fewer inconveniences and should adopt this as the better course; for one never finds any issue that is clear cut and not open to question.'

However, at the very end, Machiavelli adds a new point which tips the scales in favour of Rome. In fact, even though commonwealths may be constituted with a view not to expand themselves, it may occur that unexpected and unavoidable historical circumstances compel them to increase in size without being supplied with the required military and political resources. Machiavelli is manifestly referring to his contemporary Italian city-states no longer able to survive in a world dominated by national monarchies. In other words, expansion is no longer an option, but a historical necessity. At this point it might be useful to remind readers that the battle of Agnadello was the last significant attempt made by an Italian state to resist foreign forces, so Venetian defeat may be considered as the gravestone of Italian liberty. Indeed, in *The Prince* as well as in the *Discourses*, Machiavelli's most heartfelt concern is to give his own contribution to saving Italy from oppression, by showing the way to build a state strong enough to resist invaders.

7. *How necessary Public Indictments are for the Maintenance of Liberty in a Republic*

Before focusing our attention on the power of public indictment wielded by Roman tribunes, it may be useful to recall what their prerogatives were.

The tribunes held part of the legislative power, for they convened and presided over the *Concilium Plebis*, in which the plebs discussed and voted the *plebiscita*. By 287B.C. (*Lex Hortensia*) the latter became mandatory for all Roman citizens. Tribunes also exercised the *ius auxiliandi*, that is the right to rescue any plebeian from the hands of a patrician magistrate. Moreover, Machiavelli reminds readers of some episodes in which the tribunes had the role of mediators between the nobles and the populace – or among the nobles only – in order to keep the republican proceedings working. Machiavelli claims, however, that the most important functions of the tribunes were those by which they were to safeguard the liberties of the republic. In fact, the power both to veto any act or proposal of the magistrates – namely the *ius intercessionis* – and to indict and prosecute any citizen suspected of political crime has to be considered the most effective *super partes* safeguard for Roman liberty and legality.

Accordingly, not only did the tribunes protect the plebeians from nobles' overbearing manners but also, and more importantly, they had a controlling function over magistrates and were able to defend republican institutions.

If it has already been affirmed in *Discourses* I. 5 that the tribunes are the most effective guards of liberty in Rome, Machiavelli is still keen on drawing readers' attention to the tribunes' ability 'to indict before the people or some magistrate or court such citizens as have committed any offence prejudicial to the freedom of the state.' In order to show that this is the most useful power in the challenge for preserving republican liberties and institutions, Machiavelli follows a plainly simple argument. Since in republics there is a direct and proportional relation between the power seized by eminent people and their ability to threaten the freedom of the populace, either the state is able to employ its own authority in order to punish them or private forces will. In the first case freedom is necessarily re-established, while in the second case the state is bound to be ruined by factionalism and foreign invaders.

Machiavelli gives us eloquent examples. The first instance is constituted by Livy's version of the story of Coriolanus, who was saved from the people's fury by the intervention of the tribunes citing him to appear in his own defence.

Then, Machiavelli tells us the story of two powerful Florentine men: Francesco Valori, who led the expulsion of the Medici in 1494, and Piero Soderini, who was at the head of the state from 1502 as *Gonfaloniere* for life. As far as Francesco Valori is concerned, Machiavelli argues that his opponents, namely the anti-Savonarolian aristocrats, employed unconstitutional methods to get rid of his princely authority. Therefore, their intervention turned out to be dramatically harmful to many.

As to Piero Soderini, under whose wing Machiavelli reached the apex of his own career in the Florentine Chancery, Machiavelli reports that the animosity of his adversaries – once again the anti-democrat nobles – was the cause of the intervention of the Spanish army. After the latter invaded the Florentine territory, Soderini was deposed and the Medici returned to power. As a side effect, Machiavelli was dismissed from the Chancery, tried for conspiracy, tortured and imprisoned. However, Machiavelli refrains from giving away any feeling of resentment and he merely complains about the absence, in his own native city, of a proper court. In particular, Machiavelli argues that the eight Florentine judges, the *Otto di guardia e balìa*, could not be fit for pursuing legal action against dangerously powerful citizens, 'for the few always act as the few'.

To sum up, in this important *Discourse*, Machiavelli argues for the necessity of setting up public and limited authority against pernicious private and foreign forces. Moreover, he openly refers to Florentine politics, by clearly stating that the more the state is supplied with public authority to defend its freedom, the less it can be threatened and ruined by private partisans, *privati partigiani*, and their ill-famed factions, *parti*.

'Either make the tree good, and its fruit good; or make the tree bad, and its fruit bad; for the tree is known by its fruit.'

Following the aforementioned evangelic criterion, we might conclude the analysis of the first seven *Discourses* with the following remarks.

First of all, the enmity between the plebs and the senate is a 'good tree', since its fruits are adequate constitutional devices to guard liberties against ambitious citizens. In particular, the tribunes' prerogative of bringing charges in court is essential to preserve both the unity and the authority of the state.

Secondly, the conflict between the plebs and the senate has nothing to do with the 'bad tree' of factionalism. In fact, while the Roman Empire only benefited from such a 'good' contrast, Italian Renaissance city-states were worn out and completely wrecked by their internal factions. The more so as the latter also bore the responsibility for letting foreign invaders in.

PART TWO

ISTORIE FIORENTINE

'If any reading is useful to citizens who govern republics, it is that which shows the causes of the hatreds and factional struggles within the city, in order that such citizens having grown wise through the suffering of others, can keep themselves united.'

In the Preface of *The History of Florence*, Machiavelli clarifies the end and the means of his work. The aim, he claims, is to help actual rulers, particularly his patron Giulio de' Medici – who was then the informal leader of Florence – to make and keep Florentines united. The most effective way to promote political unity consists precisely in understanding the reasons behind civic discord.

In analysing Florence's situation, Machiavelli points out that more than one type of factional struggle is present. In fact, in Florence, not only are there quarrels between the nobles and the *popolo*, but also between the *popolo* and the *plebe*. That is to say that Florentine society is both more complex and more characterized by economic differences than it used to be in ancient Rome. The *popolo* is, in fact, constituted by citizens who do not descend from the older and powerful Florentine families, but who are still rich merchants represented by the gilds, *arti*, whereas the *plebe* is the lower working class. Nonetheless, both in Chapter 12 of Book II and in Chapter 1 of Book III, Machiavelli insists that every city is only affected by natural enmities, *naturali inimicizie,* between two groups, *popolari* and *nobili*, as the latter want to rule, and the former do not want to be ruled. It may be deduced then that the *popolo* became the actual ruling class in modern Florence by both coming up beside or even above the nobles and clashing with the *plebe*.

Let us now focus on the comparison between the enmities in Rome and in Florence, which is fully developed in Chapter 1 of Book III. 'In the two cities diverse effects were produced, because the enmities that at the outset existed in Rome between the people and the nobles were ended by debating, those in Florence by fighting; those in Rome were terminated by law, those in Florence by the exile and death of many citizens; those in Rome always increased military power, those in Florence wholly destroyed it.' So far Machiavelli's comments should be predictable for the *Discourses'* readers, who, however, would barely expect the following differentiation: 'those in Rome brought that city from an equality of citizens to a very great inequality; those in Florence brought her from inequality to a striking equality.'

At first sight the latter remark reverses 'the terms of comparison between Rome and Florence, since the concept of equality has clearly positive association in his thinking, as it does in the Florentine tradition.' If I share with Gisela Bock the idea that this remark does require some more attention, I disagree with her analysis, which seems to me unclear and unable to grasp Machiavelli's thought. In order to understand what is here being said, we simply have to keep

on reading. In fact, Machiavelli says that the different effect of enmities is grounded on the difference in their purposes. While 'the people of Rome wished to enjoy supreme honors along with the nobles; the people of Florence fought to be alone in the government, without any participation in it by the nobles.' I wish to claim that the meaning of 'equality' in this context is not the same as in the Florentine tradition. In fact, Machiavelli praises Roman institutions' 'inequality', where inequality is meant as the separation between the nobles' and the plebs' assemblies and magistrates. Whereas the Florentine 'striking equality' clearly refers to Florentine *ordini*, which left the magnates out of the government. Machiavelli openly condemns the Florentine people's will to deprive the nobles of high offices – or of any office at all – as well as the desire by the few to debar the many from ruling.

As McCormick correctly points out, Machiavellian democracy is opposed to modern representative governments, for the latter are based on a merely formal equality, which guarantees the power to a wealthy minority. 'Machiavelli's reconstruction of Roman Republic is a tale of two cities', which echoes Italian republics of the thirteenth century, divided between the magnates' and the people's magistracies. By losing this dualistic structure of Florentine *ordini* over the centuries, the plebeians lost the possibility of being represented against the overbearing wealthy people. What McCormick does not recognise, in my opinion, is that Machiavelli not only looks at the popular *umore*, but also at the nobility's. In fact, the *Grandi* as well need their own magistrates, and this is why Machiavelli praises 'inequality' in the aforementioned passage of *The History of Florence*.

According to Machiavelli, in conclusion, in order to promote the common good and the liberties the conflicting *umori* have to be represented separately, because if a group is allowed to rule and act on behalf of all the citizens, it certainly does so for its own sake.

Let us now focus on the account of the revolt of the *Ciompi* – the Florentine woolworkers, which was considered the most violent and odious tumult in Florentine history by most Florentine historians up to Machiavelli. The revolt of 1378 was the plebeians' strongest attempt to defend their own interests against the wealthy. Though Machiavelli concedes that the tumult troubled the republic, he runs counter to the conventional condemnation of the disturbance by trying to understand its political and economic reasons. The plebeians were not represented by the Florentine gilds, which wielded economic and political power in the city. In particular the Wool Gild, 'because it was very powerful, and through its strength the chief of them all, by its business has long given employment and still gives employment to the greater part of the poor and lower classes.' As a consequence, plebeian interests were not taken into account by those powerful gilds. In fact, when the workers were paid less than what they believed fair, 'they had nowhere to go for refuge except to the magistrate of the gild that ruled them; yet they believed he did not furnish them proper justice.' It might be noted that Machiavelli is not here openly agreeing with the *Ciompi*'s complaint, as he is only reporting their own beliefs. However, his

account is still remarkable because of the fact that what is at stake is precisely the lack of those *ordini*, which should give voice and an outlet to the plebs.
Interestingly, Machiavelli praises Michele di Lando, the woolworker elected *Gonfaloniere* by the people, for his *virtù*, namely for acting as a public official and not as a partisan. Not only did he stop the turmoil, he also divided the state into three parts: the greater, the minor and the new gilds. The latter represented the lowest classes and constituted the most important result of the revolt of the *Ciompi*; they were to be suppressed after Michele's downfall.
According to Machiavelli, the Guelf Party, which then came to rule, was severely harmful to the Florentines, at least immediately after it had regained power. In fact, many of the plebeian leaders and of the people who were known as supporters of the Plebeian Party were banished, including Michele di Lando.
Machiavelli, once again, distinguishes partisans from politicians promoting the common good. The latter may be symbolised by Michele di Lando, who recognised the fact that all the social *umori* have to be given a voice by public officials, like the Florentine gilds' representatives.

I will conclude this analysis of *The History of Florence* with Machiavelli's considerations on civil divisions, which are developed in Chapter 1 of Book VII. Given the fact that no republic can avoid divisions, the most important thing is to understand the difference between harmful and beneficial divisions, which consists in the presence or absence of party spirit. At this point a question arises: where do factions and partisans come from? According to Machiavelli, they come from citizens who gain their power by 'personal ways' as opposed to actions pursued on behalf of the public good. That is, they gain their reputation 'by doing favors to various citizens, defending them from the magistrates, assisting them with money and aiding them in getting undeserved offices, and by pleasing the masses with games and public gifts.' By contrast, divisions are beneficial to the common good if they are grounded on fair representation of social groups' interests – as opposed to corrupted individuals' interests – and when they help to make the whole republic great by giving guarantees of liberty and legality to all citizens.

DISCURSUS FLORENTINARUM RERUM POST MORTEM IUNIORIS LAURENTII MEDICES

After the death of the last legitimate lay male descendant, Lorenzo, in 1519, the two senior members of the Medici family, Pope Leo X and Cardinal Giulio, wanted to give the impression of intending to promote constitutional reforms. As a consequence, Florentine citizens were invited to propose their projects. Machiavelli, who was also commissioned to write the *Istorie Fiorentine* by Cardinal Giulio, answered the invitation.

At the very outset, Machiavelli points out the main reason for political instability in Florentine history, namely the absence of either a republic or a principality having the required features. No princedom can be stable if the one is in need of the approval of many; and no republic is 'fitted to last, in which there is no content for those elements (*umori*) that must be contented if republics are not to fall.' According to Machiavelli, the last Florentine republican *ordini* 'did not satisfy all the parties among the citizens; and, on the other hand, the government could not inflict punishment.' Florentine institutions lacked exactly the qualities of Roman *ordini* that are praised in the *Discourses*; namely the ability to meet the different *umori* of the citizens and to provide for public indictments.

'The reason why all these governments have been defective is that the alterations in them have been made not for the fulfillment of the common good, but for the strengthening and security of the party. Such security has not yet been attained, because there has always been in the city a party that was discontented, which has been a very powerful tool for anybody who wished to make a change.' In other words, Machiavelli claims that no party (*parte*) can attain security as long as not all of them are satisfied.

Since princedoms suit cities where inequality between the citizens is great, Machiavelli advises His Holiness to set up a well-ordered republic in Florence, for its citizens are well accustomed to equality. By saying this, Machiavelli is seemingly trying to place his own expertise at the Florentine republic's service, even if he can now do it only through the Medici family's authority.

Though Florentine citizens are accustomed to equality, they still belong – like citizens of all cities – to three different social classes, 'the most important, those in the middle, and the lowest', *primi, mezzani e ultimi*. To the *primi* 'it is not possible to give satisfaction unless dignity is given to the highest offices in the republic – which dignity is to be maintained in their persons.' These highest magistrates are the *Gonfaloniere* together with sixty-four citizens chosen for life to be 'the chief head and the chief arm' of the republic, namely the *Signoria*. The second rank in the state is to be constituted by a Council of Two Hundred, 'forty of them chosen from the minor guilds and a hundred and sixty from the major guilds; not one of them would be permitted to belong to the Sixty-five.'

A stable government is impossible without satisfying even the last class of citizens, namely 'the whole general body of citizens', *tutta la universalità dei cittadini*, which never will be satisfied in Florence if the *Gran Consiglio* is not reopened. This Council is to be formed by at least six hundred citizens, who would elect all the magistrates except the aforementioned Sixty-five and Two Hundred. His Holiness would appoint the latter and also manage to have his own friends amongst the Six Hundred.

Machiavelli, probably with irony, adds that if Leo X was going to live forever, nothing else apart from the aforementioned structure would be necessary. However, since His Holiness has

to die, some offices are to be provided in order to make a perfect republic, in accordance with Leo's own wishes.

Firstly, four Provosts are to be selected from the rank of common citizens with the only aim of observing the *Signoria* and the Two Hundred and of making these bodies abstain from harmful decisions by appealing to the Great Council. It may be noted that the Provosts' role is quite similar to the tribunes' *ius intercessionis*. However, there is an interesting difference between Machiavellian Provosts and plebeian tribunes: not only can the Provosts veto bad decisions – as tribunes did in ancient Rome, but they are also able to foster positive actions. Machiavelli's Provosts' office has the ability to combine democracy and governability.

Secondly, a Court of Appeal made up of thirty citizens is necessary to draw up a perfect republic. In the *Discursus,* as well as in *Discourses* I. 49, Machiavelli criticises the institution of the *Otto di guardia e balìa* – appointed in Florence mainly to inflict capital punishment on citizens – as they were too small a number and the few are always the servants of the few. By contrast, Machiavelli praises Roman institutions, in which the accused one could always appeal to the people, and the tribunes had the power to bring charges in court.

I wish to conclude the analysis of the *Discursus* by highlighting three points.

Firstly, it is important to remember that Machiavelli's constitutional project is based on the recognition of the different *umori* which constitute all cities. The few and the many have opposite interests, which have to be reconciled within checking and balancing constitutional orders.

Secondly, in the *Discursus,* only the stability of the state is at stake, whereas liberty is never mentioned as a value in itself. At the very end Machiavelli draws the conclusion that in order to prevent Florence from being harmed, it is necessary 'to give the city institutions (*ordini*) that can by themselves stand firm.'

Finally, Machiavelli, as has been extensively shown, clearly believes that popular agents of elite accountability are the most effective guarantee of a stable republic.

CONSIDERAZIONI SUI 'DISCORSI' DEL MACHIAVELLI BY FRANCESCO GUICCIARDINI

Guicciardini was banished from Florence in 1530 by the anti-Medici party who were in control of the Last Republic. He went to Rome in exile, in the hope of obtaining help from the Medici Pope Clement VII. In Rome Guicciardini had the chance to read the manuscript of the *Discourses*, which were expected to be published the following year. This gave him the opportunity to resume the conversation with his beloved dead friend, and to argue against the democratic convictions of his enemies.

Let us focus on *Considerations* on *Discourses* I. 4.

Discord between the plebs and the senate, Guicciardini asserts, was an illness, which cannot be excused by the goodness of its remedy. Indeed, he considers useful the fact that the nobles were forced to yield to the will of the plebs rather than to think of ways to avoid the need for them. In fact, even if in Guicciardini's ideal mixed government the *Ottimati* are expected to be able to govern with greater wisdom than the populace, they still need to be restrained from becoming arrogant oligarchs. In Rome, as long as the kings held power, the patricians could not oppress the plebeians, but when the kings were driven out the nobles became absolute arbiters of the city. Therefore, according to Guicciardini, tumults had a positive effect in that they prevented Roman nobility from becoming an oligarchy.

Guicciardini, as might be expected, is not a supporter of hereditary aristocracy. According to him, indeed, the aristocratic senate should be elected from the entire body of citizens, 'that is, from everybody legally eligible to take part in public officialdom'. This is because 'one may hope that each man who deserves it may enter; even if a few who are less than ideal enter, that is less troublesome than if some capable person were excluded.'

By contrast, Roman patricians were the aristocrats by right of birth and the division between patricians and plebeians gave rise to the harmful rebellion of the latter. If the plebeian leaders had not been deprived of the hope of being elected to the grade of patrician, the plebs would not have fought to obtain the tribunes, whose authority to propose law and to intercede harmed the republic. In fact, from Guicciardini's point of view, the people's political role should be confined to the appointment of magistrates and to the approval – and not to the discussion – of laws.

In my opinion, however, Guicciardini, in analysing the connection linking plebeian tumults and Roman *ordini*, fails to grasp the difference between two different kinds of historical connection, namely the cause-effect relation and the means-end relation. As has widely been shown, Machiavelli praises the plebs' tumults for they caused the legislation favourable to freedom as an effect. However, more importantly, plebeian tumults constituted the means deliberately chosen by the plebs in order to obtain liberty. By contrast, according to Guicciardini, had the plebeians not been unwisely oppressed by the patricians and formally excluded from all honours, they would not have struggled against the nobles. In other words, Guicciardini does not credit the populace with the capacity of autonomously pursuing political targets, especially freedom.

Not only does Guicciardini ignore the special sense of freedom of the plebs – as in fact he openly admits his total lack of understanding of *Discourse* I. 5's heading asking whether the guarding of liberty should be more safely entrusted to the people or the nobles – but he also confines their function to recognising the *virtù* of the few. In fact, the core of Guicciardini's concept of mixed government is the distinction between the many and the few. The former have to choose magistrates precisely because they are not capable of exercising power by themselves. More precisely, the role of the many consists in maximizing the impartiality of the government, namely in ensuring a disinterested selection of rulers and the subsequent transparency of

politics. By contrast, the few can govern because of the very same thirst for honour, which would turn them into arrogant oligarchs, had they not been publicly recognised by the many.

Thus, the model of government emerging in these pages can be labelled as a 'competitive meritocracy', in Pocock's words. As Pocock perfectly condenses: 'Meritocracy necessitates a measure of democracy. The *libertà* of the few is to have their *virtù* acknowledged by the *res publica*; the *libertà* of the many is to ensure that this acknowledgment is truly public and the rule of *virtù* and *onore* a true one.'

In contrast with Machiavelli, Guicciardini fails to recognize that wealth and birth necessarily spoil a 'competitive meritocracy'; and that power and glory are bound to corrupt even the most carefully selected rulers, who should therefore constantly be checked by the ruled.

CONCLUSION

Machiavelli, as we have seen, clearly endorses the conventional republican praise of mixed government as the most stable, both in his political thought and in his constitutional project. In fact, in the *Discursus* society is ruled by the one – the *Gonfaloniere* for life, the few – *Signoria* and Two Hundred, and the many – the Great Council.

Moreover, Machiavelli firmly supports the use of institutional devices – the *ordini* – in promoting and defending liberties, as opposed to resorting to 'personal ways' that would lead to factions. In every republic there are two dispositions, one seeking to preserve a privileged position and the other striving to achieve one. According to Machiavelli, in a well-ordered republic both parties have to defend their interests without going too far and should aim at making laws conducive to general liberties. This result can only be achieved through public magistrates who are called on both to represent and mediate among conflicting *umori*.

Nonetheless, Machiavelli is not impartial, as he firmly asserts that the safeguarding of liberty is more safely entrusted to the have-nots than to the haves, for at least three reasons. Firstly, since the latter are more powerful than the former, they are more dangerous to the republic. Secondly, since the populace is weaker, its main demand essentially consists in avoiding oppression. Granting such a request has the crucial effect of protecting the liberty of everybody else in society as well. Finally, the many are less easily exposed to corruption than the few.

However, the question about the nature of popular and aristocratic parties remains open. We have already seen in *The History of Florence* that modern social dynamics are much more complex than the ancient ones. Contemporary ones are even more intricate and tricky. That is the reason why I believe that, if we want to revive Machiavellian concepts of popular government and the elite's accountability, and to argue for their usefulness in the renewal and improvement of modern democracies, we should analyse thoroughly the contemporary forms of elitist oppression.

We should, in any case, bear in mind Machiavelli's enlightening lesson: real democracies cannot be grounded on competitive meritocracy, since the most coveted aim of political institutions, namely civic concord, can be threatened more strongly by vying individual ambitions than by conflicting, but well-ordered, social *umori*.

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