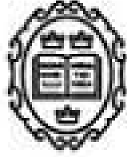

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*Machiavelli's Hybrid Republicanism**

It is a commonplace of scholarship on Machiavelli that he took great delight in paradox, expressing characteristic tensions and ambiguities in the form of apparent contradictions. The context of Machiavelli's times only amplified that intellectual tendency: he lived in an era of republics and despots; his own city's past and present were characterised by oscillation between the former and the latter; he held office as a republican official and as a Medicean appointee and he wrote for princes and republicans. Many scholars share the conviction that, just as the contradictions are the primary problem of Machiavelli scholarship, the paradoxes are likewise the primary solution to understanding the Florentine thinker and have consequently paid particular attention to them.[1]

The present article is both within that tradition and an attempt to get beyond it. Machiavelli's *Discorsi* contain unexamined and irreconcilable contradictions on the subject of citizenship, paradoxes that speak directly to the heart of his political thought and to the shortcomings of current interpretations of it. Simply put, on the surface the *Discorsi* are a commentary on the virtuous citizenry of ancient Rome and an exhortation for the moderns to imitate the ancients, but there are deeper axioms within that text which deny Rome's prescriptive value and even the possibility of the virtuous citizen. Understanding why such contradictory statements appear side by side leads to a better way of contextualising the *Discorsi* in the evolution of Machiavelli's thought and to recognising the hybrid nature of Machiavelli's later republicanism.

There is more at stake than another instance of Machiavelli's delight in paradox as a rhetorical device. The paradoxes of citizenship

*Thanks to Ed Muir, Ryan Hanley, Bill Connell and to *The English Historical Review*'s anonymous reader for helpful criticism of earlier drafts of this paper.

1. The most substantial debate in this tradition is the problem of Machiavelli as counsellor to tyrants and republics. See L. Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli* (Glencoe, 1958) and Machiavelli's republican rehabilitation by H. Baron, 'Machiavelli: The Republican Citizen and Author of "*Il Principe*"', *ante*, lxxvii (1961), 217–53, revised and repr. in H. Baron, *In Search of Florentine Civic Humanism: Essays on the Transition from Medieval to Modern Thought* (Princeton, 1988), vol. II, 101–51; G. Mattingly, 'Machiavelli's *Prince*: Political Science or Political Satire?', *The American Scholar*, xxvii (1958), 482–491; more recent examples include M. Dietz, 'Trapping *Il Principe*: Machiavelli and the Politics of Deception', *American Political Science Review*, lxxx (1986), 777–99; J. Langton and M. Dietz, 'Machiavelli's Paradox: Trapping or Teaching *Il Principe*', *American Political Science Review*, lxxxi (1987), 1277–88; M. Colish, 'Machiavelli's *Art of War*: A Reconsideration', *Renaissance Quarterly*, li (1998), 1151–68; S. de Maria, 'Machiavelli's Ironic View of History: the *Istorie fiorentine*', *Renaissance Quarterly*, xlv (1992), 248–70.

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suggest that the *Discorsi* should not be read as the self-contained and internally coherent summation of Machiavelli's thoughts on republics, but rather as a critical thinking through and comparison of Livy's history and his own experience. Reflection on ancient Rome led Machiavelli to elaborate one variety of republicanism in the *Discorsi*, but within that text there is clear evidence of ambiguity about the Roman example. In his later republican writing, which most recent Machiavelli scholarship overlooks, we see a republicanism built on different foundations from the *Discorsi* model, a new approach that synthesises Greek and Florentine traditions to produce a hybrid republican theory.

The paradox of citizenship in the *Discorsi* points to Machiavelli's rejection of the assumptions of classical republicanism and marks a crucial and under-appreciated transition in his own analysis of power. If the frame of reference is restricted to *Il Principe* and the *Discorsi*, we are confronted by a classical paradox. If the frame of reference is expanded, however, if we historicise our reading of his corpus, interpret the key texts less in terms of regime preferences and more in terms of an adaptive dialogue about the structure and exercise of power, we see a broad transformation in his thinking about power from an early focus on individuals to a later sociological analysis of power rooted in frank scepticism about the limits of individual action.[2] His earlier works saw power, politics and reform in terms of individual action and potential, irrespective of a princely or republican context, but by his later works Machiavelli had concluded that the effective exercise of power and genuinely transformative political action transcend the capability of single individuals. For this reason, it is problematic to speak of Machiavelli's republicanism or republican theory; we should instead recognise discrete and contrasting earlier and later republicanisms.

The bulk of this article is devoted to an explication of those dilemmas of citizenship in the *Discorsi* and to showing how Machiavelli's approach to politics has changed in his later works. Once one recognises the paradoxes of citizenship, however, a number of historiographical revisions, substantive and methodological, necessarily follow. The quarrel here is with scholars associated with the 'Cambridge school',

2. J. M. Najemy, 'Machiavelli and the Medici: The Lessons of Florentine History', *Renaissance Quarterly*, xxxv (1982), 551–76, makes the same argument about Machiavelli's conception and understanding of princely and Medicean power.

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most notably Quentin Skinner, but also Maurizio Viroli, Gisela Bock and J.G.A. Pocock.[3]

Given the stakes involved, the assumptions shared by Skinner and others should be made explicit:

1. *Machiavelli as humanist.* Machiavelli is presented as affirming central operating assumptions of the humanist approach to politics, notably in the vocabulary of civic virtue.
2. *The* Discorsi *as an expression of traditional republicanism.* Many radical qualities of *Il Principe* are frequently invoked, but the *Discorsi* are interpreted as consistent with the classical and neo-Roman tradition.
3. *Machiavelli's thought as static.* Machiavelli's corpus is interpreted and read as having sprung forth fully formed, each text internally consistent and externally consistent with the others.

Each of these assumptions about Machiavelli is problematic and contributes to the apparent abundance of paradoxes that so confound modern Machiavelli scholarship. En route to demonstrating the paradoxes in the *Discorsi*, explaining their significance for historicising Machiavelli's thought in context and to recognising how his understanding of power changed over time, each of these assumptions will require a closer look and a good dose of qualification.[4]

3. For a general analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the Cambridge group's approach to history, see my 'Hedgehogs and Foxes: the Present and Future of Renaissance Intellectual History', *Past and Present*, cxcv (2007), 241–68. For a discussion of the origins of the Cambridge school and Skinner's role within it, see K. Thomas, 'Politics: Looking for Liberty', *New York Review of Books*, lii, 9 (2005). By Cambridge school, I refer to scholars (many but not all of whom studied at Cambridge) who approach the history of political thought employing the linguistic and contextual methodologies established at Cambridge University in the 1960s by Quentin Skinner, J.G.A. Pocock, Peter Laslett and John Dunn. The Cambridge contextualists combined a traditional emphasis on text and language with the then novel demand that a text's meaning must be situated within and related to its intellectual and linguistic contexts. The authors associated with the Cambridge school with whom I specifically engage in this essay are those who have written extensively on Machiavelli—Skinner, Pocock, Maurizio Viroli and Gisela Bock—though proponents of the 'Cambridge' contextual approach write on a wide variety of subjects (notable adherents include Richard Tuck, Mark Goldie and Istvan Hont). The approach advocated by Skinner and Pocock has now become firmly established through Cambridge University Press' series *Ideas in Context* and *Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought*, for both of which Skinner is a series editor.

4. Skinner's arguments have not gone without criticism. Some have challenged his sense of the unity of thought among the *dictatores*; his explication of humanism's origins; his omission of medieval and monarchical appropriation of Roman models. See P. Jones, *The Italian City-State*, (Oxford, 1997) 460; R. Witt, 'Medieval "Ars dictaminis" and the Beginnings of Humanism: A New Construction of the Problem', *Renaissance Quarterly*, xxxiii (1982), 1–35; Witt, '*Footsteps of the Ancients*', 5–6; J. Blythe, *Ideal Government and the Mixed Constitution in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, 1992). Cary Nederman and Paul Rahe have critiqued Skinner's Machiavelli, Nederman on the grounds that Skinner failed to appreciate the plurality of ancient republican models, and hence to whom Machiavelli was actually indebted, and Rahe on the grounds that Machiavelli's rejection of the classical principle of differential rationality severed all ties between the Florentine and his Greek and Roman predecessors. Nederman, 'Rhetoric, Reason, and Republic', 247–269 and Rahe, 'Situating Machiavelli', 270–308.

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Skinner's aim in explicating the history of political thought has been to demonstrate the existence and importance of a republican tradition in the Western world, initially identified as 'classical' and then as 'neo-Roman'. His neo-Roman republicanism reflects a *longue-durée* of linguistic communities, articulators of shared values connecting the ancient and early modern worlds.[5] He deployed neo-Romanism and its long genealogy of theorists to demonstrate the existence of a better alternative to the gothic theories of negative liberty advanced by Hobbes, Locke and Mill, later taken up by Isaiah Berlin, John Rawls, Robert Nozick and others.[6] Renaissance political philosophy had few contributors as sophisticated as Locke and Hobbes, so it is unsurprising that Skinner's neo-Roman tradition finds its fullest early modern expression in Machiavelli's *Discorsi*, the only work from Renaissance Italy that holds it own against the *Leviathan* and the *Two Treatises*.

As the crucial proponent of neo-Romanism, it is essential for Skinner that Machiavelli be a traditional thinker, someone who grew out of the humanist milieu and who respected their language of civic virtue. Although he acknowledges moments where Machiavelli deviated from humanist assumptions, Skinner's Machiavelli is in every important sense consistent with the humanists and *dictatores*.[7] Skinner made this argument most forcefully in 1990 and has defended it in recent publications.[8] In 2000, he argued that '... the most original and creative aspects of his political vision are best understood as a series of polemical—sometimes

5. Q. Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, vol. I (Cambridge, 1978); *Machiavelli* (Oxford, 1981); *Liberty Before Liberalism* (Cambridge, 1998); *Visions of Politics*, vol. II (Cambridge, 2002). On Skinner, see J. Tully, ed., *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and His Critics* (Cambridge, 1988); for a critical view of the 'Cambridge school', see J. McCormick, 'Machiavelli Against Republicanism: On the Cambridge School's 'Guicciardinian Moments', *Political Theory*, xxi (2003), 615–43; for important evaluations of it, see J. Hankins, 'Introduction', 1–13; C. Nederman, 'Rhetoric, Reason, and Republic: Republicanisms—Ancient, Medieval, and Modern', 247–69; P. Rahe, 'Situating Machiavelli', 270–308, all in J. Hankins, ed., *Renaissance Civic Humanism: Reappraisals and Reflections* (Cambridge, 2000); work by proponents of the Cambridge school, M. Viroli, *Founders: Machiavelli* (Oxford, 1998); P. Pettit, *Republicanism: A theory of freedom and government* (Oxford, 1999).

6. Q. Skinner, 'The Idea of Negative Liberty: Philosophical and Historical Perspectives', in R. Rorty, J.B. Schneewind and Q. Skinner, eds., *Philosophy in History* (Cambridge, 1984), 193–221; revised and repr. as 'The Idea of Negative Liberty: Machiavellian and Modern Perspectives', in *Visions of Politics*, vol. II (2002), 187–212; J. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Mass. 1971); I. Berlin, *Two Concepts of Liberty* (Oxford, 1958); R. Nozick, *Anarchy, State and Utopia* (New York, 1971); for a dissenting view shared by Skinner, see C. Taylor, 'What's Wrong with Negative Liberty?', in A. Ryan, ed., *The Idea of Freedom* (Oxford, 1979), 175–93.

7. For problems with this assumption, see my review of *Visions* in *Sixteenth Century Journal*, xxxvi (2005), 522.

8. Q. Skinner, 'Machiavelli's *Discorsi* and the Pre-Humanist Origins of Republican Ideas', in Q. Skinner, M. Viroli and G. Bock, eds., *Machiavelli and Republicanism* (Cambridge, 1990), 141; Skinner revised and restated the argument in Skinner, 'The Vocabulary of Renaissance Republicanism: A Cultural *longue-durée*?', in A. Brown, ed., *Languages and Images of Renaissance Italy* (Oxford, 1995), 87–110; see also Skinner, 'Political Philosophy', in C. Schmitt, Q. Skinner, E. Kessler and J. Kraye, eds., *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1988), 389–452; the similar argument of M. Viroli, *From Politics to Reason of State: The Acquisition and Transformation of the Language of Politics* (Cambridge, 1992), 154–77.

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even satirical—reactions against the humanist assumptions that he inherited and basically continued to endorse'.[9] In 2002, he wrote: 'Turning sharply away from his impulsive endorsement of princely government, Machiavelli proceeded to devote the years between 1515 and 1519 to the development of a passionate, almost nostalgic restatement of the republican case. The assumptions and vocabulary of the *Discorsi* look back not merely to the republicanism of Leonardo Bruni and his followers a century earlier. They also look back to the ideology of the communes ..., thereby offering a brilliant restatement of a number of age-old questions about the values of elective and self-governing systems of rule.'[10]

The connections between Machiavelli and the humanists extend to *Il Principe* as well: 'Turning to the means by which a prince can hope to win power and glory, Machiavelli again discloses his essentially humanist allegiances'.[11] In some important respects, the tradition in question extends far beyond Machiavelli and the humanists. 'We may say that, in the evolution of modern political theory, there have been two main approaches to this theme. One stresses that government is effective whenever its institutions are strong, and corrupt whenever its machinery fails to function adequately.... The other approach suggests by contrast that if the men who control the institutions of government are corrupt, the best possible institutions cannot be expected to shape or constrain them, whereas if the men are virtuous, the health of the institutions will be a matter of secondary importance. This is the tradition of which Machiavelli and Montesquieu are the greatest representatives ....'[12] The latter assumption was at the heart of humanist politics, since the universal answer during the Renaissance of how to create virtuous citizens was through education and advice, the prime *métier* of the humanists—an answer that endowed their particular skills with appeal to princes and republicans alike.[13]

9. Q. Skinner, *Machiavelli: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, 2000), ix. It remains unclear to me why Machiavelli would defend values he believed in by satirically mocking them.

10. Q. Skinner, 'Republican Virtues in the Age of Princes', in *Visions of Politics*, vol. II, 149.

11. Skinner, 'Republican Virtues', 144.

12. Skinner, *Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 44–45; his binary classification of political theory is also discussed in this context by J. Hankins, 'Humanism and the Origins of Modern Political Thought', in J. Kraye, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Humanism* (Cambridge, 1996), 118–141.

13. Hankins, 'Humanism and the Origins of Modern Political Thought', 118–123; D. Cantimori, 'Rhetoric and Politics in Italian Humanism', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, i (1937), 83–102; L. Jardine and A. Grafton, *From Humanism to the Humanities: Education and the Liberal Arts in Fifteenth and Sixteenth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, Mass. 1986); P. Grendler, *The Universities of the Italian Renaissance* (Baltimore, 2004); but for a powerful dissenting view, see R. Black, *Humanism and Education* (Cambridge, 2001); 'Education and the Emergence of a Literate Society', in J. Najemy, ed., *Italy in the Age of the Renaissance 1300–1550* (Oxford, 2004), 18–36; 'École et société aux XIVe et XVe siècles. Le témoignage des *ricordanze*', *Annales HSS*, lix (2004), 827–846.

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Skinner's interpretation of Machiavelli as a traditional thinker whose major arguments restated venerable axioms of Florentine humanist and republican traditions is consistent with interpretations offered by other Cambridge theorists such as Pocock, Viroli and Pettit.[14] The most influential fellow-traveller with Skinner is J.G.A. Pocock, whose *Machiavellian Moment* has enjoyed an influence no less substantial than Skinner's writings.[15] Pocock's Machiavelli had many of his 'themes and values stated for' him by the *quattrocento* humanists, themselves refashioning the Aristotelian republicanism to the Florentine city-state context.[16] Maurizio Viroli's monograph on Machiavelli is an impassioned defence of Machiavelli's essential orthodoxy, conventional political piety and deep intellectual debt to Cicero, Quintilian and the Florentine rhetoricians.[17] Although less specifically concerned with the particularities of the Florentine tradition than Skinner, Pocock or Viroli, Philip Pettit's analysis of the republican interpretation of freedom placed Machiavelli squarely in a venerable republican tradition that originated with Cicero and culminated in Madison.[18]

Their view of Machiavelli as a traditional thinker is an influential one, and a number of historians and theorists not associated with the Cambridge school share their way of thinking.[19] Felix Gilbert consistently interpreted Machiavelli as a gifted but conventional articulator of the assumptions frequently raised in the *consulte e pratiche* deliberations of the republic of 1494–1512.[20] James Hankins made similar comparisons

14. It should be acknowledged, however, that notable differences exist within and between the Cambridge theorists. For example, Skinner's student Eric Nelson argues that Machiavelli should not be understood as a straightforward example of either Greek or neo-Roman republicanism, though Nelson acknowledges both the presence and significance of the neo-Roman tradition in early modern Europe. E. Nelson, *The Greek Tradition in Republican Thought* (Cambridge, 2004), 49–86.

15. Skinner and Pocock differ on the linguistic and conceptual origins of Renaissance republican writing, the former emphasising its debt to the Romans and the latter to the Greeks, but both agree on Machiavelli and Guicciardini's continuity with fifteenth-century humanists. See J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, 1975), 86; for a good discussion of the significance of their views on the origin of Italian republicanism, see Rahe, 'Situating Machiavelli', 274.

16. Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*, 86.

17. Viroli, *Machiavelli* (Oxford, 1998).

18. P. Pettit, *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government* (Oxford, 1997).

19. Skinner and the Cambridge theorists have been far more influential in Anglo-American scholarship on Machiavelli than in French or Italian. I suspect that this is so not because of substantive interpretative disagreement, but because the continental tradition had long been committed to a particularly Florentine contextualisation of Machiavelli. Studies by Mario Martelli, Federico Chabod, Gennaro Sasso, Carlo Dionisotti, Jean-Jacques Marchand and Denis Fachard have provided outstanding studies of Machiavelli's language and genetic analyses of his texts, as well as critical editions of key contextual documents, such as the *consulte e pratiche* from 1502 to 1512. These scholars are in general not as interested as the Cambridge theorists in determining Machiavelli's place in the broad trajectory of western political theory, which gives them little motive for debating Skinner, Pocock or Pettit's genealogy of republicans; they have produced highly contextualised readings of Machiavelli as a distinctly Florentine thinker, which gives them equally little motive for commenting on Skinner's methodological pronouncements on context.

20. F. Gilbert, *Machiavelli and Guicciardini: Politics and History in Sixteenth-Century Florence* (Princeton, 1965). For an insightful account of Gilbert's changing views of Machiavelli's debt to the humanists, see W.J. Connell, 'The Republican Idea', in *Renaissance Civic Humanism*, 17.

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between Machiavelli and the humanists: while acknowledging notable departures, he nevertheless concluded that Machiavelli 'believed that encouraging virtue among the ruling classes was the most effective means of reform' and that Machiavelli 'was more interested in changing political culture than political institutions'.[21] Donald Herzog agreed with Skinner that Machiavelli advanced a theory in which private vices could be transformed into public virtues.[22] In his analysis of the origins of civil society in Italy, Robert Putnam invoked a similar Machiavelli, to whom he attributes the argument that the success or failure of free institutions depends 'on the character of the citizens, or their civic virtue'. Putnam broke down the proper 'character' of the citizenry into its constituent parts: civic engagement, political equality, solidarity, trust, co-operation and associations.[23]

There are nevertheless two structural problems with Skinner's Machiavelli: the first rooted in internal contradictions in Skinner's writings and the second rooted in the *Discorsi* itself. The first problem results from inconsistency. On the one hand, Skinner recognises the revolutionary qualities of Machiavelli's thought and the degree to which he was unconstrained by tradition; but on the other hand, he wishes to locate in Machiavelli's writings deep continuities with humanists, *dictatores* and ancient Romans. This requires a feat of intellectual dexterity of which even the formidable Skinner is not always capable.

Skinner offers us contradictory Machiavellis. We see at one moment a 'neo-Roman such as Machiavelli' who writes a 'sarcastic repudiation of … the values of Ciceronian humanism …'.[24] On that crucial divide between reform through individuals or institutions, Skinner declared in 1978 that Machiavelli exemplified the former approach, but in 1981 emphasised Machiavelli's conviction that to understand Rome's greatness, 'we need above all to study her *ordini*—her institutions, her constitutional arrangements, her methods of ordering and organising her citizens'.[25] He assessed Machiavelli's praise of Roman tumults as running 'counter to the whole tradition of republican thought in Florence …' in which 'Remigio, Latini, Compagni, and above all Dante had issued fierce denunciations of their fellow-citizens for endangering their liberty by refusing to live in peace', concluding that Machiavelli was 'unrepentant in his attack on this orthodox belief'.[26]

If Machiavelli is the greatest example of neo-Roman republicanism and the political theory he espoused repudiated the entire Florentine

21. Hankins, 'Humanism and the Origins of Modern Political Thought', 134.
22. D. Herzog, 'Some Questions for Republicans', *Political Theory*, xiv (1986), 488.
23. R. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton, 1993), 86–91.
24. Skinner, *Machiavelli*, 62.
25. Skinner, *Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 44–5, 69.
26. Skinner, *Machiavelli*, 75–6.

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republican canon, is it logically reasonable also to assert that Florentine political theory was essentially neo-Roman? Skinner suggests that it was, since nine years later he asserted that the 'essence of Machiavelli's republicanism' was 'a wholehearted defence of traditional republican values ...' presented '... in a wholeheartedly traditional way'.[27] But one cannot have it both ways: Machiavelli cannot simultaneously attack medieval and Renaissance traditions and also articulate through the same texts a traditional political philosophy.

Skinner argued that a correct procedure for writing 'a history of political theory with a genuinely historical character' should be to situate texts within a broad linguistic matrix, enabling us to understand to what extent authors rejected convention and to what extent they affirmed it—'to see things their way'.[28] As Skinner himself observed, Machiavelli frequently emphasises the degree to which he departs from conventional wisdom, the degree to which he seeks new modes and orders, new questions and new answers. And judging from Machiavelli's context, these statements were not hyperbole. His contemporaries recognised in Machiavelli a new set of radical, and frequently objectionable, hypotheses. Guicciardini's criticism is most famous, but other Florentines such as Alessandro Pazzi responded similarly, as did those outside the Florentine orbit such as Reginald Pole.[29] Only by privileging certain sources at the expense of others can one conclude, as Skinner and Viroli have done, that Machiavelli was reiterating traditional Florentine assumptions, in spite of what nearly all of his sixteenth-century readers thought.[30]

The same objection applies to Skinner's characterisation of Florentine republican literature in the sixteenth century as part of a traditional preoccupation with inculcating civic virtue in the citizenry. Machiavelli was a lonely voice in commending Roman tumults. Nearly all of his contemporaries had their eyes squarely fixed on Venice, the site of putative civic harmony. As Pocock explained so influentially, in Florentine eyes the great achievement of Venetian republicanism was having

27. Skinner, 'Machiavelli's *Discorsi* and the pre-humanist origins of republican ideas', 141.

28. Skinner, *Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, xi, and later rephrased as 'a history of philosophy written in a genuinely historical spirit' in Skinner, *Visions of Politics*, vol. I, 3.

29. F. Guicciardini, *Considerazioni intorno ai* discorsi *del Machiavelli*, in C. Vivanti, ed., *Niccolò Machiavelli, Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Tito Livio* (Turin, 1983), 550–76; see also N. Rubinstein, 'Guicciardini Politico', in *Francesco Guicciardini 1483–1983: nel V centenario della nascita* (Florence, 1984), 161–89; R. Pole, *Apologia ad Carolum Quintum*, in A.M. Quirini (ed.), *Epistolae*, vol. I (Brescia, 1744–57), 136–52; abridged English translation in J. Kraye, ed., *Cambridge Translations of Renaissance Philosophical Texts*, vol. II (Cambridge, 1997), 274–87; on Pole and English anti-Machiavellism, see F. Raab, *The English Face of Machiavelli: A Changing Interpretation, 1500–1700* (London, 1964); A. Pazzi, *Discorso di Alessandro de' Pazzi, al Cardinale Giulio de' Medici.—Anno 1512*, in G. Capponi, ed., *Archivio Storico Italiano*, i (1842), 425. On Machiavelli's reception in the sixteenth century, see S. Anglo, *Machiavelli: The First Century. Studies in Enthusiasm, Hostility, and Irrelevance* (Oxford, 2005).

30. For Skinner, see note 22; M. Viroli, *Machiavelli* (Oxford, 1998); *Niccolò's Smile* (New York, 2000).

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mechanised virtue, relocating it from the moral character of the individual citizen to a complex set of procedures that confounded the individual's inevitable attempts to vote according to factional interest.[31] Judging from the context and from Machiavelli's contemporaries, there was a clear shift from a *quattrocento* focus on individuals to a *cinquecento* focus on institutions, and Machiavelli, at least as Skinner has defined him, constitutes a departure from convention, not a restatement of it.

One need not go further than the *Discorsi* to recognise that Machiavelli was not straightforwardly championing classical or traditional republicanism.

Skinner and Pocock are expert readers of texts, and Machiavelli does indeed write these things that the traditionalists attribute to him. But several key passages from the *Discorsi*—in which Machiavelli subverts his own models—substantially undermine the notion that he was offering a programmatic and unqualified republicanism. The history of the Roman republic was teeming with extraordinary individuals, beneficial to the republic and harmful; and while Machiavelli certainly admires those heroic individuals and their contribution to Roman greatness, he nevertheless reveals recurring anxieties about the actual impact of the virtuous citizen on the state, the way he will be perceived by his fellow citizens and the psychological similarity between the capable, ambitious citizen and the aspiring tyrant.

These doubts challenge Machiavelli's alleged continuity with *quattrocento* republicanism. Skinner and Pocock concur that Machiavelli was a humanist, at least to the extent that he believed one could create a strong and stable state by concentrating on inculcating the right character in individual citizens. There are certainly incidental arguments to that effect throughout the *Discorsi*. But there are also deeper arguments that the properly constituted state must endure in spite of its citizens, not because of them.

The heart of the issue is the perception of human nature. The dignity of man was a common theme of Renaissance humanism, Platonism and Aristotelianism.[32] For many humanists, human nature is responsive to rhetoric, exhortation and moral stimulus, and for the truly virtuous, their natures are therefore perfectable. Giannozzo Manetti and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola are the most famous contributors to this genre,

31. Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*, 284–85.

32. G. Gentile, 'Il concetto dell'uomo nel Rinascimento', in Gentile, ed., *Il pensiero italiano del Rinascimento* (Florence, 1940), 47–113; C. Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness: Humanity and Divinity in Italian Humanist Thought*, vol. I (London, 1970), 171–323. There were dissenting texts, however, such as Poggio Bracciolini's *On the Misery of the Human Condition*. P. Bracciolini, *De Miseria Conditionis Humanae*, in *Opera Omnia*, ed. Fubini, vol. I, 88–131; partial translation in J. Kraye, ed., *Cambridge Translations of Renaissance Philosophical Texts*, vol. I (Cambridge, 1997), 18–26.

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each arguing that man's inherent rationality and freedom enabled him, with the aid of philosophy, to perfect his nature.[33] Even a philosopher like Marsilio Ficino shared the humanist outlook. His argument for the immortality of the soul expressed in the *Platonic Theology* included a similar defence of the dignity of man.[34] Pomponazzi's Aristotelian response similarly argued that the true end of human existence was happiness, achieved not by contemplation but by the active performance of the virtues, which he further argued was attainable by all.[35]

Such views lent themselves perfectly to the humanist educational argument that a liberal education prepared citizens and princes for informed and wise political lives. The major educational humanist treatises of the Renaissance all asserted that readers trained by the classical canon would become morally and ethically improved, better able to exercise the classical virtues in the political arena.[36] And, as James Hankins observed, the humanist view of the individual's capacity for virtue was connected to the entire humanist resurrection of the active life, since the arena of politics provided the best location to practise the virtue and achieve its rewards of glory and fame.[37]

For Machiavelli, however, human nature is static and incapable of change, even for the most virtuous. He states this bluntly in the preface and then returns to it throughout the work. Although many people take great delight in reading about ancient deeds, he writes, they are not moved to imitate them, judging it impossible, 'as if the sky, the sun, the elements, men were any different from what they were in antiquity'.[38] And in 1:11: '... as I said in the preface, men are born, live and die, always, with the same nature'.[39] In 1:58 he points out that the apparent contrast between the methods of people and princes 'does not arise from a different nature—because it is the same in all men ...'.[40] On the subject of national traits, he writes: 'Prudent men say—and not by

33. G. Manetti, *On the Dignity of Man*, in *Two Views of Man*, ed. B. Murchland (New York, 1966), 61–103; G.P. della Mirandola, *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, in *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man*, ed. E. Cassirer, P.O. Kristeller and J.H. Randall Jr (Chicago, 1948), 223–54. On Manetti, see E. Garin, *Italian Humanism: Philosophy and Civic Life in the Renaissance* (New York, 1965), 56–60; for a more politicised reading, see L. Martines, *Power and Imagination* (New York, 1979), 214–17.

34. M. Ficino, *Platonic Theology*, ed. M.J.B. Allen and J. Hankins (Cambridge, Mass. 2001–), vol. 1, 231–47; vol. 4, 169–182; vol. 4, 241–248. On this subject, see P.O. Kristeller, *The Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino* (New York, 1943), 407–20.

35. See P. Pomponazzi, *On the Immortality of the Soul*, in *Renaissance Philosophy of Man*, 280–381. On Ficino and Pomponazzi, see P.O. Kristeller, 'Ficino and Pomponazzi on the Place of Man in the Universe', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, v (1944), 220–6.

36. See the treatises by P.P. Vergerio, L. Bruni, A.S. Piccolomini and B. Guarino, in C. Kallendorf, ed. *Humanist Educational Treatises* (Cambridge, Mass. 2002), 2–309.

37. Hankins, 'Humanism and the Origins of Modern Political Thought', 126.

38. Machiavelli, *Discorsi*, 76. Throughout, I have used for translation A. Gilbert, *Machiavelli: The Chief Works and Others*, (3 vols, Durham, 1958), though occasionally with my own alterations.

39. Machiavelli, *Discorsi*, 95

40. Machiavelli, *Discorsi*, 141.

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chance or without merit—that he who wishes to see what has to be, ought to observe what has already happened.... The reason for this is that, since they are carried out by men who have and always have had the same passions, of necessity the same results appear.'[41]

Human nature is also depraved and short sighted. 'As is demonstrated by all those who consider the well-ordered state—and history is full of examples—it is necessary for him who lays out a republic and arranges laws in it to presuppose that all men are evil and they will always act with the wickedness of their spirits whenever they have the chance.'[42] For Machiavelli, human wickedness is a consistent axiom that informs all of his analyses.

The certainty of selfishness is not only something a lawgiver should bear in mind in a republican context but also equally central to the maintenance of princely governments. In *Il Principe*, Machiavelli observes that princes should not always practise the traditional virtues because they are an ethical code that invites self-destruction in a world of permanently self-interested citizens.[43] He concludes that it is better to be feared than loved 'because we can say this generally about men: they are ungrateful, fickle, simulators and dissimulators, shirkers of danger, eager for gain ... [and] because love is held by a chain of duty which, since men are bad, they break at every chance for their own profit, but fear is held by a fear of punishment that never abandons you'.[44] The conviction of permanent human weakness is central to the *Istorie fiorentine*, the *Capitolo dell' ambizione* and *La Mandragola*.

Because men never do good except by necessity, fear becomes a crucial element in the proper configuration of the city. Machiavelli argues that the tyranny of the Tarquins had the beneficial effect of keeping the nobility humble, since they feared the Tarquins and therefore had to respect the people, who might not take the noble's side if treated badly. The people realised this only after the expulsion of the Tarquins. Since the people no longer had a powerful ally, the nobles were no longer compelled to respect them and spat 'out against the people the poison they had kept in their breasts, and injured them in any way they could'.[45] In place of the expelled Tarquins, Rome needed an institution that the nobles would fear as much as they had Tarquinian autocracy—hence the creation of the Tribunes of the People, who not only had the power to forbid decrees by noble magistrates but also had the authority to have put to death anyone who obstructed the proper exercise of their office—in short, people whom the Roman nobles had very good reason to fear.[46] Without such fear,

41. Machiavelli, *Discorsi*, 250.
42. Machiavelli, *Discorsi*, 201.
43. Machiavelli, *Il Principe*, 280.
44. Machiavelli, *Il Principe*, 282.
45. Machiavelli, *Discorsi*, 82.
46. Machiavelli, *Discorsi*, 83.

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they could always be counted on to rule according to destructive factional interests.

Machiavelli returns to the constitutive role of fear in his discussion of the importance of political renovation. By 'renovation', he refers to the process by which people's fear of transgressing the law is periodically re-established, and the most reliable process is draconian punishment, whether in ancient Rome or contemporary Florence. He praises the salutary effects on the Roman people of the republic's frequent use of the death penalty.[47] In the Florentine example, Machiavelli notes that the Medici and their partisans often remarked that every five years they needed to retake the state or risk losing power. He then elaborates on the meaning of 'ripigliare': as the Mediceans used the term, it meant restoring that same sense of terror and fear in the people as they had initially inspired on first seizing the government. 'When the memory of such punishment disappears, men take courage to attempt innovations and to speak evil ....'[48] John Najemy has argued that this passage parodies the concept of cycles, but nothing about it appears satirical—it is merely an extension of Machiavelli's frank recognition of the necessity of fear in a well-ordered state.[49]

For an alleged Aristotelian, classical or neo-Roman republican, there is little trace of the notion of establishing the right education for the city's ruling families to ensure that the aristocracy maintains a view of the common good, in whatever manner, form or variation, however distant. Humanists such as Pier Paolo Vergerio and Leonardo Bruni advanced the Aristotelian argument that education in and consideration of the moral virtues will transform citizens into inspired and selfless leaders, and the same argument is at the heart of the civic construct advanced by Skinner and Pocock.[50] Machiavelli does add that Roman citizens benefited from good education, but his consequent elaboration reveals that education is incidental, a by-product of the much more substantive Roman conflicts, whose origins and features are structural and institutional.[51]

The passage on human selfishness that opens the *Discorsi* does not just seem to contradict the humanist sense of how to achieve the proper governance of states; it is part of a larger pattern in Machiavelli's writing that he specifically deploys against the humanists. In chapter fifteen of *Il Principe*, he argues that apparent virtues are often not real ones and

47. Machiavelli, *Discorsi*, 196.

48. Machiavelli, *Discorsi*, 421.

49. Najemy, 'Machiavelli and the Medici', 562.

50. Kallendorf, *Humanist Educational Treatises*, 2–91, 92–125; see also A. Grafton, 'Humanism and Political Theory', in J.H. Burns, ed., *The Cambridge History of Political Thought, 1450–1700* (Cambridge, 1991), 9–29; Book VIII of Aristotle, *The Politics*, ed. T.A. Sinclair (London, 1962), 451–76.

51. Machiavelli, *Discorsi*, 82.

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that any man who makes it his business to be good will surely be destroyed among so many who are not good. When he remarks that he will be thought conceited since he departs so strikingly 'from the methods of others' in a discussion of the illusory qualities of the classical cardinal virtues, he is all but explicitly condemning the naïveté of humanist political argument.[52]

In the preface to the *Istorie fiorentine*, Machiavelli faulted his humanist predecessors Leonardo Bruni and Poggio Bracciolini for their reluctance to acknowledge or reflect upon Florentine factional strife.[53] He issues another critique in the *Istorie*, in his discussion of the cycle of political affairs and the way in which philosophy tends to prosper only after excellence in arms. It cannot be a coincidence that this discussion opens the chapter of the *Istorie* that begins with Cosimo de' Medici's triumph over the Albizzi faction and his ascendancy in the city. Book five is the *terminus a quo* for his history of Florence under the *quattrocento* Medici, and it begins with a discussion of the civic danger of 'letters', what Machiavelli calls *onesto ozio*. 'Because after good and well-disciplined armies have brought forth victory, and their victories quiet, the virtue of military courage cannot be corrupted with a more honorable laziness than that of letters; nor with a greater and more dangerous deception can this laziness enter into well-instituted cities.'[54] Given Cosimo's public association with Bruni, Ficino and Poggio, Machiavelli's discussion of the dangers of literary study, especially considering its location in the larger narrative of Florentine discord and failure, implies that the political lessons of the humanists helped corrupt the Florentines.[55]

Because of these operating assumptions, Machiavelli cannot be a proponent of the civic virtue approach to political theory. He is an awkward exemplar, as Skinner would have it, of the view that where the citizenry are 'virtuous, the institutions of government are of secondary importance', since he frequently asserted that the individual is never virtuous nor will ever be so.

The most immediate reason why Machiavelli should not be associated with the humanist way of thinking about politics is that he issued so many blunt rejections of that view. If we remain unsatisfied with his

52. Machiavelli, *Il Principe*, 280.

53. Machiavelli, *Istorie fiorentine*, 632–3; Gilbert, 'Machiavelli's *Istorie fiorentine*', 83–95; J.M. Najemy, 'Baron's Machiavelli and Renaissance Republicanism', *American Historical Review*, ci (1996), 119–29; J.M. Najemy, '*Arti* and *Ordini* in Machiavelli's *Istorie fiorentine*', in S. Bertelli and G. Ramakus (ed.), *Essays Presented to Myron P. Gilmore* (florence, 1978), vol. I, 161–91; A.M. Cabrini, *Per una valutazione delle 'Istorie fiorentine' del Machiavelli. Note sulle fonti del secondo libro* (Florence, 1985).

54. Machiavelli, *Istorie fiorentine*, 738.

55. I have elaborated Machiavelli's observation in more detail in my 'Civic Humanism and the Rise of the Medici', *Renaissance Quarterly*, lii (1999), 994–1020.

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own declarations, however, his distance from that tradition can be inferred directly from the *Discorsi*.

Machiavelli begins that work by identifying the features of the Roman republic that made it great and enabled it to survive, prosper and expand. His analysis looks at the role of laws in restraining the people and obstructing their passions, at institutions whose primary function was to limit the damage caused by the innate, inevitable and harmful political instincts of the citizens. This conviction led Machiavelli to make the shocking argument that the conflicts between the people and the senate were the key to Rome's greatness.[56] While most Florentines lamented the apparently petty squabbles of Rome's internal history, Machiavelli recognised that the by-products of those conflicts, chronic mutual suspicion and fear, inspired the specific content of the laws he so admired, in particular the system of public indictments that kept aristocratic ambitions in check.[57]

Consider Rome's laws, institutions and the model of citizenship and political problems that they imply. The key insight emerges in I:3: '... hunger and poverty make men industrious, and the laws make them good'.[58] From the onset, Machiavelli makes clear that he is thinking about the compulsion of citizens, about preventing them from acting according to their instincts, not of transforming their characters from essentially corrupt to essentially virtuous. People do not *become* good through the laws, or anything else for that matter; they are compelled to be good by being restrained from acting badly, just as they do not become naturally industrious, but are compelled to be so by hunger and poverty.

Machiavelli explores this assumption in several passages. Since men's 'ability appears the more where choice has less power', it would seem wiser to establish cities in barren sites, where human industry must compensate for what the environment and nature lack.[59] He explains, however, that security requires power and power requires the kind of wealth that only fertile areas can provide, so cities should be founded on fertile sites. The material fact of reasonably easy and affluent living will necessarily result in the laziness of its inhabitants, so the city should establish laws that '... force upon her those necessities which the site does not force upon her ...'.[60]

Religion compelled desirable actions and social laws prevented undesirable ones. Since the Romans feared breaking oaths more than

56. Machiavelli, *Discorsi*, 82–3.
57. Machiavelli, *Discorsi*, 87–8.
58. Machiavelli, *Discorsi*, 82.
59. Machiavelli, *Discorsi*, 77.
60. Machiavelli, *Discorsi*, 78. On this subject, see H. Mansfield, *Machiavelli's Virtue* (Chicago, 1996), 57–78.

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the laws, religion and the manipulation of religion helped Roman leaders compel people to carry out actions that they would be unwilling to do by nature, and Machiavelli provides several examples of religion's power to coerce otherwise self-interested political actors.[61] Social laws in Rome performed the inverse function. '[T]here existed the basic organisation of the government or, better, of the state; and after that the laws which, along with the magistrates, restrained the citizens.... They varied the laws that restrained the citizens, such as the law about adultery, the sumptuary law, that on canvassing for office, and many others ...'[62]

Because the Romans had institutions for bringing public charges, their political life did not suffer from the introduction of outside forces to settle factional disputes. But lest there be any doubt as to where to assign blame when one party in a city summons foreign arms, Machiavelli makes clear that one can hardly blame the individuals in question, since all people share the same essential evil humors and will therefore share the same inclination to act in a destructive manner. 'Whenever one sees foreign forces called by one party of men that live in a city, one can be certain her bad constitution is the cause, since inside the city's wall she has no method by which, without unlawful measures, the malignant humors that spring up in men can find vent.'[63]

There is an unresolved conceptual paradox at the heart of the *Discorsi* that further distances Machiavelli from the civic virtue construct. He operates for the most part on the assumption that people are wicked, self-interested and unreliable, and therefore that the wise republic should establish laws and institutions that obstruct such behaviour to minimise its bad effects. But he also recognises that virtuous and capable individuals frequently appear in public life, and indeed that no republic can hope to last if it cannot periodically rely on individuals of exceptional virtue during moments of crisis.

Such an observation is by itself relatively unremarkable, but in Machiavelli's thinking it speaks directly to a deeply rooted suspicion that, if unobstructed by the state, the virtuous citizen and the aspiring tyrant are the same person at different stages of development. The fundamental character traits that make men ambitious and capable will necessarily also make them arrogant and power hungry. Obstruct their ambition, and one denies the republic the full benefit of their talents; but acknowledge and permit the full expression of their talent, and one encourages the hubris that leads to tyranny and the erosion of liberty. The classical and humanist models of politics strive to create virtuous

61. Machiavelli, *Discorsi*, 93–5.
62. Machiavelli, *Discorsi*, 102–3.
63. Machiavelli, *Discorsi*, 88.

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citizens, but for Machiavelli the virtuous citizen is as much a republican problem as he is a solution.

We see this tension in several passages. For example, the well-organised republic should never forgo punishing a citizen who has acted badly, no matter how great and beneficial their otherwise salutary actions for the republic was. Machiavelli uses the example of Horatius, who performed a great service to the republic by overcoming the Curatii, but who also committed the crime of killing his sister, for which he was brought to trial for his life. Machiavelli explains that to some it might appear that the republic acted with ingratitude to Horatius, whereas he believes that the fault of the city lay in acquitting him. The simple conclusion is that 'no well-ordered republic ever cancels the demerits of its citizens with their merits ...'[64] If a good citizen performs good deeds, he will gain reputation and will inevitably acquire such 'boldness and confidence that without fear of penalty he does some deeds that are not good ... [and] will soon become so arrogant that all free government will disappear'.[65]

The paradox is most clear in Machiavelli's discussion of how to maintain a free government in a corrupt city. To remain effective, the laws must be revised to accommodate the nature of the people—laws formed when a people are relatively virtuous will not have the same effectiveness and will not perform their intended functions if the people have become corrupt. Machiavelli traces the decline of Roman virtue and shows its reflection in their laws. Initially, respect for religion, laws regulating slander and the right to bring public charges against the rich were adequate, but over time the Romans became increasingly corrupt and needed further restraint, hence the promulgation of laws regulating adultery, dress and elections.[66]

But he concludes that it is 'almost impossible' in actuality for a city successfully to reform its laws, and the reasons again are rooted in Machiavelli's sense of human nature. To replace the laws a little at a time, as circumstances dictate, requires prudent men 'who can see these evils at a great distance', and such men are rare; furthermore, it requires that the people collectively display foresight about their laws and traditions, since their assent is necessary. Virtuous individuals may have those traits, but in Machiavelli's estimation most people are short sighted, thoughtless and inflexible—rendering impossible that method of reform.

The other alternative is to replace all the laws all at once, to impose them on unwilling people. But since the laws themselves are the problem, they can hardly be the conduit of reform. This solution

64. Machiavelli, *Discorsi*, 108.
65. Machiavelli, *Discorsi*, 108.
66. Machiavelli, *Discorsi*, 102–3.

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requires a virtuous and ambitious individual to transgress the laws, attain authority through unlawful means and then to reshape the legal structure. But such a method is equally problematic, though, since to '... reorganise a city for living under good government assumes a good man, and to become prince of a state by violence assumes an evil man .... Anyone who tries to bring [the city] back to equality must use entirely extralegal means, such as few can or will use, as elsewhere I show in more detail.'[67] The good citizen may desire the ends, the reformation of law for the common good, but will be loathe to undertake the means, the violent seizure of authority; whereas the bad citizen will eagerly embark on the means, but will do so to establish tyranny.

Machiavelli's pessimism in this instance is merely a variation of a more universal dilemma that pervades the *Discorsi*, a paradox in the concept of citizenship: ineffective people make good citizens and effective people temporarily make great citizens, but even better tyrants. Greatness for a state can only be attained through the actions of individuals willing to give full expression to their energies, talents and ambition, but the psychology of such individuals implies egoism, violence and tyranny.[68]

Machiavelli recognises this in the original act of fratricide that began Roman history. In Livy's narrative, Romulus and Remus inherited the family curse of 'desire for kingly supremacy'. They became rivals, ambiguous auguries led the people to divide into two camps, and 'from a war of words, anger quickly turned them to bloodshed' and Remus' murder.[69] As sole sovereign, Romulus gave his name to the city. The very name of the great republic Rome thus recalls individual action in the form of tyrannical ambition, egoism and fratricide.

Cicero was troubled by the circumstances of Rome's foundation and he condemned the egotistic ambition of Romulus.[70] It is true that Machiavelli challenges Cicero, defending Romulus with the argument that only single individuals can found good states and that Romulus killed his brother not for his own benefit but for the common good. But throughout the *Discorsi* he returns to the tensions of that moment in ways that suggest a deeper discomfort with the conclusions he has drawn from it about autocratic power and the establishment of republics.[71]

We should not be surprised by Machiavelli's conclusion that, given the stuff of humanity, corruption and decline are inevitable. It is merely

67. Machiavelli, *Discorsi*, 102, 104.

68. Burckhardt's sense of the Renaissance 'state as a work of art' was rooted in the same argument. J. Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (New York, 1954), 3–44.

69. T. Livy, *The Rise of Rome*, T.J. Luce ed. (Oxford, 1998), 10–11.

70. Cicero, *On Duties*, M.T. Griffin and E.M. Atkins ed. (Cambridge, 1991), 115; see W. Nicgorski, 'Cicero's Focus: From the Best Regime to the Model Statesman', *Political Theory*, xix (1991), 230–51.

71. Machiavelli, *Discorsi*, 90–1.

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an extension of the first thesis that introduces the *Discorsi*. In the early pages of book one, he invokes Aristotle's typology of the six forms of government, the three good models—monarchy, aristocracy and popular government—and their corrupt counterparts—tyranny, oligarchy and anarchy. The forms of good government are highly unstable, and each degenerates into its counterpart because the external differences between good and bad are too subtle for all but the wise to discern, leaving the multitude deceived and unable to comprehend the transformations of their own states. 'Hence if a founder of a state organizes one of these three governments in a city, he organises it there for a short time only, because no precaution can be used to make certain that it will not slip into its contrary, on account of the likeness, in this case, of the virtue and the vice.'[72]

The similarity of virtues and vices is a recurring problem in Machiavelli's analysis. To demonstrate the merits of temporising in the face of a challenge, rather than rash confrontation, he considers Cosimo de' Medici's ascent in Florence. Cosimo inspired fear in his rivals due to his exceptional reputation and influence, the product in part of his own talents but also of the lack of perception of the multitude, leading the more perceptive minority unwisely to attack him and ultimately pave the way for his ascension in the city. As the chapter heading makes clear, Cosimo was a political problem, though the vast majority failed to recognise that in him precisely because he displayed so clearly the classical virtues: magnanimity, liberality, learning and generosity.[73]

In Skinner's discussion of this passage, Machiavelli is described as asserting that 'the price of liberty is eternal vigilance …' and that '… it is essential in the first place to learn the danger-signals—to recognise the means by which an individual citizen or a political party may be able to get more power than is safe'.[74] But Machiavelli is arguing something rather different. The moral of the passage is that, *given the impossibility of recognising dangers in time*, it is always best to temporise than to attack. He elaborates in detail on the impossibility of recognising early danger signals. The evil of a tyrannical citizen or group may eventually become clear, but always after it is too late and too dangerous to confront it. 'Many times … a citizen is allowed to get more power than is safe …; then this mistake is allowed to run on so far that to attempt a remedy is more harmful than to let it go on. Moreover, the recognition of these evils when they spring up is more difficult inasmuch as it appears more natural for people always to approve the beginnings of things … if in a state a young noble appears who possesses extraordinary ability, all the citizens turn their eyes toward him and agree, without reservation, in

72. Machiavelli, *Discorsi*, 79.
73. Machiavelli, *Discorsi*, 115–16.
74. Skinner, *Machiavelli*, 75.

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honoring him. Hence, if he has a bit of ambition ... he soon gets to such a place that, if the citizens realize their mistake, they have few methods for putting a stop to the process, and if they try to make use of all those they have, they do nothing else than hasten his rise to power.'[75] To read this passage as an exhortation to recognise early dangers is to invert Machiavelli's argument. The moral of the anecdote is the virtue of temporising.

Machiavelli reiterates this problem on the subject of Medici power in the *Istorie fiorentine*. He has Niccolò da Uzzano assert: 'We are motivated by the fear that Cosimo wishes to make himself prince of this city. But if we see things this way, others do not ... The things that make us suspect him are these: that he helps everyone with his money, not only individuals, but the government as well, and not merely the Florentines, but their hired military captains, too; that he helps this and that citizen who needs favors from the magistrates; that through his favour with the common people, he brings this and that friend of his to higher political honours. Thus, it would be necessary to claim that our reasons for driving him out are that he is compassionate, helpful, liberal and universally loved .... And although these are all methods that propel men who aim to establish a principate, nonetheless they are not seen as such.'[76] As Machiavelli sees it, the virtues themselves are the best mask for deceit and ambition.

We see again the similarity of virtue and vice in his discussion of Francesco Valori in the *Discorsi*. Valori exhibited none of the virtues so shrewdly displayed by Cosimo. He was frankly arrogant and ambitious, and therefore perceived as someone likely to transgress lawful government. His rivals formed a faction to counter his influence; he likewise formed a counter-faction; and the inevitable result was that many citizens were hurt in the ensuing confrontation.[77] Machiavelli returned to the problem posed by Francesco Valori in *Nature di huomini fiorentini* and concluded that Valori was fundamentally misunderstood by many. His patriotism, though passionate and often arrogant, was sincere. He laboured to defend the republic, but ultimately was brought down and assassinated because he was wrongly seen as harbouring tyrannical ambitions.[78]

75. Machiavelli, *Discorsi*, 115.

76. Quoted from Najemy, 'Machiavelli and the Medici', 570; Machiavelli, *Istorie fiorentine*, 731–3.

77. Machiavelli, *Discorsi*, 87–8.

78. Machiavelli, *Nature di huomini fiorentini et in che luoghi si possino inserire le laude loro*, 918. My reading of this passage has changed from my earlier view in 'Machiavelli's Sketches of Francesco Valori', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, lxiii (2002), 185–206. I initially argued that Machiavelli's sketch of Valori in *The Natures of Florentine Men* was entirely dissembled, and that he believed none of the things that he had written. I now think that Machiavelli's praise of Valori's patriotism was sincere, though I still stand by my assessment of his omission of Valori's alliance with Savonarola and his insistence that Valori did not participate in 1494 coup against the Medici. I discuss this in more detail in my *Guardians of Republicanism: The Valori Family in the Florentine Renaissance* (Oxford, forthcoming).

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In the case of Francesco Valori, the people saw a threat where there was none and acted, creating vicious factional antagonisms. In the case of Cosimo de' Medici, the people failed to see a threat where there was a great one and failed to act. In both cases, the problem was exactly the similarity of the virtues and vices, rendering the majority unable to make meaningful distinctions between good and bad motives, actions and personalities. If, as Machiavelli sees it, the majority cannot tell virtue from vice, whether assessing constitutional forms or individual citizens, how can it be asserted that he advocates a classical or neo-Roman republicanism of virtue? How can any politics of virtue, for that matter, whether cardinal or Machiavellian, possibly be constructed when few can appreciate the difference between a virtue and a vice?

In place of the dilemma of Machiavelli as republican or counsellor to tyrants, there now appears to be a substantial internal paradox within the *Discorsi*. How do we make sense of a republican text that extols the virtues of ancient Rome, analyses and praises famous Roman individuals and yet also contains a probing critique of the possibilities of individual action? In a political world where the virtues and vices are all but indistinguishable, the virtuous citizen will be perceived as dangerous, creating factional discord, and the aspiring tyrant will be perceived as classically virtuous, creating the conditions for tyranny. When the survival of the republic requires a reformation in the laws, the virtuous will refuse to transgress public authority for the common good, leaving the path wide open for the wicked to assume control for themselves, invoking a hollow and deceitful common good. And most citizens will not even notice the difference.

The apparent paradox is exacerbated by a tendency to reduce Machiavelli's political imagination to a binary alternative of *Il Principe* or the *Discorsi*, with each text read as an internally consistent final statement. In particular, Skinner and Pocock have been reluctant to consider Machiavelli's thought in terms of historical process, of multiple texts and change over time. Given Skinner's highly persuasive and influential procedural prescriptions for situating texts with sensitivity to local contexts and linguistic conventions, it is surprising that he has not systematically attempted to consider Machiavelli within the context of his early and later works.[79]

The paradox diminishes if we expand the focus to include Machiavelli's later republican treatise, the *Discursus florentinarum rerum post mortem iunioris Laurentii Medices*, a republican treatise built out of different

79. In *The Machiavellian Moment*, Pocock refers twice to the *Discursus florentinarum rerum post mortem iunioris Laurentii Medices* (hereafter *Discursus*) (203, 242) and twice to the *Istorie Fiorentine* (186, 273), both in passing. In vol. II of *Visions*, Skinner does not mention the *Discursus* and refers only twice, also in passing, to the *Istorie fiorentine*. His monograph on Machiavelli also does not mention the *Discursus*, and devotes only ten pages to the *Istorie fiorentine*.

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principles from the *Discorsi*.[80] By 1520, when he was commissioned by Leo X to propose a constitutional reform for Florence, his thinking had changed in significant ways, leading him to revise a number of critical assumptions from *Il Principe* and the *Discorsi*. In the *Discursus*, Machiavelli proposes a hybrid republicanism that fuses an Aristotelian politics of common ends and purposes with radical institutional innovation.

The *Discursus* is a particularly useful text because it is prescriptive. It is safer to make assumptions about how Machiavelli felt a republic should be constructed from a text commissioned by the very powers about to undertake the constitutional rearrangement of Florence; and he had good reason to believe, more at this moment than at any other period of his life, that the Medici were willing to listen to him. Najemy discussed Machiavelli's historical writings in terms of a broad arc in which an initial early interest in Roman history was superseded by Florentine history—and this, of course, had to be the case, since he was at the same time finally returning to Florentine public life in his capacity as the official historiographer of the city.[81] Whereas the *Discorsi* grew out of the discussions at the Orti Oricellari and were dedicated to former politicians cast down from influence and public power, the *Discursus* grew out of Machiavelli's long sought-after reconciliation with the Medici and his return to Florence. And whereas the *Discorsi* blended theory with practice, the *Discursus* spoke directly to the world as it was in Machiavelli's eyes.

The following analysis is indebted to Najemy's insights about the transformation in Machiavelli's thinking of the nature and structure of princely power. Najemy argued that Machiavelli's treatment of the Medici family in the *Istorie fiorentine* revealed his final act of 'self-liberation from the myths of *The Prince*'.[82] In *Il Principe*, the earliest of Machiavelli's political works (1513), he saw princely power in terms of virtually unbounded potential: a prince of sufficient sagacity and *virtù* could become a trans-historical reformer and redeemer of states, a lawgiver in the mould of Solon, Theseus or Romulus. Already in the *Discorsi*, his fascination with power began to shift from the individual

80. These two texts were both commissioned by the Medici and are conceptually and textually linked. The *Istorie fiorentine* contains a reference to the *Discursus* that indicates Machiavelli's expectation that the two texts should be read as interconnected. N. Rubinstein, 'Machiavelli e le origini di Firenze', *Rivista storica italiana*, lxxix (1967), 958; M. Marietti, 'Machiavel historiographe des Médicis', in A. Rochon, ed., *Les Ecrivains et le pouvoir en Italie à l'époque de la Renaissance* (Paris, 1974), vol. II, 109; G. Bock, 'Civil Discord in Machiavelli's *Istorie fiorentine*', in *Machiavelli and Republicanism*, 190.

81. On Machiavelli's acquisition of Medici patronage, see Gilbert, 'Machiavelli's *Istorie Fiorentine*', 83–95; on his earlier connections to the Medici, see M. Martelli, 'Preistoria (medicea) di Machiavelli', *Studi di filologia italiana*, xxix (1971), 377–405; also R. Fubini, 'Machiavelli, i Medici, e la storia di Firenze nel Quattrocento', *Archivio storico italiano*, clv (1997), 127–41.

82. Najemy, 'Machiavelli and the Medici', 574.

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power of the prince to more collective structures and institutions, though clear traces of the prince-redeemer remained.[83]

By the *Istorie fiorentine*, Machiavelli's thinking about the rise of the Medici, the nature of their power, and the scope of action available to them suggested to Najemy that he had demythologised the figure of prince-redeemer considerably further. Even the most virtuoso, charismatic leader of the *quattrocento* Medici, Lorenzo the Magnificent, was as much a prisoner of the factional system through which he operated as he was its *maestro*. By the 1520s, Machiavelli saw power as a more subtle and difficult problem, 'a complex network of factions and competing ambitions, of consensus and power', in which 'the prince could only maintain the system, not change it'. Najemy concluded that the 'lesson of Florentine history seemed to be that one man can actually do very little unless aided by others and the times'.[84]

My analysis shows that Machiavelli's thinking about the role and nature of the citizen underwent a similar transformation. His increasing awareness of power as a broad social phenomenon, something which necessarily had to operate through factions and fragile consensus and that constrained as much as it empowered, applied equally to citizens and clients of factions as it did to princes and heads of factions. Just as the *Discorsi* was the moment of transformation in Machiavelli's thinking about princes, so too was it the moment of transformation in his thinking about citizenship.

For Machiavelli, politics strongly influenced by an individual, whether a wise prince or a virtuous republican citizen, will always end badly. Such a conclusion is hardly surprising, given his context. Najemy speculated that Machiavelli's views of princely power and the Medici changed as a result of his sustained reflection during his years of exile on Florentine history during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. To Najemy's explanation, I would add that reflection on Machiavelli's own recent past and present could only have increased his doubts about the capacity of individuals to act effectively in politics. He admired virtuous republican figures such as Savonarola and Soderini, yet for all their virtues, their regimes ended in disaster. He admired princely figures

83. J. Najemy, 'Machiavelli The Political Theorist', in P.F. Grendler, ed., *Encyclopedia of the Renaissance*, vol. IV (New York, 1999), 1–8.

84. Najemy, 'Machiavelli and the Medici', 574–5. One might push Najemy's argument further: Machiavelli's appreciation of the ubiquity of factions and the difficulty of managing, let alone transcending, them led him to question the structural distinction between princely and republican regimes in anything other than their pure forms. He emphasises the degree to which the substance of both regimes' politics consist of factions, fragile consensus and leaders constrained by their following. In the *Discursus* (27), he observes that a prince without a nobility cannot support the weight of a princedom. In a similar vein, Machiavelli wrote two years later to Raffaello Girolami about the duties of ambassadors, and observed that an effective ambassador 'knows well the nature of the prince *and those who control him* ... (italics mine)'. Machiavelli, *Advice to Raffaello Girolami*, in *Machiavelli: The Chief Works*, vol. I, 116.

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such as Cesare Borgia, who in his estimation did most things right, but whose state nonetheless imploded overnight upon his death. Machiavelli's own career hardly contradicted these examples. As he saw it, he had served the republic loyally and capably, yet was one of the very few chancery officials to lose their jobs after the fall of the republic.[85] He shunned conspiracies and was later to mock and denounce their viability, yet was arrested, tortured and humiliated because the Medici had a misguided perception of his personality. He desired to serve the Medici as he had the republic, yet for all but his last years had failed even to get their attention.

If we read the *Discorsi* as an interrogative, rather than prescriptive, text, we begin to see why Machiavelli admired heroic individual citizens of the Roman republic, but also advanced arguments about human nature and passion that deconstruct the ancient narratives of virtuous citizenship and that expose them as myths.

Machiavelli cast his republican template for remodelling Florence less in the classical vocabulary of individuals and virtue and more in terms of institutions and collective structures of power that transcend individual influence.[86] The Medici commissioned the *Discursus* and the *Istorie fiorentine* in the same year (1520), and both texts suggest he had worked through the limitations of constructing a political solution to society's problems by considering the needs and habits of individuals, whether illustrious members of a powerful family or rank-and-file republican citizens. The *Discursus* allocates power through complex congeries of social groups, seeks always to distribute authority as broadly as possible and systematically diminishes the significance of individual offices, in comparison to collective councils—which suggests that Machiavelli had not forgotten his implicit argument in the *Discorsi* that when power operates through individuals the result will always be bad, whether innately or because of perception.

If we accept Skinner's reading of the *Discorsi*, that for Machiavelli the 'exhilarating hope ... is that if we can find the cause of Rome's success, we can repeat it', we face a difficult question about his republican blueprint for Florence: why is there not *one single reference* to Rome, to Livy, to a Roman statesman, or to any Roman example whatsoever?[87] We need not infer his attempt to think beyond the Roman model since he tells us directly of his intention. Machiavelli begins by declaring that new types of government are necessary—new to his entire way of

85. R. Black, 'Machiavelli, Servant of the Florentine Republic', 71–100 and Najemy, 'The Controversy Surrounding Machiavelli's Service to the Republic', 101–18, both in *Machiavelli and Republicanism*.

86. Sasso recognised Machiavelli's departure in this text from earlier arguments, characterising it as 'bizzarria' and 'di ingegnosa stravaganza'. Gennaro Sasso, *Niccolò Machiavelli: storia del suo pensiero politico* (Naples, 1958), 450–53.

87. Skinner, *Machiavelli*, 59.

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thinking.[88] By 1520, he has no intention of attempting or even desiring to imitate the Roman model. He does not invoke it, does not defend his proposal by establishing Roman precedent and abandons many arguments from the *Discorsi*.

Machiavelli recommends the wholesale abolition of all major institutions of the republican tradition.[89] In their place, he suggests a hierarchy of interdependent councils, each the exclusive voice of the three types of citizen: the old aristocratic families, the middle ranks and the people.[90] From the small but powerful aristocracy, a committee of sixty-five will be elected for life and will assume the responsibilities of the abolished *Signoria*. From the larger circle of middling families, a committee of 200 will be elected for life and will assume the responsibilities of the abolished councils. From the people, a committee of 1000 would reassume the functions of the Great Council. They would elect all the offices of the republic except the members of the Sixty-Five and Two Hundred. Thirty citizens from the Sixty-five and Two Hundred would form a court of appeal.[91] From the sixteen *gonfalonieri*, none of whom could be selected from the Sixty-five and whose tenure would be restricted to one month to help distribute the office more widely through the city, four rotational provosts would be chosen, either by the Medici or by the council. Enactments of the councils of the Sixty-five and Two Hundred would require the presence of two provosts to be valid; not only would their presence during deliberation be required but also they would have the right to veto and appeal the legislation.[92]

Maurizio Viroli and Gisela Bock, the two scholars associated with the Cambridge school who discuss this text, have concluded that it argues for civic equality and equal access to political office. Viroli wrote: 'Machiavelli's message is unequivocal: if a *vivero politico* is to be preserved, the highest magistracies must be open to the best citizens. The example to be followed once again is that of the Roman republic'.[93] And Bock: Machiavelli's equality is 'legal and political, meaning equality before the law and equal access to office'.[94] Viroli makes explicit the traditional

88. Machiavelli, *Discursus*, 25.

89. The *Signoria*, the *Otto di pratica*, the *Dodici buonuomini*, the councils of the seventy, hundred, people, and commune.

90. Machiavelli, *Discursus*, 27–8.

91. Machiavelli, *Discursus*, 28–30.

92. Machiavelli, *Discursus*, 29–31. Though Machiavelli acknowledges earlier in the *Discursus* that Florence cannot continue with a leader (*capo*), the treatise as a whole undermines that statement, concluding with a vision of government devoid of individual leadership.

93. M. Viroli, 'Machiavelli and the Republican Idea of Politics', in *Machiavelli and Republicanism*, 154–5.

94. Bock, 'Civil Discord in Machiavelli's *Istorie fiorentine*', 189. Far from the earlier connection made in the *Discorsi* between strict equality and republicanism, by the later writings equality has become a republican problem, not a solution. Bock in particular should recognise the argument against strict equality in the *Discursus*, since she observes in the same essay that Machiavelli has reversed his earlier position: in Rome, equality and discord were sources of Roman greatness, but in Florence, equality and discord are the causes of Florentine weakness. See also Mansfield, *Machiavelli's Virtue*, 137–75.

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elements in Machiavelli's proposal: in 'connecting *politico* with civic equality, [Machiavelli] followed a convention of the republican political language of his time and restored a principle that Cicero and Livy recommended as the necessary foundation of the *respublica*', reiterating the argument of 'republican writers and their humanist disciples' that the republic should allow for 'equal access to the highest offices on the basis of virtue'.[95]

None of these statements can be substantiated by the text. Machiavelli neither distributes office on the basis of virtue nor does he provide for equality of access, and he certainly does not make any statement to the effect that the highest offices should go to the 'best citizens'. In spite of the nominal equality of citizens that prevails in Florence, he explains that 'nonetheless some of her citizens have ambitious spirits and think they deserve to outrank the others; these must be satisfied in organizing a republic'—hardly a ringing endorsement of the 'best citizens'.[96] He characterises such citizens as 'important, influential, weighty', but nowhere implies a natural elite of exceptional virtue, merely a traditional aristocracy with traditionally egocentric views about their own importance. They must be placated, neither because they are virtuous nor because their service is superior, but because their wealth makes them dangerous when discontent. To satisfy them, Machiavelli's model strictly regulates access to office on the basis of social position. The aristocrats exclusively dominate the top executive councils; the middle ranks exclusively control the legislative councils and the people control the Great Council that appoints the minor magistracies.[97] Machiavelli advocates regulated access to office, but nothing even remotely like equal access to office.

His system of interlocking councils reveals that his thinking about the nature of liberty has changed from his earlier works—notably the complete disappearance of any notion of negative liberty. In key passages of *Il Principe* and the *Discorsi*, he attributes to the majority a negative view of liberty. In political terms, the people merely wish not to be oppressed; in economic terms, they wish to live in prosperity and security. Skinner's reading of the republicanism of the *Discorsi* persuasively showed that the text fused negative and positive conceptions of liberty.[98] At heart, Machiavelli's view of liberty was negative, defined quite explicitly as freedom from external constraint.[99] He reasoned,

95. M. Viroli, 'Machiavelli and the republican idea of politics', 154.
96. Machiavelli, *Discursus*, 27.
97. Machiavelli, *Discursus*, 27–9.
98. Q. Skinner, 'Machiavelli on the Maintenance of Liberty', *Politics*, xviii (1983), 3–15; revised and republished as 'Machiavelli on *virtù* and the Maintenance of Liberty', in *Visions of Politics*, vol. II, 160–185.
99. Machiavelli, *Discorsi*, 78–9.

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however, that one would always remain a slave if one had to depend on others for that freedom, that if one enjoyed freedom from constraint but was not involved in the state that granted it, one enjoyed a freedom that was transient and accidental rather than structural and permanent. So one needed an instrumental sense of positive liberty, an extrinsic virtue that guaranteed the intrinsic virtue of negative liberty—hence the necessity of participating directly in the common enterprise of government. Skinner situated Machiavelli squarely in the neo-Roman camp precisely because of his combination of the two conceptions of liberty.[100]

Machiavelli's earlier view of the contrasting nature of nobles and the people accounted for several arguments from the *Discorsi*, most famously that the people are better guardians of liberty than nobles, since 'that thing which is to be guarded ought to be done by those who have the least desire of usurping it'.[101] By the *Discursus*, Machiavelli sees the people and the nobility equally in terms of positive liberty: their desires are equally political, the problems they pose are identical and the solutions are identical—realising a form of government that gives them each their voice and role in the common enterprise of governing. He has abandoned the conceptual vocabulary that enabled him to argue that the people are better guardians of liberty, and not surprisingly, he has not attempted to incorporate that argument into the republican model of 1520. The safeguard of liberty is the dispersal of authority equally throughout multiple and mutually interdependent councils that each reflect the three broad social groupings of the city. Machiavelli has turned much more sharply towards an Aristotelian politics of common goals and purposes, in this case defined as the collective political self-expression of the entire *polis*.[102]

Machiavelli begins the *Discursus* with a critique of the Albizzi, *quattrocento* Medici and Soderini regimes. Each failed to recognise the basic insight at the core of his solution: because political impulses are universal and inescapable, any enduring regime must provide for the political engagement of all its citizens. He proceeds to discuss the third rank of citizens, the populace: 'It is now left to satisfy the third and final class of men, which is *the whole general body of citizens, who will never be satisfied (and he who believes differently is not wise) if their power is not restored* or if they do not have a promise that it will be restored ... (italics mine) ... without satisfying the generality of the citizens, to set

100. Skinner, 'Machiavelli on *virtù*', 162–3.

101. Machiavelli, *Discorsi*, 83.

102. He also makes the Aristotelian argument that the greatest good one can achieve is the foundation of a good republic, citing Plato, Aristotle, Solon and Lycurgus (but no Romans). Machiavelli, *Discursus*, 30–1. On Aristotle's views of political founders, see P. Rahe, 'The Primacy of Politics in Ancient Greece', *American Historical Review*, lxxxix (1984), 265–93.

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up a stable government is always impossible'.[103] Machiavelli's use of 'satisfaction' implies participation for its own sake in the deliberations of government.[104] 'We do not see also how the generality of the citizens can be other than satisfied, seeing that part of the allotments have already been made [for them] and the others seem as though little by little they would fall into their hands.'[105] In his later republicanism, the people have become irreducibly political.

The same shift in Machiavelli's republicanism can also be detected by the omission of any reference to economic prosperity. In his earlier writing, he frequently connects stable government and material prosperity.[106] The connection stems from his earlier conviction that the generality of the citizens wish merely not to be oppressed and securely to enjoy the fruits of their labour. In short, they wish to enjoy a negative variety of liberty, understood in distinctly material terms. But in the *Discursus* Machiavelli neither warns the Medici against disrupting trade and levying extraordinary taxation nor exhorts them to concentrate on rebuilding the Florentine economy, stifled during the depredations of war. The surest route to building allies is to establish formal outlets for the people's political identities.

Machiavelli's silence on economic questions is all the more striking if we compare the *Discursus* to roughly contemporaneous and similar texts commissioned by the Medici from leading figures in their party. Alessandro Pazzi, Roberto Acciaiuoli and Luigi and Francesco Guicciardini wrote similar *Discorsi* on rebuilding Medici power and they all argued that restoring material prosperity was sufficient to satisfy the people.[107] Machiavelli and the other Medicean advisors agreed on the perilous fragility of Medici rule in Florence, but only he had little regard for the economy. The *palleschi* urged the concentration of power

103. Machiavelli, *Discursus*, 28–9.

104. This is in contrast to the *Discorsi*, in which active political participation is merely instrumental, a precondition of security. Skinner's reading of the *Discorsi*, I: 3–4 is persuasive: the political self-expression of the Roman people was not innate, but derived from oppression or fear of oppression. The Tribunes of the People therefore were created not to complete the people's collective personality or make them fully realised, but merely to prevent oppression by the nobles, thereby guaranteeing the real virtue of security. Skinner, 'The Idea of Negative Liberty', 197–8.

105. Machiavelli, *Discursus*, 30.

106. In *Il Principe* and the *Discorsi*, he argues that to win the people's favour the prince should promote trade and respect private wealth. Machiavelli, *Il Principe*, 292–3; *Discorsi*, 92–3. In the *Discorsi*, one of the key attributes and characteristics of free government is the prosperity of its citizens. Machiavelli, *Discorsi*, 148.

107. G. Capponi, ed., *Discorsi intorno alla riforma dello stato di Firenze (1522–32)*, *Archivio Storico Italiano*, i (1842), 420–67; on these texts, see my 'The Guicciardinian Moment: The *Discorsi Palleschi*, Humanism, and Aristocratic Republicanism in Sixteenth-Century Florence', in C. Celenza and K. Gouwens, eds., *Humanism and Creativity in the Renaissance: Essays in Honor of Ronald G. Witt* (Leiden, 2006), 111–37; F. Gilbert, 'Alcuni discorsi di uomini politici fiorentini e la politica di Clemente VII per la restaurazione medicea', *Archivio storico italiano*, xciii, 2 (1935), 3–24; R. Devonshire-Jones, *Francesco Vettori: Florentine Citizen and Medici Servant* (London, 1972), 239–44; R. von Albertini, *Das florentinische Staatsbewusstsein im Übergang von der Republik zum Prinzipat* (Berne, 1955), 186–99.

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in the hands of an aristocratic senate and specifically argued that the people would assent so long as they were spared extraordinary taxes.[108] They displayed the same view of the people's favour evident in Machiavelli's early works: it is invested only in states that do not intrude upon the enjoyment of their labour. There is a causal connection between that view and the emphasis they placed on rejuvenating the city's economy. But Machiavelli has no interest in considering questions of finance and taxation—so long as the people are engaged in the state their satisfaction can be relied upon.

Machiavelli has introduced a number of crucial variations from the republicanism of the *Discorsi*. He initially argued that anyone intent on renovating a city's government should maintain at least a shadow of the old structures and political forms: '... you ought to strive to have these upsetting changes retain as much of the old as is possible, and if the magistrates are different ... [t]hey should at least keep their names ... And this is to be observed by all those who wish to wipe out an old form of government in a city and bring in a new and free form of government'.[109] Machiavelli was urging the Medici to accomplish precisely that, to reject the city's defective traditions and establish a pure republic, but his procedures, reforms and names were intentionally different. It now appears that he favours root-and-branch reform.

He has also embraced a Venetian style of mechanised virtue, rooted in elaborately balanced and interlocking councils, and for the first time has accepted as legitimate the institutional power of the aristocracy and has given them top tier posts for life, much like the Venetian republic. He assures Pope Leo that it will operate independently of papal supervision, that he 'need keep only half an eye turned on it'.[110] The reliability of the system is institutional and procedural, not personal—reminiscent again of the Venetian model.

Machiavelli's later sense of power as a broad social manifestation led to a corresponding expansion in his sense of the social composition of the state. In *Il Principe* and the *Discorsi*, he frequently observes that every state, whether princely or republican, consists of two parts: the nobility and the people. By 1520, he has introduced a third category of analysis: the middle ranks, a class with their own sense of identity, solidarity and interests. Machiavelli now concludes: 'Those who organize a republic ought to provide for the three different sorts of men who exist in all cities, namely, the most important, those in the middle, and the lowest'.[111] The Roman republic may have prospered

108. Acciaiuoli, 450; Pazzi, 422, 425, 426–7, 430–31; Vettori, 434–5, 438, 440; F. Guicciardini, 445–7, 456; L. Guicciardini, 464, all in *Discorsi intorno alla riforma dello stato di Firenze (1522–32)*.

109. Machiavelli, *Discorsi*, 109.

110. See note 87.

111. Machiavelli, *Discursus*, 27.

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from the tumults between the plebs and the nobility, but that can hardly be a prescription for modern times, Machiavelli must have realised, since the social make-up of city states had become more complex.

There are three conclusions worth emphasising, as sizeable stakes are riding on each.

First, the efforts of Skinner and proponents of the Cambridge school to present Machiavelli's *Discorsi* as fundamentally consistent with the traditions of Florentine humanist republicanism need scrutiny. Machiavelli consistently asserts assumptions about human wickedness and fallibility through which he distances himself from his humanist predecessors. Nor is Machiavelli's departure from 'the methods of others' a question of minor revisions in the midst of much continuity. He shares few of the political assumptions of the *quattrocento* republicans, he tells us just that more than once in his writing, and his rejection of the civic virtue construct of republicanism is built into the architectural foundation of the *Discorsi*.

Secondly, the efforts of Skinner and proponents of the Cambridge school to define the purpose of the *Discorsi* primarily as an attempt to reiterate and emulate the Roman republic require qualification. Machiavelli clearly believed that the Roman republic merited the deepest reflection and held significant lessons for the present. Yet he was at the same time critically interrogating the ancient Roman example, questioning Livy's narratives of heroism in light of his sense of human nature and the individual's inability to transcend selfishness. Throughout, he expresses doubts that suggest a deeper awareness of Rome as a collection of myths—inspiring tales no doubt, but not a procedural blueprint for a republic that actually compensates for the problems that individuals will necessarily create in the political arena. To read Machiavelli's celebration of Rome while glossing over his interrogation is to misread the text.

Thirdly and most importantly, Machiavelli's republicanism was not static, but changed over time. He outlined one way of thinking in the *Discorsi*, but within that text he revealed doubts that suggest he was still analysing, still considering and still revising his fundamental convictions. He saw power in terms of social groups and structures of power, whether rooted in class, rank or faction. He no longer viewed the desires of the people primarily in terms of security, but began to re-conceptualise the majority as displaying that same sense of positive liberty that he had initially connected only to the nobility. He acknowledged a broader range of social groupings within the *polis* than he had in *Il Principe* and the *Discorsi* and he came noticeably closer to Venetian republicanism. And he situated the regime's power in a series of broadly representative interlocking councils and offices that dispersed authority outside the reach of any single individual.

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Rather than debating whether Machiavelli was a classical or modern thinker, we should recognise the ways in which both characteristics work in his later republicanism. Given that Machiavelli fused an argument for the radical and innovative restructuring of Florentine government with an Aristotelian politics of common ends and purposes, we would be better served by using a term that does not imply a single affiliation—hence, Machiavelli's 'hybrid republicanism'.

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