

# Descending to the Particulars: The Palazzo, The Piazza, and Machiavelli's Republican Modes and Orders

**Timothy J. Lukes** Santa Clara University

*Scholars of late have attempted to implicate Machiavelli in their various takes on republican "traditions," but their tendentiousness obscures a clear picture of Machiavelli's own thinking. The key to understanding Machiavelli's concept of the republic, which requires new modes and orders, is his comparison of the piazza and the palazzo. Where the hyperbole and irresponsibility of the piazza retard republican development, the deliberateness and detail of the palazzo inspire an indispensable sophistication. The responsive republic recognizes elements in society capable of the palazzo mentality and adjusts authority relative to the capacities of its constituents. I show that Machiavelli's engaging account of the Ciompi Rebellion is central to understanding his republican musings.*

Niccolò Machiavelli says that he writes about princes in his book called *Il Principe* and that he writes about republics in his book that revisits Livy's history of the Roman republic. In this book purportedly on republics, the *Discorsi*, Machiavelli begins by comparing himself to Columbus, claiming to have discovered new ground, "new modes and orders" [Machiavelli 1960, 123 [*Discourses* proem]],<sup>1</sup> upon which to establish reprises of the Roman archetype. I believe Machiavelli when he says his *Discorsi* are about republics, and that what he has to say about republics is new. This essay is my endorsement of his credibility.

Of course, a demonstration that an eminent writer does what he says he is going to do is not normally sufficient to justify scholarly interest. In the case of Machiavelli's treatment of republics, however, it is

difficult to find a commentator that is satisfied with Machiavelli's candor. The reason for this goes beyond Machiavelli's notorious complexity and is, rather, animated by inclinations of the commentators themselves. For unlike princedoms, republics represent to many, especially in the anglophone alluvium of Locke,<sup>2</sup> a viable and preferable alternative to the hegemony of atomistic and appetitive liberalism.<sup>3</sup> The last page of Pocock's monumental republican genealogy, much of it devoted to Machiavelli, betrays his disappointment with the "impoverishment" (1975, 552) of contemporary liberalism and his sympathy with the world of Lycurgus over that of Pericles.

For Pocock and his colleagues known as the "Cambridge School,"<sup>4</sup> Machiavelli has come to be considered a sanctuary in the migration of ancient

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<sup>1</sup>"modi ed ordini nuovi." The translations of Machiavelli are mine and purposely favor clumsy accuracy over fluidity. The original Italian, from the Feltrinelli editions, is included in footnotes, and the page citations are to those editions.

<sup>2</sup>The tension I am about to describe in the English literature is for the most part anticipated, albeit more clinically, by Gennaro Sasso, perhaps the most renowned of Machiavelli scholars. For its most economical recitation see Sasso (1964, 47–51).

<sup>3</sup>Perhaps the most drastic example of this is McCormick (2003), who argues that Machiavelli is actually "against republicanism." For McCormick, modern republicanism means nothing more than a semblance of competition among elites to rule over a mostly disinterested populace, and so he "implores" (2003, 616) the likes of Pettit, Pocock and Viroli to desist in associating Machiavelli with republics, since it taints what ought to be his good populist name. But precluding a republican Machiavelli because of contemporary misrepresentations of the concept is obviously problematic.

<sup>4</sup>For specifics as to the adherents of the Cambridge School, see McCormick (2003).

republican virtues. Quentin Skinner, dean of the Cambridge consortium, labels Machiavelli a “neoroman” (1998), and colleagues Maurizio Viroli and Philip Pettit identify in Machiavelli a classical sympathy for civic religion (Bobbio and Viroli 2003) and an alternative, less atomistic, conception of freedom (Pettit 1997, 4). These scholars longingly speculate that such interests will “find a place again . . . in contemporary political discussion” (Pettit 1997, 4).

The other side of the debate over Machiavelli’s republicanism is linked to Leo Strauss and Harvey Mansfield, both of whom reject Machiavelli’s resemblance to the ancients. More recent versions of their perspective, synthesized under the rubric, “rapacious republicanism” (Rahe 2006, xxii), appear in a volume dedicated, not to a precise understanding of Machiavelli’s republic, but to the idea that “Pocock had it almost entirely wrong” (Rahe 2006, xx). Expanding upon a popular interpretation (Croce [1914] 1993; Cassirer 1944), these scholars argue that hardly a repository for ancient republican virtue, Machiavelli is in fact culpable for its demise. Thanks to Machiavelli the modern republic is a perversion of the ancient agenda, a craven surrender to “unconscious forces,” (Mansfield 1979, 9) where faceless bureaucrats regulate desires rather than inspire thoughtfulness. Placing Machiavelli in an Aristotelian paradigm is considered by these scholars to be a defense mechanism, intended to distract us from our tainted genesis. And thus fundamental distinctions between Machiavelli’s princely and republican commentaries can be questioned (Alvarez 1999).

From this perspective, the new modes and orders promised in the *Discourses* are new only in the sense that they are celebrated. They are, in fact, the previously disdained modes and orders of Thrasymachus, who argues the indistinguishability of justice and interest (see also Codevilla 1997, viii). Machiavelli’s “discovery,” then, is merely an elevation of the easily accessible, and “progress” is the transition from justice based on open and defensible principles, to justice based on secret manipulations and open bullying in the service of self interest. Both concepts, ancient and modern, agree that a “grey eminence” (Mansfield 1998, 236) of compromise and deceit exists, which brings order, never good. The difference is that whereas Aristotle is at best resigned to that order, Machiavelli celebrates it.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup>In the end, Mansfield reinforces Leo Strauss, who writes: “the restoration of something which has been disestablished for a long time is no less revolutionary or shocking than the introduction of something wholly new” (Strauss 1958, 317, n2; see also 86).

Our choices are limited, then, to considering Machiavelli’s republican musings a paean, or a perversion, of antiquity. Neither option takes his claim of innovation seriously. So I begin this essay by extricating Machiavelli from the ancients, from both their expressed virtues and their repressed vices. I do this to disrupt any easy integration of Machiavelli into a “tradition” and to be able to take seriously his claim of novelty regarding the nature of republics. Having done so, I can then specify the elements of his novelty.

My thesis is that Machiavelli’s republic rests not upon classic institutions, but upon a perspective regarding political affairs that is imbued with a sense of humility, and that depends upon access to political particulars. Machiavelli represents this perspective metaphorically with the image of the “palazzo,” where decisions are taken with a dignity, sobriety, and deliberateness worthy of a monumental edifice. And to clarify the palazzo perspective, he invokes the contrasting trope of the “piazza,” where impetuosity, rumor, and bombast prevail. Indeed, Machiavelli had witnessed the meteoric rise and equally precipitous decline of Savonarola in the Piazza della Signoria, where bonfires once fueled by secular books ultimately consumed the friar himself. Machiavelli, instead, chooses a less mercurial locus for republican success, one that reminds us of his tenure in that most imposing of Florentine structures, known in his time as the Palazzo della Signoria, in ours as Palazzo Vecchio.

Machiavelli recognizes that republican competence shifts locations, so the task of the republic is to reallocate authority relative to the distribution of that competence. I argue that there is a fluid, evolutionary quality to Machiavelli’s republican specifications.<sup>6</sup> In fact, to maintain the palazzo perspective, Machiavelli is willing to abandon some of the most precious communitarian priorities of his ancient forebears. But at the same time, his commitment to the concept of the palazzo places him squarely in opposition to the decline to pure opportunism of which he is accused by Strauss and Mansfield. As it turns out, Machiavelli’s discussions of antiquity are a component, and not a contradiction, of his interest in innovation. The palazzo perspective requires not only nimble relocations of authority, but also a sense of sobriety and humility amongst the newly empowered. Where princely modes and orders necessitate hubris, republican innovations require humility. Thus, Machiavelli is more interested in a respect for antiquity than he is in any particular ancient thing.

<sup>6</sup>I am certainly not the first to notice this. See Sasso (1980, 443–45).

## Machiavelli's Novelty

Notwithstanding current incentives for contextualizing, Machiavelli himself provides evidence of an apparent antiquarianism.<sup>7</sup> His claim to novelty in the dedication of the *Discourses* seems immediately, and strangely, betrayed in the preface to the first book by a call to imitation.<sup>8</sup> We learn that artists and their patrons eclipse the aptitudes of their politician colleagues by emulating the ancients. But as any Florentine of the time would appreciate, the emulation of which Machiavelli speaks cannot mean a simple replication.<sup>9</sup> Donatello freely includes Gothic and Romanesque elements in his St. Louis Tabernacle in the Orsanmichele (Zervas 1987, 119), much less the celebration of a Christian icon rather than an ancient scenario. And his David was “a figure type unthinkable in antiquity” (Greenhalgh 1982, 200). Likewise, Botticelli's depiction of calumny (a concept dear also to Machiavelli), while exploiting ancient myths and images, did so with liberal inclusion of the Christian and Italian (Dempsey 1992, 24).

And if Machiavelli's choice of artists as models of appropriate emulation is not enough to nuance his antiquarianism, he follows with tributes to jurists and to doctors, vocations that could match or exceed the innovations undertaken in the artistic community. For while Botticelli was reshaping calumny, the Florentine jurists were transforming the concept of accusation (Martines 1968), the laudable alternative to calumny promoted by Machiavelli in the *Discourses*. The inquisitorial model, in this case a less notorious civil version, was endorsing public over private initiation of accusations, a practice that we will see is extolled by Machiavelli.<sup>10</sup> And as for doctors, Petrarch (2003) had already slandered their departures from ancient refinement. By Machiavelli's time, their upstart guild had successfully migrated from the humanities to the sciences.

<sup>7</sup>Sasso (1964, 45) concedes, in fact, that the *Discourses* is not a unitary work, and that it is a combination of historical tribute and original thinking.

<sup>8</sup>Coby is perhaps the most resistant to Machiavelli's inventive-ness. He says that in the preface Machiavelli “announces that he will travel a heretofore untrodden path; but he does not further explain the novelty of his endeavor” (1999, 21). Of course, I believe the novelty is there for those prepared to notice it.

<sup>9</sup>Vasari's *Lives of the Artists* contains frequent references to originality. See, for instance, that of Luca della Robbia (Vasari 1822, 2: 45–54, see esp. 54).

<sup>10</sup>In fact, Machiavelli's praise for Roman law was not so much for its rigidity as for its ability to adapt to new challenges (1960, 224–29 [*Discourses* 1.40]).

We may reasonably suspect, then, that Machiavelli's interest in antiquity is selective, and that the distinction between the politicians and the three more supposedly capable professions is complex. In fact, I believe that the *Discourses* is above all Machiavelli's attempt to describe how the political system of Florence (and similar venues struggling with maturation) can match the innovations of modern legal, scientific, and artistic communities. And only in the course of that advice does it become clear why he mentions antiquity with such frequency. In fact, it is the successes of endeavors in fields such as the artistic, scientific, and legal that make politics more difficult. Even more than the other arts, the political art must guard against an excess of hubris; a reverence for antiquity can thus be especially helpful. Machiavelli recommends to reformers that they retain “at least the shadow of ancient modes” (Machiavelli 1960, 192 [*Discourses* 1.25]),<sup>11</sup> thus endorsing an appearance over a reality of return. I will show how the apparent contradiction between an ambitious dedication and a cautious preface occupy a cohesive inventory of republican innovations.

Misreading the preface as a straightforward encomium of antiquity (Gentile 1968, 365–72; Merleau-Ponty 1964; Toffanin 1921) conditions commentators in a way that obscures what might otherwise be the most obvious of themes.<sup>12</sup> Intoxicated with Machiavelli's compliments to antiquity, scholars apprehend a disillusionment with modernity. Yet Machiavelli is not so much worried about decline as he is about success. In fact, he opens the *Discourses* with a discussion of how to restrain the excesses of fertility (Machiavelli 1960, 125–29 [*Discourses* 1.1]), an odd topic if he is truly disappointed with his own environment and anxious to return to a predecessor. As I will substantiate later, connections to Polybius beyond the stylistic evaporate as Machiavelli describes politics as the art of maintaining an aura of necessity where the environment might be capable of sustaining, for at least some time, a degree of ostentation. Civility requires the modesty that issues from an impression of need. Again Machiavelli encourages modesty, but like his homage to the ancients, the modesty is predicated upon an efflorescence of resources.

Machiavelli continues his inventory of republican institutions with the seemingly quirky discussion of

<sup>11</sup>“almeno l'ombra de' modi antichi.”

<sup>12</sup>Fortunately, I need not reveal any secret message in Machiavelli in order to prove my point. Sullivan (1996), one of few to take seriously Machiavelli's claim of novelty, argues that Machiavelli's republic is most importantly a heresy, and that he cannot say so for risk of retribution.

calumny and accusation, endorsing the latter with its formal and public transmission of grievances. Not primarily to facilitate justice, accusation is directed rather at reforming the ego of the impetuous accuser. The institution of accusation maintains dignity and deliberateness. Parochial anger is exposed to public disapproval, and citizens come to recognize the legitimacy of strangers as participants in personal disputes. Less interested observers vitiate the rage of the immediate participants, either diluted in a sense of solidarity, or deflated when pettiness is exposed under disinterested scrutiny. Legislators that insist upon the transformation of calumny to accusation, Machiavelli informs us, provide not only a mechanism to let off steam (*sfogarsi*) (1960, 147 [*Discourses* 1.7]) but also a sense of sobriety due to the thoroughness and neutrality of the procedure.

There is a pattern developing in what to a first encounter can seem a series of disjointed discussions. Following the ancients is important, but only to contain the hubris of creativity and discovery. The burden of necessity is important, but only in an environment of plenty. And now sober political procedures are needed, but only to rein in the exuberance of cocky citizens. Hardly an idiosyncratic detail, the institution of accusation goes to the heart of the *Discourses* and to Machiavelli's concept of politics. The viability of Machiavelli's republic is irrevocably attached to the capacities of those to whom he entrusts it. If Machiavelli were merely to celebrate his discovery, it would be lost. Instead, his discovery demands responsibility, and his discussion of it rarely escapes corresponding rigors. We ought not, however, overlook the novelty for its requisite sobriety.

The synthesis of these discussions of fertility, necessity, accusation, and calumny is Machiavelli's discussion of palazzo and piazza (1960, [*Discourses* 1.47]); and I believe Machiavelli's trepidations regarding the piazza are at the center of his republican innovations. Where Machiavelli speaks of prior times sustaining a critical mass of citizens sensitive to the constraints of limited resources and competing constituencies, now his city is plagued with idle speculators who spread hyperbole among an indiscriminating, cynical, and sympathetic audience. The piazza, in terms of the accumulating republican vernacular, fosters calumny in the form of whispered and exaggerated slanders, as it shuns necessity by fostering speech disconnected from substantiation. Machiavelli's discovery cannot be entrusted to those of the piazza mentality.

Those who occupy the piazza believe that the comparative sobriety of the palazzo is no more than

the satedness of co-optation. Machiavelli, *less cynically*, argues that the palazzo exposes its aficionados to "particulars," the apprehension of which inspires deliberateness and circumspection superfluous to the grand theorizing of the piazza dilettantes. Where impetuosity and excess might characterize calumnious comments made in the piazza, accusations elevate participants to the perspective of the palazzo and are thus taken with more gravity. The equivocation that looks like co-optation to outsiders is really a response to the impact of responsibility (1960, 240 [*Discourses* 1.47]). The palazzo simultaneously humbles its adherents and delegitimizes private, impetuous alternatives. There is no mention of altruism on the part of the palazzo denizens, only a more complex and accurate perception of political affairs. Nor does the palazzo introduce lonely atoms to communal life; the piazza too is a civic venue, but a dangerous one. The extent that the palazzo might be called "public," then, is due its rigor, not its communalism.

Although the distinction between palazzo and piazza will become clearer as the essay develops, a brief but stark comparison may be helpful here. If the palazzo and its attendant humility define the republic, then we may speculate that the prince does not always have recourse to its advantages, and that the prince may in fact be defined by the dynamics of the piazza. This perspective illuminates perhaps the most famous passage in *The Prince*, where Remirro d'Orco is left bisected in the piazza at Cesena. There is no indication, to the Cesenati at least, as to the source of the atrocity, or of its justification, so as to truly stupefy its patrons. And that the spectacle premieres the day after Christmas inspires extraordinary speculations among its audience. The lesson is that without the luxury of legitimacy, Borgia is compelled to exploit the impetuosity and intrigue of piazza dynamics.

The reverse is true of the formation of republics. Michele di Lando, who we will see is lauded by Machiavelli as one of the few republican hopefuls in the wake of the Ciompi Revolt, issues from the piazza. However, he is gifted with a clear appreciation and aptitude for palazzo comportment, and he has access to established institutions and at least some receptive followers. So when he briefly assumes power in Florence, he erects a gallows (1962a, 245 [*History of Florence* 3.16]), in so doing extending the gravity of the palazzo into the piazza. Despite sharing Borgia's intention of moderating grandiose machinations, the source of this mechanism is clear. Its construction is deliberate, its function is clinical, and there is no doubt as to the particulars of its victims. There is little room for whispers or rumors regarding its

origin. Republican education replaces princely stupefaction.

Under Michele di Lando, executions are “public” in the Machiavellian sense; and although d’Orco’s execution is meant for communal display, it is “private” in the sense of the distinction between palazzo deliberation and piazza intrigue. Sullivan (2006, 71), a proponent of Machiavelli’s “rapacious republicanism,” correctly argues that Machiavelli embraces execution as an important political tool. However, she does not distinguish the very different approaches of Borgia and Di Lando and is thus not open to the less Machiavellian aspects of Machiavelli’s republican musings. Republican and princely executions are so different that they provide evidence distinguishing republics from principedoms, not linking them in rapaciousness.

So the promised novelty of Machiavelli’s republicanism is emerging. It is distinguished from the “rapaciousness” of the prince with an attention to the more deliberative interests of the palazzo. Yet it must also be distinguished from the classical republicans, to whom Machiavelli is often linked (see Colish 1978). Cicero speaks of an inherent human mutuality or *concordia* (1928, 64 [*De Re Publica* I, xxv, 40]; 1923, 84 [*Post Reditum in Senatu* xi, 27]) that would propel individuals to community even under conditions of extreme abundance: “a copious flowing stream of everything” (1928, 64 [*De Re Publica* I, xxv, 39]). And Polybius, whose divergence from Machiavelli will be discussed in detail, speaks of reason and sociability as motivation for human community. Machiavelli, on the other hand, attributes community to an enhanced ability to defend oneself (1960, 131 [*Discourses* 1.2]), and he argues that republican viability issues not from concord, but from an inescapable “disunione” (1960, 137 [*Discourses* 1.4]) between the people and the aristocrats (see McCormick 2001, 299).

It may be true that Machiavelli shares with ancient republicans the vernacular of a common good and a rejection of *imbecillitas* as the sole motivation for civility (even though, unlike Cicero, he does worry about the distractions of “fertility”). What separates them, however, is that for Machiavelli the common good and disunion are not incompatible. In fact, Machiavelli believes that discord is crucial to the maintenance of the concept of common good. It should be no surprise, then, that it is conflict, not harmony, that characterizes virtually the entire *Discourses* (see Skinner 1978, vol.1, 181). Machiavelli does not condemn faction, only the ignorance and decadence that threaten its proper regulation.

## Palazzo and Piazza

Machiavelli’s intriguing habit of situating republican novelty in an ambiance of deference saturates his discussion of the palazzo comportment. Significantly, he distinguishes the *animo* of piazza impetuosity from palazzo deliberation in a proverb, purportedly shared among “many men and many instances” (1960, 240 [*Discourses* 1.47]).<sup>13</sup> Among other things, elevating his preference for the palazzo to proverbial status distracts his audience from an alternative deference, still operative in contemporary Italian politics, to the agitations held “in piazza,” a persistent populist battle cry. Likewise, the proverb designation softens Machiavelli’s potentially dangerous metaphorical merger of piazza to loggia (1960, 239 [*Discourses* 1.47]), whereby he clarifies that impetuosity and impulse can traverse class boundaries.

A more important employment of the antique facade, however, is Machiavelli’s famous Polybian context for his republican musings, a context that informs the palazzo crescendo. Some have accused Machiavelli of “cribbing” Polybius’s *Histories* (Hexter 1956, 75). And, not surprisingly, the Cambridge School has suggested strong thematic connections (Coby 1999, 14; Pocock 1975, 190, 204; Shumer 1979). However, there persists a discomfort with the full compatibility of Machiavelli and Polybius (Sasso 1980, 443–47), which I find most pronounced regarding their respective reflections on the concept of republic. In fact, Machiavelli’s position is drastically, almost diametrically, divergent from its Polybian exoskeleton, reinforcing the alternative argument I have presented for his deference to the ancients. The divergence, I believe, also cries out for analytical connection to the concept of republic.

Although Polybius undertakes numerous alterations for the sake of practicality, he does not compromise the Platonic distinction between good and bad regimes (1923, III, 274–77 [*The Histories* 6, iv, 2–13]). The republic is a mixture of kingship, aristocracy, and democracy, and its advantage is its ability to forestall decline, or corruption, into the incorrigible alternatives of tyranny, oligarchy, and anarchy. The Polybian republic, consistent with the classical conception, depends upon the “sociability and companionship” (Polybius 1923, 279 [6.5.10]) of the people and is thus compatible with concepts like civic religion and communalism. However, sociability is fragile, and even the best regimes inevitably succumb

<sup>13</sup>“molti uomini e molte volte”

to “corruption,” as they traverse the universal phases of growth to prime to decay (1923, 385 [6.51.4]).

In the wonderful reformulation of Polybius that opens the *Discourses* and surrounds and substantiates Machiavelli’s endorsements of accusation, necessity, and palazzo, Machiavelli utterly dismisses the importance of Plato’s, and thus Polybius’s, distinction between good and corrupt regimes. In so doing, Machiavelli actually allies himself with the historian, Ephorus, who Polybius condemns for not recognizing the qualitative distinctions between the good Sparta and the corrupt Crete, where appetite is so revered that “no gain is disgraceful” (1923, 373 [6.46.4]). In fact, Machiavelli’s near contemptuous assessment of the Polybian distinction is that its undertaking is futile “due the similarity it has in this case the virtue and the vice” (1960, 131 [*Discourses* 1.2]).<sup>14</sup> Considered irrelevant and fanciful, Machiavelli wastes no time with speculations as to how to fend off the onslaught of appetitiveness. Remarkably, Machiavelli undertakes his republic amidst Polybian corruption, revealing that although Polybius may provide an important context in which to discuss Machiavelli’s republic, it is as a foil rather than model.

Perhaps the most telling break with Polybius is a literal one; for when Machiavelli does finally introduce the metaphor of palazzo and piazza, he forsakes the comity of the Greek Polybius for Livy’s more thoroughly Roman paradigm of action and tumult. Machiavelli is infatuated with a scenario that he repeats in three separate instances, two from Livy’s Rome, and one from his own Florence. The scenario expands upon the two animations, or minds, that he connects to palazzo and piazza. (Machiavelli introduces his proverb in the midst of the second example, that where Capua’s chief magistrate, Pacuvio, succeeds in mollifying a plebeian rebellion.) In each of the three instances, elements of the population, in piques of frustration, foment displacement of authorities. However, upon assuming important responsibilities in the crisis, each of the rebellious factions pursues a more moderate and humble alternative, in so doing preserving the republic. Machiavelli concludes his discussion of these instances with the assurance that republican eyes are opened when encouraged to “descend to the particulars” (1960, 240 [*Discourses* 1.47]).<sup>15</sup>

Because the palazzo represents a commitment to the protection and maintenance of a respect for

political particulars, republican authority is fluid, invested in the humour that best understands this. Sometimes this authority can be undertaken by a knightly aristocracy, or even (albeit rarely) in an inspired monarchy, where “liberty” may be rarefied at best (1960, 156–59 [*Discourses* 1.10]). But when excesses of the piazza consume the governing entities, protection of the palazzo perspective must be sought elsewhere. For Machiavelli’s Florence, there is an incorrigible insouciance in the aristocracy, and promise shifts to the people. In his three instances of palazzo success, there is a telling discrepancy between the two ancient examples from Livy, and Machiavelli’s own Florentine example. In the ancient examples, the moderating forces emanate from the aristocracy, while in the Florentine example, a cadre from the common people is congratulated for its republican competence.

However, even regarding the people Machiavelli fears that the fertility of the social landscape is sufficient to produce abundance faster than the political system can provide the “necessities” to prevent the same vanity and arrogance that has overtaken the grandi (1960, 191 [*Discourses* 1.24]). In fact, for Naples and Milan, there remains nothing so “grave” that can rehabilitate the “people,” much less the aristocracies of those unfortunate cities (1960, 178 [*Discourses* 1.17]). New modes and orders, then, are best discussed within the aura of imitating the ancients, which simultaneously imposes a necessity and curbs arrogance. To respect and appreciate the past elicits the requisite humility for dealing in the present. This is the sense in which innovators are especially encouraged to respect the past (Machiavelli 1960, 496 [*Discourses* 3.43]).

The problem is connecting the ascending humour to corresponding responsibility. It is the more regime-neutral modes of particularity and deliberation, and the accompanying orders of accusation and necessity that distinguish republics. Those of the appropriate humour must be exposed to the palazzo, via political and military participation and involvement in institutions like accusation, in order to maintain a quotient of gravity and humility sufficient to sustain a viable republic. What is right and what is arbitrary, what is freedom and what is domination, can have more to do with the recipients of policy than with the agents. Without a palazzo mentality, even the most fairly distributed social burdens will be experienced as intolerable.

Machiavelli’s discussion of corruption, examined without the distraction of a now suspect Polybian root, provides more detail regarding his republican

<sup>14</sup>“per la similitudine che ha in questo caso la virtute ed il vizio”

<sup>15</sup>“discendere a’ particolari”

theory. Like Polybius, Machiavelli believes that republics are best suited to resist corruption, and like Polybius, he often discusses the two concepts together. However, as stated earlier, Machiavelli's blatant disdain for the classical sanctity of the model regimes renders his concurrence with Polybius on the concept of corruption impossible. For Machiavelli, corruption cannot be the "rust and woodworms" (Polybius 1923, 291 [6.10.3]) said to distort kingships to tyrannies, aristocracies to oligarchies, and democracies to anarchies, since Machiavelli does not respect the fundamental bifurcation. Nor does Machiavelli believe that regimes follow an inexorable decline, since he speaks of the possibility of improvement after maturity (1960, 130 [*Discourses* 1.2]).

For Machiavelli, the piazza is the source of corruption, but corruption is not a byproduct of decline. Instead, we learn that there is a certain evolution that leads citizens to the aptitudes and sophistication to afford the distraction of glib chatter. When Machiavelli speaks of "human malignity" he associates it not with selfishness or ignorance, but with *astuzia* (Machiavelli 1960, 293 [*Discourses* 2.5]), the same trait we encounter in the successful prince. A byproduct of immoderate astuteness is the generation of grand ideas and "generalities," that in turn inspire arrogant and ambitious thinking (1960, 191 [*Discourses* 1.24]), crucial for a budding prince (see Lukes 2001), but debilitating to republican citizens in need of humbling "particulars" to reduce zealous attachments to narrow and frivolous solutions. Interestingly, Machiavelli discusses Dante who, deprived of the particulars of Florence after his expulsion, succumbs to the hubris of distant generalizations (Machiavelli 1965, 187–88 [*Discorso o dialogo intorno alla nostra lingua*]; see also Peterman 1990, 192–93).

It is not only the deficiencies of the aristocracy that prompt the redirection of attention to the people. In addition, and to a great extent because of the new attention, the people are becoming "more knowledgeable about natural things" (Machiavelli 1960, 164 [*Discourses* 1.12]).<sup>16</sup> Earthquakes, eclipses, and lightning are more difficult to exploit as omens (1961, 487 [*Art of War* 6]), and the people begin to doubt the impeccability of leaders who continue to assume popular innocence. Machiavelli, echoing the observations of Plutarch and Livy, speaks of the relative malleability of primitive peoples (1960, 275, 164 [*Discourses* 2.1, 1.12]), describing how much easier it is for Numa or nomad chiefs to maintain public con-

fidence (1960, 161–62 [*Discourses* 1.11]). Machiavelli is amused that Caesar could recover from a pratfall upon landing in Africa by cutely decreeing: "Africa, I have taken you" (1961, 487 [*Art of War* 6]).

In stark contrast, the more formidable populace of Machiavelli's Florence has evolved to where "astuteness and human malignity have come where it can come" (Machiavelli 1960, 293 [*Discourses* 2.5]).<sup>17</sup> Amongst the Florentines, astuteness has escaped containment in humility. If Machiavelli's new modes and orders represent a dialectical movement, as I think they do, then corruption, as an avoidable but threatening byproduct of astuteness, threatens reification. Discoveries, including Machiavelli's new modes and orders, engender dangerous perspectives. In Florence, Caesar would not find his errors so easy to spin. Dismantling the aristocrats' primacy does not ensure the survival of the palazzo mentality. New challenges arise with the shift to the popular humour. Corruption is not a "failure of rationality" (Skinner 1990, 304) as much as it is a failure of its unrestrained success.

## Republican Florence

Machiavelli's *Florentine Histories* substantiate his theoretical distinction between piazza and palazzo, a distinction crucial to understanding a successful modern republic, and to separating Machiavelli from the competing contemporary scholarly interpretations. And if my impression of a more fluid concept of republic is correct, it is not surprising that Machiavelli would need to specify the republican components relevant to the Florentine setting. For Machiavelli, only one of the two humours that comprise contemporary Florentine society remains susceptible to the weight of the palazzo, that of the people. As for the incorrigible class, the aristocracy, Machiavelli laments an irredeemable effeteness, an obsession with petty squabbles and delusions of grandeur. Machiavelli takes great pains to itemize the generous and civil actions taken by patriarch Jacopo de' Pazzi as late as one day prior to his infamous meltdown (1962a, 522–23 [*History of Florence* 8.9]). That a person of such magnanimity could the next day succumb to such a profound pettiness is illustrative of the unavailability to the wealthy class a sense of scale and moderation. The Pazzi had exchanged the palazzo for the piazza, and in so doing

<sup>16</sup>"più conoscitori delle cose naturali"

<sup>17</sup>"la astuzia e la malignità umana è venuta dove la può venire"

had lost political perspective. Their parochial problems were perceived as the monumental problems of Florence, and their unilateral intervention was the fantasized panacea. This fatal myopia is the source of the transition Machiavelli describes whereby aristocrats exchange an inspirational for a disruptive identity. The unfortunate repercussion of the degradation of this increasingly divisive element is the “cause that Florence not only of arms but of every generosity stripped itself” (Machiavelli 1962a, 211 [*History of Florence* 2.42]).<sup>18</sup>

The generosity of which Machiavelli speaks is the generosity Bruni believes still available to the *grandi*. For Bruni, the oath of knightly allegiance and valiance can be revived, based on the continuing potential for political enterprises to be considered sacred. In October of 1279, Pope Nicholas III, an Orsini, dispatched Cardinal Latino de’ Frangipani to resolve the growing discord within Florence’s aristocracy. While Bruni (2001, 287–91) describes the visit as a success, highlighting the “embrace of peace” between Guelphs and Ghibellines that purportedly revitalized a communal patriotism, Machiavelli dismisses the visit as a failure (1962a, 151–53 [*History of Florence* 2.10]). Bruni, not Machiavelli, hopes for a return. Bruni retains faith in the ancient leadership, the aristocracy, thus exploiting history more straightforwardly than Machiavelli.

Sacrificing one’s life for one’s country can be spiritually redeeming, and there is an essential generosity in Bruni’s knighthood—capable, he argues, of valor and heroism. For Machiavelli, however, gentlemanly oaths have come to be binding only when family interests are at stake (Machiavelli 1962a, 201 [*History of Florence* 2.37]), and commitments to public service among the aristocrats are maintained only as long as their immediate personal benefit lingers (1962a, 219 [*History of Florence* 3.5]). There is historical justification for Machiavelli’s perspective. Becker (1967, 5) mentions that as early as 1281, magnates were no longer compelled by the “kiss of peace” to maintain order. Instead, they were required to post a bond, to be forfeited if their voluntary interest in public concerns became distracted by the more immediate. The aristocrats have migrated inextricably to the piazza, and while Machiavelli may at times lament the loss of integrity sufficient to legitimize promises, he is more often amused by the irretrievable simplicity of ancient cultures that sustained moral purity

(1960, 160–69 [*Discourses*, 1.11, 12, 13]). In the meantime, the aristocrats have fallen victim to their own cleverness and as a result have escaped the gravity of their undertakings.

Machiavelli completes his discussion of the *grandi* with the promise that “even though the nobility had been destroyed, nevertheless to fortune was not missing modes to make reborn for new divisions new trials” (1962a, 211 [*History of Florence* 2.42]).<sup>19</sup> The conditions to support knighthood, the cavalry, and the opulent entourage are unavailable. Machiavelli is not so naive as to think that the people, with aspirations much less grandiose than their aristocratic predecessors, will embrace chivalrous behavior. Instead, Machiavelli looks to new “trials” to foster the “generosity” needed to maintain republican inclinations. Generosity is not so much opposed to stinginess as it is to arrogance and simplicity. The humours must be reordered in proportions commensurate with receptivity to the institution of accusation and the gravity of the palazzo. He looks to a new army, and a new segment of society,<sup>20</sup> that although not enthralled with sacrifice and bravura, might nevertheless be willing to defer a season’s harvest for the prospect of more peaceful and lucrative commerce in seasons to come. More importantly, it is a segment of society not fully infected with calumny and excess, remaining capable of distinguishing the frivolous from the weighty.

Thus, while it may have formerly been the case that the nobles and military deserved more attention, now it is necessary “to satisfy the people over the soldiers, because it is the people that can do more than those” (1960, 83 [*Prince* 19]; see also 1960, 261 [*Discourses* 1.58]).<sup>21</sup> In the *Discourses* and the *History of Florence*, we learn that the people must be attended more scrupulously. Machiavelli is not expecting or recommending the disappearance of the aristocracy; conflict between the classes, as per the Roman model, will remain the key element of republican success. But he does detect a radical shift, and he can no longer embrace the patronizing winks and nods of the ancient republicans that viewed popular influence as a

<sup>18</sup>“cagione che Firenze non solamente di armi, ma di ogni generosità si spogliasse.”

<sup>19</sup>“benché fusse la nobilità distrutta, nondimeno alla fortuna non mancorono modi a fare rinascere per nuove divisioni nuovi travagli.”

<sup>20</sup>This helps to explain Machiavelli’s longstanding interest in recruiting the new militia from the *contado*, and why he often mentions the republican promise of Tuscany, not Florence.

<sup>21</sup>“satisfare a’ populi che a’ soldati, perché e’ populi possono più di quelli.”

concession, not an asset.<sup>22</sup> Rather, he is relocating the source of virtue, away from the grandi and toward the people (see Lukes 2004).

## The Ciompi Revolt

Machiavelli's description of the Ciompi Revolt, in which the tropes of piazza and palazzo appear prominently, is especially informative regarding the dynamics of republican competence. The revolt is an explosion of popular hubris, precipitated by the tainted formation of the guilds. The Ghibelline leadership, under Count Guido Novello, is fatally tardy in recognizing the growing capacities of the people (Machiavelli 1962a, 148–51 [*History of Florence* 2.8,9]), so from the start the guilds elicit popular resentment and mistrust. Having become astute under the abuse of the Ghibelline grandi, but deprived of the palazzo perspective, the public resorts to hunting down indiscriminately those who were hated for "either public or private cause" (Machiavelli 1962a, 241 [*History of Florence* 3.14]).<sup>23</sup> The rebels are neither a degenerate rabble, as Bruni would have it, nor the desperate dispossessed, as later analysts have argued (Rodolico 1945). Like Bruni, Machiavelli has little admiration for the untutored plebs. But he does notice in its midst a more thoughtful element, whose relegation to the piazza does not fully obscure its growing qualifications for the palazzo.

The most obvious of this element is Michele di Lando, to whom Machiavelli confers high compliments. Michele may be "scalzo" (1962a, 245 [*History of Florence* 3.16]), but he is hardly sansculotte. In fact, he is a "pettinatore di lana," one of the subsidiary professions to the woolen guild interested less in disrupting the status quo than in entering it. Machiavelli describes in detail the breakup of the fragile union of ciompi and lumpen, where Michele courageously, but humbly, reorders rather than ruins institutions of deliberation. And as already described, Michele quickly introduces the palazzo paradigm into the piazza with the erection of a gallows. Gravity, both literally and figuratively, is the operative force.

Although Machiavelli, following Cavalcati, Bruni, and Guicciardini, lauds the intervention of Michele

in the Ciompi disruption, he clearly consults Gino Capponi, introducing and significantly altering Capponi's less formidable, but no less important, Ciompi participants. For instance, Machiavelli complements Michele with one Niccolò da San Friano, depicted by Machiavelli<sup>24</sup> as keeper of the Palazzo clock. Niccolò is immersed in complex technology and is thus receptive to the gravity of the discussions he overhears in the adjacent Hall. Literally, then, he has access to the palace but no authority within it. He has the scientific and technical knowledge that qualify him to understand the inner workings of the state, the particulars, but he is isolated. He is denied recognition and audience and can only listen to the undertakings of the signori while simultaneously observing the growing unrest in the piazza below. So when he overhears the torture of a Ciompi conspirator in the adjoining chamber,<sup>25</sup> his only participatory recourse is to descend from the tower, foment anger and militance in his neighborhood, and thereby derail the preemptive strike that the authorities had engineered for the early morning.

I think there is a reason for Machiavelli's inclusion of what might at first seem a superfluous discussion of a clock keeper. For it is Niccolò, not the more heroic Michele, who is the quintessential metaphor for that part of the people qualified for palazzo access. For Michele is exceptionally, perhaps excessively, predisposed to republican leadership, having been "more to nature than to fortune obliged" (1962a, 245 [*History of Florence* 3.16]) for his thoughtfulness and responsibility. He is constitutionally averse to the distractions of the piazza, and needs little in terms of new modes and orders to reinforce his integrity.

Niccolò, on the other hand, is less heroic, and in dire need of recognition and encouragement of his aptitudes and education. I believe, then, that he best represents "the people" in Machiavelli's modern republican components. His environment is complex, and dependent upon his expert knowledge of the particulars. If encouraged, he will understand and participate in policy deliberations, but he has neither the charisma nor the courage to undertake responsibility unilaterally. Rather, if frustrated, he is more likely to forsake his sophistication and join his less

<sup>22</sup>The "mixed constitutions" of antiquity were, in effect, oligarchies (Badian 1966, xv), and this was embraced by Aristotle, Polybius, Cicero and Plutarch (see Yarbrough 1979, 66). Not only did Machiavelli wonder at the innocence of the ancient people, but so did Livy (Livy 1861, 1:385 [*History of Rome* 10:40]).

<sup>23</sup>"o per publica o per privata cagione"

<sup>24</sup>It is highly improbable that this was in fact the case. For although there are references to his employment in the tower as early as 1353, he does not appear on the record after 1358, when the position was assumed by a Giovanni Paciui di Milano (Machiavelli 1962b, 315 n.).

<sup>25</sup>Machiavelli's rendition of the Ciompi revolt is the only one I know of that allows a close connection between Niccolò and Simone, the unfortunate suspect.

enlightened colleagues who are always loitering in the square.

And, of course, it is impossible to resist linking the two Niccolòs, especially given the probability that Machiavelli intentionally alters history to provoke the curiosity. It has long been suspected that Machiavelli signals connections of himself to Nicomaco, the old man of *Clizia*, by way of similar names (see Lukes 1980). Transporting yet another namesake to the tower encourages an exquisite metaphorical connection of two experts, one in the mechanics of a clock, the other in the mechanics of state, who despite their excruciating proximity to power are not allowed full participation. Machiavelli's own office in the Palazzo, in fact, is an alcove scant meters away from the Great Hall. And to further join our author to his medieval predecessor, the earlier Niccolò is nominally associated with San Friano, the quarter of the city to which the stubborn Florentine Guelphs who refused exile congregated. Submersion in particulars distinguish both Niccolòs, as does the frustration and tragedy of exclusion. And, of course, my speculations here are less fanciful given a theory of republicanism so grounded in the importance of political experience and detail, assets that also define Machiavelli's life.

Similarly provocative, however, is Machiavelli's description of the unfortunate recipient of the signori's raucous interrogation, Simone della piazza. There are questions regarding Machiavelli's alteration of Simone's name, which some accounts specify merely as Simoncino, and which Capponi (1862, 258) elaborates as Bugigatto dalla Porta a San Pietro Gattolini (see Gaeta's note 2, Machiavelli 1962a, 240). There is even some doubt, because of discrepancies in the various editions of the *Florentine Histories*, as to whether the "p" in Machiavelli's piazza is lower case and thus descriptive, or upper case and thus only nominal. While some (see Carli's note, Machiavelli 1967, 303) consider the discrepancy a harmless imprecision, Fiorini, in his meticulous concordance (1962b, 314 n.), elevates the issue to some importance. He insists, albeit with insufficient justification, upon the lower case permutation, thus ratifying a descriptive intention.

Fiorini is right to consider Machiavelli's alteration of the name as intentional. I suggest that the adjectival association of Simone with the piazza reveals the complexity and sophistication of Machiavelli's analysis, as well as the importance of the palazzo/piazza metaphor. Not all members of the plebs are for Machiavelli qualified to assume republican responsibility, and the Ciompi revolt is a challenging mixture of legitimacy and chaos. Simone's dedication to the cause is shallow and unconsidered, and his relegation

to the piazza is metaphorical substantiation. However, Simone's simplicity and cowardice is countered by the frustrated competence of his disenfranchised peers, which may be more interesting in Niccolò than Michele.

The Ciompi description demonstrates that corruption is not the byproduct of decline but of popular astuteness. Michele and Niccolò are invested in Florentine society, but are not adequately rewarded or recognized. Their economic and technical successes engender an astuteness that Machiavelli deems sufficient to assume, even demand, a participatory role. That they are both ultimately expelled from the palazzo and unburdened of its gravity is the more complex source of corruption not often recognized. Unfortunately, Niccolò and Michele are unable to resist the reactionary pressures of the exiled aristocrats. The piazza is too prominent in this scenario. The grandi are forced to exploit it, and the plebs has no recourse but to occupy it. Machiavelli is clear that this was the beginning of the end, and the failure to recognize qualified participants began a doomed strategy of palliatives.

Machiavelli's republic, then, should be considered for its ability to curb piazza prominence.<sup>26</sup> By extending the palazzo perspective, and then the palazzo itself, to qualified elements of the people, politics evolves in a way that embraces a new and hopeful element, less susceptible to simplicity and impetuosity. When Machiavelli speaks of return, he cannot be speaking literally. Nor can he consider corruption simply a loss of what preceded. Instead, corruption is based on gain, and thus necessitates "new modes for new problems." Brunni and Savonarola may agree that corruption is nothing more than "moral decay" (Pocock 1975, 204) demanding the suspension of the "time process" (1975, 205). But Pocock misreads Machiavelli when he lumps him in this group. Instead, Machiavelli accepts, even embraces, the corruptions that come with time, and he moves to adapt. His concept of republic is accused of not accommodating corruption, when it is really based on seeing and resisting it.

## Conclusion

Not recognizing the full complexity of Machiavelli allows Strauss to accuse him of crude relativism. But

<sup>26</sup>I dare say that religion is a major component of re-establishing the palazzo mentality, and that Machiavelli's treatment of Christianity, worthy of an essay in itself, merits revisiting with an eye toward compatibility with his novelty.

for Machiavelli the key to successful republican politics is not to manipulate virtue to fit the idiosyncrasies of the presently powerful individual, but to adjust the location of republican virtue to the evolving sophistication of the participants. Strauss is famous for his indictment of Machiavelli's craven abandonment of Socrates. I argue that Machiavelli shuns Socrates not so he can engage in the simpler calculations of Thrasymachus, but because Socrates and his friends occupy the piazza. And where Athens may have been simple enough to tolerate such distractions, Florence is not.

Spinoza,<sup>27</sup> not Machiavelli, is more aptly the Thrasymachan;<sup>28</sup> for it is Spinoza that argues the primacy of the passions, and that ethics are disingenuously manufactured in church at the end of life (Spinoza 1951, 289). For Spinoza, nothing resembling ethics resides in the palazzo. But Machiavelli, in a dramatic contradiction of his reputation, directly confronts this cynical position. He recognizes it in his peers, as he accuses them of suspecting sellout among those who adjust to the gravity, if not ethics, of responsibility. Spinoza is enamored of Machiavelli because he is a practical politician and thus not burdened with philosophy. But Machiavelli responds that it is precisely because he is a politician that he can see the picture more clearly and soberly, not more simply.

It is not surprising that Strauss is the strongest voice in attempting to link Machiavelli to Spinoza. Strauss is convinced that Machiavelli's relativism is animated by the banality of unsublimated appetite, despite the reservations of others that attenuate Spinoza's attraction (Calvetti 1972). Conceding to Strauss, for argument's sake, that Spinoza is enchanted with libido, I argue that neither Spinoza nor Strauss care to see a more sophisticated source of Machiavelli's relativism, namely his interest in adaptations necessary to sustain the perspective of the palazzo. Appropriately constituted and sustained, the palazzo and its metaphorical extensions protect and inspire responsibilities transcendent of the immediate and libidinal.

But protection and inspiration does not demand a heroic imposition of civic religions or ancient moralities. For Machiavelli, the republican impetus

need only be recognized and protected in the societal elements that evolve to the maturity requisite to maintain it. Niccolò da San Friano and Michele di Lando have come to appreciate the complexity and gravity of public affairs, and Machiavelli is confident that they are capable of bringing to public affairs the ingredients of republican governance. Republican modes and orders are needed not so much to condition and restrict Niccolò and Michele as they are to identify and embrace them.

Skinner and his ensemble invoke an almost religious reverence for a communal virtue, and for Machiavelli's attachment to it, as if some magical migration to altruism or harmony is Machiavelli's interest. Yet it is not as if the community goes undiscussed in the piazza; in fact, the piazza is more gregarious than the palazzo. And neither is it the case that the Pazzi did not consider the destiny of Florence. The distinction of public and private is not that between the community and the individual. The palazzo is distinguished from the piazza by a consciousness of the complexity and sophistication of political affairs. The task of the republic is to facilitate, not create, that consciousness.

A concern for perspective is not exclusive to the *Discourses*. In his dedicatory letter to *The Prince*, Machiavelli, literally, allows his prince to remain on the mountaintop, aloof from particulars, as long as he seeks counsel amongst pedestrians like Machiavelli. *The Prince* is a short work, packed with sweeping generalities and inspirational unction for the Medici du jour to whom it is dedicated. Clearly, the palazzo has yet to be erected, and the prince is only distracted with descents to particularity. The contrasting styles of Machiavelli's two most famous works are powerful reflections of his theoretical distinctions between republic and princedom, palazzo and piazza.

The dangers of unmitigated faction stem not from competing interests but from their simplistic prosecution. What separates Machiavelli's republic from his princedom are not diverse regime structures that nurture noble communitarian inclinations. Those that expect such distinctions are compelled to reject Machiavelli's contention that his two most famous books treat two discrete polities. Rather, the princedom and the republic are distinguished by the replacement of the clever and heroic prince with a powerful and sophisticated segment of the populace, that while irreconcilably at odds with competing interests, nevertheless understands that alternative positions are legitimate. Where the prince cannot always respect the distinction, the republic is dedicated to a preference for palazzo over piazza.

<sup>27</sup>My mention of Spinoza will seem logical to those familiar with Strauss. For a quick refresher see Strauss (1972, 273–77).

<sup>28</sup>Curley says: "I do not call Spinoza a Machiavellian because he believes that right is coextensive with power, since I do not think Machiavelli himself believed that. As Spinoza is sometimes more Hobbesian than Hobbes himself, sometimes he is more Machiavellian than Machiavelli" (2002, 328).

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Timothy J. Lukes is professor of political science, Santa Clara University, Santa Clara, CA 95053.