

## IDEAS IN CONTEXT

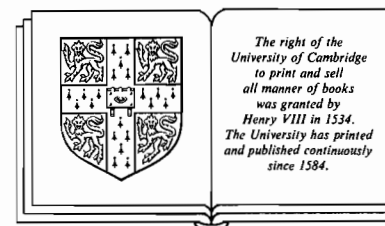
Edited by Richard Rorty, J. B. Schneewind, Quentin Skinner and Wolf Lepenies

The books in this series discuss the emergence of intellectual traditions and of related disciplines. The procedures, aims and vocabularies generated will be set in the context of the alternatives available within the contemporary frameworks of ideas and institutions. Through detailed studies of the evolution of such traditions, and their modification by different audiences, it is hoped that a new picture will form of the development of ideas in their concrete contexts. By this means, artificial distinctions between the history of philosophy, of the various sciences, of society and politics, and of literature, may be seen to dissolve.

*Ideas in Context* is published with the support of the Exxon Education Foundation. For a full list of titles in this series, please see end of book.

# MACHIAVELLI AND REPUBLICANISM

EDITED BY  
GISELA BOCK  
QUENTIN SKINNER  
MAURIZIO VIROLI



CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE  
NEW YORK PORT CHESTER MELBOURNE SYDNEY

debate and the experiment itself must have brought some of these effects to Florence. Florentines were steadily becoming aware of the implications of the wider state in many ways other than just buying estates in it, and the militia 'movement' must have strengthened this tendency. It proposed substituting for the essentially sedentary Ufficiali della Condotta the Nove della Ordinanza e della Milizia, the role of which had inevitably to be played out outside the city; it would have led to a substantial extension of the power and interests of the state. But that is a different Machiavellian theme for another occasion.

## Civil discord in Machiavelli's *Istorie Fiorentine*

GISELA BOCK

### I

In the prologue to the *History of Florence (Istorie Fiorentine)*, which Machiavelli wrote between 1520 and 1525 and which comprises the period between the decline of the Roman republic and the end of the Quattrocento, the author explains the 'ordini e modi' which he followed in writing this history. While praising the 'two excellent historians' Leonardo Bruni and Poggio Bracciolini for their 'description of the wars waged by the Florentines against foreign princes and peoples', he also criticises them for having neglected what he considered the specific and crucial element in the history of his city: 'civil discord and internal strifes and their consequences' or, as he writes a little later, 'the hatreds and divisions in the city'. The *Istorie Fiorentine* does not only deal, as did the *Prince*, with 'the actions of the great men', but with actions that seemed 'insignificant' and 'unworthy' to be described in detail and to become part of historical memory.<sup>1</sup> This vision of Florentine history seemed so crucial to Machiavelli as even to cause him to alter his original project. Initially, he intended to start with the year 1434 when Cosimo il Vecchio returned from exile to Florence and established his regime, and this was probably due to fact that it was a Medici – Cardinal Giulio and future Pope Clement VII – who had conferred this task upon him. It was precisely his interest in understanding civil discord that made him go back to the origins of the city.<sup>2</sup> Again in the prologue, he summarises the content of the *Istorie Fiorentine* and his historiographical perspective:

If any republic ever had notable divisions, those of Florence were most notable: for most of the other republics of which we have some notice have been content with one division

<sup>1</sup> Machiavelli, *Istorie Fiorentine* (from now on quoted as *IF*), 'Proemio', p. 632; *Il Principe*, 'Dedica', p. 257. Machiavelli's writings are quoted from *Tutte le Opere*, ed. M. Martelli (Florence, 1971). For comments on the *IF*, see the edition by V. Fiorini (1894), repr. Florence, 1978. The translations of Machiavelli are mainly based on *The History of Florence*, ed. M.P. Gilmore (New York, 1970) and on *The Discourses*, ed. M. Walker (London, 1950). The other translations are mine, and I would like to thank Ian Fraser for translating the first version. For Machiavelli's critique and use of Leonardo Bruni's and Poggio Bracciolini's histories of Florence see A.M. Cabrini, *Per una valutazione delle 'Istorie Fiorentine' del Machiavelli. Note sulle fonti del Secondo Libro* (Florence, 1985).

<sup>2</sup> *IF*, pp. 632–3; R. Ridolfi, *Vita di Niccolò Machiavelli*, 7th edn (Florence, 1978), pp. 284–90, 305–42.

through which, as things went, they may sometimes have prospered, sometimes ruined their city; but Florence, not content with one, made many of them. In Rome, as everybody knows, after the kings had been driven away, the discord between the nobles and the plebs emerged, and this division continued until the ruin of the republic. Similarly in Athens and in all the other republics which flourished at that time. But in Florence, first the nobles were divided among themselves, then there was division between the nobles and the *popolo*, and finally between the *popolo* and the plebs; and it often happened that one of those parties, having gained the upper hand, split in two. From these divisions there came as many deaths, as many exiles, as many destructions of families, as ever arose in any city whose history is known to us.

Machiavelli presents here a gloomy picture of the history of Florence, a city of which, a century earlier, Bruni had written not merely a glorifying history but even a *Laudatio*, and Bruni and many others had compared it to the Roman and the Athenian republics.<sup>3</sup> Machiavelli too hints at this comparison in the prologue, referring specifically to the 'disunity between the nobles and the plebs' in the Roman republic. A few years earlier, he had studied this phenomenon in his *Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Tito Livio*, and also in the prologue to the *Discorsi* he had underlined the centrality of the 'civic disputes which arise between citizens'. The fundamental affirmation of the *Discorsi* in this context has been analysed in depth, namely that – in the words of the heading to Book I, chapter 4 – 'Discord between the Plebs and the Senate of Rome made this Republic both Free and Powerful'. In the subsequent chapters, Machiavelli dwelt at length and in detail on these divisions and his positive assessment of them, demonstrating the intrinsic conflictuality of the political universe, describing civil discord not as a disruptive element, but as the leaven and cement of a free republic, and presenting the common good as the result of compromises and balances between the nobles and the plebs.<sup>4</sup>

Later, however, in the *Istorie Fiorentine*, Machiavelli seems to have abandoned this positive evaluation of civil conflict. The variegated vocabulary he uses in this connection would not seem to leave any doubt as to the negativity of the phenomenon: *discordia (civile)*, *divisione*, *odio*, *inimicizie*, *disunione*, *disordine*, *disparere*, *parti*, *sette* and, occasionally, *fazioni* and *contenzioni*. On the other side,

<sup>3</sup> Leonardo Bruni, *Laudatio Florentinae Urbis*, ed. H. Baron in *From Petrarch to Leonardo Bruni* (Chicago, 1968), pp. 217–63; H. Baron, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance*, 2nd edn (2 vols., Princeton, NJ, 1966) esp. pp. 54–80; N. Rubinstein, 'Machiavelli e le origini di Firenze', *Rivista storica italiana*, 79 (1967), 952–9; R. Fubini, 'Osservazioni sugli "Historiarum Florentini populi libri XII" di Leonardo Bruni' in *Studi di storia medievale e moderna per E. Sestari*, (Florence, 1980), vol. 1 pp. 403–48; A. Moulakis, 'Leonardo Bruni's constitution of Florence', *Rinascimento*, 26 (1986), pp. 141–90.

<sup>4</sup> *Discorsi*, I, 'Proemio', p. 76; *Discorsi*, I/4–6, pp. 82–7; G. Sasso, 'Machiavelli e i detrattori antichi e nuovi di Roma. Per l'interpretazione di *Discorsi* I, 4' in *Atti dell' Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei. Memorie, Classe di scienze morali, storiche e filologiche*, ser. VIII, vol. XXII, fasc. 3, pp. 319–418; G. Sasso, *Niccolò Machiavelli* (Bologna, 1980), pp. 446–78, 487; G. Cadoni, 'Machiavelli teorico dei conflitti sociali', *Storia e politica*, 17 (1978), pp. 197–220; G. Procacci, 'Machiavelli rivoluzionario' in N. Machiavelli, *Opere scelte*, ed. G.F. Berardi (Rome, 1969), pp. xv–xxxv.

to the vision of a well-ordered city he applies a vocabulary that includes such terms as *unione*, *amicizia*, *quiete*, *pace*, *stabilità*, *amore* or *amore della patria*. Already in the prologue, the author underlines that the historical study of the 'causes of hatred and divisions in the city' might be a useful lesson to those citizens who govern the republic on how to attain 'unity'.

While the assessment of civil conflict in the *Discorsi* had broken with a tradition of political thought that had always condemned discord as both cause and effect of bad government and corruption,<sup>5</sup> its evaluation in the *Istorie Fiorentine* instead seems to seize on and reaffirm that tradition. Describing, deploring and criticising the divisions had also been an integral part of Florentine historiographical tradition, from Giovanni Villani, Marchionne di Coppo Stefani, Piero Minerbeti and Giovanni Cavalcanti to Piero Parenti, Bartolomeo Cerretani and Francesco Guicciardini.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the topic was part of the political language in the Florentine government. In particularly critical moments, 'pratiche super unione' (deliberations about unity) were promoted, and there was discussion both of discord and of the need for, and ways of reaching, concord, the common good, love, and unity. On several occasions laws were brought in against political groupings, whether public or secret, more or less organised: what we today would call 'parties' and in Florence at those times were called *intelligenzie*, *compagnie*, *parti* or *sette*.<sup>7</sup>

Against this background, I wish to present some aspects of Machiavelli's thinking on civil discord. Even though this issue has played an important part in general and specific works on Machiavelli, few authors have examined it in a systematic way and for its own sake, and they usually focus only on the above-mentioned passages in the *Discorsi*. This chapter will contribute to these studies from the perspective of the *Istorie Fiorentine* and therefore of Machiavelli's latest stage of life. It may help to illustrate the nature of his republicanism since his thought on social and political conflict was at its centre.

It may also contribute to answer some open questions about Machiavelli's political and historical thinking. Firstly, is there a contradiction or not between the positive view of conflict in the *Discorsi* and the negative one in the *Istorie Fiorentine*? Has the author of the latter resigned and given himself up to the

<sup>5</sup> Q. Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought* (2 vols., Cambridge, 1978), vol. 1, esp. pp. 181–2, 235.

<sup>6</sup> See e.g. G.A. Brucker, *Florentine Politics and Society 1343–1378* (Princeton, 1962), pp. 131–2; D.J. Wilcox, *The Development of Florentine Humanist Historiography in the 15th Century* (Cambridge, MA, 1969), pp. 73–81; N.C. Struever, *The Language of History in the Renaissance* (Princeton, NJ, 1970), pp. 115–43; N. Rubinstein, 'Politics and constitution in Florence at the end of the 15th century' in *Italian Renaissance Studies*, E.F. Jacob, ed. (London, 1960), pp. 148–83, p. 170; M. Phillips, 'Machiavelli, Guicciardini, and the tradition of vernacular historiography in Florence', *American Historical Review*, 84 (1979), p. 102; L. Green, *Chronicle into History. An Essay on the Interpretation of History in Florentine Fourteenth-century Chronicles* (Cambridge, 1972), pp. 39–43, 95–102, 106–7.

<sup>7</sup> Rubinstein, 'Politics and constitution in Florence', p. 168 and 'Machiavelli e le origini di Firenze', pp. 957–8.

utopia of a quiet, united, homogeneous and stable order, of social peace, to the myth of the Venetian republic with its actual or alleged absence of internal conflicts, which he had vehemently questioned in the *Discorsi*? And has the author of the *Istorie Fiorentine* abandoned his penetrating and disturbing, unscrupulous and 'machievellian' analysis of the functioning and relationships of power, the issue, not so much of a 'demon of power',<sup>8</sup> but of the dynamics of power? In other words: Has nothing remained of the *Principe* and the *Discorsi* in the *Istorie Fiorentine*?

Secondly, various modern scholars have seen Machiavelli's positive judgement of discord and parties, especially in the *Discorsi*, as an important precursor of the positive evaluation or legitimacy of modern political parties.<sup>9</sup> This view, however, is controversial; it may be questioned on the grounds that the conflicting parties in Florentine history might not really have been forerunners of modern parties or that Machiavelli's thought may be seen in a different light. As to the latter question it was, for instance, Rousseau who saw it in a different way. In the *Contrat social* he condemned the 'sociétés partielles', an embryonic form of modern parties,<sup>10</sup> as being contrary to the 'volonté générale', and he cited in confirmation of his opinion none other than Machiavelli with a passage from the *Istorie Fiorentine* on 'divisions'.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, the commentator on the *Contrat social* in the Pléiade edition criticises Rousseau for having misunderstood Machiavelli and assumes that Machiavelli would have given a positive verdict on such 'sociétés partielles'.<sup>12</sup> What do the *Istorie Fiorentine*, as a document of Machiavelli's political thought, contribute to the solution of this problem?

Thirdly, as we have seen, Machiavelli mentions some of the subjects of civil conflict: the *nobili*, the *popolo* and the *plebe*. He deals with an issue which even centuries later continued to divide the major historians of Florence, such as Gaetano Salvemini and Nicola Ottokar: namely, whether the discord among sections of the commune is to be seen as a conflict among groups that we today would call 'classes', or else as a conflict among families, clans, client groups or

<sup>8</sup> G. Ritter, *Die Dämonie der Macht* (Munich, 1948; 1st edn 1940); see also F. Meinecke, *Die deutsche Katastrophe* (Wiesbaden, 1946), pp. 79–86 ('Der Massenmachievellismus'); E. Faul, *Der moderne Machievellismus* (Cologne, 1961).

<sup>9</sup> E. Faul, 'Verfemung, Duldung und Anerkennung des Parteiwesens', *Politische Vierteljahresschrift*, 5 (1964), pp. 68–9; S. Bertelli, 'Embrioni di partiti politici alle soglie dell'età moderna' in *Per Federico Chabod (1901–1960). Atti del seminario internazionale*, S. Bertelli, ed., vol. 1: *Lo stato e il potere nel Rinascimento*, Annali della Facoltà di Scienze Politiche (Perugia, 1980–1), pp. 17–35; G. Silvano, *'Vivere civile' e 'Governo misto' a Firenze nel primo Cinquecento* (Bologna, 1985), pp. 170–3; Rubinstein, 'Politics and constitution in Florence', pp. 166–83.

<sup>10</sup> R. von Albertini, 'Parteiorganisation und Parteibegriff in Frankreich 1785–1940', *Historische Zeitschrift*, 193 (1961), p. 534.

<sup>11</sup> J.-J. Rousseau, *Contrat social* in *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris, 1964), vol. III, ed. R. Derathé, p. 372 ('Il importe donc pour avoir bien l'énoncé de la volonté générale qu'il n'y ait pas de société partielle dans l'Etat'), with note referring to IF, VII/1. <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1458, note 4.

patronage systems.<sup>13</sup> What answer do the *Istorie Fiorentine*, as a document of historical thought and interpretation, provide?

An attempt to extract from a historiographical work which reconstructs and interprets the past – and this is the primary character of the *Istorie Fiorentine* – the political views of its author, meets particular methodological problems. The more an author uses the description of the past merely to express and corroborate his own political opinions and values, the more he tends to project the present upon the past (with the risk of anachronism) and theory onto history (risking an ahistorical procedure). Conversely, reading the *Istorie Fiorentine* solely to pick out Machiavelli's political opinion – and this has often been done – presupposes that he was a poor historian, incapable or unwilling to let himself be guided by the sources more than by his own preconceived opinions and political partiality. This is indeed a common opinion of Machiavelli as a historian, and he is said to have violated history which to him was no more than 'ancilla scientiae politicae'.<sup>14</sup> Other historians, however, have praised him as a true historian and the *Istorie Fiorentine* as a watershed in the history of historiography precisely because he did not follow the earlier Florentine chronicles – his main sources – in simply lining up more or less important and heterogeneous events in chronological order, but instead selected and structured sources and events in view of the essential causes and forces in Florentine history, and because he presented them in a perspective of 'impartiality'.<sup>15</sup> This discord among historians on how to evaluate Machiavelli

<sup>13</sup> G. Salvemini, *Magnati e popolani in Firenze dal 1280 al 1295* (Florence, 1899); N. Ottokar, *Il Comune di Firenze alla fine del Dugento* (Florence, 1926; repr. 1962); for the use of the term 'class' in this context see the sensitive remarks by Cadoni, 'Machiavelli teorico', p. 198, note 4. Faul in 'Verfemung', sees the rise of 'parties' as closely linked to class struggle. For more recent statements of the above-mentioned historical problem see, e.g., N. Rubinstein, 'Oligarchy and democracy in 15th century Florence' in *Florence and Venice: Comparisons and Relations* (Florence, 1980), vol. 1, pp. 99–115; L. Martines, ed. *Violence and Civil Disorder in Italian Cities, 1200–1500* (Berkeley, CA, 1972); D. Kent, *The Rise of the Medici. Faction in Florence 1426–1434* (Oxford, 1978); J.N. Stephens, *The Fall of the Florentine Republic, 1512–1530* (Oxford, 1983); H.C. Butters, *Governors and Government in Early Sixteenth-century Florence, 1502–1519* (Oxford, 1985).

<sup>14</sup> E. Fueter, *Geschichte der modernen Historiographie* (Munich and Berlin, 1911 (*Storia della storiografia moderna* (Milan and Naples, 1970)), p. 66 (Italian translation, p. 86); similar and negative judgements on Machiavelli storico, particularly when measured against today's historical writing, may be found in R. Romano, *La storiografia italiana oggi* (Rome, 1978), p. 22; E.W. Cochrane, *Historians and Historiography in the Italian Renaissance* (Chicago, 1981), pp. 265–70; Felix Gilbert, 'Machiavelli's *Istorie Fiorentine*' in M.P. Gilmore, ed. *Studies on Machiavelli* (Florence, 1972), p. 99; F. Gilbert, *Machiavelli and Guicciardini, Politics and History in Sixteenth-century Florence* (Princeton, NJ, 1965). For a critical view of this interpretation, see A. Garosci, *Le Istorie Fiorentine del Machiavelli* (Turin, 1973), p. 190.

<sup>15</sup> This was Gervinus' view, and he compared Machiavelli with Thucydides in this respect (G. Gervinus, *Geschichte der florentinischen Historiographie* (Frankfurt, 1871; 1st edn 1833)). Other authors who see the IF in a more positive light and Machiavelli as an outstanding historian, are, e.g. F. Gaeta, 'Introduction' to N. Machiavelli, *Istorie Fiorentine* (Milan, 1962), pp. 45–62 and 'Machiavelli storico' in R. Aron et al., *Machiavelli nel 5 centenario della nascita* (Bologna, 1973), pp. 139–51; Garosci, *Le Istorie Fiorentine del Machiavelli*; G.M. Anselmi, *Ricerche sul Machiavelli storico* (Pisa, 1979); Carlo Dionisotti, 'Machiavelli storico' in C. Dionisotti, *Machiavellismo* (Turin, 1980),

storico and how to relate him to *Machiavelli politico* is still alive and has brought to the fore important new investigations. Since the early nineteenth century when it was discovered that Machiavelli had used Cavalcanti as a major source, many other sources have been identified.<sup>16</sup> Such studies confirm that Machiavelli's political views are implicit in his historical account (as political views may be implicit in other historical narratives), but that they can be gathered only from painstaking comparison with his sources; no passage of the *Istorie Fiorentine* may be used to demonstrate the author's implicit or explicit political view without examining if and how it was taken over from one of the sources or if it was Machiavelli's original contribution. This is not the place, however, to pursue that procedure.

The 'impartiality' which Gervinus referred to, means that Machiavelli – as other early modern Italian historians – presents events and activities from the different and sometimes opposing perspectives of their protagonists and he by no means always and explicitly tells us how he himself evaluates them. This is most obvious in the fictive speeches of individuals and groups which present – following and renewing a historiographic tradition which lasted from Thucydides to the seventeenth century – what the author interprets to be their causes and motives and the inner logic of events.<sup>17</sup> Such speeches from the *Istorie Fiorentine* have often been singled out in order to demonstrate the political views of its author; yet this procedure does not always take sufficient account of their historiographical function. To use them for the reconstruction of Machiavelli's political thinking requires not taking them out of, but placing

pp. 365–409; N. Rubinstein, 'Machiavelli storico', *Annali della Scuola Normale di Pisa, Classe di lettere e filosofia*, ser. 3, 17/3, pp. 695–733. For the state of contemporary historiography against which Machiavelli needs to be evaluated, see also H. Baron, 'Das Erwachen des historischen Denkens im Humanismus des Quattrocento', *Historische Zeitschrift*, 147 (1932), 5–20; E. Garin, 'La storia nel pensiero del Rinascimento' in E. Garin, *Medioevo e Rinascimento* (Bari, 1964), pp. 179–95; A. Buck, *Das Geschichtsdenken der Renaissance* (Krefeld, 1957); M.P. Gilmore, 'The Renaissance conception of the lessons of history' in his *Humanists and Jurists* (Cambridge, MA), pp. 1–37. F. Gilbert, 'The Renaissance interest in history' in *Art, Science and History in the Renaissance*, Ch. Singleton, ed. (Baltimore, 1967), pp. 373–87; M.B. Becker, 'Towards a Renaissance historiography in Florence' in *Renaissance. Studies in Honor of Hans Baron*, A. Molho and John A. Tedeschi, eds. (Florence, 1971), pp. 141–71; D. Hay, *Annalists and Historians: Western Historiography from the Eighth to the Eighteenth Centuries* (London, 1977); M. Phillips, *Francesco Guicciardini: The Historian's Craft* (Toronto, 1977); R. Black, 'The new laws of history', *Renaissance Studies*, 1 (1987), 126–56.

<sup>16</sup> See e.g. B. Richardson, 'Notes on Machiavelli's sources and his treatment of the rhetorical tradition', *Italian Studies*, 26 (1971), 24–48; Anselmi, *Ricerche sul Machiavelli storico*, pp. 115–59; Cabrini, *Per una valutazione delle 'Istorie Fiorentine'*; Rab Hatfield, 'A source for Machiavelli's account of the regime of Piero de' Medici' in Gilmore, ed. *Studies on Machiavelli*, pp. 319–33.

<sup>17</sup> Struever, *The Language of History in the Renaissance*, esp. pp. 72–3, 125–43; Anselmi, *Ricerche sul Machiavelli storico*, pp. 182–6; R. Aguirre, 'Machiavelli's use of fictive speeches in the *Istorie Fiorentine*', unpublished PhD Dissertation, University of Oregon, 1978; G. Bock, 'Machiavelli als Geschichtsschreiber', *Quellen und Forschungen aus italienischen Archiven und Bibliotheken*, 66 (1986), 178–84.

them in the context both of the historical narrative and the entire sequence of the speeches.

An example concerning the subject of civil discord is the speech of Gualtieri di Brienne, Duke of Athens and governor of Florence in the 1340s, presented by Machiavelli as a tyrant who destroyed the civil liberties with demagoguery and violence and justified his tyranny pointing out that 'those cities alone are in slavery that are disunited, while the united are free'.<sup>18</sup> This phrase has been described as 'la plus profonde et la plus essentielle des vérités' in Machiavelli's eyes, indicating that his concept of liberty meant to 'écraser tout germe de dissension civile'.<sup>19</sup> Yet, this interpretation does not take into account that the Duke's sentence was a response to the no less important preceding speech of a group of republican-minded citizens ('who loved their country and liberty') who, protesting against the Duke's tyranny, stressed and threatened that 'the only lasting government is one based on the people's will'.<sup>20</sup> On the level of the author's personal opinion, it has been plausibly argued that the citizens' speech corresponds more closely to Machiavelli's own view than the Duke's who merely instrumentalises the traditional language of liberty for the sake of tyranny.<sup>21</sup> On the level of historiographical presentation we are dealing with an antilogy, a set of two opposing speeches which present contrasting viewpoints and leave the judgement, at least in part, to the reader; here it is of course not without significance that the tyrant is able to apply the language of liberty to his own ends. On the level of Machiavelli's political thinking, the two speeches may be seen to express precisely his complex treatment and ambivalent evaluation of civil discord which is the subject of this chapter and which should not be reduced to one of these opposing opinions.

The *Istorie Fiorentine* includes some passages which express his political thinking not only implicitly but also explicitly, without direct recourse to sources and fiction, namely – besides the prologue – the first chapters of the eight books which introduce their main subjects and sometimes summarise the previous one; three of them, the introductions to Books III, IV and VII, deal with civil discord, and the following considerations are mainly based on them. However, despite their more theoretical style, they cannot be separated from the historical narrative. Their character as a summary and interpretation of the historical account – and not simply as a preconceived political theory – has

<sup>18</sup> *IF*, II/35, p. 683.

<sup>19</sup> M. Marietti, 'Machiavel historiographe des Médicis' in *Les Écrivains et le pouvoir en Italie à l'époque de la Renaissance*, ed. A. Rochan, vol. II, no. 3, 2nd series (Paris, 1974), p. 147.

<sup>20</sup> *IF*, II/34, p. 682 ('quello dominio è solo durabile che è volontario'). Both speeches are not in the source (Villani); see Machiavelli, *Istorie Fiorentine*, ed. V. Fiorini (1894/1978), p. 237–8, 240.

<sup>21</sup> By Fiorini, p. 240 (see previous note). Moreover, the Duke has only an indirect speech, the citizens a direct one. See also Garosci, *Le Istorie Fiorentine del Machiavelli*, pp. 210–12.

recently been confirmed by the fact that the introductions to the books I–VI were written after the narrative of these books.<sup>22</sup> Dealing with them therefore means tracing Machiavelli's political thinking within his historical thinking as well as tracing his historical thinking within his political thinking.

## II

The introduction to Book III, praised by Federico Chabod as a marvellous analysis of the Italian cities' evolution and problems,<sup>23</sup> is located chronologically in the second half of the fourteenth century, and summarises the previous book while alluding to the following one. 'Those serious, though natural enmities, which occur between the common people and the nobility' are caused by the 'desire of the latter to command and the former not to obey'; these two contrasting attitudes are the *umori* and their diversity, and they are the cause of 'all the evils that arise in cities'. This assertion, of an anthropological character, is to be met with frequently in Machiavelli's works: according to him, there are various *umori* or *sorte* or *qualità* of men – sometimes two (*nobili* and *popolo*), sometimes three (*nobili*, *popolo* and *plebe*) – and the enmities among them are natural, i.e. exist in every city, are inevitable and ineliminable, comprehensible and perhaps even legitimate.<sup>24</sup> On this anthropological ground, the author continues with a comparison between the Roman and Florentine republics. He begins with one parallel: the 'diversity of humours' that kept Rome disunited likewise kept Florence divided. However, as elsewhere in Machiavelli's writings, the same causes may have different effects, and the evil may have positive effects, though still remaining evil.<sup>25</sup> The effects of the evil of the enmities were positive in Rome and negative in Florence: here the parallelism between the two republics becomes transformed into a polemical contrast, polemical with respect to the humanist tradition which glorified Florence by equating it with the glorious Roman republic. According to Machiavelli, Romans and Florentines handled their discordances in quite different ways: 'The early quarrels between the nobles and the people in Rome were settled by discussions, those in Florence by fighting. In Rome, they ended with laws, in Florence with the exile and death of many citizens. In Rome they increased military *virtù*, in Florence they destroyed it altogether.' Three different effects,

<sup>22</sup> E. Levi, 'Due nuovi frammenti degli abbozzi autografi delle Istorie Fiorentine del Machiavelli', *Bibliofilia*, 69 (1967), 309–23. <sup>23</sup> F. Chabod, *Scritti su Machiavelli* (Turin, 1964), pp. 72–3.

<sup>24</sup> IF, III/1, pp. 690–1; see also IF, II/12, p. 666; II/34, p. 681; II/36, p. 684; II/42, p. 689; *Principe*, IX, p. 271; *Discorsi*, I/5, p. 83; *Discursus* p. 27. For the *umori* see also Sasso, *Niccolò Machiavelli*, pp. 446–7, 460–5.

<sup>25</sup> IF, III/1, pp. 690–1; see also *Principe*, VIII, pp. 270–1. Guicciardini strongly criticised this view: 'Non fu adunque la disunione tra la plebe e el senato che facesse Roma libera e potente . . . Laudare la disunione è come laudare in uno infermo la infermità, per la bontà del remedio che gli è stato applicato' (*Considerazioni sui Discorsi del Machiavelli*, in: *Opere*, (Turin, 1970) vol. I, pp. 615–16). See Skinner, *The Foundations*, vol. I, pp. 181–2.

then, to which there follows a fourth that is striking because it breaks the simplistic counterpoint between a glorious Rome and a wretched Florence: 'In Rome they changed the state of equality among the citizens to a state of very great inequality, in Florence they led from inequality to a remarkable state of equality.'<sup>26</sup>

At a stroke, Machiavelli has reversed the terms of comparison between Rome and Florence, since the concept of equality has clearly positive associations in his thinking, as it does in the Florentine republican tradition. In the *Discorsi*, he had stated that equality is a precondition for a true republic, and while he maintains this assertion in the *Discursus florentinarum rerum post mortem iunioris Laurentii Medices*, written around 1520, here he also proposes an 'equality' within the constitution: the restitution of the Consiglio Maggiore which had been abolished in 1512, and the broadening of the social basis of government so that each of the 'humours' would have 'la parte sua' in government.<sup>27</sup> Machiavelli's 'equality' is not economic or social, but legal and political, meaning equality before the law and equal access to office; in the terms of the *Discorsi*, it is not 'equalità di sustanze' or 'della roba', but 'equalità di grado' or 'de' onori'.<sup>28</sup> In Book II of the *Istorie Fiorentine*, he had described the struggles between people and nobles in Florence for and against this kind of equality, the abolition of the privileges of the old feudal nobility, and he had defined equality more specifically as abolition of their juridical and military power. But he had also described how not only were these privileges abolished, but it was sought to exclude the aristocracy entirely from government, from office, from the city, and when an excluded nobleman aspired to an office, he even had to be recognised as a *popolano*; conversely, to be declared noble meant to lose access to office.<sup>29</sup>

Machiavelli strongly criticises this practice in the introduction to Book III, placing this criticism right after his praise of equality. He does so again through

<sup>26</sup> IF, III/1, p. 690: 'Quelle [nemicizie] di Roma da una ugalità di cittadini in una disuguaglianza grandissima quella città condussono, quelle di Firenze da una disuguaglianza ad una mirabile ugalità l'hanno ridutta.'

<sup>27</sup> *Discorsi*, I/55, pp. 136–9; *Discursus*, pp. 25–9; for the Consiglio Maggiore see N. Rubinstein, 'I primi anni del Consiglio Maggiore di Firenze', *Archivio storico italiano*, 112 (1954), 151–94; 'Politics and constitution in Florence'; 'Florentine constitutionalism'; 'Oligarchy and democracy'; for the ideal of 'equality' see Skinner, *The Foundations*, vol. I, pp. 166, 170, 236–8, 259; Rubinstein, 'Florentine constitutionalism' and 'Machiavelli e le origini di Firenze', p. 958; Cadoni, 'Machiavelli teorico', p. 199; Carlo Dionisotti, 'Machiavelli letterato' in Dionisotti, *Machiavellerie*, p. 213; Sasso, *Niccolò Machiavelli*, pp. 471–4, 490–1, 521–6. For the *Discursus* see esp. G. Guidi, 'Niccolò Machiavelli e i progetti di riforme costituzionali a Firenze nel 1522', *Il Pensiero Politico*, 2 (1969), 580–90 and 'La teoria delle "tre ambizioni" nel pensiero politico del primo '500', *Il Pensiero Politico*, 5 (1972), 241–59; R. von Albertini, *Das florentinische Staatsbewusstsein im Übergang von der Republik zum Prinzipat* (Berne, 1955), pp. 46, 84–5; Sasso, *Niccolò Machiavelli*, pp. 524–6, 610–15; Silvano, *Vivere civile*, pp. 91–109.

<sup>28</sup> *Discorsi*, I/6, p. 85; I/37, pp. 118–20; Sasso, *Niccolò Machiavelli*, pp. 484–5.

<sup>29</sup> IF, II/11–14, pp. 665–7; II/42, pp. 689–90; III/2–4, pp. 691–2; III/19, pp. 706–7.



the comparison between Rome and Florence, again reversing it in the sense of Roman positiveness and Florentine negativeness. He explains how a natural and universal fact like the 'diversity of humours' could possibly produce such diverse effects in different cities. The 'parties' to the fight had had 'diverse aims' and 'diverse desires' in the two cities, and he goes on with a new list of contrasts: 'The people of Rome wanted to enjoy the chief honours with the nobles, the people of Florence fought to have the government to themselves without the participation of the nobility'; the Roman people's 'desire was more reasonable', whereas that of the Florentine people 'was unjust and abusive'. Therefore, the Roman nobility conceded the people's request 'without resorting to violence', whereas in Florence 'the nobility prepared to defend themselves more efficiently', and this 'led to bloodshed and exile'. The laws and reforms introduced in Rome after these conflicts were for the 'common good', but in Florence 'in favour of the victor'. In Rome the accession of men of the people to government caused them to become similar to the nobility and to assume the latter's *virtù*, including the military commitment; in Florence it produced the opposite effect, so that the nobles, in order to be readmitted to government, had to become like men of the people and – an argument that recalls the *Principe* – 'not only to be like the *popolani* in their behaviour, in their opinions, and in their style of living, but they had to be seen to be so'.<sup>30</sup> Thus, Florence 'became more and more humble and base'.

At this climax of condemnation of the conflicts in Florence there follows a second abrupt turn, again reversing the comparison between the two cities. Machiavelli continues: 'And whereas Rome, when its *virtù* had turned into pride, was reduced to such a state that she could not be held together without a prince, Florence has reached a stage where she could easily be reformed by a wise lawgiver and given any form of government.'<sup>31</sup> It is clear, and undisputed among scholars, that the last sentence refers not only to the preceding Book II, but also and mainly to the *Discursus* just mentioned, written at the same period, and is to be read as a call for the introduction of a republican order in accordance with Machiavelli's proposal, addressed to Giulio de' Medici who commissioned both the *Istorie Fiorentine* and the *Discursus* and who was then informal leader of the government of Florence.<sup>32</sup>

Less clear, however, is the meaning of the reversal of the comparison between Rome and Florence. Machiavelli seems to fall into open contradiction

<sup>30</sup> *IF*, III/1, pp. 690–1; see *Principe*, XVIII, p. 284.

<sup>31</sup> *IF*, III/1, p. 691; the same idea is expressed in a speech by republican-minded citizens in *IF*, III/5, p. 694: 'la Italia tutta e questa città è condotta in tanta uguaglianza che per lei medesima si può reggere . . . E questa nostra repubblica massimamente si può . . . non solamente mantenere unità, ma di buoni costumi e civili modi riformare, pure che Vostre Signorie si disponghino a volerlo fare.'

<sup>32</sup> Rubinstein, 'Machiavelli e le origini di Firenze', p. 958; Marietti, 'Machiavelli historiografo', p. 109.

by ultimately maintaining that the civil and better kind of discord led to the decline of the Roman republic, the rise of Caesar, and was therefore harmful to Rome, whereas the uncivil and dangerous kind of discord in Florence was beneficial to a republican order. Or has he perhaps started to revise his earlier vision, considering it an idealisation of a much cruder and crueller history of the Roman republic on one side, and an exaggeration of Florentine corruption on the other? Vittorio Fiorini, author of the important, and only, detailed commentary on the *Istorie Fiorentine*, published in 1894, could not explain this contradiction otherwise than by asserting that 'in reality no logical connection need be sought between what was said previously and the two new observations: instead, the latter must be regarded as an appendix without any connection with the rest'. In other words: as an addition without significance, better not to have been written.<sup>33</sup> This explanation is hardly convincing, particularly in view of the usual acuteness of Machiavelli's language and reflection and especially when it comes to contradiction, irony or provocation. Yet, an alternative explanation may be found by coming back to the *Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Tito Livio*, Book I, chapter 37, where we find a similar contradiction.

This chapter deals not with the merits and glory of the Roman republic, but with its failures and ultimate fall. Machiavelli identifies the cause of the decline precisely in what he earlier saw as the cause of its freedom and power, namely the discord between nobles and people, when it came to the point of exasperation. In order to explain this, he places a general consideration ahead of the historical argument, again of an anthropological kind. Men fight each other because of need, and if there is no need, they do so because of ambition; this is because nature has created them in such a way that 'though all things are objects of desire, not all things are attainable; so that desire always exceeds the power of attainment, with the result that men are ill content with what they possess and their present state brings them little satisfaction'. Therefore, the Roman plebs was not satisfied with its political influence through the tribunes, and it wished to share not only the 'onori', but also 'le sustanze', 'la roba', property and wealth. This happened in the struggles around the agrarian law at the time of the Gracchi, which set a limit to land ownership and provided for conquered lands to be divided up among the plebs, and this 'caused the destruction of the republic'. The cause was not only, or not so much, the shift from the political to the economic struggle – Machiavelli in fact writes that the Gracchi's intentions were more praiseworthy than their prudence – as the methods of this struggle, namely violence 'in which neither moderation nor respect for civic customs was shown', a shift from 'civil discord' to 'civil war'. In the course of these events,

<sup>33</sup> Fiorini, in Machiavelli, *Istorie Fiorentine*, p. 271. To my knowledge, no alternative explanations have been proposed, but Sasso, *Niccolò Machiavelli*, p. 508, note 69, has suggested the link between *IF*, III/1 and *Discorsi*, I/37.

Machiavelli underlines several factors: the power of the nobility which has increased through the republic's expansion and was now used against the plebs, the use not of political and constitutional but of private means, the emergence of individual leaders (*capì*) on both sides – Sulla for the nobility, Marius for the plebs – and the final victory of Caesar who took sides, against Pompey, for the plebs and thus became 'Rome's first tyrant, after which that city never again recovered its liberties'.<sup>34</sup>

Machiavelli himself seems not to have been entirely satisfied with his introductory and anthropological explanation of this account which named civil discord as cause both of Roman liberty and its destruction. Therefore he added an epilogue in which he himself stresses the contradiction to Book I, chapter 4, which 'seems to be incompatible with this conclusion'. But nevertheless he insists: 'I am not on this account inclined to change my opinion'.<sup>35</sup> He insists because according to him the historical circumstances have changed, and he indicates three of them. Firstly (and as if he wished to balance the introduction where he had attributed the fault to the ambition of the plebs), the ambition of the nobility is so great that, in order to avoid the ruin of the city, it needs to be checked; if the plebs had not done so, servitude would have come even earlier. Secondly, he again emphasises the link between violence and the struggle for wealth: men care more for property than for honours and therefore 'when it came to property' ('come si venne alla roba') which the Roman nobility obstinately defended, the plebs had recourse to violence. Thirdly, he argues that the Gracchi pursued the wrong policy by urging the conflict and thus accelerating the evil they intended to combat, instead of temporising it. For this issue, he refers to an earlier chapter where he discussed a parallel in the history of Florence: Cosimo il Vecchio would not have become 'principe della repubblica' without the exasperated opposition of those who, realising that his increasing reputation posed a threat to the republic, sought to remove this danger by removing Cosimo and thereby – by sending him into exile, hence committing an injury and reinforcing his 'party' – helped him to come to power.<sup>36</sup> As to the contradiction which Machiavelli

<sup>34</sup> *Discorsi*, I/37, p. 120; the anthropological consideration: 'Perché la natura ha creati gli uomini in modo che possono desiderare ogni cosa, e non possono conseguire ogni cosa . . .' (p. 119). See also Sasso, *Niccolò Machiavelli*, pp. 487–94, 530–4.

<sup>35</sup> *Discorsi*, I/37, p. 120 ('E benché noi mostrassimo altrove, come le inimicizie di Roma intra il Senato e la Plebe mantenessero libera Roma, per nascerne, da quelle, leggi in favore della libertà; e per questo paia disforme a tale conclusione il fine di questa legge agraria; dico come, per questo, io non mi rimuovo da tale opinione'). Compared to Guicciardini's critique of the contradiction (see note 25 above), Machiavelli seems to stress it.

<sup>36</sup> *Discorsi*, I/37, p. 120 ('come di sopra largamente si discorse, non si fa altro che accelerare quel male, a che quel disordine ti conduce: ma, temporeggiandolo, o il male viene più tardo, o per se medesimo col tempo, avanti che venga al fine suo, si spegne'); see *Discorsi*, I/33, p. 115; *IF*, IV/27, pp. 731–3 (Niccolò da Uzano advises not to use force and exile against Cosimo il Vecchio).

reflects upon, he seems to say that it is to be sought not in his thinking but in the historical events and the course of history itself.

This parallel in the *Discorsi* shows that the similar contradiction in the *Istorie Fiorentine* is not a mistake or superfluous, but deliberate and decisive. In both works, Machiavelli's political and historical interest prohibits him from merely glorifying the Roman republic and simply presenting it as a model to be imitated;<sup>37</sup> he also insists on its deficiencies which are not to be followed. Moreover, the reference at the beginning of Book III of the *Istorie Fiorentine* to its decline seems to have a specific and important function. It is no accident that the comparison between Rome and Florence is worked out exclusively in these pages.<sup>38</sup> Why did Machiavelli use it specifically to introduce this book? The reason seems evident: it is in Book III that he presents, following the struggles between *popolo* and *nobili* and the ultimate fall of the nobility in Book II, the struggles between *plebe* and *popolo*, and this process also marks the passage from the struggle for honours and office to that for property and wealth and to violence. It is the story of the revolt of the Ciompi, the Florentine woolworkers, that shook the city for three months in 1378. The contradiction in the introduction refers to the contradictory course of Florentine history.

Machiavelli gives the Ciompi revolt more space than any other event taking the same length of time. He describes it as a culminating moment of the communal divisions, attributing to it a deep and lasting significance for the city's history.<sup>39</sup> Its salient points may be read almost as a counterpoint to his presentation of the struggles around the agrarian law in the *Discorsi* – the passage from political to economic struggle, from civil discord to civil war, the recourse to private means, the emergence of individual leaders on both sides, the brief victory of *plebs* and *popolo minuto* and the slow rise to power of those of the *popolo grasso* who took their part – members of the Medici family – outside the traditional republican institutions.

But nonetheless, Machiavelli's historical account of the Ciompi revolt is not simply modelled upon Roman similarities, but follows its own dynamics, with an attitude similar to that with which he had once approached ancient authors: 'Tucto mi transferisco in loro'.<sup>40</sup> Most historians before him – including his sources – and most historians following him up until the nineteenth century saw the cause of the revolt, and of discord in general, either in instigation by the devil or in punishment for the sins of the citizens, or else in inscrutable fate or

<sup>37</sup> Sasso, *Niccolò Machiavelli*, pp. 487–91, 530–4.

<sup>38</sup> Some brief references to ancient history appear in the prologue (see above), in IV/1, p. 715; V/4, pp. 740–1.

<sup>39</sup> *IF*, III/18, p. 706: 'Dalla quale (i.e. divisione tra i popolani nobili e i minori artefici) perché seguirono in varii tempi di poi effetti gravissimi, e molte volte se ne arà a fare menzione, chiameremo l'una di queste parte popolare e l'altra plebea.' See also IV/2 and IV/3, p. 716; *IF*, IV/9–10, pp. 720–1; IV/28, p. 734. <sup>40</sup> Letter of 10 December 1513, p. 1160.



individual immoral behaviour, or else in manipulation of the people by some nobleman, or – in the case of the Ciompi – in the reprehensible claims of men incapable of exercising public office.<sup>41</sup> Machiavelli was perhaps the first historian to see the causes not in moral terms, but in political ones, and above all in the material conditions and rational interests of the Ciompi themselves. He thus arrived at a conclusion that has not been surpassed by modern historiography.

According to him, there existed 'the *popolo minuto*'s hatred of the rich citizens and the leaders of the guilds, since they did not feel remunerated for their labours as they believed they rightly deserved'. This aspiration for higher wages was pursued up to a certain point within the framework of the constitutional order of the *arti*, guilds or corporations. Since the *popolo minuto* and the *plebe* were not organised in 'Guilds of their own', but were included in, and subordinated to, the guilds dominated by their employers, 'they did not feel that the justice was done to them to which they were entitled'.<sup>42</sup> Initially they sought to attain their goal by setting up new corporations that would allow access to the magistracies and to justice for the plebs too, but then had recourse to violence. This shift of political method is introduced, in Machiavelli's account, by the speech of an anonymous Ciompo to the crowd for which the author did not have – as in the case of other speeches – a model in one of his sources. It is a famous piece in Machiavelli's prose and interpretation, and some, among them Karl Marx, have regarded it as inspired by Catiline's speech in Sallust. Yet, the Ciompo's speech is part of a public and popular rebellion in the context of civil discord, not of a secret and aristocratic conspiracy like Catiline's, and in its focus on political relations of power and violence it reminds one much more of Machiavelli's *Principe*.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Eugenio Garin, 'Echi del Tumulto dei Ciompi nella cultura del Rinascimento' in *Il Tumulto dei Ciompi. Un momento di storia Fiorentina ed europea* (Florence, 1981), pp. 59–93; Ernesto Sestan, 'Echi sul Tumulto dei Ciompi nella cronistica e nella storiografia' in *ibid.* pp. 125–60; L. Green, *Chronicle into History*, pp. 90–102; D.J. Wilcox, *Development*, pp. 51–3, 149–51.

<sup>42</sup> IF, III/12, p. 700. See also V. Hunecke, 'Il Tumulto dei Ciompi – 600 Jahre danach', *Quellen und Forschungen aus italienischen Archiven und Bibliotheken*, 58 (1978), 360–410 and 'The conference on the Tumulto dei Ciompi held in Florence, 16–19 September 1979', *Journal of Italian History*, 2 (1979), 281–92; J.M. Najemy, 'Arti and Ordini in Machiavelli's *Istorie Fiorentine*' in *Essays presented to Myron P. Gilmore*, ed. by S. Bertelli and G. Ramakus, vol. 1, Florence, 1978, pp. 161–91; *idem* "'Audiant omnes artes'": corporate origins of the Ciompi revolution' in *Il Tumulto dei Ciompi*, pp. 59–93. A. Bonadeo, *Corruption, Conflict, and Power in the Works and Times of Niccolò Machiavelli* (Berkeley, CA, 1973), does not include the Ciompi revolt in the chapter on civil conflict.

<sup>43</sup> IF, III/13, pp. 700–2. For Marx's comparison see N. Badaloni, 'Natura e società in Machiavelli', *Studi Storici*, 10 (1969), 675–708, p. 700; Ragionieri, 'Biografie di Marx e di Engels', *Critica marxista*, 5 (1969), 146; it was criticised by O. Tommasini, *La vita e gli scritti di Niccolò Machiavelli*, vol. II (Rome, 1911), p. 524. For Machiavelli's own presentation of Catiline, who represents not civil discord, but the *coup d'état*, see *Discorsi*, I/10, p. 92; III/6, pp. 209–10; von Hentig, *Studien zur Psychologie des Staatsstreichs und der Staatsgründung* (Berlin, 1924); for the difference between both see, e.g. IF, VIII/1, pp. 817–18.

The Ciompo sets out with an analysis of such relations: to be sure, 'to take up arms, burn and rob citizens' houses' is an evil, but a necessary evil, since there is no other way to avoid the punishment for the evils already committed than by 'redoubling evils'. Wealth should be taken away from the rich because on one hand it has been acquired by deceit and violence, and on the other hand 'faithful servants always stay servants, and good men remain always poor; nor do any ever emerge from servitude but the disloyal and bold, nor from poverty save the rapacious and fraudulent'. At the centre of the speech is an argument in favour of an equality that is not only political but also economic: 'Be not deceived about that antiquity of blood by which they exalt themselves above us. For all men had one common origin, are all equally ancient, and nature made them all alike. Strip us naked and you will see that we are all the same. Dress us in their clothes and them in ours; we shall surely look noble and they ignoble. For it is only poverty and wealth that make us unequal.'

In the context of the entire Book III – its introduction, the historical narrative and the three major speeches – Machiavelli seems to judge the revolt in the following terms. The passage from the struggle for equality of honours to that for equality of wealth is not necessarily illegitimate, and is in any case comprehensible and rational in terms of human nature; but it also brought about the move from constitutional to violent means that the author condemns.<sup>44</sup> Yet, he condemns them not as sin and, as in the epilogue of *Discorsi* I, 37, he attributes them not to human nature, but to historical development and change ('Do not impute the old disorders to human nature, but to the times, and since times may change, you may hope for better fortune for our city, if better institutions are created').<sup>45</sup> He condemns them because they ruin the republic, and it is no accident that the speech of the Ciompo is the only one among the major three of this book which does not refer to the 'patria'.

Two further motives of his judgement are important for the subject of civil discord. The rebels did not only want to take part in government and wealth, but to exclude their enemies from it; according to the Ciompo, 'now is the time not only to free yourselves of them but to become so superior to them that they may have more to rue and fear you than you them'. In Machiavelli's eyes they attempted, and for a while succeeded, to become 'principe dello stato'; in the *Istorie Fiorentine* this term frequently refers to groups, not to individuals.<sup>46</sup> Secondly, the revolt was not only an expression of discord and divisions, but the rebels also systematically pursued a policy of division, including alliance

<sup>44</sup> The three major speeches of Book III summarise these motives: IF, III/5, pp. 692–5; III/11, pp. 699–700; III/13, pp. 700–2. The author also gives explicit judgements on their content: 'Queste parole, perché erano vere . . .' (p. 700); 'queste persuasioni accendono forte . . . al male' (p. 702).

<sup>45</sup> IF, III/5, pp. 694–5.

<sup>46</sup> IF, III/13, pp. 701–2; III/21, p. 709; III/22, p. 709 ('tutta la parte che era principe'). In II/26, p. 675, Lucca is described as 'principe di se stessa'.

with some patricians, among them Salvestro de' Medici.<sup>47</sup> It is here that Machiavelli saw the origins of the Medici's rise to power – he was the first one to do so – because the restoration of the rule of the oligarchy after 1382 brought about a *stato* which was 'no less harsh to its citizens nor less oppressive in its early stages than the regime of the plebs'.<sup>48</sup> In 1434 Cosimo il Vecchio could base himself on those who were no longer satisfied with it.

This is the subject of Book IV, and its introduction deals again with discord and division. There are cities which, even though being formally republics, are not 'well-ordered'. Their frequent changes of 'governì e stati' are not, 'as many believe', between liberty and servitude, but between servitude and licence, the former being the rule of the nobility and the latter that of the *popolani*; in both cases, liberty is but a name, since neither the laws nor the magistrates are respected, and in both cases it is only through individual leaders that a minimum of stability is maintained ('both of them must be upheld by the *virtù* and fortune of a man, who can fail through death or become useless because of political trouble'). Obviously, this refers to Florence and to the conflicts described in the previous and subsequent books. Machiavelli then dwells, as already twice before, on the possibility, though uncertain and rare, that a 'wise, good and powerful citizen' may appear who establishes laws and a constitution which check the opposing 'humours' of the nobles and the people, so as to prevent them from doing harm, and which simultaneously guarantee stability and continuity, so as to render the original legislator superfluous.<sup>49</sup> This vision has a double function. On one side, it announces Giovanni Bicci's and Cosimo de' Medici's future roles, on the other side it was again addressed to Giulio de' Medici who had commissioned the *Istorie Fiorentine* and who was called upon, in Machiavelli's contemporaneous *Discursus*, to establish precisely such a republican order that could later do without a Medici leader; in fact, in the early 1520s it seemed that the Medici family would become extinct after Giulio's death.<sup>50</sup>

The introduction to Book VII deals with discord from a new perspective. Machiavelli develops here a concept which he had not yet touched upon in the earlier introductions: the *sette* (sects, factions), namely the divisions not between the horizontal, class-like *umori* but between vertical groups such as families (*case*), clans, client groups, patronage systems. It is against these groups and their conflicts, much more than against discord between classes, that he unleashes all his wrath. It is a deception and a hope, he writes, to assume that a republic may exist in perfect unity of purpose. But he distinguishes between

<sup>47</sup> IF, III/13, p. 701; III/18, p. 706; IV/2, p. 716. <sup>48</sup> IF, III/21, p. 709.

<sup>49</sup> IF, IV/1, pp. 715–16; see also IF, III/1, p. 691; III/5, pp. 614–15; IV/10, pp. 720–1.

<sup>50</sup> See IF, IV/3, pp. 716–17; IV/14, 16, pp. 722–4; IV/26, p. 731; *Discursus*, p. 30; *Minuta di provvisione per la Riforma dello Stato di Firenze l'anno 1522*, p. 23.

two types of divisions, and this is the passage that Rousseau was later to cite in support of his condemnation of 'sociétés partielles':

Some divisions harm republics, and others benefit them. The ones that harm are those accompanied by *sette* and partisans, those that benefit are carried on without *sette* and partisans. So since the founder of a republic cannot make provisions against civil discord, at least he should take care that there are not *sette*.<sup>51</sup>

The *sette* are different from the *umori* which Machiavelli had described in the introduction to Book III; the latter are natural, unavoidable and may even lead, if checked and handled in a civilised way, to equality and the common good, the former are merely struggles for power, are avoidable and hence should be avoided. There are two different ways of arriving at political power: either through 'vie pubbliche', within the constitutional institutions, or through 'modi privati', outside or against such institutions, by securing – through wealth, generosity or protection – 'partisans' that support the benefactor and his sect for their own benefit and not for the common good. To the earlier condemnation of the rise to power through violent means, Machiavelli adds that of power reached through private wealth, and it is obvious that this verdict also refers to Cosimo de' Medici's policy. Machiavelli sees in the history of Florence not only negative forms of conflict – the introduction to Book III has shown this – but ultimately the negative ones predominated; hence his overall judgement:

The enmities in Florence were always through *sette* and therefore always harmful. The winning side only remained united for as long as the opposing sect was alive. As soon as the defeated side was broken, the reigning faction was no longer restrained by fear or internal discipline, and it split up again.

Again, the reference to the 'founder of a republic' in this introduction seems to be addressed to Giulio de' Medici; in similar words, Machiavelli asked him in the *Discursus* to provide that 'the powerful men cannot form *sette*, which are the ruin of a state'.<sup>52</sup>

Whereas in the sequence of the general introductions to the eight books the term *sette* appears only in that to Book VII, in the historical narrative it had appeared much earlier. In Book I, covering the history of the peninsula since the barbarian invasions until 1434, it referred to religious sects; in Book II, which deals with the origins of Florence until the plague of 1348, it appears very rarely and the prevailing term for the communal divisions is *parte* – for the Guelph and Ghibelline factions as well as for the different social strata. In Book III, *sette* are very much in the foreground, referring to powerful, rival families and to the revival of the old divisions between the Guelphs and the Ghibellines ('la nuova

<sup>51</sup> IF, VII/1, pp. 792–3; see note 11 above.

<sup>52</sup> IF, VII/1–2, pp. 792–4; VII/6, pp. 796–7; IV/26–7, pp. 731–3; *Discursus*, p. 24.

setta di guelfi'). On the eve of the Ciompi revolt we find the first great accusation against the *sette*, 'le famiglie fatali', in the speech of an anonymous citizen who asked the Signoria for a reform that would wipe out 'those institutions which promote the *sette*' and would thus lead to a 'truly free and civil life'. In Book IV, the term is almost never used – except for Giovanni Bicci being described as an ardent opponent of *sette* in general – and the competing families and oligarchic groups are usually called *parte* (the Medici, Albizzi, the Parte Guelfa). In Books V and VI, which deal with the relations between Florence and the other Italian states, *sette* are the armies of the *condottieri* which Machiavelli had so often criticised.<sup>53</sup> Book VII – preceded by the introductory consideration on *sette* – does not use the term, and instead we find *divisione*, *parte*, *civili discordie*, *fazioni*, *contenzioni civili*; the same holds for Book VIII.

From this use of the term *sette* – its more theoretical definition in the introduction to Book VII as well as in the historical account – it is clear that Machiavelli sees them in entirely negative terms, but that he tries to separate them from the legitimate and 'natural' groups which he had theorised about in the introduction to Book III. It seems then that Rousseau did not really misunderstand Machiavelli when he cited his distinction between two kinds of divisions in the *Contrat social*; Rousseau also distinguished between two kinds of 'différences' of interest among the citizens: one which does not exclude, and even leads to, the 'volonté générale' or 'common interest', in contrast to that which is organised in 'associations partielles' in such a way that they take the place of, and win over, the 'volonté générale'. Obviously, the latter correspond to Machiavelli's '*sette*'. As to Machiavelli's thinking as an anticipation of the legitimacy of modern parties, on the linguistic level he uses *parte* both for the legitimate *umori* and the illegitimate *sette*, but he clearly condemns lobby-like groups based on the securing of *partigiani* and *amici*. On the political level he pleads – in the *Discorsi* and the *Istorie Fiorentine* – for the abolition of vertical contrapositions and for the acceptance and tolerance of horizontal divisions, based on social differences, not on clans.<sup>54</sup>

Machiavelli's attempt to sort out and separate the two different kinds of discord – carefully distinguished in the introductions to Books III, IV and VII – is counterbalanced, or perhaps jeopardised, by their dynamic overlap and interaction in the historical events which he narrates. He finds mainly two such dynamics. The groups of both kinds remain united as long as they are

<sup>53</sup> IF, I/5, p. 637; III/3, pp. 691–2; III/5, pp. 692–3 ('famiglie fatali'); IF, IV/11, p. 721; V/2, p. 739 ('sette di armi'); VI/23, p. 780.

<sup>54</sup> Hence, concerning the *sette* which Machiavelli sees embodied most clearly in the *Parte Guelfa*, his attitude is by no means an 'entschiedenste Abkehr von der mittelalterlichen Tradition' (Faul, 'Verfemung', pp. 67–8); but it is true for his opinion on the *umori*. See also Bertelli, 'Embrioni di partiti politici', pp. 34–5. For the concept of 'tolerance' see *Discorsi*, I/6, pp. 86–7: 'Credo ch'e' sia necessario . . . quelle inimicizie che intra il popolo ed il senato nascessino, tollerarle, pigliandole per uno inconveniente necessario a pervenire alla romana grandezza.'

suppressed, and they divide themselves once they are in power. Secondly, the *sette* usually use, in their own conflicts and for their own ends, one of the social classes and their conflicts, and vice versa. In Book II, the division between Guelphs and Ghibellines is a conflict between families and simultaneously instrumentalises and represents the conflict between nobles and the people. In Book III, Machiavelli summarises the interaction:

On the side of the Guelph party were all the families of the old nobility and the greater part of the most powerful *popolani*, with Messer Lapo (di Castiglionchio), Piero (degli Albizzi) and Carlo (Strozzi) as leaders. On the other side were all the lesser *popolani*, the leaders being the Eight of the War Council, Messer Giorgio Scali, and Tommaso Strozzi, with whom the Ricci, Alberti and the Medici went along. The rest of the multitude, as almost always happens, sided with the party of the malcontents.<sup>55</sup>

The divisions and alliances between classes or parts thereof, and families or parts thereof, cause him to summarise a similar situation in Book IV in the words of Niccolò da Uzano, when he advised the anti-medicean *parte* in 1433 not to kill Cosimo: 'You have christened our party the nobles' party and the opposition the plebeian party', but this does not correspond to reality, because

many families, even many households, are divided; people side with them against us out of envy for brothers or kinsmen. I will remind you of some of the most important cases, and you can think of the others for yourself. Of Maso degli Albizzi's sons, Luca has gone over to their party out of envy for Rinaldo; in the Guicciardini household, of the sons of Luigi, Piero opposes Giovanni and favours our enemies; Tommaso and Niccolò Soderini oppose us openly because of the hatred they bear their uncle, Francesco. Hence, taking into consideration the character of both parties, I do not know why our party should deserve to be called noble any more than theirs does.<sup>56</sup>

On the other hand, the rise of the 'parte de' Medici' is seen both as a result of its rivalry with the anti-Medicean part of the oligarchy and of its alliance with the lower classes who resented the oligarchical rule. Both *Istorie Fiorentine* and *Discursus* leave no doubt as to Machiavelli's belief, and criticism of the fact, that Cosimo gradually undermined the republic and transformed it into a *principato*. At first, the Medici were able to use civil discord in their favour ('civil discord always increased Cosimo's power in Florence'); later, after the 1460s, 'lo stato de' Medici' succeeded in extinguishing open and public conflict and Cosimo was no longer of 'equal authority' but became the 'only authority' in the city. He became 'principe nella sua patria', and 'lo stato di Cosimo' tended 'more toward a principate than a republic'.<sup>57</sup> But both texts also leave no doubt that

<sup>55</sup> IF, III/8, p. 696. For another example of such interaction of *umori* and *sette* see IF, II/12, p. 666.

<sup>56</sup> IF, IV/27, p. 732. For this speech, Machiavelli had a source in Cavalcanti, but he completely rewrote it: Cavalcanti *Istorie Fiorentine*, ed. G. Di Pino (Milan, 1944), pp. 143–4. See also the references in note 39 above.

<sup>57</sup> IF, VII/5, pp. 795–6; VIII/1, p. 817; *Discursus*, p. 24–5. See also J.M. Najemy, 'Machiavelli and the Medici: the lessons of Florentine history', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 35 (1982), 551–76.

Machiavelli was equally critical of the *parte* of Cosimo's opponents, because they aspired to precisely the same end – the term *principe* is often used in respect to them – and he saw their oligarchical hegemony as equally harmful to the republic.<sup>58</sup> Machiavelli's view of the overlap between the *sette* and more acceptable kinds of civil discord, and of the predominance of the *sette* in Florentine history may well be due, as has been suggested, to his insight 'that the real cause of the irruption of *sette* on to the political stage was the impossibility of mediating the heightened conflict between *popolo* and *grandi*'.<sup>59</sup>

This historical development – or rather Machiavelli's study of it – may be the reason why he presented his theoretical reflections about the *sette* only in the seventh introductory chapter and not in the earlier ones or in the prologue, even though this concept proved so central to his overall judgement on the harms and benefits of civil discord to the republic, particularly in his later years (the *Discorsi* had dealt with *sette* in quite a different way).<sup>60</sup> In fact, during the fifteenth century the open conflict between nobility and people had moved to the back of the political stage, and it revived when the Consiglio Maggiore was introduced in 1494.<sup>61</sup> Machiavelli's own political experience had been shaped by this revival, even though it was only *post res perditas* that he pronounced on, and took sides in, these tensions.<sup>62</sup> This experience may have shaped his insight not only into Florentine politics, but also into Florentine history. When, after having written the narrative of Books I–VI of the *Istorie Fiorentine*, he wrote the introductions to these six books and then took up the seventh, the debate on the Florentine constitution and its reform, in which he actively participated, had recently reached a culminating point. His *Discursus*, which included historical sections, and the *Istorie Fiorentine*, which included theoretical sections, were not only an expression of the more 'democratic' reform tendencies, but also an attempt to reflect both theoretically and historically on the problems of and obstacles to such a reform, particularly among the

<sup>58</sup> *IF*, III/9, p. 697; III/18, p. 706; III/21, p. 709; III/22, p. 709; IV/27, pp. 732–4; VII/12, p. 801; *Discursus*, pp. 24–6. The anti-medicean faction pursued, according to Machiavelli, a policy which ran counter to the Medici's financial generosity but was equally harmful to the republic: the imposition of taxes ('gravezze'), particularly on the lower classes, for the purpose of war. The Medici are presented as supporters of a more benevolent taxation (*IF*, IV/4–10, pp. 717–21; IV/14–15, pp. 722–4; VII/17, pp. 829). In *IF*, IV/14, Machiavelli argues very similarly as in *Discorsi*, I/37 in terms of human nature and of equality (see note 34 above): 'Ma come accade che mai gli uomini non si sodisfanno, e avuto una cosa, non vi si contentando dentro, ne desiderano un'altra, il popolo, non contento alla ugalità della gravezza che dalla legge nasceva, domandava che si rindassero i tempi passati, e che si vedesse quello che i potenti, secondo il catasto, avevano pagato meno . . .' (p. 723). Machiavelli seems to underline, in important sections, 'le sustanze' which were so crucial to *Discorsi*, I/37 and to the Ciompi revolt.

<sup>59</sup> Cadoni, 'Machiavelli teorico', p. 220. <sup>60</sup> *Discorsi*, II/5, p. 154; III/1, p. 195.

<sup>61</sup> Rubinstein, 'I primi anni' and 'Oligarchy and Democracy', pp. 107–10, his contribution to this volume and his comments at the 1987 conference; see also Samuel Cohn, 'The character of protest in mid-Quattrocento' in *Il Tumulto dei Ciompi*, pp. 199–219, esp. pp. 218–19.

<sup>62</sup> See Robert Black's chapter 4 in this volume; Ridolfi, *Vita*, p. 213.

'Florentines who are unable to keep liberty and cannot put up with servitude'.<sup>63</sup> He used current terms of the Florentine tradition of political language and transformed them into categories and typologies, attempting – theoretically – to control civil discords by naming them and – politically – by tolerating and institutionalising them within the constitutional framework.<sup>64</sup>

There are differences, then, in Machiavelli's judgement on civil discord between the *Discorsi* and the *Istorie Fiorentine*, but not contradictions, and the choice is not between a Machiavelli who analysed and favoured the *principato* and unscrupulous politics, and a resigned Machiavelli who believed in a harmonious, unified and pacified republic. Precisely because he was a convinced republican – in respect to the city-state<sup>65</sup> – he perceived and analysed the fact that in republics there are contrasting interests, harsh conflicts, power relations, tyranny and amorality. But it is only in the republican order that the discords among the various human *umori* can and must be expressed; on the other hand, it is these very discords that continually threaten it. They are both the life and the death of the republic.

<sup>63</sup> *IF*, II/36, p. 684; similarly in *IF*, III/5, p. 694. For the debate on the Florentine constitution, which lasted until the suppression of the conspiracy of 1522, see esp. von Albertini *Das florentinische Staatsbewusstsein*; Guidi, 'La teoria delle "tre ambizioni"'; Silvano, 'Vivere civile'. Machiavelli's insistence on the *sette* in the introduction to Book VII might suggest the possibility that he wrote it after 1522; I am grateful to Nicolai Rubinstein for drawing my attention to this possibility. For the problem of the chronology of Machiavelli's writing the first books of the *IF*, see Ridolfi, *Vita*, esp. pp. 315–320, 328, 566; Levi, 'Due nuovi frammenti'; Felix Gilbert, 'Machiavelli's *Istorie Fiorentine*: an essay in interpretation' in Gilmore, ed. *Studies on Machiavelli*, pp. 73–99; Carlo Dionisotti, 'Machiavelli storico' in Dionisotti, *Machiavellerie*, pp. 365–409.

<sup>64</sup> I am grateful to John Najemy who underlined, at the 1987 conference, the importance of Machiavelli's efforts at, and faith in, controlling political processes by naming and categorising them.

<sup>65</sup> In the *IF*, Machiavelli does not – or at least not in any explicit way – ground his favourable judgement on the discord of the *umori* on the view that they constitute the dynamic force for expansion and empire, as he did in the *Discorsi* (see *Discorsi*, I/4 and, e.g., note 54 above). Therefore, the argument of the *IF* seems not to contribute to the question as to whether Machiavelli's positive view of civil discord was secondary to that of expansion or vice versa. But it suggests that at least for the late Machiavelli, civil discord was more crucial than expansion and empire.