

UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI PARMA
Dottorato di Ricerca in FILOSOFIA E ANTROPOLOGIA
Ciclo XXVIII

Machiavelli's reading of Aristotle. A reassessment.

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Introduction.

That Machiavelli was a philosopher, and a great one indeed, nobody questions. That his own view of the world and of human beings lays at the foundation of our own, no one would dare to deny either. Also, that our own way to conceive of power and politics has roots in his intellectual experience, it is not possible to cast doubt on.

The widespread belief that Machiavelli is a turning-point in the history of the West is predicated on the assumption that he was a totally “new” figure, one who came to break up with the earlier philosophical and literary tradition completely. To some extent, this assumption is nothing but true. Machiavelli’s realistic conception of political power as well as his ideas of the role and the benefit of social conflict stand out as two striking examples of that.

In other words, the consensus is that no one could legitimately question that Machiavelli was a philosopher, in that he did actually contribute to shape the overall image of reality for the centuries to come. If seen from this very perspective, the legacy of Machiavelli to Modern era appears to everyone as a genuinely philosophical one.

Now, what happens if we change perspective? What if we start wondering about the extent of his debt to Classical and Medieval philosophy rather than his capacity to influence Modern and Contemporary one?

In plain words, what happens if we turn from the issue of Machiavelli’s philosophical legacy to that of Machiavelli’s philosophical culture?

Instead of a general agreement, the latter question has raised one of the most harshly debated issues of the whole Machiavelli’s historiography.

Furthermore, the question of Machiavelli’s philosophical culture has led to another, quite similar, question: which was the real extent of Machiavelli’s philosophical education?

To answer this question would be a great achievement. In the first place, it would make it possible to better define the cultural background of one of the most influential figures in Early Modern history. This would also enable to shed light on his early education, which belongs to a phase of his life of which very little is known. In the second place, and more importantly, a re-assessment of Machiavelli's philosophical learning would allow to sort what proceeds from Machiavelli's conversation with past authors from what can be considered his original contribution.

This dissertation aims to address this problem. The fundamental idea of my work is that Machiavelli's philosophical culture was, in its essence, of Aristotelian kind.

Needless to say, Machiavelli grew up within a context in which Aristotle's philosophy was still the prevailing one. On the other hand, late fifteenth-century Florence was also the cradle of Renaissance Platonism, as well as the place where all the major philosophical schools of Antiquity were being revived. Not even in such a rich context, however, did all these doctrines succeed in overthrowing Aristotle from his role of foremost authority.

Yet, the presence of Aristotle's philosophy within Machiavelli's own writings is by no means easy to prove. Such a difficulty depends on two main reasons. Firstly, Machiavelli does not seem very interested in disclosing his philosophical sources. Unlike the major Roman historians (who are often quoted explicitly), Ancient and Medieval thinkers hardly deserve Machiavelli's acknowledgment. As far as the sole Aristotle is concerned, his name occurs no more than three times in Machiavelli's entire *corpus*. It is therefore very hard for his readers to understand whether or not Machiavelli is relying on a particular philosophical doctrine (which may be connected to a particular philosophical text).

The other reason why it proves difficult to define Machiavelli's indebtedness to Aristotle is that there is almost no evidence of his education and studies. As well known, Machiavelli did not attend the university; he did follow, however, a private educational path, which his father had designed for him. Unsurprisingly, the only source providing information about his early readings is his father's diary. Therein, some of the texts that came into Niccolo's house and were

eventually read by him are carefully listed. Unfortunately, the diary covers a few years only, and accordingly should not be taken as a full description of all the books available in the house.

However valuable, this information cannot be used to make up for the scarce amount of explicit reference in Machiavelli's writings (needless to say, the opposite strategy would be even more ineffective).

Given such difficulties, two different approaches will be combined in this work: historical and textual. As for the former, I did my best to grasp the precise intellectual context within which all the issues I took into account were set. In doing so, I was able sometimes to make up for the lack of documentation concerning some phases in Machiavelli's life. An examination of the Florentine Chancery environment, for instance, proved helpful to better assess Machiavelli's cultural learning. This historical approach is particularly evident in chapters 1 and 4.

As for the textual approach, I began by sorting out some specific aspects of Machiavelli's thought which prove relevant from a philosophical point of view. These are: [a] his view of time and history, [b] his method of examining political phenomena, [c] his conception of fortune and human free will, [d] his anthropological thought. By taking into exam all the places in which these issues are dealt with in Machiavelli's *opera*, I tried to show the extent to which they rely on Aristotle's philosophy. Textual analysis takes place in chapters 2 and 3.

According to these methodological premises, the outline of the work will be the following.

In the first chapter it was claimed that Machiavelli's philosophical background must be traced back to Aristotle's and Cicero's practical thought. The ethical, political and rhetorical writings of Aristotle and Cicero provided the philosophical education required to any prospective official and public servant in Florence since at least the late thirteenth century.

Machiavelli's early education too was firmly grounded on the study of both Aristotle's and Cicero's practical works, as it is shown from his father's diary. In this respect, I was also able to prove that Machiavelli's familiarity with these two authors was greater than usually assumed. By paying attention to some neglected

aspects of the diary, it was possible to bring out some new texts of Aristotle and Cicero which were completely overlooked by scholars.

In the second chapter I dealt with Machiavelli's notion of eternity of the world. The aim of the analysis was to show that Machiavelli's own concept of eternity was entirely consistent with Aristotle's own one. Following the Greek philosopher, Machiavelli clearly expressed the belief that the eternity involves only the "macro-structures" of history.

According to Aristotle's notion of eternity, Machiavelli will then develop his own method of evaluating political phenomena, a method which is, in turn, firmly grounded on the account of inductive arguments Aristotle gave in his logical works and in the *Rhetoric*.

Further evidence of Machiavelli's indebtedness to Aristotle's inductive method comes from the examination of the notion of conjecture (*coniectura*), a concept that is employed by the Florentine only occasionally, yet in a way that is entirely consistent with the account given by Aristotle.

The third chapter is devoted to the examination of a key-concept of Machiavelli's thought, namely his concept of fortune. There are three main elements in Machiavelli's reflections on fortune that need to be singled out because of their highly philosophical relevance. These are: [1] the belief in a twofold level of causality affecting, respectively, the natural world and the moral dimension; [2] the idea of men's nature as something incapable of changing; [3] the view of fortune as an irrational power which men can hopefully beat by recurring to a just as much irrational conduct. These three elements must be all ascribed to Aristotle, who had clearly addressed them both in his practical and in his physical writings. I addressed all of them in turn, concentrating my analysis on chapter 25 of the *Prince*.

In the fourth and last chapter I dealt with one of the most challenging aspects of Machiavelli's cultural attitude: his barely-concealed distaste for professional philosophers and intellectuals. This issue must be seen as closely intertwined with another: the remarkably low amount of explicit references to philosophical works, both Ancient and Medieval. I suggested that a possible explanation of this problem is by setting Machiavelli's use of classical philosophy, and above all of

Aristotle's philosophy, against the intellectual background within which Machiavelli's project took its shape; in particular, I will test his allegedly negative attitude towards philosophical speculation by measuring it against the debate over active and contemplative life which took place in Florence at the turn of the fifteenth century.

A full-funded PhD scholarship provided by the Università di Parma enabled me to concentrate entirely on my project for the last three years. I want therefore express my gratitude to this Institution.

As Director of the PhD program, professor Beatrice Centi supported me in many occasions. I am very grateful for her invaluable help.

I am also much indebted to professor Fabrizio Amerini, who helped me in many circumstances, both scientific and practical.

During the PhD program I was able to spend two research periods abroad. In fall 2014 I was Visiting Research PhD student at the Department of Italian Studies of the Warwick University (UK). I wish to thank Dr. David Lines for his help during my stay. In fall 2015 I was La Motta Chair Visiting student at the Seton Hall University, NJ (US). It was a real pleasure to meet professor William Connell. It is difficult to say how much this thesis benefited of his insights.

It is common behavior to say that without someone this work would have never been the same. However, in the case of Gian Mario Cao, this statement is literally true. Gian Mario was always the first person reading through my pages. His insights and comments has increased the quality of these pages in a way that is not possible to express.

As supervisor of my PhD project, professor Stefano Caroti supported me from the very beginning. His collaboration was of invaluable help for me.

The greatest debt is owed to professor Vittoria Perrone Compagni, who has been following my work on Machiavelli since 2010, when I was first introduced to the Florentine's writings in one of her courses. I wish to express my deepest gratitude to her.

1. Between Aristotle and Cicero. On Machiavelli's «cultural toolkit».

One of the most debated issues among the students of Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527) has been how to assess his cultural background.¹ In particular, there are at least two main reasons why the issue of Machiavelli's education has played a crucial role in both recent and non recent scholarship. Firstly, because it includes the question of his debt to both classical and medieval thinkers and historians – a question which proves preliminary to any attempt to sort what proceeds from Machiavelli's conversation with past authors from what can be considered his original contribution.² Secondly, the question of Machiavelli's education may provide important clues about his appointment to the Florentine chancery in 1498, enabling us to understand why a citizen with no previous political training and experience was assigned to such an important office.³

In this chapter I will claim that Machiavelli's philosophical background must be traced back to Aristotle's and Cicero's practical philosophy.⁴ The ethical,

¹ Among the most sharp judgments on this point, see M. MARTELLI, *Machiavelli e Firenze dalla Repubblica al Principato*, in *Niccolò Machiavelli. Politico storico letterato*. Atti del Convegno di Studi (Losanna, 27-30 settembre 1995), a cura di J. J. Marchand, Salerno, Roma, 1996, pp. 15-31: 15: «Raramente è dato trovare acque così tempestose come quelle attualmente solcate dalla navicella degli studi machiavelliani. Su niente c'è accordo: non sulla cronologia e sulla storia redazionale del *Principe*; non sulla storia redazionale e sulla cronologia dei *Discorsi*; non sul significato del concetto e dell'ente "principato civile"; non sull'attribuzione del cosiddetto *Dialogo o discorso intorno alla nostra lingua*; non, per quanto ormai il dissidio sia a questo punto meno grave, sulla datazione della *Mandragola*. Non c'è accordo, soprattutto e per tutto questo, sulla identificazione stessa del personaggio "Machiavelli": per alcuni un filosofo, per altri un umanista, per questi un letterato, per quelli un teorico delle dottrine politiche».

² J. J. MARCHAND, *Preface* to A. GUIDI, *Un Segretario militante. Politica, diplomazia e armi nel Cancelliere Machiavelli*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2009, pp. 9-10.

³ On this problematic historiographical issue within the scholarship on Machiavelli, see at least: O. TOMMASINI, *La vita e gli scritti di Niccolò Machiavelli nella loro relazione col machiavellismo. Storia ed esame critico*, 2 vols in 3 tomes, Loescher, Roma-Torino-Firenze, 1883-1911, I, 2, pp. 131-177; M. MARTELLI, *Preistoria (medicea) di Machiavelli*, «Studi di filologia italiana», XXIX (1971), pp. 377-405; ID., *L'altro Niccolò di Bernardo Machiavelli*, Sansoni, Firenze, 1975; Q. SKINNER, *Machiavelli*, Oxford University Press, Oxford-Melbourne-Toronto, 1981, pp. 3-6; J. B. ATKINSON, *Niccolò Machiavelli. A Portrait*, in *The Cambridge Companion to Machiavelli*, edited by J. M. Najemy, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2010, pp. 14-30, especially the part devoted to *Youth (1469-1489) and "Lost" Years (1489-1498)*, pp. 15-18.

⁴ In Machiavelli's theoretical outlook a great role is played, as known, by the knowledge of history. It is not the aim of these page to neglect such an evidence. However, I shall now concentrate on Machiavelli's acquaintance with rhetorical and philosophical texts rather than to

political and rhetorical writings of Aristotle and Cicero provided the philosophical education required to any prospective official and public servant in Florence since at least the late thirteenth century. It was at that time that the practical works of Aristotle and Cicero began to occupy a central position in the curriculum of any Florentine statesman.

THE MEDIEVAL ROOTS OF MACHIAVELLI'S EARLY EDUCATION

This cultural tendency was mainly due to the contribution of the Florentine notary Brunetto Latini (1220 ca.-1295 ca.). Brunetto's major writings – the *Tresor* and the *Rettorica* – had in fact a very significant impact on the cultural setting of the Florentine *Trecento*, playing a central role in the definition of the educational profile and skills required to any person who wished to occupy professional positions in the government of the state.

In 1260, after the battle of Montaperti (September 4), many prominent citizens belonging to the Guelph party were expelled from Florence, and then forced into exile. Brunetto learned about the debacle of his faction while he was coming back from a diplomatic mission at the court of Alfonso X of Castile.⁵ Being banished from Florence, he decided to move to France and stay there until he and his fellow Guelphs were allowed to return home (the ban was eventually repealed in 1266).⁶ It was in this period that Brunetto composed the *Tresor*, which he wrote in French

historical works. These will be taken under examination later on in my work, and they will be considered as an essential tool of Machiavelli's theory of history.

⁵ G. VILLANI, *Nuova Cronica*, VII, 73, critical edition by G. Porta, 3 voll., Guanda, Parma, 1990, I, pp. 367-368: «Nel detto anno, essendo d'assai tempo prima per gli elettori dello 'mperio eletti per discordia due imperadori, l'una parte (ciò furono tre de' lettori) elessono il re Alfonso di Spagna, e l'altra parte degli elettori elessono Ricciardo conte di Cornovaglia e fratello del re d'Inghilterra; e perché il reame di Boemia era in discordia, e due se ne facevano re, ciascuno diede la sua boce a la sua parte. E per molti anni era stata la discordia de' due eletti, ma la chiesa di Roma più favoreggiava Alfonso di Spagna, acciò ch'egli colle sue forze venisse ad abbattere la superbia e signoria di Manfredi; per la qual cagione i Guelfi di Firenze gli mandarono ambasciatori per somuoverlo del passare, promettendogli grande aiuto acciò che favorisse parte guelfa. E l'ambasciatore fue ser Brunetto Latini, uomo di grande senno e autoritade; ma innanzi che fosse fornita l'ambasciata, i Fiorentini furono sconfitti a Monte Aperti, e lo re Manfredi prese grande vigore e stato in tutta Italia».

⁶ For the list of all the Guelph *Fuoriusciti*, among whom also ser Brunetto Latini is mentioned, see G. VILLANI, *Nuova Cronica*, VII, 79, cit., I, pp. 380-382.

vernacular.⁷ Among the many significant features of Brunetto's work, at least three can be singled out for shaping the cultural ideology that was designed to inform the education of any member of the Florentine political class.

Firstly, the *Tresor* is a work conceived and written by a Florentine man for his own city, and its significance in the cultural history of Florence will prove substantial and lasting. Unsurprisingly, in the ninth book of his *Nuova Cronica* (1322-1348), Giovanni Villani defined Brunetto as the «cominciatore e maestro in digrossare i Fiorentini, e farli scorti in bene parlare, e in sapere guidare e reggere la nostra repubblica secondo la Politica».⁸

Secondly, the *Tresor* was soon translated into Florentine Vernacular, certainly by the end of the thirteenth century. This version, which was initially misattributed to Bono Giamboni, was even more successful than the French original one. Its large circulation in Tuscany up until the end of the fifteenth century is testified by the impressive number of manuscripts still surviving in Florentine libraries;⁹ moreover, the Italian *Tresor* was printed in Treviso by Girardo Flandrino in 1474 and then again in Venice in 1528 and 1533. The dissemination of the Italian *Tresor* shows that its *fortuna* lasted longer than two centuries.

In the third place, the importance of Brunetto's *Tresor* lies in its highly pedagogical purpose, that is to say, in the aim to train the future members of the ruling class by providing them with a solid yet specific cultural background. This point is made clear from the very beginning of the work:

⁷ On Brunetto's choice of writing his *Tresor* in French Vernacular, the judgment expressed by Dante has gained the widest notoriety: DANTE, *Inferno*, XV, ll. 22-124. See also G. BRIGUGLIA, *Il diletto del linguaggio. La scelta della lingua come spazio politico in alcuni testi politici e letterari della seconda metà del Duecento*, in *Thinking Politics in the Vernacular. From the Middle Ages to the Renaissance*, edited by G. Briguglia-T. Ricklin, Academic Press, Fribourg, 2011, pp. 43-56, in part. pp. 50-54, devoted to Brunetto Latini.

⁸ G. VILLANI, *Nuova Cronica*, IX, 10, cit., II, p. 28.

⁹ P. SQUILLACIOTI, *La tradizione manoscritta delle opere di Brunetto Latini*, in B. LATINI, *Tresor*, edited by P. G. Beltrami, P. Squillacioti, P. Torri, S. Vatteroni, Einaudi, Torino, 2007, pp. L-LII lists 29 extant manuscripts. On the manuscript tradition of the Italian version of the *Tresor*, see also *Volgarizzamenti del Due e Trecento*, edited by C. SEGRE, UTET, Torino, 1953, pp. 62-65; C. MASCHERONI, *I codici del volgarizzamento italiano del «Tresor» di Brunetto Latini*, «Aevum», XLIII (1969), 5-6, pp. 485-510; M. GIOLA, *La tradizione dei volgarizzamenti toscani del «Tresor» di Brunetto Latini. Con un'edizione critica della redazione α (I.1-129)*, QuiEdit, Verona, 2010; G. CONTINI, *Letteratura italiana delle origini*, Rizzoli, Milano, 2013 (or. ed. Firenze, 1976), pp. 291-293.

Sì come il signore che vuole in cigulo luogo ammassare cose di grandissimo valore, non solamente per suo diletto, ma per crescere il suo potere, e per assicurare lo suo stato in guerra ed in pace, vi mette le più care e le più preziose gioie che puote secondo la sua bona intenzione; così è il corpo di questo libro compilato di sapienza, sicome quello ch'è istratto di tutti li membri di filosofia in una summa brevemente.¹⁰

Brunetto is here announcing the framework of his *Tresor* to be encyclopaedic, arguing that the notions it provides encompass all the branches of human knowledge («tutti i membri di filosofia»). In this respect, Brunetto's *Tresor* can be classified together with other famous encyclopaedias dating from the thirteenth century, such as the *De proprietatibus rerum* by Bartholomaeus Anglicus and the *Speculum maius* by Vincent of Beauvais. Between the *Tresor* and these collections, however, there is a substantial difference with regard to the aim they wish to achieve. In the prologues of their books, in fact, both Bartholomaeus and Vincent emphasize the intellectual and scholastic task they assigned to their works. In particular, the first one clearly states that he wrote his book as a useful tool for those who inquire into «naturas rerum et proprietates», showing that his encyclopaedic collection was mainly intended for the use of students and university professors.¹¹ Similarly, Vincent of Beauvais describes his *Speculum maius* as a work aimed to restore the true knowledge of all those things that are essential «ad fidei nostrae dogmatis astructionem, vel ad morum istructionem, sive ad excitandam charitatis devotionem, aut divinarum scripturarum mysticam expositionem, vel ad ispius veritatis manifestam aut symbolicam declarationem».¹²

On the other side, Brunetto's *Tresor* goes explicitly beyond the boundaries of a mere scholastic treatise, for it addresses directly to the lord who is striving to increase his power and preserve his own state in war and peace («lo signore che

¹⁰ B. LATINI, *Il Tesoro di Brunetto Latini volgarizzato da Bono Giamboni*, I, 1, raffrontato col testo autentico francese edito da P. Chabaille, emendato con mss. ed illustrato da L. Gaiter, 4 voll., Romagnoli, Bologna, 1878-1883 (henceforth: B. LATINI, *Il Tesoro*), I, pp. 3-4.

¹¹ BARTHOLOMAEUS ANGLICUS, *De proprietatibus rerum*, Prohemium, edited by C. Meier, H. Meyer, B. Van Den Abeele, I. Ventura, Brepols, Turnhout, 2007, I, p. 51.

¹² VINCENTIUS BELLOVACENSIS (VINCENT DE BEAUVAIS), *Speculum quadruplex sive Speculum maius*, 4 voll., Akademische Druck- u. Verlagsanstalt, Graz, 1964-1965, I, Generalis prologus, p. 1.

vuole [...] acrescere lo suo podere e assicurare lo suo stato in guerra et in pace»). Thus, although quite similar to other encyclopaedias in many of its aspects, the *Tresor* did not spring from – and was not designed for – the academic environment. Rather, Brunetto’s work had a much more practical and political purpose: to teach how to master all those skills which are required to statesmen.¹³ Latini gives an exhaustive account of such competences in introducing the contents of his *Tresor*:

E la prima parte di questo Tesoro è come denari contanti, per ispendere tutto giorno in cose bisognose: cioè a dire, ch’egli tratta del cominciamento del mondo, e delle vecchie istorie, e dello stabilimento del mondo, e della natura di tutte cose in summa. E ciò appartiene a la primiera scienza della filosofia, cioè Teorica, secondo ciò che il libro parla qui appresso. E siccome senza danari non avrebbe veruno mezzo tra l’opere delle genti che dirizzasse l’uno contra l’altro, altresì non potrebbe l’uomo dell’altre cose pienamente, se non sapesse questa prima parte del libro.

La seconda parte, che tratta de’ vizii e delle virtudi, è di preziose pietre che danno altrui delitti e virtudi: cioè a dire, che cose dee l’uomo fare, e che no: E di ciò mostra la ragione, e il perché. E questo appartiene a la seconda e alla terza parte della filosofia, cioè a Pratica e a Logica.

La terza parte del libro del Tesoro si è di oro fino, cioè a dire, ch’ella insegna parlare all’uomo secondo la dottrina della Retorica, e come il signore dee governare le gente che ha sotto di lui, e specialmente secondo l’usanza d’Italia. E tutto ciò appartiene alla seconda scienza della filosofia, cioè a Pratica. Chè siccome l’oro transcende tutte maniere di metalli, così la scienza di ben parlare e di governare la gente che l’uomo ha sotto di sè, è più nobile che nulla altra scienza del mondo.¹⁴

¹³ On the importance of notaries – and, in particular, of Brunetto – in the evolution of Florentine culture from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century, see P. VITI, *I notai e la cultura fiorentina nei secoli XIII-XVI*, in *Il notaio nella civiltà fiorentina. Secoli XIII-XVI*, Mostra nella Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana (Firenze, 1 ottobre-10 novembre 1984), XVII Congresso Internazionale del Notariato latino Firenze, Vallecchi, Firenze, 1984, pp. 101-150.

¹⁴ B. LATINI, *Il Tesoro*, I, 1, cit., I, pp. 3-6.

The plan given by Brunetto to his work corresponds to a threefold division of philosophy into Theory, Practice, and Logic.¹⁵ Theory teaches the knowledge of all things celestial and terrestrial, of their origin and growth along history. Accordingly, the first part of the *Tresor* is devoted to world history (from the Creation down to medieval times) as well as to natural philosophy.¹⁶ Here the author makes use of a quite large and motley set of sources including, but not limited to, classical works on natural science such as Pliny the Elder's *Naturalis historia* and Palladius' *De re rustica* (which often relates to Aristotle's *De generatione et corruptione*); medieval bestiaries such as Hugh of Fouilloy's *De bestiis et aliis rebus*; well-known collections such as Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae*, Solinus' *Collectanea rerum memorabilium*, and Vincent of Beauvais' *Speculum maius*; Latin works on world and sacred history such as Petrus Comestor's *Historia scholastica* and Isidore's *De ortu et obitu Patrum*.¹⁷ As Francis J. Carmody has pointed out, in the first part Brunetto «sought to be brief, to present a very complex and long account in a few pages, saving space for subjects he felt more capable of development».¹⁸

The second and more valuable section of the *Tresor*, in fact, aims to teach men how to govern themselves (Practice), as well as to provide compelling reasons

¹⁵ P. G. BELTRAMI, *Tre schede sul Tresor. 1. Il sistema delle scienze e la struttura del Tresor. 2. Tresor e Tesoretto. 3. Aspetti della ricezione del Tresor*, «Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa. Classe di Lettere e Filosofia», XXIII (1993), 1, pp. 115-190: 115-133 clarifies the distinction occurring between the system of sciences given by Brunetto in the chapters 2-5 of the first book and the general plan of the work provided in the opening chapter. On the same argument see also S. BALDWIN, P. BARRETTE, *Introduction to B. LATINI, Li Livres dou Tresor*, edition and study by S. Baldwin, P. Barrette, Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, Tempe (AZ), 2003, pp. XIV-XXI.

¹⁶ P. G. BELTRAMI, *Tre schede sul Tresor*, cit., p. 129: «Alla teologia pertengono l'esposizione dei capitoli 6-18 (creazione, natura, dio, male, angeli, anima, natura umana, legge divina) e la storia universale (19-98); alla fisica la geografia (122-125), il trattato sull'arte di costruire le case (126-130), il bestiario (131-202); [...] non ricevono invece una propria trattazione aritmetica, musica, geometria. Mentre la trattazione teologico-storica e quella astronomica sono compatte e, per gli scopi dell'opera, complete, quella fisica ha un carattere selettivo che può perere inevitabile, data la vastità dispersiva della definizione».

¹⁷ On the sources used by Brunetto in the first part of his *Tresor*, see P. TOYNBEE, *Brunetto Latino's Obligations to Solino*, «Romania», XXIII (1984), pp. 62-77; F. J. CARMODY, *Latin Sources of Brunetto Latini's World History*, «Speculum», XI (1936), pp. 359-370; ID., *Brunetto Latini's «Tresor»: Latin Sources on Natural Science*, «Speculum», XII (1937), pp. 359-366; F. CAPACCIONI, «La nature des animaux» nel «Tresor» di Brunetto Latini. Indagine sulle fonti, in *Bestiaires médiévaux. Nouvelles perspectives sur les manuscrits et les traditions textuelles*. XV Colloque de la Société Internationale Renardienne (Louvain-la-Neuve, 19-22 août 2003), éditées par B. Van den Abeele, Louvain-la-Neuve, 2005, pp. 31-47.

¹⁸ F. J. CARMODY, *Latin Sources of Brunetto Latini's World History*, cit., p. 359.

why they should do so (Logic).¹⁹ The entire first part of this book is – as Brunetto states – grounded on the authority of Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*,²⁰ whose late ancient epitome known as *Compendium Alexandrinum* or *Summa Alexandrinorum* is here presented in French vernacular by Brunetto, who probably made use of Taddeo Alderotti’s translation.²¹ The second part consists of a collection of excerpts and brief discussions on virtues and vices taken from many prominent authors, both Greek and Latin, as well as from sacred texts.

Finally, the third and most important part of the *Tresor* deals with rhetoric and politics. According to the division given by Brunetto in the fourth chapter of the first book, there are two different kinds of politics: the one relating to works and the other one relating to words.²² Together with grammar and dialectic, rhetoric belongs to the latter category, and thus it proves to be an essential component within the field of politics.²³ In his *Rettorica* Brunetto makes the connection between rhetoric and politics even more clear, stating that:

In fatti è la ragione delle cittadi sì come l’arte de’ fabbri, de’ sartori, de’ pannari e l’altre arti che si fanno con mani e con piedi. In detti è la rettorica e l’altre scienze che sono in parlare. Adonque la scienza del governamento delle cittadi è cosa generale sotto la quale si comprende rettorica, cioè l’arte del ben parlare.²⁴

¹⁹ On the interaction between Practice and Logic, see what Brunetto states at the beginning of the second part of his *Tresor* in B. LATINI, *Il Tesoro*, II, 1, cit., III, pp. 7-8: «E di queste due scienze tratterà lo maestro miscolatamente, per ciò che loro argomenti sono sì miscolati, che a pena potrebbero essere divisati».

²⁰ B. LATINI, *Il Tesoro*, II, 1, cit., III, pp. 9-10: «Ma innanzi vuole fondare [*scil.* maestro Brunetto] suo edificio sopra lo libro d’Aristotile, lo quale si chiama Etica, e sì lo trasmuterà di latino in romanzo, e porrà al cominciamento della seconda parte del suo libro».

²¹ S. GENTILI, *L’uomo aristotelico alle origini della letteratura italiana*, prefazione di P. Dronke, Carocci-La Sapienza, Roma, 2005, pp. 41-49; EAD., *L’«Etica» volgarizzata da Taddeo Alderotti (m. 1295). Saggio di commento*, «Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medioevale» XVII (2005), pp. 249-281; EAD., *L’edizione dell’Etica in volgare attribuita a Taddeo Alderotti: risultati e problemi aperti*, in *Aristotele fatto volgare. Tradizione aristotelica e cultura volgare nel Rinascimento*, a cura di D. A. Lines ed E. Refini, ETS, Pisa, 2014, pp. 39-59.

²² B. LATINI, *Il Tesoro*, I, 4, cit., I, p. 17: «La terza è politica, e senza fallo questa è la più alta scienza ed il più nobile mestiero che sia in tra gli uomini. [...] E si c’insegna tutte le arti e mestieri che sono bisognosi alla vita dell’uomo. E ciò è in due maniere, ch’è l’una in opere, e l’altra è in parole».

²³ On this aspect see P. G. BELTRAMI, *Tre schede sul Tresor*, cit., pp. 118-120.

²⁴ B. LATINI, *La Rettorica*, 17, 4, testo critico di F. Maggini, prefazione di C. Segre, Le Monnier, Firenze, 1968, p. 41. Some passages above (p. 40) Brunetto states: «Per la qual cosa questa arte di

Politics and rhetoric stand on the top of Brunetto's theoretical edifice, and rhetoric is included in the sphere of politics as a part. Evidence of how close was the link between these two disciplines is provided by the very title of Latini's *Rettorica*, which is not simply a formal variation of the word "retorica" but, rather, as Enrico Artifoni has shown, the mental and cultural signal that the figures of the *rètore* (orator) and the one of the *rettore* (the political leader) began to be considered as completely overlapping.²⁵ The members of the ruling class whom Brunetto addresses are required to master the skills of both the orator and the political leader, and the two central authorities to be endorsed in this process are, respectively, Cicero and Aristotle. On the one hand, the *corpus Aristotelicum*, as well as the medieval literary tradition stemming from it, are the main references for ethical and strictly political matters.²⁶ The entire second book of the *Tresor*, concerning all the issues related to ethics and economics, as well as some queries about the government of cities, is – as we have seen – totally based on the authority of Aristotle. On the other hand, Cicero's provides nothing less than a rhetorical model in that the first part of the third section of the *Tresor* may be seen as a revised version of Cicero's *De inventione*. Evidence of Brunetto's interest in Cicero's text may also be found in his *Rettorica*, which not only translates the *De inventione* into Florentine vernacular, but also comments on it.

To summarize, two aspects of Brunetto's cultural project deserve particular attention. The first aspect is his full endorsement of the Aristotelian definition of the disciplines which pertain most properly to the political activity – namely ethics, economics and politics. The second aspect is the notion of looking at rhetoric as a part of the political discourse by considering politics and rhetoric as the main elements in the government of cities. These elements are then placed by Brunetto under the aegis, respectively, of Aristotle and Cicero.

rettorica porremo in quel genere che noi diciamo della civile scienza, cioè della scienza delle cittadi».

²⁵ E. ARTIFONI, *I podestà professionali e la fondazione retorica della politica comunale*, «Quaderni storici», LXIII (1986), pp. 687-719: 000. See also P. G. BELTRAMI, *Introduction* to B. LATINI, *Tresor*, cit., p. XII.

²⁶ P. G. BELTRAMI, *Tre schede sul Tresor*, cit., p. 133.

E sappiate che retorica è sotto la scienza del governare le città, secondo che disse Aristotile qua addietro nel suo libro, sì come l'arte di fare freni e selle è sotto l'arte di cavalleria. L'ufficio di questa arte, secondo che dice Tullio, è di parlare pensatamente, per far credere lo suo detto.²⁷

It has now to be noticed that, as Giuliano Tanturli and Enrico Fenzi have claimed, the pattern introduced by Brunetto Latini will persist in Florence up until the end of the fifteenth century, showing its vitality all along the tradition of Florentine civic Humanism.²⁸ Before them, and from a broader perspective, Quentin Skinner too had emphasized the continuity, within Florentine Humanism, between the political and rhetorical tradition of medieval *dictatores* and the civic Humanists of fifteenth-century Florence. In particular, he argued that one important element of continuity between these two groups «is that they generally received the same form of legal training, and subsequently went to occupy very similar professional roles, acting either as teachers of rhetoric in the Italian universities or more usually as secretaries in the employment of cities or the Church».²⁹ Skinner also described the career of the most prominent figures of Florentine Humanism, belonging both to the older generation, like Coluccio Salutati (1331-1406), Leonardo Bruni (1369-1444), Pier Paolo Vergerio (1370-1444), and Poggio

²⁷ B. LATINI, *Il Tesoro*, III, 2, cit., IV, p. 15.

²⁸ G. TANTURLI, *Continuità dell'Umanesimo civile da Brunetto Latini a Leonardo Bruni*, in *Gli umanesimi medievali*. Atti del II Congresso dell' "Internationales Mittelateinerkomitee", edited by C. Leonardi, Sismel-Edizioni del Galluzzo, Firenze, 1998, pp. 735-780; E. FENZI, *Brunetto Latini, ovvero il fondamento politico dell'arte della parola e il potere dell'intellettuale*, in *A scuola con ser Brunetto. Indagine sulla ricezione di Brunetto Latini dal Medioevo al Rinascimento*, edited by I. Maffia Scariati, Sismel-Edizioni del Galluzzo, Firenze, 2008, pp. 323-369. On the relation between rhetoric and politics in the Italian Humanism, see D. CANTIMORI, *Rhetoric and Politics in Italian Humanism*, «Journal of the Warburg Institute», I (1937), pp. 82-102 (then published in Italian in ID., *Eretici italiani del Cinquecento*, edited by A. Prosperi, Einaudi, Torino, 1992, pp. 483-511).

²⁹ Q. SKINNER, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 2 Voll., Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998 (or. ed., 1978), I, p. 72. On this point, Skinner declares his debt to «P. O. Kristeller's seminal essays on the development of humanism» (p. 71, n. 1). See P. O. KRISTELLER, *Humanism and Scholasticism in the Italian Renaissance*, in ID., *Studies in Renaissance Thought and Letters*, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, Roma, 1956, pp. 553-583, esp. 563-568. On Kristeller's work for the criticism of the so-called "Baron thesis" (H. BARON, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance. Civic Humanism and Republican Liberty in an Age of Classicism and Tyranny*, Princeton University Press, Princeton (NJ), 1955), see J. HANKINS, *The "Baron Thesis" after Forty Years and some Recent Studies of Leonardo Bruni*, «Journal of the History of Ideas», LVI (1995), 2, pp. 309-338. On the Medieval *Ars dictaminis* during the fifteenth-century Italy, see R. G. WITT, *Medieval «Ars dictaminis» and the Beginnings of Humanism. A New Construction of the Problem*, «Renaissance Quarterly», XXXV (1982), 1, pp. 1-35.

Bracciolini (1380-1459), and to the younger one, like Leon Battista Alberti (1404-1472), Giannozzo Manetti (1396-1459), and Matteo Palmieri (1406-1475), showing that they all had received a specific training designed to make them master the professional skills of both the orator and the statesman.

One of the most remarkable features of this cultural setting was to stress the centrality of the active life as the most worthy and important dimension of human affairs. Of course, none of the authors mentioned above openly questioned the superiority of the contemplative life claimed by Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (X, 8, 1178a 9-1179a 32).³⁰ However, they all assigned the highest dignity to active life, and sometimes they even wished to imply that it must be preferred to a contemplative life, insofar as it had to do with public security, utility and wealth.

In the second book of the *Tresor*, for instance, Brunetto Latini stated that:

L'una vita è attiva, l'altra è contemplativa. La vita attiva è, innocenza di buone opere, secondo quello che 'l maestro ha detto infino a qui nel conto delle quattro virtù. La contemplativa è li pensieri delle celestiali cose. Quella conviensi a' più, questa a' pochi. La vita attiva usa bene le mondane cose; la contemplativa rifiuta loro, e diletta in Dio solamente. [...]. Meglio è a cavare l'occhio della contemplativa, e guardare quello della attiva, si ch'egli vada per sue opere la vita durabile, innanzi che andare al fuoco d'inferno per errore della contemplativa.³¹

³⁰ See also J. HAMESSE, *Les Auctoritates Aristotelis, Un florilège médiéval. Étude historique et édition critique*, Publications Universitaires, Louvain, 1974 («Philosophes médiévaux», XVII), 12 (210), p. 247: «Vita contemplativa melior est quam vita activa quae est vita secundum hominem, quia vita contemplativa est vita divina». Another evidence of this can be found in A. DE FERRARIIS GALATEO, *Epistole*, critical edition by A. Altamura, Centro di Studi Salentini, Lecce, 1959, VI. *De dignitate disciplinarum. Ad Marinum Pancratium*, pp. 47-68. Discussing about the relation between *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa*, Galateo states: «Utra autem illarum dignior sit non oportet disputare: ab Aristotele enim lata sententia est, a qua non licet provocare. [...] In decimo [scil. libro Ethicorum] anteposit contemplationem omnibus virtutibus, cuius solius deos participes facit et per quam homines quantum possunt similes fiunt diis» (pp. 50-51). On *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa* in Renaissance Humanism, see P. O. KRISTELLER, *The Active and the Contemplative Life in Renaissance Humanism*, in ID., *Studies in Renaissance Thought and Letters*, IV, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, Roma, 1996, pp. 197-213.

³¹ B. LATINI, *Il Tesoro*, II, 75, cit., III, pp. 497-500.

Similarly, also Leonardo Bruni in his *Isagogicon moralis disciplinae* did not deny the preference for the «negotiosa et civilis vita», arguing that:

Sapientia enim et scientia et intelligentia contemplativum alunt, prudentia vero in omni actione dominatur. Utraque sane vita laudes commendationesque proprias habet. Contemplativa quidem divinius plane atque rarior, activa vero in communi utilitate prestantior. Itaque vel in privata vel in publica re quaecumque excellenter et cum laude, quaecumque pro utilitate aut nostra aut patriae aut hominum nobis carissimorum agimus, ea quidem omnia a prudentia et ab his virtutibus, quae sunt cum prudentia copulatae, descendunt.³²

Bruni is even more clear in the *praemissio* to his new translation of Aristotle's *Politics*, completed during the years 1435-1437:

Inter moralis disciplinae praecepta, quibus humana vita instituitur et docetur, eminentissimum quodammodo locum obtinent, quae de civitatibus earumque gubernatione conservationeque traduntur, quippe disciplina huiusmodi omnis felicitatem hominibus conficere studet; felicitatem vero si uni acquirere preclarum est, quanto magnificentius erit universae civitati beatitudinem adipisci?³³

Almost in the same years, Matteo Palmieri too in his *Vita civile* endorsed the belief of his predecessors, stating that:

³² L. BRUNI, *Isagogicon moralis disciplinae*, in ID., *Humanistisch-philosophische Schriften mit einer Chronologie seiner Werke und Briefe*, a cura di H. Baron, Tuebner, Leipzig, 1928, pp. 20-41: 39-40. See also Ivi, p. 21: «Equidem memini primis ab annis studiosum te philosophiae fuisse, verum illius, quae ad naturae pertinet indagacionem. Quae, etsi est sublimis atque excellens, tamen minus habet utilitatis ad vitam, quam ista, quae ad mores hominum virtutesque descendit [...] Ego igitur, Galeotte, vehementer quidem te ad haec studia revoco. Quid enim pulchrius nobili viro et virtutum ab ipsa natura amatori et intelligentia rationeque praestanti, quam ea discere, per quae ad casum vivere desistat, suas ipse vias actusque discernat?». An English translation of Bruni's *Isagogicon* can be found in *The Humanism of Leonardo Bruni. Selected Texts*, translations and introductions by G. Griffiths, J. Hankins, D. Thompson, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies-The Renaissance Society of America, Binghamton-New York, 1987, pp. 267-282.

³³ L. BRUNI, *Praemissio quaedam ad evidentiam novae translationis Politicorum Aristotelis*, in ID., *Humanistisch-philosophische Schriften*, cit., pp. 73-74: 73 (English translation in *The Humanism of Leonardo Bruni*, cit., pp. 162-164).

Governatrice di tutte queste et principalissima di tutte le doctrine et atti humani è poi la philosophia. Questa ha due parti degnissime: la prima è posta in nella investigatione de' segreti della natura, la quale certo è parte sublime et eccellente, ma alla vita nostra molto minore utilità tribuisce che non fa la parte seconda, la quale ministra i costumi et approvato vivere degl'uomini virtuosi: però che, avenga Idio che il conoscere la generatione et corruptione delle piove, grandini et neve, la cagione de' colori dell'arco celeste, de' baleni et tuoni sia cosa rilevata et splendida, et abbia in sé cognizione degnissima, nientedimeno piccolissima utilità porge di vivere. Ma questa altra parte di philosophia è tutta nostra, guida degl'huomini, maestra delle virtù, scacciatrice de' vitii, amica del bene vivere, consigliatrice de' buoni et ferma certezza di nostra vita, dalla quale none a caso come le bestie, ma con ordine diritto nel vero fine s'impura a vivere.³⁴

From this vantage point, it is easier to grasp the real meaning of Giovanni Villani's statement that Brunetto Latini «fue *cominciatore* e maestro in digrossare i Fiorentini, e farli scorti in bene parlare, e in sapere guidare e reggere la nostra repubblica secondo la Politica».³⁵ Villani meant to emphasize Brunetto's contribution to an educational tradition whose main tenet was that political competence and rhetorical skills could not but go hand in hand.³⁶ From that moment onwards, as we have seen, civic Humanists and 'practitioners of politics' in Florence up until at least the late fifteenth century will always stick to this model.³⁷

It is this pattern that must be borne in mind when we try to set Machiavelli's own cultural background in its appropriate context. Of course, as Andrea Guidi

³⁴ M. PALMIERI, *Vita civile*, I, critical edition by G. Belloni, Sansoni, Firenze, 1982, pp. 29-30.

³⁵ See also the judgment given to Brunetto by F. VILLANI, *Le vite d'uomini illustri fiorentini*, colle annotazioni del conte Giammaria Mazzucchelli, ed una cronica inedita, con illustrazioni del cavaliere Franc. Gherardi Dragomanni, Sansone Coen Tipografo-editore, Firenze, 1847, p. 35.

³⁶ On the link between rhetoric and practical philosophy in the fifteenth-century Italian culture, see P. O. KRISTELLER, *Humanism and Scholasticism in the Italian Renaissance*, cit., p. 568.

³⁷ In this respect, see what Leonardi Bruni wrote to Niccolò Strozzi in L. BRUNI, *Epistolarium libri VIII, Recensente Laurentio Mehus (1741)*, VI, 6, edited by J. Hankins, 2 voll., Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, Roma, 2007, II, p. 50. Discussing about the education of Alexander the Great, thus one of the greatest political leaders of history, Bruni stated that the reason why Philip II choose Aristotle as tutor of his son was to make him well acquainted with practical philosophy and rhetoric, competences that are required to a statesman even more than the knowledge of civil law: «Alexandrum certe Philippus pater Aristoteli tradidit non ad discendum ius civile, quod tanto Regi sordidum fuisset, sed ad doctrinam vitae ac morum, et ad eloquentiam perdiscendam».

has recently shown, the learning requirements and the cultural profiles of Florentine public officers at the time of Machiavelli's political appointment were slightly different from what they used to be for the earlier generations.³⁸ Since the latest years of the fifteenth century, in fact, Florentine Chancery began to avail itself of more practical-minded figures who knew how to deal successfully with practical issues. Lack of experience and of practical sense might explain why great humanists such as Cristoforo Landino and Ugolino Verino did not reach the highest positions in the Chancery;³⁹ on the other hand, it became possible for men with no outstanding education to occupy important offices within Florence's government bodies, as long as they proved to be pragmatic and resolute.⁴⁰

This, however, does not mean that secretaries and Chancery employers from Machiavelli's time were no longer learned and cultivated. In fact, in spite of the increasing technicality within all the major political appointments, the late fifteenth-century generation of public officers continued to consider themselves as the heirs of the great humanistic tradition.⁴¹

In his book, Guidi examined an interesting manuscript kept in the Biblioteca Riccardiana of Florence (Riccardiano 2621), containing the exercise book that belonged to Pietro Crinito while he was a pupil at the school of Paolo Sassi da Ronciglione, who was also teacher of the young Niccolò Machiavelli from November 1481.⁴² That document offers important information regarding

³⁸ A. GUIDI, *Un Segretario militante*, cit., pp. 37-90. An important role in performing this change within the Florentine Chancery was played by the reform carried out by Bartolomeo Scala in 1483. See F. KLEIN, *La riforma del 1483 e l'istituzione dei segretari*, in *Consorterie politiche e mutamenti istituzionali in età laurenziana*, edited by M. A. Morelli Timpanaro, R. Manno Tolu, P. Viti, Silvana, Firenze, 1992, pp. 79-80.

³⁹ D. MARZI, *La cancelleria della Repubblica fiorentina*, Le Lettere, Firenze, 1987 (or. ed., Rocca San Casciano, 1910), p. 275; A. GUIDI, *Un Segretario militante*, cit., p. 53.

⁴⁰ A. GUIDI, *Un Segretario militante*, cit., pp. 48-55.

⁴¹ Ivi, pp. 80-82: «Nonostante non fossero interessati alla filologia o alla filosofia come gli umanisti della generazione immediatamente precedente, non si può però dire che non possono essere anch'essi considerati in qualche modo figli diretti della stagione umanistica. Molti di loro non conoscevano il greco, ma erano senz'altro tutti assai attenti allo studio dei testi antichi. Erano insomma una nuova leva di cultori della dottrina classica, discendente diretta dell'Umanesimo, che, rispetto alla generazione del Poliziano, giova ripeterlo, era maggiormente preoccupata di far aderire quel patrimonio culturale alla realtà contemporanea, allargandone lo spettro di applicazione e donandole, in tal modo, nuova linfa vitale».

⁴² A. GUIDI, *Un Segretario militante*, cit., pp. 55-82. The manuscript *Riccardiano 2621* was first noticed by F. BAUSI, *Machiavelli*, Salerno Editrice, Roma, 2005, p. 29, n. 10. More recently, the issue has been addressed by R. BLACK, *Machiavelli*, Routledge, London-New York, 2013, pp. 15-16. On the teaching activity of Paolo Sassi da Ronciglione, see A. F. VERDE, *Lo Studio Fiorentino*

Crinito's education, which can be legitimately extended to Machiavelli. The exercises assigned by *maestro* Paolo to his pupil testify a quite large attention given to the rules of medieval *ars dictaminis* as well as to the canons of Roman classical rhetoric, thereby confirming that this practice continued to prove essential within the curriculum of the future members of the ruling class in the late fifteenth-century Florence.⁴³

In a recent paper, Peter Stacey has pointed out that «Machiavelli's entry into public service in the department in 1498 would have been unthinkable had he not acquired the requisite rhetorical education as a youth».⁴⁴ In his article, Stacey examined Machiavelli's characteristic method of ramifying his arguments through successive divisions, showing «the extent of the debt which his political philosophy owes to the Roman *ars rhetorica*».⁴⁵

An example of the importance that a classical education – mainly based on the knowledge of rhetoric and practical philosophy – had for the future rulers of fifteenth-century Florence can be found in the first book of Leon Battista Alberti's *Libri della famiglia*, where the author deals with the education of children:

1473-1503. *Ricerche e documenti*, 5 Voll., Olschki, Firenze, 1973-1994, II, pp. 534-535. On Paolo Sassi da Ronciglione as teacher of Machiavelli, see B. MACHIAVELLI, *Libro di ricordi*, edited by C. Olschki, with an afterword by L. Perini, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, Roma, 2007 (or. ed.: Le Monnier, Firenze, 1954), p. 138. Some inadequacies made by Cesare Olschki in the transcription of the codex containing Bernardo's *Libro di ricordi* have been corrected by R. BLACK, *New Light on Machiavelli's Education*, in *Niccolò Machiavelli. Politico storico letterato*, cit., pp. 391-398.

⁴³ See R. BLACK, *Machiavelli, Servant of the Florentine Republic*, in *Machiavelli and Republicanism*, edited by G. Bock, Q. Skinner, M. Viroli, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1990, pp. 71-99; ID., *Machiavelli in the Chancery*, in *The Cambridge Companion to Machiavelli*, cit., pp. 31-47.

⁴⁴ P. STACEY, *Definition, Division, and Difference in Machiavelli's Political Philosophy*, «Journal of the History of Ideas», LXXV, (2014), 2, pp. 189-212: 190.

⁴⁵ P. STACEY, *Definition, Division, and Difference in Machiavelli's Political Philosophy*, cit., p. 191. Scholarship has paid a great deal of attention to the legacy of Roman classical rhetoric in Machiavelli's work. Among the numerous studies that could be mentioned, see at least L. RUSSO, *Machiavelli*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 1966 (or. ed., Bologna, 1945), pp. 89-165; F. CHABOD, *Metodo e stile di Machiavelli*, in ID., *Scritti su Machiavelli*, Einaudi, Torino, 1964, pp. 369-388 (originally published in *Il Cinquecento*, edited by the Libera cattedra di storia della civiltà fiorentina, Sansoni, Firenze, 1955, pp. 1-21; an English version of this paper has been published in F. CHABOD., *Machiavelli and the Renaissance*, translated from the Italian by D. Moore, with an introduction by A. P. d'Entrèves, Harper & Row, New York, 1965, pp. 126-148); V. KAHN, *Machiavellian Rhetoric. From the Counter-Reformation to Milton*, Princeton University Press, Princeton (NJ) 1994, pp. 13-59; V. COX, *Rhetoric and Ethics in Machiavelli*, in *The Cambridge Companion to Machiavelli*, cit., pp. 173-189.

Non mi stendo, chè troppo sarebbe lungo recitare quanto siano le lettere, non dico utili, ma necessarie a chi regge e governa le cose. [...] Facciano dunque e' padri ch'e' fanciulli si dieno alli studi delle lettere con molta assiduità. Insegnino a' suoi intendere e scrivere molto corretto, né stimino averli insegnato se none veggono in tutto e' garzoni fatti buoni scrittori e lettori. [...] Poi ritornino a gustare e' poeti, oratori, filosofi, e soprattutto si cerchi d'averne solleciti maestri, da' quali e' fanciulli non meno imparino costumi buoni che le lettere. E arei io caro che e' miei s'ausassero co' buoni autori, imparassino grammatica da Prisciano e da Servio, e molto si facessino familiari, non a cartule e gregismi, ma sopra tutti a Tullio, Livio, Sallustio, ne' quali singularissimi ed emendatissimi scrittori, dal primo ricever di dottrina attingano quella perfettissima aere d'eloquenza con molta gentilezza della lingua latina.⁴⁶

SOME NOTES ON BERNARDO MACHIAVELLI'S DIARY

The pieces of advice given by Alberti to Florentine family men seem to have been followed by Bernardo Machiavelli in the education of his son, Niccolò. Thanks to the studies carried out by Armando Verde we know that Machiavelli did not attend the University in Pisa, but this does not necessarily mean that his cultural training was of a poor level.⁴⁷ In recent years, many scholars have focused their attention on Niccolò's father, on his relationships with other important humanists of his time as well as on the library of Machiavelli's childhood home, which is partially described in Bernardo's *Libro di ricordi*.⁴⁸ The aim of such studies has been to bring out the different features of the environment within

⁴⁶ L. B. ALBERTI, *Libri della famiglia*, I, edited by R. Romano, A. Tenenti, new edition by F. Furlan, Einaudi, Torino, 1994, pp. 86-88.

⁴⁷ A. F. VERDE, *Niccolò Machiavelli studente*, «Memorie domenicane», IV (1973), 404-408.

⁴⁸ C. ATKINSON, *Debts, Dowries, Donkeys: the Diary of Niccolò Machiavelli's Father, messer Bernardo*, in *Quattrocento Florence*, Peter Lang, Frankfurt, 2002; L. PERINI, *Afterword*, in B. MACHIAVELLI, *Libro di ricordi*, cit., pp. 263-323; C. GINZBURG, *Machiavelli, l'eccezione e la regola. Linee di una ricerca in corso*, «Quaderni storici», XXXVIII (2003), 1, pp. 195-213; R. BLACK, *Machiavelli*, cit., pp. 3-29; F. BAUSI, *Da Bernardo a Niccolò Machiavelli. Sui legislatori che fecero ricorso alla religione (Discorsi I 11)*, «Bruniana & Campanelliana», XX (2014), 1, pp. 25-33; A. GUIDI, «Machiavelli, Bernardo», in *Enciclopedia Machiavelliana*, 3 voll., Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, Roma, 2014, II, pp. 108-112; L. BOSCHETTO, «Scala, Bartolomeo», in *Enciclopedia Machiavelliana*, cit., II, pp. 492-495.

which Niccolò grew up, and to emphasize how much Machiavelli's scholarship and thought were influenced by his father's intellectual interests and curiosity. Furthermore, another important clue that may be useful for the understanding of the cultural atmosphere of Machiavelli's household is provided by the discovery of a previously unknown manuscript with annotations by Bernardo Machiavelli, which has been recently identified by Franco Bacchelli.⁴⁹ That is the cod. 2263 of the Biblioteca Riccardiana of Florence, composed of three clusters of booklets gathered together which totally amount to 81 *chartae*. The first section of booklets contains the vernacular translation of John of Holywood's *Tractatus de sphaera* made by the fourteenth-century Florentine notary Zuccherò Bencivenni;⁵⁰ in the second section we can find an anonymous *Trattato dell'alcibra amuchabile*, which is transmitted by this witness only; the final section presents a vernacular translation of the pseudo-Fibonacci's *Liber Abaci*, the first part of the *Libro di Sidrach* (mutilated at the end), and a poem on the death of John Hawkwood.

This important discovery is further evidence of Bernardo Machiavelli's interest in astronomy and science, a fact that invites us to reconsider the intellectual impulses and the cultural background that must have characterized Niccolò's youth. Moreover, being the codex described by Bacchelli a collection of vernacular texts, it does not seem fair to ascribe an «almost complete indifference to vernacular literature» to Bernardo, as Robert Black recently did.⁵¹

These considerations aside, my point here is to show that the educational pattern described above – a firm-based knowledge of classical rhetorical canons combined with the main themes of practical philosophy – is perfectly enacted in Bernardo's library. Machiavelli's father belonged to the same generation of

⁴⁹ F. BACCHELLI, *Un manoscritto postillato dal padre del Machiavelli*, «Giornale critico della filosofia italiana», XCI (2012), 2, pp. 224-233. Unfortunately, no mention to this study can be found in the later scholarship on Machiavelli.

⁵⁰ The translation is here attributed to the Persian astronomer Alfraganus, who was author of a quite spread work entitled *Libro dell'aggregazione delle stelle*, which also Dante made use of (see F. BACCHELLI, *Un manoscritto postillato*, cit., pp. 224-225).

⁵¹ R. BLACK, *Machiavelli*, cit., p. 10. See also *Ivi*, p. 11: «For Bernardo Machiavelli, books and reading meant Latin». The other vernacular work held in Machiavelli's library was an Italian translation of Pliny's *Natural History*. Thus, it might be interesting to notice that – as it seems from the documentation at our disposal – Bernardo's preference to vernacular texts was mainly given to works on natural science. On vernacular literature as the most appropriate source of Machiavelli's learning, see F. BAUSI, *Machiavelli e la tradizione culturale toscana*, in *Cultura e scrittura di Machiavelli*. Atti del Convegno (Pisa-Firenze, 27-30 ottobre 1997), Salerno, Roma, 1998, pp. 81-115.

Florentine Humanists such as Cristoforo Landino and Bartolomeo Scala, the latter being in fact a very close friend of Bernardo.⁵² There is no doubt that, once engaged in the task of designing for Niccolò a specific educational path with a view to his future career in city public offices, Bernardo set out to refer to the cultural paradigm of his time as the most suitable and compelling course of studies. As Armando Verde has pointed out, the private education received by Niccolò Machiavelli from both his father and the many esteemed teachers whose classes he did actually attend should not be considered of a lower level than the education he could have gained from any University.⁵³ As a matter of fact, no major text of *Quattrocento* humanism was missing from Machiavelli's family library. Legal texts apart, the role of which in Machiavelli's cultural background must not be actually neglected,⁵⁴ it is worth pointing out how the works of Cicero and Aristotle are variously represented in Bernardo's library. Among the books of the Greek philosopher, the *Libro di ricordi* lists the complete collection of his works on Logic (*Organon*),⁵⁵ and the *Nicomachean Ethics*.⁵⁶ As for Cicero's texts, Bernardo's acquisitions are even greater: between September 1475 and December 1480 he borrowed or purchased such works as *De officiis*, *Philippics*, *De oratore* and the pseudo-Ciceronian *Rhetorica ad Herennium* (*Rettorica nuova*).⁵⁷ Furthermore, it is surprising that no scholar has ever noticed that Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and Cicero's *De officiis* are the only works

⁵² On the friendship between Bartolomeo Scala and Bernardo Machiavelli, see B. SCALA, *Dialogue on Laws and Legal Judgments*, edited by D. Marsh, in ID., *Essays and Dialogues*, edited by R. N. Watkins, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (MA), 2008, («The I Tatti Renaissance Library»), pp. 158-231: 161.

⁵³ A. F. VERDE, *Lo Studio Fiorentino 1473-1503*, cit., p. 537: «Dall'insieme del *libro dei ricordi* verrebbe da dire che il padre Bernardo abbia tracciato una personale linea pedagogica per il suo figlio e che faceva poco ricorso all'insegnamento pubblico e, d'altronde, egli possedeva una tale familiarità di libri di diritto, di storia, di umanità, da poter dare al suo figlio una cultura o "dottrina" non inferiore a quella universitaria. Per accedere poi ai pubblici uffici non si richiedeva necessariamente il dottorato conseguito all'università degli Studi, essendo sufficiente quello dato dalle diverse Arti».

⁵⁴ It is not the purpose of the present work to examine the influence that jurisprudence and legal texts had on Machiavelli's thought. For a comprehensive exposition of this issue, see D. QUAGLIONI, *Machiavelli e la lingua della giurisprudenza. Una letteratura della crisi*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2011. The connections between two legal texts held in Bernardo's library (the *Quaestiones mercuriales super regulis iuris* and the *Novella super sexto Decretalium*) and Machiavelli's *Mandragola* have been studied by C. GINZBURG, *Machiavelli, l'eccezione e la regola*, cit.

⁵⁵ B. MACHIAVELLI, *Libro di ricordi*, cit., p. 11.

⁵⁶ B. MACHIAVELLI, *Libro di ricordi*, cit., pp. 88 and 141.

⁵⁷ B. MACHIAVELLI, *Libro di ricordi*, cit., p. 11, 58, 88, 123. See R. BLACK, *Machiavelli*, cit., p. 11.

occurring twice along the pages of the *Libro di ricordi*, a particular showing that Bernardo's interest in these texts was not fortuitous at all, nor superficial. Cicero's *De officiis* is first mentioned on 2 September 1475, when Machiavelli's father recorded to have returned it – together with Aristotle's *Organon* – to the library of the convent of Santa Croce, from which collection he used to borrow books.⁵⁸ Subsequently, Aristotle's *Ethics* and Cicero's *De officiis* occur together, when Bernardo noted in his diary that on 29 April 1479 he had given back to ser Giovanni di Francesco «l'Etica d'Aristotile e Tullio De Offitij con altre operette di Tullio in forma, sciolte».⁵⁹ Finally, on 25 April 1482 Bernardo informs us that he has purchased the «Comento di Donato Acciaiuoli sopra l'Etica d'Ari[stotele]» from Piero Gualterotti.⁶⁰

Moreover, if we pay attention to some passages of Bernardo's *Libro di ricordi* it will be possible, I believe, to further increase those lists.

As far as Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* is concerned, scholars have always focused on Donato Acciaiuoli's commentary to the translation edited by John Argyropoulos as it was the only version of this text that has entered into Machiavelli's house. On 29 April 1479, however, Bernardo wrote that he had returned to ser Giovanni di Francesco «l'Etica d'Aristotile e Tullio De Offitij con altre operette di Tullio in forma, sciolte». He simply wrote «l'Etica d'Aristotile», a fairly shorter note than «Comento di Donato Acciaiuoli sopra l'Etica d'Ari[stotele]»,⁶¹ the latter being a note he drew two years later to record first the loan and then the purchase of the book. In all likelihood, Bernardo – who always took note very accurately in his diary, specifying both the format and the material conditions of what had come into his possession – was referring to two different versions of the text. Donato Acciaiuoli's commentary to Aristotle's *Ethics* was published in January 1478 by the printing press of the monastery of San Jacopo di Ripoli, with the title *Donati Acciaiuoli Florentini expositio super libros ethicorum Aristotelis in novam traductionem Iohannis Argiropyli Bisantii*; it is following this title that Bernardo mentioned the work in the last two entries of his diary,

⁵⁸ B. MACHIAVELLI, *Libro di ricordi*, cit., p. 11.

⁵⁹ B. MACHIAVELLI, *Libro di ricordi*, cit., p. 88.

⁶⁰ B. MACHIAVELLI, *Libro di ricordi*, cit., p. 141.

⁶¹ B. MACHIAVELLI, *Libro di ricordi*, cit., p. 141, 142.

respectively on 20 February 1482 (1481) and on 25 April 1482: «*Commento di Donato Acciaiuoli sopra l'Etica d'Ari[stotele]*». ⁶² Moreover, when in February 1482 Bernardo received a copy of the same text from Piero Gualterotti (by means of Bartolomeo Tucci), he wrote that Piero had given him the *Commento* so that he could look himself through the text and decide whether to buy it or not («a vedere e comprarlo se mi piacesse»). It is hard to believe that Bernardo would have written so had he been already acquainted with Acciaiuoli's text. This hypothesis is corroborated by the fact that Bernardo kept the commentary for more than two months before he eventually purchased it – a detail which seems consistent with the idea that he had never seen the commentary before (or, at least, that he had never had the chance to examine it carefully).

In view of these elements, it seems more than plausible that the edition of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* that Bernardo mentioned in April 1479 was not Argyropoulos-Acciaiuoli's. In fact, it is very likely that Machiavelli's father was referring to Leonardo Bruni's version of Aristotle's *Ethics*, translated in 1416 and still surviving in more than 280 manuscripts and 30 early printed editions. ⁶³ It is not the purpose of these pages to make a comparison between the two humanistic translations of the Stagirite's work. It suffices to lay stress on the fact that Bernardo Machiavelli's interest in the *Nicomachean Ethics* was neither random nor shallow. Within just three years (April 1479-April 1482) two different

⁶² On the printing activity of the monastery of San Jacopo di Ripoli, with a focus on the edition of Acciaiuoli's *expositio*, see P. FINESCHI, *Notizie storiche sopra la stamperia di Ripoli le quali possono servire all'illustrazione della storia tipografica fiorentina*, In Firenze, Nella Stamperia di Francesco Moücke, 1781, p. 50; P. BOLOGNA, *La stamperia fiorentina del Monastero di S. Jacopo di Ripoli e le sue edizioni. Studio storico e bibliografico*, Loescher, Torino, 1893, p. 1; E. NESI, *Il diario della stamperia di Ripoli*, Bernardo Seeber, Firenze, 1903, p. 39; M. CONWAY, *The Diario of the Printings Press of San Jacopo di Ripoli. 1476-1484. Commentary and Transcription*, Olschki, Firenze, 1999, p. 293. On the text and the sources of Donato Acciaiuoli's commentary, see L. BIANCHI, *Un commento 'umanistico' ad Aristotele: l'Expositio super libros Ethicorum di Donato Acciaiuoli*, in ID., *Studi sull'Aristotelismo del Rinascimento*, Il Poligrafo, Padova, 2003, pp. 11-39 (with previous bibliography). The emphasis in the quotation is mine.

⁶³ J. HANKINS, *Translation Practice in the Renaissance: the case of Leonardo Bruni*, in *Methodologie de la Tradiction: de l'Antiquité à la Renaissance*. Rencontres Scientifiques de Luxembourg (1992. 3), edited by C. M. Ternes, Etudes Classiques IV, Luxembourg, 1994, pp. 154-175: 166. On Bruni's translation of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, see at least E. GARIN, *Le traduzioni umanistiche di Aristotele nel secolo XV*, «Atti e memorie dell'Accademia fiorentina di scienze morali La Colombaria», XVI (1947-1950), pp. 55-104: 62-68; C. B. SCHMITT, *Aristotle and the Renaissance*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (MA), 1983, pp. 67-73; *The Humanism of Leonardo Bruni*, cit., pp. 201-208. On the manuscript tradition of Bruni's works, see J. HANKINS, *Repertorium Brunianum. A Critical Guide to the Writings of Leonardo Bruni*, Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medio Evo, Roma, I, 1997.

editions of that text came into Machiavelli's house, and one of them was purchased, a fact that confirms the prominence Bernardo gave to Aristotle's practical doctrine for the education of his son.

Turning now to Cicero's works, it may be useful to further reflect on what Bernardo recorded in April 1479, when he stated to have given back to ser Giovanni di Francesco «Tullio De Offitijs con altre operette di Tullio in forma, sciolte», after having kept them for some weeks. As far as I know, no scholar has ever wondered which works those "altre operette di Tullio" may actually be, although it is not so hard to determine it, at least with a high chance of success. At the time Bernardo took that note in his diary, in fact, there were 14 Italian early printed editions in which Cicero's *De officiis* was followed by other works of the Roman writer: four published in Venice (1472, '73, '77, and one bearing no date of publishing), three in Milan (1474, '76, '78), three in Naples (1474, '78, '79), three in Rome (two of them printed in 1469, whilst the third one bears no date, but was certainly completed before 1478), and one in Parma (1477).⁶⁴ It is worth noticing that in all but three of these editions, the works which used to go with Cicero's *De officiis* were always the same, namely his *De amicitia*, *De senectute*, and the *Paradoxa Stoicorum* (and, in four cases, also the *Somnium Scipionis*).⁶⁵ The many works of Cicero – and not only his – were gathered in early printed editions on a thematic basis, so that we always meet with the same groups of texts collected together: rhetorical books (*Rhetorica vetus*, (pseudo-) *Rhetorica nova*, *De inventione* on the one side, *De oratore*, *Topica* and *Orations* on the other),⁶⁶

⁶⁴ L. HAIN, *Repertorium bibliographicum, in quo libri omnes ab arte typographica inventa usque ad annum MD. Typis expressi ordine alphabetico vel simpliciter enumerantur vel adcuratius recensentur*, 4 Voll., Görlich, Milano, 1966, II, pp. 138-142. The Rome's edition with no date was prepared by the German printer Ulrich Han (Udalricus Gallus or Ulricur Barbatus) who worked in Rome between 1467 and 1478. See J. FRANCK, «Han, Ulrich», in *Allgemaine Deutsche Biographie*, Duncker & Humblot, Leipzig, 1879, X, p. 495; H. LÜLFING, «Han, Ulrich», in *Neue Deutsche Biographie*, Duncker & Humblot, Berlin, 1966, VII, p. 601; «Han, Ulrich», in *Enciclopedia Italiana di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti*, Edizioni Istituto G. Treccani, Rizzoli, Milano, 1933, XVIII, p. 352.

⁶⁵ In the edition published in Parma in 1477, the *De officiis* is printed together with *De amicitia* and *Somnium Scipionis* (L. HAIN, *Repertorium bibliographicum*, cit., pp. 141-142). In the 1478 Neapolitan edition, Cicero's work was published together with *Paradoxa Stoicorum*, *De amicitia* and the *Epistolae ad Atticum, ad Brutum et Q. Fratrem* (L. HAIN, *Repertorium bibliographicum*, cit., p. 139). Finally, the aforementioned Roman edition of Ulrich Han published the text of the *De officiis* together with *De republica*, *De legibus* and *De fato* (L. HAIN, *Repertorium bibliographicum*, cit., p. 141).

⁶⁶ L. HAIN, *Repertorium bibliographicum*, cit., pp. 114-127.

letters,⁶⁷ philosophical and theological works (*Tuscolanae disputationes* – often edited by its own – *De finibus bonorum et malorum*, *De natura deorum*, *De divinatione*, *De fato*),⁶⁸ philosophical and political works (*De officiis*, *De senectute*, *De amicitia*, *Paradoxa Stoicorum*, and sometimes also the *Somnium Scipionis* and, in a very few cases, his *De legibus*).⁶⁹ According to these classifications, there can be only a little doubt that the Cicero's works collected together with *De officiis* in the printed edition mentioned by Bernardo Machiavelli were not those listed in the latter group. That means that we can reasonably add at least *De senectute*, *De amicitia* and the *Paradoxa Stoicorum* to the other books by Cicero which Bernardo explicitly mentioned in his *Libro di ricordi*.⁷⁰ Among those three works, especially the *Paradoxa Stoicorum* may be an important source concerning some of the issues that Bernardo was most interested in, i.e. fate, fortune, human free will and natural determinism. In the codex 2263 of the Biblioteca Riccardiana of Florence mentioned above, in the margins of the cc. 23v and 24r, Machiavelli's father transcribed five long passages from Cicero's *De fato* and one from the *De divinatione*, in which the Roman orator dealt with the Stoic school's account of natural causality, of fate and fortune, and of human ability to foresee and address upcoming events.⁷¹ Among these quotations – whose content

⁶⁷ L. HAIN, *Repertorium bibliographicum*, cit., pp. 127-135.

⁶⁸ L. HAIN, *Repertorium bibliographicum*, cit., pp. 135-137 and 148-153.

⁶⁹ L. HAIN, *Repertorium bibliographicum*, cit., pp. 138-147.

⁷⁰ Cicero's *De amicitia* (chap. 95) is explicitly quoted in N. MACHIAVELLI, *Discorsi*, I, 4, cit., I, p. 36: «e li popoli, come dice Tullio, benché siano ignoranti, sono capaci della verità, e facilmente cedano quando da uomo degno di fede è detto loro il vero».

⁷¹ F. BACCHELLI, *Un manoscritto postillato*, cit., pp. 228-229. The five passages quoted from Cicero's *De fato* are: CICERO, *De fato*, XV, 34-35, edited by H. Rackham, Heinemann Ltd.-Harvard University Press, London-Cambridge (MA), 1948 («The Loeb Classical Library»), p. 230: «Causa autem ea est quae id efficit cuius est causa, ut vulnus mortis, cruditas morbi, ignis ardoris. Itaque non sic causa intellegi debet ut quod cuique antecedit id ei causa sit, sed quod cuique efficienter antecedit, nec quod in campum descenderim id fuisse causae cur pila lauderem, nec Hacubam causam interitus fuisse Troianis quod Alexandrum genuerit, nec Tyndareum Agamemnoni quod Clytaemnestram. Hoc enim modo viator quoque bene vestitus causa grassatori fuisse dicitur cur ab eo spoliaretur. Ex hoc genere illud est Ennii: «Utinàm ne in nemore Pelio»»; *Ivi*, XVI, 36, p. 232: «Interesse autem aiunt utrum eiusmodi quid sit sine quo aliquid effici non possit an eiusmodi quo aliquid effici necesse sit. Nulla igitur earum est causa, quoniam nulla eam rem sua vi efficit cuius causa dicitur; nec id sine quo quippiam non fit causa est, sed id quod cum accessit id cuius causa est efficit necessario»; *Ivi*, XVII, 39, p. 234: «duae sententiae fuissent veterum philosophorum, una eorum qui censerent omnia ita fato fieri ut id fatum vim necessitatis afferret, in qua sententia Democritus, Heraclitus, Empedocles, Aristoteles fuit, altera eorum, quibus viderentur sine ullo fato esse animorum motus voluntarii, Chrysippus tamquam arbiter honorarius medium ferire voluisse, – sed applicat se ad eos potius qui necessitate motus animos liberatos volunt»; *Ivi*, XVII-XVIII, 40-41, pp. 236-238: «'Si omnia fato fiunt, omnia fiunt causa

should have certainly had a great impact on Bernardo's mindset – the one taken from the *De divinatione* proves especially important for its consequences on Niccolò Machiavelli's account of fortune and human virtue. Both the overall conception and the images used by Cicero and then transcribed by Bernardo will be followed by Machiavelli in the unfolding of his own theory:

Quid est enim aliud fors, quid fortuna, quid casus, quid eventus, nisi cum sic aliquid cecidit, sic evenit, ut vel non cadere atque evenire, ut vel aliter cadere atque venire potuerit? Quo modo ergo id, quod temere fit caeco casu et volubilitate fortunae, praesentiri et praedici potest? Medicus morbum ingravescentem ratione providet, insidias imperator, tempestates gubernator; et tamen ei ipsi saepe falluntur, qui nihil sine certa ratione opinantur.⁷²

Leaving aside, for the moment, the interaction between virtue and fortune in Machiavelli, my purpose here was to stress the elevated position occupied by Cicero's works and doctrines within Machiavelli's house. In addition to the titles

antecedente; et si appetitus, illa etiam quae appetitum sequuntur; ergo etiam assensiones. At si causa appetitus non est sita in nobis, ne ipse quidem appetitus est in nostra potestate; quod si ita est, ne illa quidem quae appetitu efficiuntur sunt sita in nobis. Non sunt igitur neque assensiones neque actiones in nostra potestate. Ex quo efficitur ut nec laudationes iustae sint nec vituperationes nec honores nec supplicia'. Quod cum vitiosum sit, probabiliter concludi putant non omnia fato fieri quaecumque fiant.

Chrysippus autem cum et necessitatem improbaret et nihil vellet sine prepositis causis evenire, causarum genera distinguit, ut et necessitatem effugiat et retineat fatum. 'Causarum enim,' inquit, 'aliae sunt perfectae et principales, aliae adiuvantes et proximae; quam ob rem cum dicimus omnia fato fieri causis antecedentibus, non hoc intellegi volumus, causis perfectis et principalibus, sed causis adiuvantibus et proximis'. Itaque illi rationi quam paullo ante conclusi sic occurrit: si omnia fato fiant, sequi illud quidem ut omnia causis fiant antepositis, verum non principalibus et perfectis sed adiuvantibus et proximis. Quae si ipsae non sunt in nostra potestate, non sequitur ut ne appetitus quidem sit in nostra potestate. At hoc sequeretur si omnia perfectis et principalibus causis fieri diceremus, ut, cum eae causae non essent in nostra potestate, ne ille quidem esset in nostra potestate»; *Ivi*, XIX-XX, 45-46, p. 242: «Omninoque, cum haec sit distinctio, ut quibusdam in rebus vere dici possit cum hae causae antegressae sint non esse in nostra potestate quin illa eveniant quorum causae fuerint, quibusdam autem in rebus causis antegressis in nostra tamen esse potestate ut illud aliter eveniat, hanc distinctionem utrique approbant; sed alteri censent quibus in rebus cum causae antecesserint non sit in nostra potestate ut aliter illa eveniant, illas fato fieri, quae autem in nostra potestate sint, ab his fatum abesse...

Hoc modo hanc causam disceptari oportet, non ab atomis errantibus et de via declinantibus praesidium petere».

On these philosophical annotations made by Bernardo, see also V. PERRONE COMPAGNI, *Machiavelli metafisico*, in *Nuovi maestri e antichi testi. Umanesimo e Rinascimento alle origini del pensiero moderno*, edited by S. Caroti-V. Perrone Compagni, Olschki, Firenze, 2012, pp. 223-252: 235.

⁷² CICERO, *De divinatione*, II, 6, 15-16, edited by W. Armistead Falconer, Heinemann-Putnam's Sons, London-New York, 1923 («The Loeb Classical Library»), p. 386.

of the Roman orator that are explicitly listed in Bernardo's diary, many others should be considered as belonging to his collection. As Franco Bacchelli has pointed out, Bernardo's intense interest in the problems of fortune, natural causality, men's free will and foresight reflects the doubts and concerns that characterized the cultural scene of late fifteenth-century Florence, and which will pave the way to the ongoing astrological debate, with the involvement of such thinkers as Girolamo Savonarola, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and Marsilio Ficino.⁷³ In these respects, the six tracts making out Cicero's *Paradoxa Stoicorum* are also full of arguments that Bernardo was doubtless interested in. In the chapter devoted to the presentation of the fifth paradox («Solum sapientem esse liberum, et omnem stultum servum»), Cicero had dealt with the same topics – albeit less seriously – as those informing the *De fato* and *De divinatione*, whose passages Machiavelli's father has annotated in his manuscript.⁷⁴

Another important evidence of how close was the link between rhetoric and practical philosophy in the late fifteenth-century Florence is provided by the fact that the writings of their main authorities – Cicero and Aristotle – were both considered at the same time as examples of fine oratory and critical thinking. Aristotle was not read as a philosopher only, nor was Cicero taken just as a canonical writer in rhetoric. As we have seen, many of Cicero's works deal with strictly philosophical matters, and his reputation as a philosopher in the cultural community of fifteenth-century Florence was as positive as his fame as an orator.⁷⁵ A striking evidence of this can be found in a passage from Leonardo Bruni's *Vita Ciceronis*, in which the author emphasized Cicero's achievements as a philosopher:

⁷³ F. BACCHELLI, *Un codice postillato*, cit., p. 229.

⁷⁴ CICERO, *Paradoxa Stoicorum*, V, 33-41, edited by H. Rackham, Heinemann Ltd.-Harvard University Press, London-Cambridge (MA), 1948 («The Loeb Classical Library»), pp. 284-293.

⁷⁵ Many useful remarks on Cicero's enterprise of translating Greek philosophical terms into Latin are provided by C. MORESCHINI, *Osservazioni sul lessico filosofico di Cicerone*, «Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa. Classe di Lettere e Filosofia», IX (1979), 1, pp. 99-178; J. GLUCKER, *Cicero's Remarks on Translating Philosophical Terms – Some General Problems*, in *Greek into Latin from Antiquity until Nineteenth Century*, edited by J. Glucker and C. Burnett, The Warburg Institute-Nino Aragno Editore, London-Torino, 2012 («Warburg Institute Colloquia», 18), pp. 37-96.

Hic enim [*scil.* Cicero] primus philosophiam antea nostris litteris incognitam et pene a romano sermone abhorrentem, de qua nec latine scribi nec disputari posse plerique docti viri arbitrabantur, latinis litteris explicuit. Hic plurima verba ad usum patrii sermonis adiunxit, quo lucidius et commodius philosophorum inventa disputataque exprimerentur.⁷⁶

On the other hand, Aristotle's *opera* too was regarded by Bruni and his successors as an example of rhetorical elegance, which had been corrupted by Medieval translators and thus needed to be adequately restored. Bruni made this point clear in his preface to the new translation of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, where he stated that «studiosum eloquentiae fuisse Aristotelem et dicendi artem cum sapientia coniunxisse, et Cicero ipse in multis locis testatur, et libri eius summo cum eloquentiae studio luculentissime scripti declarant».⁷⁷ Similarly, in his *Vita Aristotelis* Bruni intended to clarify that:

Nec philosophiae solum, quamquam in illa eminent [scil. Aristoteles], sed aliarum quoque sive artium sive facultatum curiosissimus fuit. Nam et rhetoricam artem pluribus voluminibus omnemque illius vim, natura ornatumque explicuit. Et de poetica multa perscripsit et utriusque harum studiosissimus fuit. Exercuisse vero in eloquentia iuvenes ac postmeridiano tempore precepta dicendi tradere ac sapientiam cum eloquentia miscere instituisse constat.⁷⁸

The *plura volumina* devoted by Aristotle to rhetorical art, which Bruni refers to in this passage are, in addition to the *Rhetoric*, some of his logical works such as, for instance, the *Topics* and the two *Analytics*, which provide with a detailed account

⁷⁶ L. BRUNI, *Vita Ciceronis, seu Cicero novus*, in ID., *Opere letterarie e politiche*, edited by P. Viti, UTET, Torino, 1996, pp. 411-499: 468. On this topic, see *The Humanism of Leonardo Bruni*, cit., 177-178 and 184-185, where the preface of Bruni's work is translated into English; G. TOFFANIN, *Storia dell'Umanesimo, II, L'Umanesimo Italiano (dal XIV al XVI secolo)*, Zanichelli, Bologna, 1964 (or. ed., Bologna, 1942), pp. 109-116; J. IANZITI, *A New Life of Cicero*, in ID., *Writing History in Renaissance Italy. Leonardo Bruni and the Uses of the Past*, Harvard University Press, London-Cambridge (MA), 2012, pp. 44-60.

⁷⁷ L. BRUNI, *Praemissio quaedam ad evidentiam novae translationis Ethicorum Aristotelis*, in ID., *Humanistisch-Philosophische Schriften*, cit., p. 77 (translated into English in *The Humanism of Leonardo Bruni*, cit., p. 213).

⁷⁸ L. BRUNI, *Vita Aristotelis*, in ID., *Opere letterarie e politiche*, cit., pp. 501-529: 520-522.

regarding the different techniques and typologies of discourse. This is certainly what Bernardo Machiavelli was searching for when he borrowed the volume containing Aristotle's *Organon* from the convent of Santa Croce in 1475.⁷⁹ More than to the subtleties of Aristotle's logical account, Machiavelli's father was doubtless interested in the passages where the Greek philosopher had defined the rules and methods for both oral and written arguments, and he wanted his son Niccolò to get well acquainted with them.⁸⁰ I am referring, for instance, to the passages of the I book of the *Topics* devoted to the examination of likeness as a useful tool with a view to inductive arguments,⁸¹ or to those in the VI book where Aristotle explained how to give a correct definition.⁸²

In the cultural context within which Machiavelli grew up and was educated it was not conceivable to separate the legacy of classical rhetoric from the lesson of practical philosophy – especially of Aristotle's –, since they had been closely linked for at least two centuries that they became like the two sides of the same token.⁸³ And this is particularly true for such figures as public officers and members of government, who were expected to master the skills of the orator and also to know at least the general principles of political theory.

Many critics have already brought to light the real measure of Machiavelli's familiarity with the canons of ancient oratory, showing that he was acquainted

⁷⁹ B. MACHIAVELLI, *Libro di ricordi*, cit., p. 11. The volume of Aristotle's *Organon* borrowed by Bernardo was identified by S. BERTELLI-F. GAETA, *Noterelle Machiavelliane. Un codice di Lucrezio e di Terenzio*, «Rivista storica italiana», LXXIII (1961), 3, pp. 544-557: 547 with the codex *Sanctae Crucis*, *Plut. XXIII sin. 10*. See A. M. BANDINI, *Catalogus codicum latinorum Bibliothecae Mediacae Laurentianae*, IV, *Catalogus Codicum Bibliothecae Sanctae Crucis Pietri Leopoldi Med. Iussu in Laurentianam translatae die XVI octobris 1766*, Florentiae, 1777, col. 172. A fifteenth-century catalogue of the library of Santa Croce in Florence has been discovered and transcribed by C. MAZZI, *L'inventario quattrocentistico della biblioteca di Santa Croce in Firenze*, «Rivista delle biblioteche e degli archivi», VIII (1897), pp. 16-31, 99-113, 129-147. On the history of that Library from Middle Ages, see F. MATTESINI, *La biblioteca francescana di Santa Croce e Fra Tedaldo Della Casa*, «Studi francescani», LVII (1960), 3-4, pp. 254-316.

⁸⁰ In his *praelectio* to a course held at the Florentine *Studium* on Aristotle's *Prior Analytics* in the academic year 1492-1493, Angelo Poliziano justified the importance of such a work by arguing that «those two volumes of logical works called the *Prior Analytics* are calling me now. In them, every rule of reasoning correctly is contained»: in ANGELO POLIZIANO'S *Lamia*, Text, Translation, and Introductory Studies, edited by C. S. Celenza, Brill, Leiden-Boston, 2010, 78, p. 251 (text based on the critical edition by Ari Wesseling, Brill, Leiden, 1986; see *Ivi*, p. 18: «vocant ecce me nunc eundem ad se Resolutoria dou volumina quae *Priora* vocantur, in quibus omnis recte ratiocinandi regula continetur»).

⁸¹ ARISTOTLE, *Topics*, I, 18 108b 7-33, in ID., *The Complete Works*, edited by J. Barnes, 2 Voll., Princeton University Press, Princeton (NJ), 1995, I, pp. 180-181.

⁸² ARISTOTLE, *Topics*, VI, 4 141a 23-142b 19, in ID., *The Complete Works*, cit., I, pp. 238-240.

⁸³ P. O. KRISTELLER, *Humanism and Scholasticism in the Italian Renaissance*, cit., pp. 572-573.

with that discipline much more than one could infer from the texts listed in his father's diary, or from the amount of explicit references he gave throughout his work.⁸⁴ My main purpose in the following pages will be to show that the same claim may be applied to Machiavelli's knowledge of practical philosophy. In this respect, I fully endorse the belief expressed by Robert Black when he argued that «in understanding Machiavelli's humanism, one problem has always been the obvious fact that, as a scholar, he cannot be classed together with the leading Florentine lights of his day, such as Poliziano, Pietro Crinito or Adriani».⁸⁵ Black's statement can be reasonably extended to the more general problem of "Machiavelli's cultural background". As far as his acquaintance with philosophy is concerned, it is my persuasion that Machiavelli's familiarity with the tradition of Western thought was particularly compelling in those fields that were connected to his activity as a statesman. I am referring, in particular, to the three disciplines belonging to practical philosophy and related to the sphere of the *vita activa* (Ethics, Economics and Politics, this one being also closely linked to Rhetoric).⁸⁶ It is in this area that the foundations of a properly *machiavellian* philosophy must be searched. If we are allowed to suppose, in fact, that the Florentine did not possess a deep knowledge in such fields as natural philosophy or metaphysics, this assumption cannot be definitely extended to the principles of practical philosophy. Besides Aristotle's *Organon* and *Nicomachean Ethics* there are, I would argue, some more of the Stagirite's works that Machiavelli certainly read, i.e. the *Economics*, the *Politics* and the *Rhetoric*. It is safe to say that no Florentine citizen without a grasp of the methods and questions dealt with in the foundational texts of Aristotle's political philosophy could even hope to be

⁸⁴ V. COX, *Rhetoric and Ethics in Machiavelli*, cit., p. 173; P. STACEY, *Definition, Division, and Difference in Machiavelli's Political Philosophy*, cit.

⁸⁵ R. BLACK, *Machiavelli*, cit., p. 20.

⁸⁶ L. BRUNI, *Praefatio in Libros Oeconomicorum [Pseudo-] Aristotelis. Ad Cosmam Medicem*, in ID., *Humanistisch-philosophische Schriften*, cit., p. 121: «Primum igitur illud praemittendum: duas philosophiae esse partes, quarum altera in cognitione rerum, altera in agendo versatur. Prima pars fere ad illa pertinet, quorum finis est ipsa cognitio. Activa vero praecepta vitae continet, quae scire parum est, nisi deducas in actum. Ea vero praecepta dividuntur trifariam: aut enim circa mores nos instruunt aut circa rem familiarem aut circa rem publicam. Harum prima *ethicam*, secundam *oeconomicam*, tertiam *politicam* Graeci appellant. Nos, ut opinor, nostris vocabulis uti magis decet, quam alienis» (English translation available in *The Humanism of Leonardo Bruni*, cit., p. 306).

appointed to any public office – including the one that Machiavelli held for fourteen years.

2. Eternity of the World and Inductive Method.

In this chapter I will deal with two foundational features of Machiavelli's thought, respectively his idea of history as a cyclical and everlasting phenomenon, and his adoption of a historico-inductive approach to the analysis of reality.

As for the first aspect, I will not address directly the *vexata quaestio* of the sources informing chapter 5 in the second book of the *Discorsi*, as it is a problem that has often shifted scholars' attention away from many other and equally important places in which Machiavelli deals with the notion of eternalism.

I will rather concentrate my study in showing the extent to which Machiavelli's overall conception of the eternity of the world owes to Aristotle's account of the same notion, although the Florentine has never acknowledged the Greek philosopher as a source.

According to the main tenets of Aristotle's physical doctrine, Machiavelli will then develop his own method of evaluating political phenomena, a method which is, in turn, firmly grounded on the account of inductive arguments Aristotle gave in his logical works and in the *Rhetoric*.

Finally, in the last part of the chapter I will give an example of how heavy Machiavelli's indebtedness is to Aristotle's inductive method by dealing with the notion of conjecture (*coniectura*), a concept that is employed by the Florentine only occasionally, yet in a way that is entirely consistent with the account given by Aristotle.

WHICH KIND OF ETERNITY?

I. Machiavelli's belief in a cyclical and everlasting view of history is not a matter of discussion. The assertions showing his endorsement of such a conception are numerous and spread throughout his works: from the very early to the most mature writings, from the works in prose to his poetic compositions.⁸⁷

These assertions, however, have been usually taken as no more than the evidence of Machiavelli's agreement with a generic idea of time and history, an idea that was shared by many classical philosophical schools.⁸⁸ By labeling the Florentine with the title of "eternalist", scholars did nothing but leave the problem unresolved, since they eschewed from facing the question that really matters: which kind of eternalism does Machiavelli embrace?

In the following pages, I will focus on some specific aspects related to Machiavelli's account of history in order to show that it originated in the Aristotelian analysis of time given in the *Physics* and in the *De coelo*, as well as in many passages of other works.

Machiavelli expressed in many places of his writings the belief that the world is eternal and that everything in history proceeds cyclically. In the preface to book 5 of the *Istorie fiorentine*, he probably did so more extensively than elsewhere:

Sogliono le provincie il più delle volte, nel variare che le fanno, dall'ordine venire al disordine, e di nuovo di poi dal disordine all'ordine trapassare; perché, non essendo dalla natura conceduto alle mondane cose il fermarsi, come le arrivano alla loro ultima perfezione, non avendo più da salire, conviene che scendino; e similmente, scese che le sono, e per li disordini ad ultima bassezza pervenute, di necessità, non potendo più scendere, conviene

⁸⁷ Among the places in which Machiavelli most explicitly shows his belief in this conception, see N. MACHIAVELLI, *Discorsi*, I, proemio; *ivi*, I, 2; *ivi*, I, 6; *ivi*, I, 11; *ivi*, I, 39; *ivi*, II, proemio; *ivi*, II, 5; *ivi*, III, 9; *ivi*, III, 43. ID., *Il Principe*, XXV. ID., *Istorie fiorentine*, V, proemio. ID., *Lettere*, 121 (N. Machiavelli a G. B. Soderini, 13-21 settembre 1506); *ivi*, 290 (N. Machiavelli a F. Guicciardini, 16-20 Ottobre 1525). ID., *L'asino*, III, vv. 88-102; *ivi*, V, vv. 94-105.

⁸⁸ L. DERLA, *Sulla concezione machiavelliana del tempo*, «Il contestò», III (1977), pp. 3-31. Also C. VASOLI, *Machiavelli e la filosofia degli antichi*, in *Cultura e scrittura di Machiavelli*, Atti del convegno di Pisa-Firenze (27-30 ottobre, 1997), Salerno, Roma, 1998, pp. 37-62: 48-51 connected Machiavelli's view over cyclical eternalism to a large variety of classical authors (Aristotle, Plato, Polybius, Epicurus, Lucretius). However, the contribution does not lead to a precise identification of the source/s laying at the basis of Machiavelli's own understanding of time.

che salghino, e così sempre da il bene si scende al male e da il male si sale al bene.⁸⁹

Similarly, in his *Del modo di trattare i popoli della Valdichiana ribellati*, one of Machiavelli's earliest pieces of writing, he had maintained:

Le istorie sono la maestra delle azioni nostre, e massime de' principi; e il mondo fu sempre ad uno modo abitato da uomini che hanno avuto sempre le medesime passioni e sempre fu chi serve e chi comanda.⁹⁰

In these passages Machiavelli addressed the problem of the eternity of time in quite general terms. His analysis is actually limited to the claim that the world is everlasting («il mondo fu sempre ad uno modo abitato da uomini [...]») and that it proceeds cyclically («così sempre da il bene si scende al male, e da il male si sale al bene»). No further qualification is provided here by Machiavelli, so that it is hard for the reader to understand whether or not he is relying on a particular philosophical doctrine which may be connected to a particular philosophical school or thinker.

These rather generic assertions made by Machiavelli may explain why his notion of time and history has often been charged with simply relaying vaguely classical ideas – or, in the best cases, vaguely Aristotelian – over cyclical eternalism.⁹¹ Such a view, however, fails to account for at least two central aspects. Firstly, because it arbitrarily attaches a cyclical and everlasting conception of time to the

⁸⁹ N. MACHIAVELLI, *Istorie fiorentine*, V, proemio, cit., II, p. 449.

⁹⁰ ID., *Del modo di trattare i popoli della Valdichiana ribellati*, cit., p. 462. A historical and philological analysis of this work has been provided by J. J. MARCHAND, *Niccolò Machiavelli. I primi scritti politici (1499-1512). Nascita di un pensiero e di uno stile*. Antenore, Padova, 1975, pp. 98-119.

⁹¹ While commenting on the opening paragraph from *Discorsi* II, 5, Francesco Bausi claimed that the entire discussion over the eternity of the world put forward by Machiavelli is nothing but the «notissima tesi aristotelico-averroista dell'eternità del mondo [...] che si configura come un puro e semplice luogo comune, che potrebbe esser giunto a Machiavelli per le vie più diverse, e che non è, pertanto, documento di particolari studi o interessi filosofici da parte dell'ex Segretario» (N. MACHIAVELLI, *Discorsi*, II, 5, cit., I, p. 339, n. 2). Also G. FERRONI, *Machiavelli, o dell'incertezza. La politica come arte del rimedio*, Donzelli, Roma, 2003, p. 115, n. 1: «convince la nota al passo di F. Bausi, che parla appunto di un "luogo comune" e rinvia a un passo della *Vita civile* di Matteo Palmieri». Although with regards to *Discorsi*, II, 5 only, Gennaro Sasso too talked about «tesi aristotelica» (G. SASSO, *La tesi aristotelica*, in ID., *Machiavelli e gli antichi e altri saggi*, I, cit., pp.233-243).

entire classical thought, an assumption that is fundamentally wrong, as Arnaldo Momigliano showed some fifty years ago.⁹² Secondly, because it holds that the legacy of Aristotle to Machiavelli's own understanding of time consists in nothing but the endorsement of a cyclical and eternal view of history.

Beginning with the latter point, it is actually possible to further evidence this legacy by paying attention to what Machiavelli argued in some particular places of his writings. The first of these places is the preface to the second book of the *Discorsi*. In the opening of the chapter Machiavelli showed his disagreement with the opinion of those who always praise the past and condemn the present, a behavior that for Machiavelli originates from the ignorance of the things long gone-by and from the fact that, in doing so, men can cancel the two most powerful causes of dislike – fear and envy – since «what is past can neither do us hurt, nor afford occasion for envy».⁹³ After claiming so, Machiavelli went further and looks at the problem from a different perspective.

Replico pertanto essere vera quella consuetudine del laudare e del biasimare soprascritta, ma non essere già sempre vero che si erri nel farlo. Perché qualche volta è necessario che giudichino [*scil.* gli uomini] la verità: perché, essendo le cose umane sempre in moto, o le salgano o le scendano.⁹⁴

Being all human things always in constant movement, «it must be that they either rise or fall».⁹⁵ Accordingly, it is arguable that he, who lives in a state that because of its great founder and free institutions is experiencing a period of flourishing, should praise the present rather than the past. While on the other side, Machiavelli argues, one cannot place blame on people who live in ages of decline – as we now are – and wish to commend the past.

These considerations lead the author of the *Discorsi* to reflect on the whole course of history, and to wonder why political virtue seems to move from one country to

⁹² A. MOMIGLIANO, *Time in Ancient Historiography*, «History and Theory», VI (1966), pp. 1-23.

⁹³ N. MACHIAVELLI, *Discourses*, II, preface, in ID., *The Chief Works and Others*, cit., I, p. 321.

⁹⁴ N. MACHIAVELLI, *Discorsi*, II, proemio, cit., I, p. 296.

⁹⁵ N. MACHIAVELLI, *Discourses*, II, preface, in ID., *The Chief Works and Others*, cit., I, p. 322. The same point is made by Machiavelli in ID., *Discorsi*, I, 6, cit., I, p. 48: «Ma sendo tutte le cose degli uomini in moto, e non potendo stare salde, conviene che le salgano o che le scendano».

another, shifting about across the centuries and affecting the life of societies cyclically. It is at this stage of the chapter that Machiavelli introduced his own account of time and history, in a version that is actually more sophisticated than the one given in the two passages quoted above. He said:

E pensando io come queste cose procedino, giudico il mondo sempre essere stato ad uno medesimo modo, ed in quello essere stato tanto di buono quanto di cattivo, ma variare questo cattivo e questo buono, di provincia in provincia; come si vede per quello si ha notizia di quegli regni antichi, che variavano dall'uno all'altro per la variazione de' costumi; ma il mondo restava quel medesimo.⁹⁶

To the sensitive philosophical reader, Machiavelli's statement sounds rather familiar. He is not simply holding that the world is eternal and cyclically moving, but he is depicting a more complex picture of it: a world that, remaining continually the same with regards to its overall structure, presents a variety of inner modifications («giudico il mondo sempre essere stato ad uno medesimo modo, ed in quello essere stato tanto di buono quanto di cattivo, ma variare questo cattivo e questo buono [...] quegli regni antichi, che variavano dall'uno all'altro per la variazione de' costumi; ma il mondo restava quel medesimo»). It is clear that here Machiavelli is endorsing neither a generic version of cyclical eternalism nor a conception of eternity in the form of eternal return.⁹⁷ He actually claims that the “frame” of the world is steadily fixed and yet, in the inside, a stream of contingent events takes place endlessly. These events produce a great number of modifications for they change, for instance, the balances of power from state to state – «whereas at first Assyria was made the seat of its excellence, this was afterwards placed in Media, then in Persia, until at least it was transferred to Italy and Rome» – but, nevertheless, the world as a whole continues as before.⁹⁸

The idea laying at the basis of Machiavelli's reasoning on the way how history proceeds is to acknowledge that not everything in the world is subject to

⁹⁶ N. MACHIAVELLI, *Discorsi*, II, proemio, cit., I, pp. 297-298.

⁹⁷ The former view is implicitly given in the reading by L. DERLA, *Sulla concezione machiavelliana del tempo*, cit.

⁹⁸ N. MACHIAVELLI, *Discourses*, II, preface, in ID., *The Chief Works and Others*, cit., I, p. 322.

modification. So are only the “minor entities” within history, such as human habits, political supremacy or the different dissemination of “good” and “evil” over the countries. Such entities do experience a variety of alterations along history: they may change as time passes by, they may diffuse among many nations or concentrate instead in one only, they may move on in such a way as to lead both to the rise and to the fall of states. On the contrary, these processes of modification by no means involve the main patterns of history, i.e. all those elements that constitute the framework of the world.

Although not expressed in highly rigorous philosophical terms, Machiavelli is here clearly relaying on Aristotle’s notion of eternity as he had presented it, most extensively, in the *Physics* and in his *De coelo*, as well as in some of his biological writings.

To clear up the question, one must notice that in Aristotle the notion of ‘eternity’ (αἰών) is dealt with in connection to four main objects: a) the eternity of the motion; b) the eternity of the things that lay out of the time; c) the eternity of the things that lay within the time; and, closely connected to that, we find d) the eternity of the species.⁹⁹ Notion a) is famously treated by Aristotle in book VIII of the *Physics*. By endorsing the principle that «omne quod movetur ab aliquo movetur»¹⁰⁰, Aristotle argues that «just as a becoming of motion (*generatio*) would involve a change previous to the first, in the same way a perishing of motion (*corruptio*) would involve a change subsequent to the last».¹⁰¹ Accordingly, «there never was a time when there was not motion, and never will be a time when there will be not motion».¹⁰² The eternity of motion demonstrated by Aristotle implies the eternity of time – being time a kind of affection of motion –¹⁰³ and thus the eternity of the world.¹⁰⁴ Moreover, the eternity of motion also

⁹⁹ Unless otherwise specified, I take the notions of “eternity of time” and “eternity of the world” as synonyms.

¹⁰⁰ ARISTOTLE, *Physics*, VIII, 1 251a 10. See J. HAMESSE, *Les Auctoritates Aristotelis, Un florilège médiéval. Étude historique et édition critique*, Publications Universitaires, Louvain, 1974 (Philosophes médiévaux, XVII), 2 (183), p. 155, and ivi, 2 (211), p. 157.

¹⁰¹ ARISTOTLE, *Physics*, VIII, 1 251b 30-32, cit., I, p. 420 (my interpolations)

¹⁰² ARISTOTLE, *Physics*, VIII, 1 252b 5-6, cit., I, p. 421.

¹⁰³ ARISTOTLE, *Physics*, VIII, 1 251b 29. See also Ivi, IV, 11 219b 2. See J. HAMESSE, *Les Auctoritates Aristotelis*, cit., 2_(142), p. 151: «Tempus est passio motus, et praecipue motus caeli»; ivi, 2 (137), p. 151: «Tempus est numerus motus secundum prius et posterius».

leads Aristotle to admit the existence of a first mover unmoved, because, being the motion without intermission, «there must necessarily be something eternal, whether one or many, that first imparts motion, and this first mover must be unmoved».¹⁰⁵

Notions b) and c) are dealt with by Aristotle in the last five chapters (10-14) from book four of the *Physics* and in book one of his *De coelo*.¹⁰⁶ Drawing upon a concept of time that was already put forward by earlier eminent philosophers, such as Parmenides and Plato, Aristotle claims that the word ‘eternity’ has two different meanings.¹⁰⁷ On the one hand, it may be referred to everlasting things, i.e. things that, being in the time, last forever (τα αει οντα); this kind of eternity is what we define “temporal eternity”. On the other hand, it may refer to all the things that do not find themselves in the time (ουκ εστιν εν χρονω) and by no means are affected by its action; this kind of eternity is what we define “extra-temporal eternity”.¹⁰⁸

What belongs to the latter category is shown by Aristotle in *Physics* IV, 12:

Hence, plainly, things which are always are not, as such, in time; for they are not contained by time, nor is their being measured by time. An indication of this is that none of them is *affected* by time, which shows that they are not in time.¹⁰⁹

Aristotle believes two specific objects to be recipients of the extra-temporal eternity, respectively logical truths and the celestial bodies of the outermost

¹⁰⁴ See J. HAMESSE, *Les Auctoritates Aristotelis*, cit., 2 (201), p. 156: «Motus est aeternus»; also *ivi*, 2 (202): «Mundus est aeternus».

¹⁰⁵ ARISTOTLE, *Physics*, VIII, 6 258b 10-12, cit., I, p. 432.

¹⁰⁶ A detailed and well conducted analysis of chapters 10-14 from *Physics* IV has been provided by E. CAVAGNARO, *Aristotele e il tempo. Analisi di Physica, IV 10-14*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2002 (see esp. pp. 185-200 and 236-253).

¹⁰⁷ On this point see E. BERTI, *Tempo ed eternità*, in *ID.*, *Nuovi studi aristotelici*, 2 voll., Morcelliana, Brescia, 2005, II, pp. 95-113. See also R. MONDOLFO, *L’eternità divina e la perennità del cosmo in Aristotele: l’infinità temporale in potenza e in atto; la serie finale e la meccanica*, in *ID.*, *L’infinito nel pensiero dell’antichità classica*, La Nuova Italia, Firenze, 1967, pp. 119-139. R. SORABJI, *Time, Creation and the Continuum. Theories in Antiquity and Early Middle Ages*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca (NY), 1983, pp. 98-105.

¹⁰⁸ On this point, see R. MONDOLFO, *Extratemporalità e infinità nel concetto eleatico dell’eterno*, in *ID.*, *L’infinito nel pensiero dell’antichità classica*, cit., pp. 91-99.

¹⁰⁹ ARISTOTLE, *Physics*, IV, 12 221b 3-5, cit., I, pp. 374-375 (emphasis in the text). See J. HAMESSE, *Les Auctoritates Aristotelis*, cit., 2 (141), p. 151: «Sempiterna non sunt sub tempore».

heaven. To begin with logical truths, Aristotle believes them to be “extra-temporally eternal” because, technically speaking, they neither were, nor are, nor will be. The principles provided by mathematics, for instance, are totally out of the time since they find themselves in a condition of «timeless present».¹¹⁰ It would make no sense, in fact, to inquire into the past or the future of mathematical principles, or to wonder whether there was, or there will be, a time in which they may not be valid.

As to such things as it [*scil.* time] does not contain in any way, they neither were nor are nor will be. These are those non-existents whose opposites always are, as the incommensurability of the diagonal always is – and this will not be in time. Nor will be the commensurability, therefore; hence this eternally is not, because it is contrary to what eternally is.¹¹¹

The same condition of «timeless present» is shared by celestial bodies, more precisely by those located in the outermost heaven. These entities are immovable substances «of such a nature as not to occupy any place, nor does time age them, nor is there any change in any of the things which lie beyond the outermost motion».¹¹² Some specific remarks on the eternity of celestial bodies have been provided by Aristotle at the end of chapter two from book one of his *De coelo*:

For in the whole range of time past, so far as our inherited records reach, no change appears to have taken place either in the whole scheme of the outermost heaven or in any of its proper parts. The name, too, of that body seems to have been handed down right to our own day from our distant ancestors who conceived of it in the fashion which we have been expressing. The same ideas, one must believe, recur in men’s minds not once or twice

¹¹⁰ G. E. L. OWEN, *Plato and Parmenides on the Timeless Present*, «The Monist», L (1966), pp. 317-340.

¹¹¹ ARISTOTLE, *Physics*, IV, 12 222a 2-7, cit., I, p. 375. See also ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysics*, IX, 10 1052a 4-7, cit., II, p. 1661: «It is evident also that about unchangeable things there can be no error in respect of time, if we assume them to be unchangeable. E.g. if we suppose that the triangle does not change, we shall not suppose that at one time its angles are equal to two right angles while at another time they are not (for that would imply change)».

¹¹² ARISTOTLE, *On the heavens*, I 9 279a 19-20, cit., I, p. 463. See J. HAMESSE, *Les Auctoritates Aristotelis*, cit., 3 (29), p. 161: «Extra caelum nec est locus, neque tempus, neque vacuum, sed ibi sunt entia inalterabilia, impassibilia, optimam vitam ducentia quam toto aeterno perficiunt».

but again and again. And so, implying that the primary body is something else beyond earth, fire, air, and water, they gave the highest place the name of *aether*, derived from the fact that ‘it runs always’ for an eternity of time.¹¹³

Coming down to earth, it must be observed that Aristotle allows for a kind of eternity also in the sublunary world. That is the c) temporal eternity, which involves all the things that lie within the time and are, nevertheless, everlasting. Of such a nature are, for instance, the four elements. The never-ending and cyclical process of generation and corruption accounts for their becoming as much as for their being eternal. Aristotle makes this point towards the end of the second book of his *De generatione et corruptione*, where he states:

Coming-to-be (*generatio*) and passing-away (*corruptio*) will, as we have said, always be continuous, and will never fail owing to the cause we stated. [...] The cause of this as we have often said, is circular motion; for that is the only motion which is continuous. That, too, is why all the other things – the things, I mean, which are reciprocally transformed in virtue of their qualities and their powers, e. g. the simple bodies – imitate circular motion. For when Water is transformed into Air, Air into Fire, and Fire back into Water, we say the coming-to-be has completed the circle, because it reverts again to the beginning. Hence it is by imitating circular motion that rectilinear motion too is continuous.¹¹⁴

As far as the sublunary world is concerned, the temporal eternity of the elements that are subject to the process of generation and corruption is not the only kind of everlasting duration. On the earth, in fact, the species too are eternal. Clearly, the d) eternity of the species is closely connected to the temporal eternity insofar as it too is concerned with sublunary entities that are affected by time. There is a difference between the temporal eternity of simple bodies (the

¹¹³ ARISTOTLE, *On the heavens*, I, 3 270b 14-24, cit., I, p. 451 (*emphasis* in the text).

¹¹⁴ ARISTOTLE, *On generation and corruption*, II, 10 336b 25-26 – 337a 1-9, cit., I, pp. 551-552 (my interpolations). See J. HAMESSE, *Les Auctoritates Aristotelis*, cit., 4 (44), p. 170: «Generatio et corruptio sunt perpetua». Also ivi, 4 (50), p. 171: «Generatio et corruptio perpetuantur circulariter et non secundum rectitudinem».

elements) and that of the species (say, the human species). While the elements are *numerically* eternal – since they return upon themselves exactly in the same way – , human beings are eternal only *specifically* – because they produce other human beings who are the same only with regards to the species.

Then why do some things manifestly come-to-be in this fashion [...] while men and animals do not return upon themselves so that the same individual comes-to-be a second time? [...] In discussing this, we must begin by inquiring whether all things return upon themselves in a uniform manner; or whether, on the contrary, though in some sequences what recurs is *numerically* the same, in other sequences it is the same only *in species*. Now it is evident that those things, whose substance – that which is undergoing the process – is imperishable, will be numerically the same; for the character of the process is determined by the character of that which undergoes it. Those things, on the other hand, whose substance is perishable (not imperishable) must return upon themselves specifically, not numerically.¹¹⁵

Reproduction is the way through which all living beings (i.e. those entities «whose substance is perishable») preserve their existence on the earth and make the species to which they belong everlasting, and men too are plainly involved in this process. Aristotle points it out also in the second book of his *De anima*, where he states that «the most natural act is the production of another like itself in order that, as far as its nature allows, it may partake in the *eternal* and divine».¹¹⁶

Aristotle's complex analysis over the notion of eternity, in all its different meanings, shows that he believed many different objects to be the recipients of this privileged condition. A large variety of things, from celestial bodies down to a number of earthly entities, share in the eternity, although in different ways and degrees. The point of Aristotle's reflection on eternity is thus to acknowledge that there is in the world, *lato sensu*, a set of things which preserve themselves from becoming. This set includes: the heaven, the celestial bodies, the elements and the

¹¹⁵ ARISTOTLE, *On generation and corruption*, II, 11 338b 6-18, cit., I, p. 554. See J. HAMESSE, *Les Auctoritates Aristotelis*, cit., 3 (70), p. 165: «Absentia materiae est causa aeternitatis».

¹¹⁶ ARISTOTLE, *On the soul*, II, 4 415a 27-30, cit., I, p. 661 (my *emphasis*).

species – together with, of course, motion, whose eternity proves to be the very condition for the eternity of time, world and natural processes.

Machiavelli seems to have been rather well acquainted with this theory, since the very same eternal items presented by Aristotle occur in the preface of his *Discorsi*. Blaming those who do not avail themselves of the historical knowledge for political purposes, since they consider the imitation of «ancient modes» not possible, Machiavelli argued that such an imitation is instead achievable due to the fact that:

Il cielo, il sole, li elementi, l'uomini [non sono] variati di moto, d'ordine e di potenza da quelli che gli erano antiquamente.¹¹⁷

The listing given by Machiavelli is not a matter of chance. The very same eternal objects Aristotle had presented in his account appear in Machiavelli's passage: the heaven, the sun (as representative of celestial bodies), the elements and men – being these ones seen from the broad perspective of the species («l'uomini»). Machiavelli also sorted all the items in descending order, according to their different “degree of eternity”, and he linked them to three mostly comprehensive categories (*moto*, *ordine*, *potenza*) which certainly refer to just as many Aristotelian concepts (motion, time,¹¹⁸ potentiality).

Even if we assume that the Florentine did not possess an in-depth knowledge of all the subtleties of Aristotle's physics, which was actually disseminated among many and rather difficult texts, we may take for granted that he did know very well which was the distinctive feature of Aristotle's notion of eternity, i.e. the fact that the everlasting duration involved only the “macro-structures” of history.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ N. MACHIAVELLI, *Discorsi*, I, proemio, cit., I, p. 7 (in this edition Francesco Bausi actually writes «moti» instead of «moto», which is the reading given in all the major editions. I would rather stick to the latter form which sounds, to me, more convincing because of its syntactic consistency with the two following terms – «ordine» and «potenza»). See also *ivi*, I, 11, p. 83: «perchè gli uomini, come nella prefazione nostra si disse, nacquero, vissero e morirono sempre con uno medesimo ordine».

¹¹⁸ Meaning the *order* in which they actually occur in the time.

¹¹⁹ This aspect has been already pointed out by V. PERRONE COMPAGNI, *Machiavelli metafisico*, cit., p. 233: «I singoli fatti sono variabili nella loro istantaneità, ma c'è un'immutabilità di fondo dell'accadere, che garantisce la possibilità di sottoporre gli eventi a una lettura razionale, di rintracciare la costanza e l'uniformità dei processi e degli effetti».

This very view lies at the basis of Machiavelli's assertion that although those «regni antichi variavano dall'uno all'altro per la variazione dei costumi», nevertheless, «il mondo restava quel medesimo».¹²⁰

II. That Machiavelli was rigorously sticking to the Aristotelian kind of eternalism can also be proved by comparing that theory with other versions of it, most notably with the one put forward by the Stoic school.¹²¹

It is known that one of the main tenets of Stoic physics was the belief that the world is subject to cyclical conflagrations and renewals. After such events, the world returns again to the very same shape as before, and everything in it happens again in the very same way. Thus, as a famous sentence puts it, Socrates and Plato were told to recur for infinite times, and for infinite times they were told to perform exactly the same actions.¹²²

The Stoic doctrine of the everlasting recurrence was transmitted by a large number of ancient and medieval authors, so that there can be no doubt that it was quite known in fifteenth-century Florence too. Among the many medieval sources relaying the Stoic account, one should not forget such a successful text as Lactantius' *Divinae Institutiones*. In chapter 23 from book 7, the author stated:

Chrysippus [...] when speaking of the world's renewal, drew the following conclusion: 'Since this is so, it is evidently not impossible that we too after our death return again to the shape we now are, after certain periods of time have elapsed'.¹²³

¹²⁰ N. MACHIAVELLI, *Discorsi*, II, proemio, cit., I, p. 296.

¹²¹ On the main sources relaying the Stoic philosophy which were available during the XV and XVI century, see J. HANKINS-A. PALMER, *The Recovery of Ancient Philosophy in the Renaissance: A Brief Guide*, Olschki, Firenze, 2008, pp. 37-42.

¹²² *Stoicorum veterum fragmenta*, edited by H. von Arnim, Teubner, Stuttgart, 1964, II, 625, p. 190.

¹²³ *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, edited by A. A. LONG and D. N. SEDLEY, 2 Voll., Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2006 (or. ed. 1987), I, p. 308. L. CAELIUS FIRMIANUS LACTANTIUS, *Divinarum Institutionum Libri Septem*, 23, 3, Fasc. 4, Liber 7, ediderunt E. Heck-A. Wlosok, De Gruyter, Berlin-Boston, 2011, p. 720.

Similarly, one of the most representative late-ancient commentators of Aristotle, Alexander of Aphrodisias, illustrated the Stoic notion of everlasting recurrence in his commentary to the *Prior Analytics*:

They [*scil.* the Stoics] hold that after the conflagration all the same things recur in the world numerically, so that even the same peculiarly qualified individual as before exists and comes to be again in that world, as Chrysippus says in his books *On the world*.¹²⁴

The two aforementioned passages bring out the main difference between the Stoics' and Aristotle's own idea of eternity. While Aristotle believed only the simple bodies to be numerically recurrent in the sublunary world (since all the living beings are so only specifically), the Stoics attached numerical eternity to every single thing and event occurring in the world. The everlasting recurrence of identical circumstances, therefore, made the very same individuals and facts take place continually in history.

It is interesting to notice that rejection of this very theory seems to be at the basis of Machiavelli's decision to put on the *Clizia*. The comedy, as known, is based upon a classical play, Plautus' *Casina*, whose action took place in the streets of ancient Athens. Machiavelli recovered and located the key elements of Plautus' plot into a new setting: the Florence of his time. He justified this historical adaptation in the very first lines of the prologue:

Se nel mondo tornassino i medesimi uomini, come tornano i medesimi casi, non passerebbono mai cento anni, che noi non ci trovassimo un'altra volta insieme a fare le medesime cose che ora.¹²⁵

The reason why such historical recovering can be legitimately performed stands right in Machiavelli's explicit refusal of the Stoic notion of time: by no means do the same men recur infinitely in the world. The «casi» which the author refers to –

¹²⁴ *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, cit., p. 309.

¹²⁵ N. MACHIAVELLI, *Clizia*, prologo, in ID., *Opere*, IV, edited by L. Blasucci, with the collaboration of A. Casadei, UTET, Torino, 1989, p. 177.

as opposed to the single men – are nothing but the recurrent patterns of history, i.e. the chains of events seen from a macro-historical standpoint. In the case of the *Clizia*, «caso» is the overall plot of the play, which informs Plautus' story as much as Machiavelli's, although with some particular variations due to the different historical settings in which they take place. Machiavelli made this point in the following lines of the prologue, where he stated:

Questo si dice perchè già in Atene, nobile ed antichissima città in Grecia, fu un gentile uomo al quale, non avendo altri figliuoli che uno maschio, capitò a sorte una piccola fanciulla in casa, la quale da lui infino alla età di diciassette anni fu onestissimamente allevata. Occorse dipoi che in uno tratto egli ed il figliuolo se ne innamororno: nella concorrenza del quale amore assai casi e strani accidenti nacquono; [...] Che direte voi, che questo medesimo caso, pochi anni sono, seguì ancora in Firenze?¹²⁶

The chain of events framing the plot is the same for both stories (a gentleman, having no other children than one boy, into whose house entered by chance a little girl...etc.). However, they differ in regards to many particular happenings – those «assai casi e strani accidenti» Machiavelli explicitly discusses. If Machiavelli's story is not the same as Plautus', in fact, is just because only the «casi» constantly recur in the same way as before, while all the accidents (to put it in Aristotelian terms) always change.¹²⁷ A story whose main features are the same as a long gone-by event (the one reported by Plautus) has just happened in late fifteenth-century Florence. However, the “Florentine affair” presents its own specificities, distinguishing it from the past. This is why the story told by Machiavelli is, actually, a different and thus worth-recounting story. Had Machiavelli not been deeply convinced of that, he would have made nothing more than an identical copy of Plautus' *Casina*, which the *Clizia* actually is not.

According to the elements given so far, it is hard to question Machiavelli's full and conscious endorsement of Aristotle's notion of time and history. Evidently, he

¹²⁶ N. MACHIAVELLI, *Clizia*, prologo, in ID., *Opere*, cit., p. 177.

¹²⁷ J. HAMESSE, *Les Auctoritates Aristotelis*, cit., 36 (13), p. 322: «Accidens est quod neque est genus, neque species, neque proprium, neque differentia, sed est aliquid rei».

did embrace neither an undefined conception of cyclical eternalism, nor a concept of everlasting duration in the form of numerical recurrence. Rather, he showed more than once to stick firmly to a much more sophisticated notion of eternity. According to this notion, only the “macro-structures” within the world and history are steadily fixed, while all the other “minor entities” are subject to the action of time and do not preserve themselves in the world.

III. Aristotle’s account of the eternity of the world was intensely discussed – and also condemned – throughout the Middle Ages.¹²⁸ Thirteenth-century university masters and theologians did not certainly overlook the distinctive feature of Aristotle’s concept of eternity, namely, the fact that it applied only to some major entities of the world. Among the 219 propositions condemned in Paris in 1277, for instance, one openly took issue with Aristotle’s account and listed a sequence of items that remind, again, those presented by Machiavelli:

Quod mundus est aeternus, quantum ad omnes species in eo contentas; et, quod tempus est aeternus, et motus, et materia, et agens, et suscipiens.¹²⁹

A few years before, probably around 1272, Siger of Brabant had composed his *Tractatus de aeternitate mundi*, a work aiming to prove the eternity of the world right on the basis of the eternity of the human species.¹³⁰

Dicere enim quod ipsa [*scil.* species humana] esse inceperit, cum penitus non praefuisset, est dicere quod aliquod eius individuum esse inceperit ante quod non fuerit aliud individuum illius speciei.¹³¹

¹²⁸ For an overall yet detailed treatment of this topic, see L. BIANCHI, *L’errore di Aristotele. La polemica contro l’eternità del mondo nel XIII secolo*, La Nuova Italia, Firenze, 1984.

¹²⁹ *Propositions condamnées par Étienne Tempier, évêque de Paris 1277*, 85, in P. MANDONNET, *Siger de Brabant et l’Averroïsme latin au XIII siècle*, 2 voll., Institut Supérieur de Philosophie de l’Université, Louvain, 1908, II, p. 182 (the proposition listed by Mandonnet as n. 85 is actually n. 87 in the original order). See also *ibidem*, 91: «Quod infinitae praecesserunt revolutiones coeli, quas non fuit impossibile comprehendere a causa prima, sed ab intellectu creato» (n. 101 in the original order).

¹³⁰ SIGERI DE BRABANTIA *Tractatus de aeternitate mundi*, in SIGER DE BRABANT, *Questiones in tertium De anima. De anima intellectiva. De aeternitate mundi*, édition critique par B. Bazán, Publications Universitaires-Nauwelaerts, Louvain-Paris, 1972, pp. 113-136. On the date of composition of Siger’s *Tractatus*, see *ivi*, introduction, pp. 77-78.

Following Aristotle, Siger claimed that the human species is not everlasting in itself (*materialiter*), but as a consequence of the reproduction of the individuals (*per accidens*).

Theologians found a great deal of difficulties in coping with the arguments proposed by Siger, and with those provided by other thinkers too. As Luca Bianchi has pointed out, it was in the decade between 1267 and 1277 that the majority of writings *de aeternitate mundi* came out, so that practically no master or theologian eschewed from facing the argument. Whatever side a given thinker would take in the conflict between *antiquitas* and *novitas mundi*, his position could not but reveal his understanding of the relation between reason and faith.¹³²

A striking example of how problematic was such a relation for the thirteenth-century mind is provided by Boethius of Dacia's *De aeternitate mundi* (probably 1272-1277), a work whose main concern is to show that there is no contradiction between reason and faith with regards to the issue of the world's eternity.¹³³

Almost in the same years as Boethius' work, Thomas Aquinas authored a treatise *De aeternitate mundi contra murmurantes* (1274) and provided – like many other authors – a detailed account of the problem *de aeternitate* while commenting on

¹³¹ *Ivi*, I, p. 117.

¹³² L. BIANCHI, *L'errore di Aristotele*, cit., p. 163: «Per spiegare fino in fondo l'eccezionale presa che ebbe [*scil.* the thirteenth-century debate on the eternity of the world] sulle menti dei più diversi maestri e dottori, l'attenzione quasi maniacale che si conquistò, le passioni violente che suscitò, la sua elevata densità teorica non è però del tutto sufficiente: è necessario anche rifarsi alle circostanze in cui si svolse. Progressivamente caricato di contenuti teorici ed emotivi, esso finì per acquisire valore paradigmatico: la posizione che un pensatore vi teneva divenne – a ragione o a torto – il simbolo del suo più generale orientamento nel conflitto in atto circa il rapporto fra ragione e fede o, più precisamente, circa i modi e i limiti dell'accettazione da parte della cristianità del patrimonio filosofico-scientifico ereditato dai pagani». On this point, see also ID., *L'inizio dei tempi. Antichità e novità del mondo da Bonaventura a Newton*, Olschki, Firenze, 1987, pp. 5-6.

¹³³ BOETHII DACI *De aeternitate mundi*, in ID., *Opera*, VI, 2, *Opuscola*, edited by N. G. Green-Pedersen, Gad, Copenhagen, 1976, pp. 335-336: «[...] volentes sententiam christianae fidei de aeternitate mundi et sententiam Aristotelis et quorundam aliorum philosophorum reducere ad concordiam, ut sententia fidei firmiter teneatur, [...] ut etiam sententia philosophorum salvetur, quantum ratio eorum concludere potest, nam eorum sententia in nullo contradicit christianae fidei nisi apud non intelligentes. [...] Ut appareat quod fides et philosophia sibi non contradicunt de aeternitate mundi, ut etiam appareat quod rationes quorundam haereticorum non habent vigorem, per quas contra christianam fidem mundum tenent esse aeternum, de hoc per rationem inquiramus, scilicet utrum mundus sit aeternus». On the issues connected to the date of composition of Boethius' work, see *ivi*, *Introduction*, pp. XXII-XXIII. On the relation between reason and faith in Boethius' *De aeternitate mundi*, see S. LANDUCCI, *La doppia verità. Conflitti di ragione e fede tra Medioevo e prima età moderna*, Feltrinelli, Milano, 2006, pp. 59-74 (further discussion on the date of the work is provided at pp. 71-72).

the second book of Peter Lombard's *Sententiae* (1254-1256).¹³⁴ Among the many examples of *Commentaria Sententiarum*, moreover, the one wrote by Bonaventure (1250-1254) proves especially paradigmatic, since it aimed to discuss and refute all the arguments supporting the eternity of the world.¹³⁵

The thirteenth-century debate *de aeternitate mundi* gave rise to an impressive amount of writings the dissemination of which was one of the main reasons leading to the condemnation of 1277 in Paris. In fact, both the circulation and the condemnation contributed to disseminate the themes of the dispute throughout the following centuries.¹³⁶

As far as the cultural context of Machiavelli is concerned, it is not surprising to come across the very same (Aristotelian) conception of eternity of the world in the writings of Francesco Guicciardini. In his *Ricordi*, Guicciardini clearly showed his acceptance of the notion of “eternity of the macro-structures” formulated by Aristotle and later endorsed by Machiavelli. He stated:

Tutto quello che è stato per el passato e è al presente, sarà ancora in futuro; ma si mutano e nomi e le superficie delle cose in modo, che chi non ha buono occhio non le riconosce, né sa pigliare regola o fare giudizio per mezzo di quella osservazione.¹³⁷

At a previous stage of his writing, Guicciardini had taken the following note:

¹³⁴ L. BIANCHI, *L'errore di Aristotele*, cit., p. 6: «Quanto agli studi più strettamente teologici, è noto che fra il 1223 e il 1229 Alessandro di Hales si servì nelle sue lezioni del *Liber Sententiarum* di Pier Lombardo. Una ventina d'anno dopo, tale uso si era definitivamente consolidato: ogni baccelliere in teologia era tenuto a commentare le *Sentenze*. Ma è impossibile commentare il secondo libro delle *Sentenze*, relativo alla creazione, senza incontrare la dottrina dell'eternità del mondo, cui lo stesso Pier Lombardo aveva accennato».

¹³⁵ S. BONAVENTURAE, *Liber II Sententiarum. De rerum creatione et formatione corporalium et spiritualium. Et aliis pluribus eo pertinentibus*, Distinctio I, Pars I, Art. I, Q. II, in ID., *Opera Theologica Selecta*, iussu et auctoritate R.mi P. Leonardi M. Bello, Quaracchi, Firenze, 1938, II, p. 13: «Hae sunt rationes, quas commentatores et moderniores superaddunt rationibus Aristotelis, sive ad has possunt reduci». See also L. BIANCHI, *L'errore di Aristotele*, cit., pp. 6-7; R. C. DALES, *Medieval Discussions of the Eternity of the World*, Brill, Leiden-New York, København-Köln, 1990, esp. pp. 86-177.

¹³⁶ On the diffusion of the debate over the eternity of the world throughout the fifteenth-century Italy, see W. J. CONNELL, *The Eternity of the World and Renaissance Historical Thought*, «California Italian Studies», II (2011), 1, pp. 1-23.

¹³⁷ F. GUICCIARDINI, *Ricordi*, C 76, cit., p. 750.

Le cose passate fanno lume alle future, perché el mondo fu sempre di una medesima sorte, e tutto quello che è e sarà è stato in altro tempo e le cose medesime ritornano, ma sotto diversi nomi e colori: però ognuno non le riconosce, ma solo chi è savio e le osserva e considera diligentemente.¹³⁸

Only the names and colors change in this world (i.e. the accidents), while what is under the surface of the merely empirical understanding («le superficie delle cose») does not undergo modifications of any sort and it is doomed to repeat itself continually.

Guicciardini's thoughts over the concept of eternity are expressed in the very same way as Machiavelli's. Moreover, his insistence on the variation of names, colors and accidents seems to echo Machiavelli's statement in the prologue of the *Clizia*, which was performed in Florence a few years before Guicciardini composed his *Ricordi*:

E volendo questo nostro autore l'uno delli dua rappresentarvi, ha eletto el fiorentino [...] perché Atene è rovinata, le vie, le piazze, i luoghi non vi si ricognoscono; [...] Prendete, pertanto, el caso seguito in Firenze, e non aspettate di riconoscere o il casato o gli uomini, perché lo autore, per fuggire carico, ha convertiti i nomi veri in nomi fitti.¹³⁹

The closeness between Machiavelli's and Guicciardini's notion of eternity of the world may be explained on the grounds of a similar education (a fact that still needs to be adequately assessed albeit, very promising, I think, being that they are not the only two representatives of the Florentine ruling class endorsing such a conception)¹⁴⁰ as well as in the light of their reciprocal influence. As for the latter

¹³⁸ F. GUICCIARDINI, *Ricordi*, B 114, cit., p. 826.

¹³⁹ N. MACHIAVELLI, *Clizia*, prologo, in ID., *Opere*, cit., p. 177.

¹⁴⁰ In this sense, a very interesting case is Giovanni Cavalcanti's *Trattato politico-morale* (1447-1450 ca.) Giovanni, whose *Istorie fiorentine* and *Seconde Istorie* have been widely used by Machiavelli during his composition of the *Florentine Histories*, was also the author of a huge companion of moral philosophy which still survives in four Florentine manuscripts (Biblioteca Riccardiana di Firenze, ms. 2431 e ms. 403; Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze, ms. Ginori Conti, Appendice 3 e ms. Capponi 131) and whose third and last part was edited only in 1937 by Marcella T. Grendler with the following title: G. CAVALCANTI, *Trattato politico-morale*, critical edition and interpretation by M. T. Grendler, Librairie Droz, Genève, 1973. Discussing about the single virtues included in the virtue of prudence, Giovanni argued for the importance of having

point, it is very likely that the two Florentine men had the opportunity to share their insights into time and history in connection to many contingent political questions. On May 18, 1521, for instance, while Machiavelli was in diplomatic mission at the General Chapter of the Minor Friars in Carpi, Guicciardini wrote to him. He praised both his oratorical skills and outstanding curriculum, also arguing that Machiavelli's legation in Carpi reminded him of the great Spartan admiral Lysander, who after uncountable heroic deeds ended up serving food to the same soldiers he had previously led in many battles. Dwelling on the resemblances between Lysander's and Machiavelli's case, Guicciardini went on and expressed the same view of history held in the two passages of his *Ricordi*:

Vedi che, mutati solum e visi delli uomini et e colori estrinseci, le cose medesime tutte ritornano; né vediamo accidente alcuno che a altri tempi non sia stato veduto. Ma el mutare nomi e figure alle cose fa che soli e prudenti le riconoscono.¹⁴¹

IV. In conclusion, there is one more point that still needs to be addressed. The claim that Machiavelli constantly stuck to the Aristotelian notion of eternalism urges us to set his own understanding of time against other conceptions of time formulated by the major philosophical schools of Antiquity. This will enable us to bring out the distinctive features of each conception, and eventually grasp the real measure of Machiavelli's endorsement of Aristotle's account.

To this end, we shall begin from what Arnaldo Momigliano argued in his 1966 article on *Time in Ancient Historiography* already mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. One of the greatest merits of this contribution is to get rid of a number of faulty questions usually related to the issue of time in ancient thought,

memory of past events, and he justified his claim by maintaining that: «Niuna cosa è advenuta che altra volta non ritorni, ma in diverse conditioni, modi, e forme, et luoghi: per li cui ragioni c'è mostrato dalla cosa c'è a sseguire quello che cci appartiene di fare. Advegnia iddio che dal segno non procede la cosa; anzi dalla cosa procede il segno. Adunque, per li segni già passati si debbono prosumere le cose ad venire; e così discorrendo le cose, i segni vanno innanzi alle cose» (Ivi, p. 120). The closeness between his view and those expressed by Machiavelli and Guicciardini is evident and, I believe, worth-studying in depth.

¹⁴¹ N. MACHIAVELLI, *Lettere*, 272 (F. Guicciardini to N. Machiavelli, 18 maggio 1521), cit., p. 524.

thereby avoiding a great deal of confusion to which this issue is likely to lead. Needless to say, many of the questions addressed by Momigliano are of the utmost importance for the Renaissance student too. As far as Machiavelli is concerned, for instance, scholars have always overlooked Momigliano's remarks about one of the most controversial yet taken-for-granted sources of the Florentine, namely Polybius.¹⁴² Machiavelli's reliance on book 6 of Polybius in *Discorsi* II, 5 would actually deserve a more adequate assessment at the light of Momigliano's analysis. The Italian scholar showed that the chapters from book 6 that seem to have inspired Machiavelli are nothing but a large digression, and that «the relation between this digression and the rest of Polybius' work is not easy to grasp, so that Polybius himself would have been embarrassed to explain it».¹⁴³ What is more, one has to reckon with the fact that, outside these digressive chapters, Polybius does not seem to have a cyclical view of history;¹⁴⁴ Momigliano maintained that «Polybius very probably learned about the cycle of the forms of government from some philosopher and liked the idea, but was unable to apply it to his historical narrative».¹⁴⁵

In his concluding remarks Momigliano warned against the assumption that only a single and exclusive notion of time was present in ancient historiography (specifically, a cyclically eternal one in opposition to the finite and linear that was formulated by the Jews).¹⁴⁶ Momigliano urged scholars to reckon with the complications connected with the notion of time in the Ancient world, as well as acknowledge that many different «attitudes towards time»¹⁴⁷ actually coexisted in the same cultural setting.

Momigliano's considerations regarding classical historians may be fruitfully applied to philosophical schools as well. In order to address the problem of time in Ancient philosophy as clearly as possible, one should take into account that any eternalist view of time may be informed by three main ingredients. These are: [a]

¹⁴² On this point, see at least J. H. HEXTER, *Seyssele, Machiavelli, and Polybius VI. The Mystery of the Missing Translation*, «Studies in the Renaissance», III (1956), pp. 75-96; R. ORR, *The Time Motif in Machiavelli*, «Political Studies», XVII (1969), 2, pp. 145-159.

¹⁴³ A. MOMIGLIANO, *Time in Ancient Historiography*, cit., p. 12.

¹⁴⁴ *Ivi*, p. 13.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibidem*.

¹⁴⁶ *Ivi*, p. 22.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibidem*.

the “infiniteness” or eternity of time; [b] the “circularity” of time; [c] the eternal return. It has also to be noticed that by no means these three elements must be all present within the same conception. In someone’s opinion time may be eternal, but not cyclically moving; or else it may be cyclical, but without entailing an eternal return. This does not detract, however, from the fact that each element of the sequence necessarily implies the preceding element: cyclical time [b] is in itself everlasting [a], and every form of eternal return [c] is clearly a kind of circular time [b].

It is fair to say that any conception of eternal time formulated in Antiquity is nothing but the result of a specific combination of these elements.

[a] The Epicureans held a concept of time that rested on the first factor only: it was eternal, though neither cyclical nor returning upon itself identically. Everlasting were, for Epicurus and his followers, only the void and the atoms, but not the single worlds which they gave birth to continually. Thus, only the universe (the *summa summorum*, as Lucretius used to call it, meaning the amalgam of void and atoms) is eternal, while the earth is nothing but one of the countless worlds that were created by the random combination of atoms floating in the void. Apart from the succession of seasons, the motion of celestial bodies such as the sun and the moon, and the progression of nights and days, no cyclical proceeding of any kind finds place in the Epicureans’ physical account. Accordingly, every form of eternal return is ruled out as well.

[b] In Aristotle, as we have seen, time (and the world, too) is eternal and cyclically moving. However, it does not proceed in such a way as to entail an identical return of things. Only the macro-structures of history preserve themselves continually, while all the other entities are subject to the cyclical process of generation and corruption.

[c] In the farthest position of the sequence we find the Stoic school, whose own view over time was constituted by all the three elements: it was cyclical since identically returning, it was eternal since cyclically moving.

Finally, Plato's account does not find any place in the sequence insofar as even the first ingredient (eternity) is missing.¹⁴⁸

These remarks may be seen as an attempt to single out the distinctive features shaping the different notions of time that were formulated by the classical schools of philosophy. In so doing, it is possible to better appreciate the real extent of Machiavelli's adoption of Aristotle's account of time, in opposition to those of the other major thinkers. Machiavelli's embracing of a cyclical and everlasting view of time entailing the identity of macro-structures in history clearly makes of him a fellow student at Aristotle's school.

Furthermore, a comparative analysis of the principal philosophical doctrines proves to be preliminary to a better assessment of the problem concerning the role of Epicureanism in the shaping of Machiavelli's concept of time and history. Epicurus is, as known, an author who cannot be neglected while dealing with Machiavelli's philosophical training. The Florentine first met his doctrine when still young (probably in 1497), while copying a manuscript containing the work of the foremost Roman follower of Epicureanism, namely Lucretius' *De rerum natura*.¹⁴⁹ Sergio Bertelli first wrote about Machiavelli's transcription in 1961.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁸ PLATO, *Timaeus*, 28b-c, in ID., *The collected dialogues*, cit., p. 1161: «Was the heaven then or the world, whether called by this or by any other more appropriate name – assuming the name, I am asking a question which has to be asked at the beginning of an inquiry about anything – was the world, I say, always in existence and without beginning, or created, and had it a beginning? Created, I reply, being visible and tangible and having a body, and therefore sensible, and all sensible things are apprehended by opinion and sense, and are in a process of creation and created». I am aware of the many issues related to Plato's account of the origin of the world (the poetical form through which the creation is recounted by Timaeus; the problem concerning the pre-existence of a matter thanks to which the creator shaped the world). However, I take here Plato's cosmology at its more general level, i. e. as a conception holding the creation of the world. Further discussion on this point in R. MONDOLFO, *L'eternità trascendente, la perennità del moto e l'infinità del tempo in Platone*, in ID., *L'infinito nel pensiero dell'antichità classica*, cit., pp. 101-117, esp. pp. 104-114.

¹⁴⁹ A. BROWN, *Lucretius and the Epicureans in the Social and Political Context of Renaissance Florence*, «I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance», IX (2001), pp. 11-62; EAD., *The Return of Lucretius to Renaissance Florence*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (MA)-London (UK), 2010 (an Italian translation of Brown's book recently appeared under the following title: *Machiavelli e Lucrezio. Fortuna e libertà nella Firenze del Rinascimento*, Carocci, Roma, 2013, along with a postface by M. De Caro); A. PALMER, *Reading Lucretius in the Renaissance*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (MA)-London (UK), 2014.

¹⁵⁰ S. BERTELLI-F. GAETA, *Noterelle machiavelliane. Un codice di Lucrezio e di Terenzio*, «Rivista storica italiana», LXXIII (1961), 3, pp. 544-555 (more particularly, Sergio Bertelli dealt with Machiavelli's reproduction of Lucretius' text, while Franco Gaeta with the copy of Terence's *Eunuchus*); S. BERTELLI, *Noterelle machiavelliane. Ancora su Lucrezio e Machiavelli*, «Rivista storica italiana», LXXVI (1964), 3, pp. 774-790. See also R. RIDOLFI, *Del Machiavelli, di un codice di Lucrezio e d'altro ancora*, «La Bibliofilia», LXV, (1963), 3, pp. 249-259; G. SASSO,

He also noticed that Machiavelli's exemplar (currently MS Rossi 884 of the Vatican Library) may be connected to Marcello Virgilio Adriani's own reading of Lucretius. Machiavelli's transcription includes a good number of corrections made by Adriani in his exemplar of *De rerum natura* (MS Laurenziano 35.32), a fact that encouraged Bertelli to suggest that Machiavelli «may have been preparing a clean copy of the text incorporating Adriani's annotations – or even that both men were working on a Florentine printed edition to compete with the Venice 1495 edition, in anticipation of the Florentine Giuntine edition of 1512».¹⁵¹

In addition to Lucretius' *De rerum natura*, Machiavelli's acquaintance with the tenets of Epicurean philosophy must have come from another text which the Florentine certainly knew, that is to say Diogenes Laertius' *Vitae et doctrinae Philosophorum*. A large section of book 2 (chap. 8) reporting the life of Aristippus, one of Socrates' followers, has been famously used by Machiavelli in the final part of his *Vita di Castruccio Castracani da Lucca*.¹⁵²

Book 10 from Diogenes Laertius' *Vitae* is entirely devoted to Epicurus. His first piece of writing provided by Laertius is the famous *Letter to Herodotus*, which contains an epitome of Epicurus' physics.

My aim here is to show that Machiavelli's view of time and history is fundamentally different from the one he could find along the pages of both Lucretius' *De rerum natura* and Epicurus' *Letter to Herodotus*.

As for the former work, Lucretius dealt with the origins of the earth and of all natural phenomena in the last two books (5 and 6) of the poem. Book 5, in particular, is entirely devoted to the demonstration of the non-eternity of the

L'epicureismo e, sopra tutto, Lucrezio, in ID., *Machiavelli e gli antichi e altri saggi*, I, cit., pp. 202-216; A. BROWN, *The Return of Lucretius to Renaissance Florence*, cit., pp. 68-70.

¹⁵¹ A. BROWN, *The Return of Lucretius to Renaissance Florence*, cit., p. 70. With regard to the influence of Adriani to Machiavelli, especially in connection with the topics of fortune and the superstitious origins of religion, see also what Brown argues about Adriani's 1497 lecture *Nil Admirari* (ivi, pp. 69-74 and 78-82).

¹⁵² Machiavelli puts into Castruccio's mouth 34 sayings drawn from Diogenes' account of Aristippus. N. MACHIAVELLI, *La vita di Castruccio Castracani da Lucca*, cit., I, pp. 56-65. On this point, see G. M. CAO, «Diogenes Laertius», in *The Classical Tradition*, edited by A. Grafton, G. W. Most, S. Settis, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge (MA)-London (UK), 2010, p. 271. For a brief discussion on the impact of Diogenes Laertius' *Vitae* on Machiavelli's Florence, see C. VASOLI, *Machiavelli e la filosofia degli antichi*, cit., pp. 43-44.

world.¹⁵³ Only the universe (the *summa* of void and atoms) is eternal, while all the worlds (including the earth) have been generated and are doomed to perish.

[...] Quapropter maxima mundi
cum videam membra ac partis
consumpta regigni,
scire lice caeli quoque item
terraeque fuisse
principiale aliquod tempus
*clademque futuram.*¹⁵⁴

Plainly, Lucretius' belief that the world did raise at a certain moment in the "history of universe" and will ruin in the future contrasts with Machiavelli's notion of the world as something eternal. Moreover, apart from the succession of seasons,¹⁵⁵ the progression of nights and days,¹⁵⁶ and the motion of celestial bodies,¹⁵⁷ Lucretius rejected the idea that the life of the world as a whole proceeds cyclically. On the contrary, being every world the result of a random and temporary agglomeration of atoms in the void, it is impossible for such a mass to give birth to something that has already occurred. The universe in its entirety proceeds linearly, giving raise to infinite and always different worlds continually. Atoms are involved in a kind of "kaleidoscopic" movement due to which they cannot produce the same configuration for more than once. According to this point, no room is left in Epicurus' physics for any sort of cyclical return, whether it be a return of macro-structures only, or an identical return of every single event.

Mutat enim mundi naturam totius
aetas

¹⁵³ In connection to Epicurus' physical account, I will use the terms "earth" and "world" as synonyms. Both of them are opposed to the universe.

¹⁵⁴ LUCRETIUS, *De rerum natura*, V, 243-246, edited by W. H. D. Rouse, Heineman-Harvard University Press, London-Cambridge (MA), 1943, p. 356 (my *emphasis*).

¹⁵⁵ LUCRETIUS, *De rerum natura*, V, 737-750, cit., p. 392.

¹⁵⁶ LUCRETIUS, *De rerum natura*, V, 978, cit., p. 408.

¹⁵⁷ LUCRETIUS, *De rerum natura*, V, 931, cit., p. 406.

ex alioque alius status excipere
 omnia debet,
nec manet ulla sui similis res:
omnia migrant,
omnia commutat natura et
vertere cogit.
 Namque aliud putrescit et aevo
 debile languet,
 porro aliud succrescit et e
 contemptibus exit.
 Sic igitur mundi naturam totius
 aetas
 mutat et ex alio terram status
 excipit alter,
quod tulit ut nequeat, possit quod
*non tulit ante.*¹⁵⁸

Epicurus' *Letter to Herotodus* leads us to the same conclusions. It too assumes the eternity of the universe in opposition to the non-eternity of the world. Its account of the processes leading to the agglomeration of atoms in the void, however, proves to be more detailed and rigorous than Lucretius' one.¹⁵⁹

To conclude, it is safe to say that Epicurus' physics hardly played a role in the shaping of Machiavelli's view of time and history. As we have seen, many essential differences occur between Machiavelli's own notion of time and Epicurus' physical theory. In the first place, they differ in regards to the very nature of the world. For the Florentine it was eternal, while for the Greek philosopher it was not. In the second place, they differ in regards to how the world moves on in the time. As a matter of fact, neither in book 5 from Lucretius' *De rerum natura* nor in Epicurus' *Letter to Herodotus* do we find any reference to whatever kind of cyclical motion of time and history, a point which lies at the

¹⁵⁸ LUCRETIUS, *De rerum natura*, V, 828-836, cit., p. 398 (my *emphasis*).

¹⁵⁹ DIOGENES LAERTIUS, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, with an English Translation by R. D. Hicks, 2 voll., Heinemann-Putnam's Sons, London-New York, 1925 («The Loeb Classical Library»), II, pp. 565-613.

basis of Machiavelli's understanding of historical evolution. In the third place, no traces of atomist doctrine are to be found in any of Machiavelli's works.¹⁶⁰

The line from Lucretius' *De rerum natura* that is often quoted as evidence of Machiavelli's alleged Epicurean view of time and history is «eadem sunt omnia semper» (III, 945).¹⁶¹ Such a statement, however, can lead at most to the acknowledgment of some form of identity and fixity in history, but it does not entail any concept of circularity. It may be consistent with Machiavelli's idea of the cosmos and of man's nature as unchanging, but it does not explain his view of history as a cyclical phenomenon.¹⁶²

According to these elements, it is safe to say that the influence of Epicureanism on Machiavelli's mind, if there were any, must be searched in other parts of his oeuvre.¹⁶³

As we have seen, the Florentine addressed the problem of the eternity of the world very often.¹⁶⁴ Machiavelli's uncountable analyses of political situations and historical contingencies often pushed him to formulate more general axioms on the way that history seems to proceed. While giving these rules, the Florentine showed to stick to Aristotle's account of time constantly. Both the overall view and the terms Machiavelli made use of in dealing with the issue of time must be traced back to the Aristotelian paradigm. Furthermore, there are places in his writings in which Machiavelli even confirmed his rejection (and thus his

¹⁶⁰ On the substantial difference between Machiavelli and Epicurean philosophy with regards to the eternity of the world, see also G. SASSO, *L'epicureismo e, sopra tutto, Lucrezio*, cit., pp. 208-210.

¹⁶¹ E. GARIN, *Aspetti del pensiero di Machiavelli*, cit., p. 49. ID., *Polibio e Machiavelli*, cit., p. 17. G. BAYOD, «*Que la vie du monde est infinie*». *Montaigne y la tesis de la eternidad del mundo*, Le Dossier du Grihl, Les Dossiers de Jean-Pierre Cavallé, Libertinage, athéisme, irréligion. Essais et bibliographie, III, 2010, 53.

¹⁶² The substantial inconsistency of Machiavelli's idea of cosmos and of man's nature with Epicurus' doctrine seems to have been overlooked by recent scholarship. See, among the latest contribution, R. J. ROECKLEIN, *Machiavelli and Epicureanism. An investigation into the origins of modern political thought*, Lexington Books, Lanham (MD), 2012; G. BORRELLI, *Tracce del Machiavelli epicureo: tra 'viver politico' e 'ripigliar lo stato'*, in *La filosofia politica di Machiavelli*, a cura di G. M. Chiodi e R. Gatti, Franco Angeli, Milano, 2014, pp. 33-57.

¹⁶³ The substantial discrepancy between Machiavelli and the Epicurean doctrine with regards to the eternity of the world has been briefly pointed out by A. BROWN, *The Return of Lucretius to Renaissance Florence*, cit., pp. 76-77.

¹⁶⁴ It is hard to agree with Francesco Bausi's claim that the only place in which Machiavelli deals with the problem of the eternity of the world is *Discorsi* II, 5 (F. BAUSI, *Machiavelli*, cit., p. 18). On the contrary, almost every account of historical or political situations made by Machiavelli is provided with a more general statement of historical theory.

command) of other forms of eternalism, as he does in the prologue of the *Clizia* with regards to the Stoic account.

Machiavelli's coherence to a specific concept of time, along with his conscious opposition to different versions of that notion, allows to a twofold consideration. On the one hand, it proves to be an evidence of his acquaintance with the major philosophical theories of time "available" at his days. On the other hand, and consequently, it urges us to take his selection very seriously. Machiavelli's adoption of a particular idea of time rather than another is a matter that still needs to be adequately assessed. The point I will try to put forward in the following pages is that Machiavelli's choice of Aristotle's account of time must be seen at the light of his method of examining and coping with political facts.

INDUCTIVE METHOD AND INQUIRY INTO HISTORY

Which are the consequences of Machiavelli's notion of history on his way of approaching political issues, both theoretically and practically? How his view of time, which he borrowed from Aristotle, affected his understanding of political problems and his way of finding solutions to them?

Machiavelli believed that time gives rise to events that are neither always the same as the past, nor always different. Given that only some major patterns preserve themselves in history, the politician ventures to stand in a rather puzzling situation: he can neither take for granted that what has already happened will never happen again, nor can he assume that what has already happened will certainly happen again in the future. He only knows that there are in history some patterns of events which tend to reiterate, while all the accidental aspects featuring them change continually.

It is known that for Machiavelli one of the most important skills required to the statesman (if not *the* most important) is the ability to foresee for a given circumstance its possible developments, as well as to provide adequate remedies in advance.¹⁶⁵ The forecast of future events may be performed by turning the eyes

¹⁶⁵ As in the case of Machiavelli's endorsement of a cyclical and everlasting view of time, the places in which the Florentine expressed the importance for the ruler to foresee upcoming events

toward the past time, a dimension disclosing a set of events that, having already happened, are likely to happen again. However, given the changeable manner in which these events recur along history, how can the knowledge of the past be employed in a fully productive way?

Machiavelli's solution to this problem centered on two main points: the observation of likeness and the practice of adaption. Both of them compose his historico-inductive method of examining and dealing with political matters. More particularly, the observation of likeness consists in a study into past contingencies aimed to detect patterns of events; these patterns of events present a good number of similarities with the current situation the politician has to deal with. This is followed by the practice of adaption, thanks to which the politician is able to judge what, from the past occurrence he selected, proves to be imitation-worthy, and how to put such an imitation into practice.

In the following pages, I will focus on the first step of Machiavelli's historico-inductive method – the observation of likeness – in order to show that it originated in the Aristotelian account of inductive arguments presented in the Philosopher's works on *Logic* as well as in the *Rhetoric*. The Florentine drew upon the main tenets of Aristotle's doctrine on induction as a "rhetoric instrument", and he applied them to his method of inquiring into history.

To begin with, it must be noticed that the observation of likeness and the practice of adaption both require a deep knowledge of history as much as a good experience of current affairs. These skills are precisely what Machiavelli meant to offer in addressing his most famous work to Lorenzo de' Medici:

Desiderando io adunque offerirmi alla Magnificenzia Vostra con qualche testimone della servitù mia verso di Quella, non trovando intra la mia suppellettile cosa quale io abbia più cara o tanto essistimi quanto la cognizione delle azioni delli òmini grandi, imparata con una lunga esperienza delle cose moderne et una continua lezione delle antique, le quali

are, too, very numerous. See at least N. MACHIAVELLI, *Discorsi*, I, proemio; ivi, III, 9; ivi, III, 43. ID., *Il Principe*, XXV. ID., *Lettere*, 121 (N. Machiavelli a G. B. Soderini, 13-21 settembre 1506).

avendo io con gran diligenza lungamente escogitate e essaminate, e ora in uno piccolo volume ridotte, mando alla Vostra Magnificenzia.¹⁶⁶

Both the discovery of likeness throughout history and the performance of historical adaption require a «long experience with modern things» as well as the «continuous reading of the ancient ones».

Machiavelli's view of the statesman's work may be described as a constant interaction between the study of the past and the experience of the present. On the one side, history provides the ruler with a large set of exemplary cases and chains of events whose main features may prove similar to the circumstance at hand. On the other side, the experience of the present (in the twofold meaning of awareness of political happenings and familiarity with the exercise of power) allows the leader to select from history only the case (or just a few aspects from it) that meets the requirements of the time. Furthermore, as soon as a political trouble has been successfully dealt with, it immediately becomes an additional exemplary case to be stored in the leader's "historical archive", and it is ready to be appealed to again in the future.

Focusing now on the observation of likeness in history, we shall begin from a rather general remark on the importance of examining the past made by Machiavelli in book 3 from his *Discorsi*:

Sogliono dire gli uomini prudenti, e non a caso né immeritadamente, che chi vuole vedere quello che ha a essere, consideri quello che è stato: perché tutte le cose del mondo in ogni tempo hanno il proprio riscontro con gli antichi tempi. Il che nasce perché, essendo quelle operate dagli uomini, che hanno e ebbono sempre le medesime passioni, conviene di necessità che le sortischino il medesimo effetto. [...] Fa ancora facilità, a conoscere le cose future per le passate.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁶ N. MACHIAVELLI, *Il Principe*, dedica, cit., pp. 57-59. The interaction between the experience with modern things and the reading of the ancient ones occurs also in other places within Machiavelli's *Discorsi*. See ID., *Discorsi*, I, proemio; ivi, II, proemio.

¹⁶⁷ N. MACHIAVELLI, *Discorsi*, III, 43, cit., II, pp. 768-769.

There is no need to further insist on the significance of history in Machiavelli's thought.¹⁶⁸ My point here is to lay stress on the way how the inquiry into history should be performed by the ruler who seeks to foresee upcoming events. The study of the past, in the way that was formulated in the passage from the *Discorsi*, may turn out to be sometimes not enough to make the politician aware of what is going to happen. History, as we have seen, tends to produce events that are in some way different from the past; it follows that it will be almost impossible for the politician to find in the histories the very same contingency he is currently addressing. However, he will be likely to find a good number of contingencies being *similar* to the circumstance at hand. By "similar" I mean – just as in the case of Plautus' *Casina* and Machiavelli's *Clizia* – a situation sharing the same causal framework with another situation, but not the very same accidental features.

The examination of similar patterns of events in history provides the ruler with the understanding of well-defined causal chains that may be used to foresee possible developments of the current affairs. In his *Del modo di trattare i popoli della Valdichiana ribellati* (1503), Machiavelli put this view into practice. While illustrating to the members of Florentine government the way that the rebellious peoples of the Valdichiana should deserve to be dealt with, Machiavelli offered a detailed description of the ways how the Roman statesman Lucius Furius Camillus had dealt with the rebel subjects of the Lazio many centuries before.¹⁶⁹ The Secretary urged the Florentine government to imitate the Romans' modes, which involved avoiding any «via di mezzo» in hitting back to the revolt, and ultimately decide whether to benefit the rebels or to eliminate them all.¹⁷⁰ He justified such a sharp resolution by acknowledging the positive outcomes that it

¹⁶⁸ The topic has been widely addressed by the scholarship. See at least F. GILBERT, *Machiavelli and Guicciardini. Politics and History in sixteenth-century Florence*, Princeton University Press, Princeton (NJ), 1965, esp. pp. 236-240; G. M. ANSELMINI, *Ricerche sul Machiavelli storico*, Pacini, Pisa, 1979, esp. pp. 75-114; T. HAMPTON, *Writing from History. The Rhetoric of Exemplarity in Renaissance Literature*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1990, esp. pp. 62-80; A. MATUCCI, *Machiavelli nella storiografia fiorentina. Per la storia di un genere letterario*, Olschki, Firenze, 1991; G. INGLESE, *Per Machiavelli. L'arte dello stato, la cognizione delle storie*, Carocci, Roma, 2006, esp. pp. 107-139.

¹⁶⁹ See J. J. MARCHAND, *Niccolò Machiavelli. I primi scritti politici*, cit. pp. 107-114.

¹⁷⁰ N. MACHIAVELLI, *Del modo di trattare i popoli della Valdichiana ribellati*, cit., pp. 461-463: «Restaci ora a consultare, perché spesso ribellandosi e' ci mettono in pericolo, come noi dobbiamo per l'avvenire assicurarcene, o con incrudelire verso di loro, o con il perdonare loro liberamente». [...] I Romani pensarono una volta che i popoli ribellati si debbono o beneficiare o spegnere, e che ogni altra via sia pericolosissima».

had produced in the past situation, a situation that is actually very similar to the present one:

Se alcuno non credesse questo, si specchi in Arezzo l'anno passato e in tutte le terre di Valdichiana, che fanno una cosa molto simile a quella de' popoli latini: quivi si vede la ribellione e dipoi il riacquisto come qui; ancora che nel modo del ribellarsi e del riacquistare vi sia differenza assai, pure è simile la ribellione e il riacquisto.¹⁷¹

Machiavelli's words enable us to understand how his method of historical inquiry actually works. What he looks for in history is not the same situation as the present one (since it is very hard to find one); he rather looks for a contingency sharing the same causal framework with that of the present time, notwithstanding the fact they may differ with regard to their accidental aspects («quivi si vede la ribellione e di poi il riacquisto, come qui; ancora che nel modo del ribellarsi e del riacquistare vi sia differenza assai»). As soon as he has identified an event with the same causal pattern as the present time, he proceeds with the extrapolation of that pattern from its original context in order to apply it to the circumstance at hand.

Dunque se è vero che le istorie sieno la maestra delle azioni nostre, non era male, per chi aveva a punire e giudicare le terre di Valdichiana, pigliare esempio e imitare coloro che sono stati padroni del mondo, massime in un caso dove e' vi insegnano appunto come vi abbiate a governare.¹⁷²

The forecast of future developments in the stream of events and the choice of the most appropriate line of conduct to put into practice may be performed thanks to a correct utilization of history. The political leader is frequently asked to play the role of the historian, and to go in quest of similarities through the past:

¹⁷¹ N. MACHIAVELLI, *Del modo di trattare i popoli della Valdichiana ribellati*, cit., pp. 462-463.

¹⁷² N. MACHIAVELLI, *Del modo di trattare i popoli della Valdichiana ribellati*, cit., p. 463.

E' si conosce facilmente, per chi considera le cose presenti e le antiche, come in tutte le città e in tutti i popoli sono quegli medesimi desiderii e quelli medesimi omori, e come vi furono sempre. In modo che gli è facil cosa, a chi esamina con diligenza le cose passate, prevedere in ogni republica le future, e farvi quegli rimedii che dagli antichi sono stati usati, o, non ne trovando degli usati, pensarne de' nuovi per la similitudine degli accidenti.¹⁷³

In all the cases in which history cannot provide a ready-made answer (which happens nearly always), the ruler must search for contingencies showing the same causal scheme (i.e. the same cause-effect chain) as the situation at hand.

The discovery of likeness in history is a real *leitmotiv* that penetrates Machiavelli's writings completely, and it should be singled out as one of the most typical aspects of his mind-set. One could quote a sheer number of occurrences in which the Florentine is engaged in the examination of a given political episode and sets out to connect it with similar past events. In the second book of his *Discorsi* (chap. 15), for instance, he even declared to his fellow citizens that had they been acquainted with Livy's remarks about how hurtful are the tardy resolves, they might have saved from «all the loss and vexation which they underwent at the hands of the French came into Italy»:

E se i Fiorentini avessero notato questo testo, non arebbono avuto co' Franciosi né tanti danni, né tante noie quante ebbono nella passata che il re Luigi di Francia duodecimo fece in Italia contro a Lodovico duca di Milano.¹⁷⁴

The observation of likeness stands at the core of Machiavelli's view of the statesman's activity. The knowledge of the causes that led to the emergence of an event in the past enables the ruler to foresee what is going to happen with a high chance of success, and thus to take precautions in advance.

¹⁷³ N. MACHIAVELLI, *Discorsi*, I, 39, cit., I, p. 194 (my *emphasis*).

¹⁷⁴ N. MACHIAVELLI, *Discorsi*, II, 15, cit., I, pp. 394-395.

What is more, as soon as the politician realizes that the same cause-effect chain has occurred more than once in the past, the formulation of a general axiom becomes possible. Sometimes events disclose a certain degree of regularity in the way they occur, making the prudent man aware that similar causes are likely to produce similar effects («Conosci pertanto come questo modo di procedere per leghe è stato sempre simile, e ha fatto simili effetti», as Machiavelli maintained in the *Discorsi*).¹⁷⁵

Scholarship has already pointed out the intensity of Machiavelli's effort to draw general axioms from history.¹⁷⁶ Evidence of this attitude may be found in all of his writings, so that it is not difficult to meet up with these rules either in the opening passages or in the conclusions of his political analyses. At the beginning of chapter 16 from book 1 of his *Discorsi*, Machiavelli provided one of the several axioms he has drawn from the lesson of history:

Quanta difficulta sia a uno popolo, uso a vivere sotto a uno principe perseverare dipoi la libertà, per alcuno accidente l'acquista come l'acquistò Roma dopo la cacciata de' Tarquini, lo dimostrano infiniti esempi che si leggono nelle memorie delle antiche istorie.¹⁷⁷

In Machiavelli's method, the observation of likeness is the first step toward the formulation of universal principles of causality. The collection of a number of historical examples disclosing the same causal chain helps the ruler/historian in coping with similar circumstances in the present.

Vittoria Perrone Compagni has recently pointed out the extent to which Machiavelli's method of inferring universal tenets of causality from a range of empirical instances owes to Aristotle's notion of induction.¹⁷⁸ Perrone Compagni quoted two relevant passages from the *Posterior Analytics* (I, 1 71a 1-9; I, 18 81b 2-5) that are indeed very consistent with Machiavelli's view of historical

¹⁷⁵ N. MACHIAVELLI, *Discorsi*, II, 4, cit., I, p. 336.

¹⁷⁶ This topic has been addressed from a linguistic standpoint by F. CHIAPPELLI, *Studi sul linguaggio del Machiavelli*, Le Monnier, Firenze, 1952 (examining the language of Machiavelli's *Prince*); ID., *Nuovi studi sul linguaggio di Machiavelli*, Le Monnier, Firenze, 1969 (dealing, in particular, with Machiavelli's early stage writings – 1498-1501).

¹⁷⁷ N. MACHIAVELLI, *Discorsi*, I, 16, cit., I, p. 100. Similar statements concerning the importance of history can be found in *ivi*, I, 3; *ivi*, I, 10; *ivi*, I, 23; *ivi*, I, 29; *ivi*, II, 4; *ivi*, II, 29; *ivi*, III, 7.

¹⁷⁸ V. PERRONE COMPAGNI, *Machiavelli metafisico*, cit., pp. 227-230.

knowledge as a political tool, and she also recalled the presence of Aristotle's text in the house of the young Niccolò Machiavelli.¹⁷⁹

As a matter of fact, there can be no doubt that Aristotle's doctrine over inductive arguments contributed significantly to the shaping of Machiavelli's notion of likeness as an instrument for inquiring into the past. Machiavelli's belief that a set of empirical instances drawn from history may be used in order to formulate universal statements is nothing but the application of Aristotle's logical tenets to the study of the past.

In addition to the passages from the *Posterior Analytics* provided by Perrone Compagni, there are other places within Aristotle's *opera* which are relevant to the issue of induction. One of these is the final chapter in the first book of the *Topics*, a treatise whose main goal is to teach one how to perform dialectical deductions properly. By dialectical deductions Aristotle means any argument starting from reputable opinions.¹⁸⁰ Given their nature, these deductions may be said to embody the closest form of argument to the "normal" discussions, since the premises from which they start are not absolutely true and primitive. The *Topics* deals, for instance, with political and forensic oratory, and its purpose is to help in building, corroborating and making one's argumentations more convincing.

In the eighteenth and last chapter of the first book, Aristotle illustrates some "rhetorical instruments" designed to make strong arguments. Among them, there is also the examination of likeness:

The examination of likeness is useful with a view both to inductive arguments and to hypothetical deductions, and also with a view to the rendering of definitions. It is useful for inductive arguments, because it is by means of an induction of particulars in cases that are alike that we claim to

¹⁷⁹ V. PERRONE COMPAGNI, *Machiavelli metafisico*, cit., pp. 227-228. Especially the latter of the two quotations from the *Posterior Analytics* proves to be worth-reporting: ARISTOTLE, *Posterior Analytics*, I, 18, 81b 2-5, cit., I, p. 132: «it is impossible to consider universals except through induction (since even in the case of what are called abstractions one will be able to make familiar through induction that some things belong to each genus, even if they are not separable, insofar as each thing is such and such)». On Bernardo Machiavelli's return of Aristotle's works on Logic to the Convent of Santa Croce in September 1475, see B. MACHIAVELLI, *Libro di ricordi*, cit., p. 11. See also *supra*, chap. 1.

¹⁸⁰ ARISTOTLE, *Topics*, I, 1, 100a 29-30, cit., I, p. 167.

induce the universals; for it is not easy to do this if we do not know the points of likeness.¹⁸¹

Every time Machiavelli drew a universal axiom from a number of historical cases, he was well aware he was performing a philosophically rigorous and well defined operation. The collection of past examples provided an adequate empirical foundation for the induction of general principles («ex experientia particularium accipimus universalem scientiam»)¹⁸² The inductive process, if carried out appropriately, allows the ruler to achieve a universally reliable knowledge.

Aristotle's account of inductive arguments given in the *Topics* virtually continues in the first book of his *Rhetoric*, a work Machiavelli could read in George of Trebizond's widespread Latin translation, first edited in Paris in 1475 and then three more times by the end of 1523.¹⁸³

In the second chapter of book 1, Aristotle examines the different means of effecting persuasion through the hearers. Among them, there is the persuasion «effected through the speech itself when we have proved a truth or an apparent truth by means of the persuasive arguments suitable to the case in question».¹⁸⁴ The rhetorical induction through examples proves to be one of the most effective ways to achieve such a persuasion, since it allows to induce the universal by appealing to a series of empirical instances. It is at this very stage of the account that Aristotle shows how inductive analysis may be applied to the study of history:

The example has already been described as one kind of induction; and the special nature of the subject-matter that distinguishes it from the other kinds has also been stated above. Its relation is not that of part to whole, nor whole

¹⁸¹ ARISTOTLE, *Topics*, I, 18, 108b 8-13, cit., I, p. 180.

¹⁸² J. HAMESSE, *Les Auctoritates Aristotelis.*, cit., 2 (188), cit., p. 155.

¹⁸³ *Collectanea Trapezuntiana. Texts, Documents, and Bibliographies of George of Trebizond*, edited by J. Monfasani, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies in conjunction with The Renaissance Society of America, Binghamton (NY), 1984, p. 700 lists the following printed editions: (1) Paris, Petrus Caesaris and Io. Stol, 1475 (*editio princeps*); (2) Paris, Gilles de Gourmont, date unknown; (3) Venice, Bernardinus Venetus de Vitalibus, 1504; (4) Venice, Aldine Press, 1523. 21 manuscripts are also listed, 12 of which are from Italy (p. 699). See also E. GARIN, *Le traduzioni umanistiche di Aristotele nel secolo XV*, cit., pp. 75-76; J. MONFASANI, *George of Trebizond. A Biography and a Study of his Rhetoric and Logic*, Brill, Leiden, 1976.

¹⁸⁴ ARISTOTLE, *Rhetoric*, I, 2, 1356a 20-22, cit., II, p. 2155.

to part, nor whole to whole, but of part to part, or like to like. When two statements are of the same order, but one is more familiar than the other, the former is an example. The argument may, for instance, be that Dionysius, in asking as he does for a bodyguard, is scheming to make himself a despot. For in the past Peisistratus kept asking for a bodyguard in order to carry out such a scheme, and did make himself a despot as soon as he got it; and so did Theagenes at Megara; and in the same way *all other instances known to the speaker are made into examples, in order to show what is not yet known, that Dionysius has the same purpose in making the same request: all these being instances of the one general principle, that a man who asks for a bodyguard is scheming to make himself a despot.*¹⁸⁵

Here the same passage in George of Trebizond's edition:

Exemplum autem quid sit, et in quibus versetur inductio, dictum est. Est enim neque ut pars ad totum, neque ut totum ad partem, neque ut totum ad totum; sed ut pars ad partem, simile ad simile, quando utraque sub eodem genere sunt, sed alterum altero magis perspicuum, hoc pacto: per insidias Dionysius ad tyrannidem praesidium petit. Nam et Pisistratus ad tyrannidem per insidias petiit praesidium; quod cum impetrasset, tyrannide civitatem oppressit. Et Theagenes in Megaris. *Alii etiam quos id fecisse sciunt, omnes exemplum Dionysii fiunt, quem nondum sciunt idcirco petere. Quae omnia sub eodem sunt universali.* Qui praesidium petit, insidiosae tyrannidem affectat.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁵ ARISTOTLE, *Rhetoric*, I, 2, 1357b 27-1358a 1, cit., II, p. 2158 (my *emphasis*). A detailed account of arguments by examples is provided in the *Prior Analytics* as well. See ARISTOTLE, *Prior Analytics*, II, 24, 68b 36-69a 16, cit., I, p. 110: «We have an example when the extreme is proved to belong to the middle by means of a term which resembles the third. It must be familiar both that the middle belongs to the third term, and that the first belongs to that which resembles the third. For example let A be evil, B making war against neighbours, C Athenians against Thebans, D Thebans against Phocians. If then we wish to prove that to fight with the Thebans is an evil, we must assume that to fight against neighbours is an evil. *Convictions of this is obtained from similar cases*, e.g. that the war against the Phocians was an evil to the Thebans. Since then to fight against the Thebans is to fight against neighbours, it is clear that to fight against the Thebans is an evil. [...] Clearly then an example stands neither as part to whole, nor as whole to part, but rather as part to part, when both are subordinate to the same term, and one of them is familiar» (my *emphasis*).

¹⁸⁶ ARISTOTELIS *Rhetoricorum ad Theodecten libri tres Georgio Trapezuntio interprete*, I, 2, apud Bernardinum de Vitalibus, Venetiis, 1504, p. 14 (my *emphasis*).

Aristotle is here formulating the same historico-inductive methodology which will be later adopted by Machiavelli. His remarks go actually well beyond the explanation of a merely rhetorical theory, for they serve as a basis for any inductive-minded approach.

The two principles underlying Machiavelli's analysis of history – namely, the possibility to foresee future developments in the chain of events and to set forth general axioms of conduct – are clearly formulated by Aristotle. The Philosopher claims in fact that the induction through examples enables, on the one hand, «to show what is not yet known» and, on the other hand, to grasp «one general principle». The recourse to a large variety of historical instances allows to project chains of past events on the present, and thus to know in advance what is going to happen («that Dionysius has the same purpose in making the same request»). In addition to the forecast of future events, Aristotle believes that the collection of many similar instances drawn from history provides the reader with the grasp of universal principles that may be useful to understand the way that “similar causes are likely to produce similar effects” («a man who asks for a bodyguard is scheming to make himself a despot»)¹⁸⁷.

Machiavelli's historico-inductive method of examining and dealing with political matters must be considered as closely depending to Aristotle's account of induction. Furthermore, Machiavelli's approach to the study of history proves not only to be a coherent reassessing of Aristotle's logical and rhetorical tenets, but it is also entirely consistent with his conception of time, which he also borrowed from Aristotle. It is precisely because nothing in history recurs identically that the good ruler must search for similarities throughout the past. He is engaged, as William Connell put it, «in a search for causal patterns»¹⁸⁸ («se niuna cosa diletta o insegna, nella istoria, è quella che particolarmente si describe; se niuna lezione è utile ai cittadini che governono le repubbliche, è quella *che dimostra le cagioni* delli odi e delle divisioni delle città, acciò che possino, con il pericolo d'altri

¹⁸⁷ A few pages above, Aristotle argues that «he [*scil.* the political leader] should know, too, whether the military power of another country is like or unlike that of his own; for this is a matter that may affect their relative strength. With that end in view he must, besides, have studied the wars of other countries as well as those of his own, and the way they ended; similar causes are likely to have similar results» (ARISTOTLE, *Rhetoric*, I, 4 1360a 1-5, cit., II, p. 2162).

¹⁸⁸ W. CONNELL, *The Eternity of the World and Renaissance Historical Thought*, cit., p. 3.

diventati savi, mantenersi uniti», as Machiavelli stated in the preface of his *Istorie fiorentine*).¹⁸⁹ The ruler/historian is asked to skim off the accidental aspects from historical contingencies and to identify the causal chain inhering them. In so doing, he will be able to grasp the unchanging structure of events, which is the only element tending to reiterate in history.

Of course, the correct application of this method is not at all an easy operation, for it requires a great deal of awareness in selecting only those historical instances that are suitable to the case in question (i.e. those disclosing the same causal pattern as the present case). If the selection fails – due to a limited or inaccurate knowledge of history – then the ruler will not draw from history any useful lesson to be applied in the present time. Machiavelli seemed to be aware of this, for he often warned that, in dealing with the study of both the past and the present, it is not easy to grasp what lies beyond the surface of the merely accidental data. In the second book of his *Discorsi* (chap. 22), for instance, he pointed out that:

Nascono ancora certi accidenti dove facilmente sono ingannati gli uomini che non hanno grande isperienza delle cose, avendo in sé quello accidente che nasce molti verisimili, atti a fare credere quello che gli uomini sopra tale caso si persuadono.¹⁹⁰

A very concern will be later expressed by Francesco Guicciardini in his *Ricordi*:

È fallacissimo el giudicare per gli esempi, perché, se non sono simili in tutto e per tutto, non servono, conciosia che ogni minima varietà nel caso può essere causa di grandissima variazione nello effetto: e el discernere queste varietà, quando sono piccole, vuole buono e perspicace occhio.¹⁹¹

Machiavelli's approach to the analysis and to the exploitation of history is built up in a way that is totally consistent with his conception of time. Since only the macro-structures of history are stable and recurring, one is forced to undertake a

¹⁸⁹ N. MACHIAVELLI, *Istorie fiorentine*, proemio, cit., I, p. 90 (my *emphasis*).

¹⁹⁰ N. MACHIAVELLI, *Discorsi*, II, 22, cit., I, p. 449.

¹⁹¹ F. GUICCIARDINI, *Ricordi*, C, 117, cit., p. 762.

long and hard examination of the past if he wishes to find out clues that may be useful for the present. The ruler who seeks to foresee future developments is supposed to go throughout the past in quest of causal patterns that may be suitable in order to address the present trouble.

MACHIAVELLI ON CONJECTURE

Further evidence of Machiavelli's indebtedness to Aristotle's logical and rhetorical theory comes from the examination of a specific notion, which is employed by the Florentine only occasionally, albeit very precisely. That is the notion of "conjecture" (*coniectura*, in Machiavelli's vernacular; *coniecturare* is the verbal form), a notion which, as far as I know, no scholar has ever taken into consideration.

The term *coniectura* (in all its syntactic forms) occurs in four of Machiavelli's chief writings: in the *Prince* (2 occurrences), in the *Istorie fiorentine* (2), in the *Art of war* (14) and in the *Discorsi* (15). Modern editors have usually assigned a wide range of meanings to the word, thereby assuming that the author did not intend to use it with a rigorous or specific connotation. Accordingly, in most cases *coniectura* is deemed to stand for "cognizione", in a few others for "deduzione" and in two cases only for «congettura».¹⁹²

In fact, a thorough examination of the passages in which the notion of conjecture occurs, shows that Machiavelli's utilization of that concept is internally consistent and homogeneous. In using the term *coniectura/coniecturare*, the Florentine always meant a specific kind of inference starting from empirical clues. The inference may apply to events in the present as much as in the future. The collection of different data which are known from experience (whether it be direct or not) enables to achieve conclusions about facts not previously known.

An example of conjecture about the present is provided in chapter 22 of the *Prince*:

¹⁹² As for this last connotation, see N. MACHIAVELLI, *Discorsi*, III, 6, cit., II, p. 560, n. 111; N. MACHIAVELLI, *Discorsi*, III, 18, cit., II, p. 656, n. 3. Both passages will be further discussed in the next pages.

Non è di poca importanza a uno principe la elezione de' ministri, li quali sono buoni o no secondo la prudenzia del principe. E la prima coniettura che si fa di uno signore e del cervello suo è vedere li òmini che lui ha dintorno.¹⁹³

Similarly, in the first book of the *Art of war*, Machiavelli put into Fabrizio Colonna's mouth the following statement concerning the recruitment of soldiers:

Dico pertanto che la bontà d'uno che tu hai ad eleggere per soldato si conosce o per esperienza, mediante qualche sua egregia opera, o per coniettura. [...] È necessario pertanto, mancando questa esperienza, ricorrere alla coniettura; la quale si trae dagli anni, dall'arte e dalla presenza.¹⁹⁴

Conjectural understanding does not coincide with the empirical knowledge entirely, although there is no doubt that experience plays a fundamental role in the process of conjecture. More precisely, conjecture is a kind of inferential projection performed on the basis of a number of empirical (*lato sensu*) evidences. In the passage from the *Art of war* just quoted, Machiavelli made a clear distinction between direct experience and conjecture. However, this one proves to be firmly grounded on information deriving from experience (age, profession, physical appearance). Anyone being informed about these data can hopefully infer how good the man is as a soldier. In other words, anytime the recourse to direct experience is not possible, we may gather all the empirical data at our disposal together and fill our knowledge gap by conjecture.

As we can imagine, the performance of conjectural process proves even more noteworthy when applied to upcoming events. Not surprisingly, it is in this very form that it occurs in the majority of cases within Machiavelli's writings. To some extent, conjectures about the future may be said to resemble the historico-inductive method analyzed above, for they too are engaged in the forecast of future developments in the chain of events. However, conjectures about the future

¹⁹³ N. MACHIAVELLI, *Il Principe*, XXII, cit., p. 290. On this aspect, see also N. MACHIAVELLI, *Discorsi*, III, 34, cit., II, p. 733: « E perché nessuno indizio si può avere maggiore d'uno uomo che le compagnie con le quali egli usa».

¹⁹⁴ N. MACHIAVELLI, *Arte della guerra*, I, cit., p. 65.

differ from the historico-inductive process for two main reasons: firstly, because they do not search for similarities throughout the past, and secondly because they do not lead to the formulation of general axioms. Similarly to those about the present, conjectures about future aim to perform projections on the basis of a number of empirical clues that are known to us. These two kinds of *congettura*, then, differ only in regards to the time they apply to: that is the present in the first case, and the future in the second.

Among the many places that are relevant to the issue of conjectures about future, a passage from book 6 of the *Art of war* proves especially worth-mentioning:

Quanto all'altra parte di non essere assediato, conviene considerare la natura del luogo, dove sono posti gli amici e dove i nimici, e da questo fare la tua congettura se tu puoi essere assediato o no.¹⁹⁵

Plainly, Machiavelli's remarks have nothing to do with the collection of similarities in past events, nor with the formulation of general axioms concerning political matters or human behaviors. In this case, no general lesson is to be learnt from history. Conjecture is, instead, totally involved in the particular. The result of such a process of knowledge is valid only for the case it applies to. Fabrizio Colonna's remarks on how to conjecture unexpected events in the combat by observing the lay of the battlefield are, indeed, applicable to that very case only.

In his 1509 *Discorso sopra le cose della Magna e sopra l'Imperatore*, Machiavelli provided one of the most striking examples of conjecture about the future. The aim of the writing is to inform the two Florentine ambassadors, Gianvittorio Soderini and Piero Guicciardini, that negotiating with the emperor will not be easy at all, being him a very moody and changeable person. He argued:

Questo [*scil.* the emperor's volubility] fa difficili le legazioni appresso di lui, perché la più importante parte che abbia uno oratore che sia fuori per uno principe o republica, si è *congiettare bene le cose future*, così delle pratiche come de' fatti: perché chi le congettura saviamente e le fa intendere bene al suo superiore, è cagione che il suo

¹⁹⁵ N. MACHIAVELLI, *Arte della guerra*, VI, cit., p. 232.

superiore si possa avanzare sempre con le cose sue e provvedersi ne' tempi debiti.¹⁹⁶

A place where the notion of conjecture is extensively employed is *Discorsi III, 6*, where Machiavelli addressed the issue of conspiracies. Such plots, it is argued, may be discovered either by disclosures made by someone («per relazione»), or by conjecture («per coniettura»)¹⁹⁷. As for the second way, he claimed as follows:

Quanto allo scoprirsi per coniettura, ce n'è in esempio la congiura pisoniana contro a Nerone, nella quale Scevino, uno de' congiurati, il dì dinanzi che gli aveva da ammazzare Nerone fece testamento, ordinò che Milichio suo liberto facessi arrotare un suo pugnale vecchio e rugginoso, liberò tutti i suoi servi e dette loro danari, fece ordinare fasciature da legare ferite; per le quali conietture accortosi Milichio della cosa, lo accusò a Nerone. Fu preso Scevino, e con lui Natale, un altro congiurato, i quali erano stati veduti parlare a lungo e di segreto insieme il dì davanti; e non si accordando del ragionamento avuto, furono forzati a confessare il vero tale che la congiura fu scoperta, con rovina di tutti i congiurati.¹⁹⁸

Milichio, one of Scevino's freedmen, was able to conjecture what work was in his master's hand on the basis of empirical clues. He did nothing but interpreting all Scevino's preparations as links of the same chain. By reflecting on the possible connections among these elements (the will, the liberation of the slaves, the sharpening of the dagger, the bandages), Milichio could realize that a conspiracy was one of the possible outcomes to which those actions might lead. The specific process he put into practice – following which he gathered all the clues together so to forecast one of their possible effects – is what Machiavelli meant for *coniettura*.

As far as I know, Machiavelli never used the notion of conjecture with a meaning different from the one we have just illustrated.

¹⁹⁶ N. MACHIAVELLI, *Discorso sopra le cose della Magna e sopra l'Imperatore*, in ID., *L'arte della guerra. Scritti politici minori*, cit., p. 518 (my emphasis).

¹⁹⁷ N. MACHIAVELLI, *Discorsi*, III, 6, cit., II, p. 560.

¹⁹⁸ N. MACHIAVELLI, *Discorsi*, III, 6, cit., II, pp. 563-564.

In addition to the passages already quoted, many others might be mentioned. In the opening of chapter 18 in the third book of his *Discorsi*, for instance, Machiavelli referred the opinion of Epaminondas, the Theban statesman, concerning one of the pivotal skills for a captain:

Diceva Epaminonda tebano nessuna cosa essere più necessaria e utile ad uno capitano, che conoscere le diliberazioni e partiti del nimico. E perché tale cognizione è difficile, merita tanto più laude quello che adopera in modo tale che la coniettura.¹⁹⁹

In *Discorsi* II 1, while examining the earliest military acquisitions made by the Romans, Machiavelli reported the assertion of some historians who thought such acquisitions should be beholden to fortune rather than to virtue, because the Romans never had two great wars on their hand at once: «they had war with the Latins only when they not merely had entirely defeated the Samnites but were actually waging war in their defense. They did not fight the Tuscans until they had subjugated the Latins and with frequent defeats taken from the Samnites almost all their strength».²⁰⁰ «Che se due di queste potenze intere si fossero, quando erano fresche, accozzate insieme» – Machiavelli went on – «senza dubbio si può facilmente conietturare che ne sarebbe seguito la rovina della romana Republica».²⁰¹

Therefore, conjectures are nothing but “anticipatory inferences” performed on the basis of signs and clues that are grasped through empirical knowledge. Conjectural process is the only way to achieve reliable conclusions in those issues, such as human habits, in which no scientific demonstration can be given. All fields of knowledge involving human actions eschew, as such, any kind of logical evidence and they cannot be dealt with through a rigorously logical and non-fallible method. The process leading Milichio to find out Scevino’s plot, for instance, was performed on the basis of merely empirical clues. If we take the mental process followed by Milichio as an example of syllogism, then we must

¹⁹⁹ N. MACHIAVELLI, *Discorsi*, III, 18, cit., II, p. 656.

²⁰⁰ N. MACHIAVELLI, *Discourses*, II, 1, in ID., *The Chief Works and others*, I, cit., p. 325.

²⁰¹ N. MACHIAVELLI, *Discorsi*, II, 1, cit., I, p. 305.

acknowledge that the conclusion (that is, that Scevino was plotting against Nero) did not follow *logically* from the premises (the will, the liberation of the slaves, the sharpening of the dagger, the bandages). In this case, the conclusion turns out to be only one of the many possible explanations. This aspect is actually of the utmost importance in order to grasp the substantial difference between, for instance, conjecture and deduction. In deductive inferences, what is inferred is necessarily true if the premises from which it is inferred are true. Clearly, this does not apply to conjectural inferences. For this reason, it is rather misleading to render Machiavelli's *coniectura* through the Italian term "deduzione".

Needless to say, Machiavelli was by no means the "inventor" of this conjectural methodology. That was actually systematized long before by Aristotle, and Machiavelli did nothing but drawing upon it – indeed in a very precise and consistent way.²⁰²

Aristotle had dealt with conjectural method in connection to five main fields of knowledge, namely medicine, rhetoric, ethics, politics and military art (this one being most frequently exemplified through the art of navigation). What these disciplines have in common, in Aristotle's opinion, is the fact they all have to do with objects that cannot be verified in a scientific way. Matters such as the best way to acquire physical health, or to induce persuasion through the hearers, or to deal successfully with issues connected to human conduct are all far from being scientifically verifiable.

By no means, a rigorously mathematical method could be applied to the sphere of human *praxis* and to that of medicine, which inquire into individual and non-stable realities.²⁰³

²⁰² On the issue of conjecture in Aristotle, see at least J. BARNES, *Aristotle and the Methods of Ethics*, «Revue Internationale de Philosophie», XXXIV, (1980), pp. 490-511; A. MARCOS, *Towards a Science of the Individual: the Aristotelian Search for Scientific Knowledge of Individual Entities*, «Studies in History and Philosophy of Science», XXXV, (2004), 1, pp. 73-89; V. BOUDON-MILLOT, *Art, Science and Conjecture, from Hippocrates to Plato and Aristotle*, in *Hippocrates in Context. Paper read at the XIth International Hippocrates Colloquium*, University of Newcastle upon Tyne (27-31 August 2002), edited by P. J. Van Der Eijk, Brill, Leiden-Boston, 2005, pp. 87-99; S. DI PIAZZA, *What Epistemological Status for technai stochastikai? Plato and Aristotle on Conjectural Knowledge*, «Skepsis», XVIII, (2007), 2, pp. 147-159; ID., *Congettura e approssimazioni. Forme del sapere in Aristotele*, Mimesis, Udine, 2011.

²⁰³ A. MARCOS, *Towards a Science of the Individual*, cit.

This aspect is addressed by Aristotle in many of his writings, although it is in the *Nicomachean Ethics* that he set out to illustrate it most carefully. In chapter 2 from the second book, for instance, he argued that:

Matters concerned with conduct and questions of what is good for us have no fixity, any more than matters of health. The general account being of this nature, the account of particular cases is yet more lacking in exactness; for they do not fall under any art or set of precepts, but the agents themselves must in each case consider what is appropriate to the occasion, as happens also in the art of medicine or of navigation.²⁰⁴

The epistemological status of disciplines such as medicine and the art of navigation is further explained by Aristotle in chapter 3 of the third book, where he stated:

We deliberate about things that are in our power and can be done; and these are in fact what is left. For nature, necessity, and chance are thought to be causes, and also thought and everything that depends on man. Now every class of men deliberates about the things that can be done by their own efforts. And in the case of exact and self-contained sciences there is no deliberation, e.g. about the letters of the alphabet (for we have no doubt how they should be written); but the things that are brought about by our own efforts, but not always in the same way, are the things about which we deliberate, e.g. questions of medical treatment or of money-making. And we do so more in the case of the art of navigation than in that of gymnastic, inasmuch as it has been less exactly worked out, and again about other things in the same ratio, and more also in the case of the arts than in that of the sciences; for we have more doubt about the former.²⁰⁵

As far as the sphere of politics is concerned, Aristotle made the same point in the work he devoted to that discipline. In the second book of his *Politics*, he maintained that:

²⁰⁴ ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics*, II, 2, 1104a 4-10, cit., II, p. 1744.

²⁰⁵ ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics*, III, 3, 1112a 31-1112b 8, cit., II, p. 1756.

As in other sciences, so in politics, it is impossible that all things should be precisely set down in writing; for enactments must be universal, but actions are concerned with particulars.²⁰⁶

According to Aristotle, the nature of the disciplines that belong to the realm of active life is very different from that of the exact and self-contained sciences. No mathematical calculus or scientific demonstration can be possible in the realm of human actions, whether they be of the single man (Ethics), of the family (Economics), or the state (Politics and military sphere). Medicine, too, is included among the disciplines whose epistemological status eschews any kind of rigorously scientific approach.

Unsurprisingly, these are the very branches of knowledge to which conjectural method applies. In these fields, the lion's share is played by the interpretation rather than by mathematical demonstration, and the premises from which conjectural reasoning starts are not logical principles, but rather empirical clues that call for someone who can read through them carefully and patiently. The physician, for instance, is asked to identify his patients' illness only on the basis of external signs (the symptoms), in order to anticipate its possible degenerations and to find a therapy adequate to the case. In the same way, the political leader as much as the general and the pilot must set their own strategy according to a series of criteria (practice, direct experience, and especially clues acquired through the analysis of the circumstance at hand) other than the scientific calculus, and they need to forecast the development of a given situation right on the basis of those particular clues.

The verb Aristotle used for expressing the act of conjecturing is *στοχάζεσθαι*, which literally means "to aim at", "to guess".²⁰⁷ It is not surprising that the majority of occurrences of the term *στοχάζεσθαι* (in any of its syntactic forms) are to be found in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (14), in the *Rhetoric* (7) and in the *Politics*

²⁰⁶ ARISTOTLE, *Politics*, II, 8, 1269a 10-12, cit., II, p. 2014.

²⁰⁷ Further discussion on Aristotle's usage of the verb *στοχάζεσθαι* is provided by V. BOUDON-MILLOT, *Art, Science and Conjecture*, cit., pp. 96-99.

(7), namely those writings whose object of study is affected by conjectural knowledge most heavily.²⁰⁸

In the second book of the *Rhetoric*, for instance, Aristotle dedicated an entire chapter to the use of maxims, in order to see «upon what subjects and occasions, and for what kind of speaker, they will appropriately form part of a speech».²⁰⁹

While outlining one of the advantages of using maxims, Aristotle argued:

The maxim, as has been already said, is a general statement, and people love to hear stated in general terms what they already believe in some particular connexion: e. g. if a man happens to have a bad neighbour or bad children, he will agree with any one who tells him, ‘Nothing is more annoying than having neighbours’, or ‘Nothing is more foolish than to be a parent of children’. The orator has therefore to guess (στοχάζεσθαι) the subject on which the hearers really hold views already, and what those views are, and then must express, as general truths, these same views on these same subjects. This is one advantage of using maxims.²¹⁰

In order to achieve a more effective persuasion, Aristotle invited orators to harmonize the maxims of their speeches with the audience’s beliefs. To do so, they must project themselves to the hearers so to grasp which are the «views» they actually hold. This action of projecting, of “aiming at”, is expressed by Aristotle through the verb στοχάζεσθαι.

It is this very term that fifteenth-century Latin translators of Aristotle will be rendering in most of cases through the word *coniectura/coniectare* (or *conicere*). As far as the passage from the *Rhetoric* given above is concerned, George of Trebizond’s edition of Aristotle’s text provided with the following translation:

Nam sententia, ut dictum est, universalis enunciatio est. Gaudent autem cum id universaliter dicitur, quod particulariter ipsi opinantur: si quis vicinos aut liberos pravos habeat, gratum profecto illud sibi videbitur, Nihil vicino molestius, vel, Nihil procreation liberorum stultius. Quare *coniectura*

²⁰⁸ S. DI PIAZZA, *Congetture e approssimazioni*, cit., p. 70.

²⁰⁹ ARISTOTLE, *Rhetoric*, II, 21, 1394a 20-21, cit., II, p. 2221.

²¹⁰ ARISTOTLE, *Rhetoric*, II, 21, 1395b 1-12, cit., II, p. 2223.

primum sequendum est quod praeopinentur, deinde in universum de ipso dicendum. Hic igitur usus sententiae usus est.²¹¹

In one occasion, George of Trebizond used the verb *conicere* also to translate the Greek καταμανθάνειν (to learn, to understand). He did so in a passage where the Greek verb is employed in a sense that is very close to the meaning usually assigned to the term στοχάζεσθαι, i.e. to guess, to anticipate. In the final part of chapter 9 from book 1, Aristotle argued that «examples are most suitable to deliberative speeches; for we judge of future events by divination from the past».²¹² In the original Greek, the second part of the passage sounds in the following way: εκ γάρ των προγεγόντων τά μέλλοντα καταμαντευόμενοι κρίνομεν. George of Trebizond translated as follows:

Ex praeteritis enim futura conijcientes iudicamus.²¹³

His rendering is indeed very consistent with the sense Aristotle meant to give to the sentence. By using the verb *conicio*, George could express in a perfect way the idea of a “projecting action”, of something that “aims at” something else.

Both John Argyropoulos in his edition of Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* and Donato Acciaiuoli in his commentary on the same work have systematically used the verb *coniecto* in order to describe the nature of the true virtue: *virtus medii coniectatrix*.²¹⁴

As for Argyropoulos’ translation more particularly, a very relevant occurrence of the verb *coniecto* may be found in the fifth chapter from treatise 1 in book 6

²¹¹ ARISTOTELIS *Rhetoricorum ad Theodecten libri tres Georgio Trapezuntio interprete*, II, 21, cit., p. 107 (my emphasis).

²¹² ARISTOTLE, *Rhetoric*, I, 9, 1368a 29-30, cit., II, p. 2178.

²¹³ ARISTOTELIS *Rhetoricorum ad Theodecten libri tres Georgio Trapezuntio interprete*, I, 9, cit., p. 41.

²¹⁴ Among the many places one might mention, see ARISTOTELIS *Ethicorum ad Nicomachum Libri decem Ioanne Argyropylo Byzantio Interprete*, p. 45 ff. (which refers to ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics*, II, 6-9, 1106a 15-1109b 28). The same chapters will be later commented on by Donato Acciaiuoli in his widespread commentary. DONATI ACCIAIOLI FLORENTINI *Expositio super libros Ethicorum Aristotelis in novam traductionem Iohannis Argiropyli Bisantii*, apud Sanctum Iacobum de Ripoli, Florentiae, 1478, p. 101: «Concludit [scil. Aristotle] quod virtus est coniectatrix medii hoc pacto omnis ars activa cum proficit opus suum redigit illud ad medium et est coniectatrix medii».

(corresponding to E. N. VI, 7, 1141 b 13-14), where Argyropoulos wrote: «Is autem ad bene consulendum est simpliciter aptus qui coniectura [sic] id quod est homini optimum eorum quae cadunt in actionem excogitando mente capere potest».²¹⁵

In the late fifteenth-century Florence, the notion of *coniectura* was also systematized from a more theoretical standpoint by one of the foremost representatives of the humanistic movement, namely Angelo Poliziano. In the opening oration to his 1491-92 University course on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, Poliziano intended to provide a brief yet complete overview of all the branches of knowledge Aristotle had dealt with in his *opera*. The oration, which was immediately printed in 1492 with the title of *Panepistemon* and then five more times by the end of 1519, underwent a quite impressive degree of circulation.²¹⁶ At the outset of the work, Poliziano argued that there are three main branches within which any discipline can fall. These are Theology, Philosophy and Divination.

Tria sunt igitur inter homines genera doctrinarum: inspiratum, inventum, mixtum. In primo genere Theologia nostra, in secundo mater atrium Philosophia, in tertio Divinatio sita est.²¹⁷

As far as the third branch is concerned, Poliziano explained that there exist five different kinds of divination, namely spiritual, natural, artificial, popular and profane.²¹⁸ According to Aristotle, the artificial proves to be the type of divination to which human knowledge most properly pertains. It is at this very stage that the notion of conjecture occurs, indeed with regards to the same fields of knowledge to which Aristotle too used to connect it.

²¹⁵ ARISTOTELIS *Ethicorum ad Nicomachum*, cit., p. 131.

²¹⁶ A. POLIZIANO, *Panepistemon*, in ID., *Opera omnia*, edited by Ida Maier, Tomus primus, Scripta in editione basilensi anno MDLIII collecta, Bottega d'Erasmus, Torino, 1971, pp. 462-473. C. H. LOHR, *Medieval Latin Aristotle Commentaries*, «Traditio», XXIII (1967), p. 362 lists the following editions of the work: Firenze 1491 (?92), Firenze 1496, Venezia 1497, Venezia 1498 (in *Opera omnia*), Paris 1512, Paris 1519.

²¹⁷ A. POLIZIANO, *Panepistemon*, cit., p. 462.

²¹⁸ A. POLIZIANO, *Panepistemon*, cit., p. 473: «Reliqua divinatio est, quae prophetia quoque dicitur a nostris. Haec (ut ait sacer Chrysostomus) aut spiritualis, aut naturalis, aut artificiosa, aut popularis, aut damnata est, et prophana».

Artificiosa est, qua *medici*, qua *consilarii*, qua *gubernatores* utuntur. Nam et medici morborum principia, momenta, finesque praesciscunt; et consilarii, quid expediat in posterum *coniectant*; et gubernatores ventorum tempestatumque praevident varietates.²¹⁹

Drawing upon the main tenets of Aristotle's practical philosophy, Poliziano contributed to both relay and clarify some pivotal concepts of the Philosopher's doctrine, such as the notion of conjecture (in fact, the human kind of divination, in his account). The professional figures to whom such a notion applies are the same as in Aristotle. The kind of knowledge pertaining to the areas within which the activity of doctors, rulers and navy leaders falls is necessarily characterized by instability and uncertainty. All these figures share an expertise which cannot pretend to the rank of science (*episteme*, which Poliziano had outlined in the section of his *Panepistemon* devoted to philosophy), but only to that of art (*techne*).²²⁰ It is for this reason that the method which is proper of medicine, politics and navy must of necessity be different from that of such disciplines as mathematics or geometry.

Rather than by means of logical principles and theorems, the method usually employed by practitioners of politics and of medicine is supposed to proceed by means of clues, conjectures and personal interpretation.²²¹

Every decision made by the political leader, for instance, whether it be to introduce a new law, to wage war on a stranger country or whatever else, must necessarily reckon with the instability connected to human actions. No mathematical calculus or scientific formula can be applied to the cases the politician might venture to face in his office.

The condition of uncertainty that characterizes conjectural knowledge was perfectly understood by Machiavelli. It is not a coincidence that the use he made of the notion of *coniectura* in his writings was absolutely accurate and consistent

²¹⁹ A. POLIZIANO, *Panepistemon*, cit., p. 473 (my *emphasis*).

²²⁰ On this aspect, see S. DI PIAZZA, *Congetture e approssimazioni*, cit., pp. 73-80.

²²¹ On this point, see V. BOUDON-MILLOT, *Art, Science and Conjecture*, cit.

with the account given by Aristotle, and later relayed by some of the most successful authors of his days.

Furthermore, Machiavelli must have been well acquainted with this notion since his youth, for we find an occurrence of the term *coniettare* in a 1503 official letter to the Florentine Republic that he wrote during his first legation to Rome (Oct-Dec 1503). On the 2nd of December, he informed the Florence's government about the negotiations between Cesare Borgia and the Cardinal Georges d'Amboise for the control of some fortresses in Romagna. The fortune of both Cesare and his father was soon to change though, and some signs of their weakness began to be visible. By putting the following sentence in the mouth of some undefined «molti», Machiavelli actually expressed his own opinion on Cesare's near future:

E però non si sa bene *interpretare* che fine arà costui, ma molti lo *conietturano*
tristo.²²²

To conclude, we have seen that the problem of which kind of knowledge can be the most suitable for handling such uncertain and unstable matters as human behaviors was explicitly addressed by Aristotle in his practical works. The solution he offered centers on the notion of conjecture (τέχνη στοχαστική) as an instrument to foresee the possible developments of a given circumstance by paying attention to a series of “clues”. This notion was clearly relayed by all the major fifteenth-century editions and commentaries of Aristotle's practical texts (George of Trebizond, John Argyropoulos, Donato Acciaiuoli), and it was also presented in a much more systematic way in one of the most successful fifteenth-century works on Aristotle's ethics, namely Poliziano's *Panepistemon*.

According to these elements, it seems quite unfair to question Machiavelli's reliance on Aristotle's notion of conjecture while using in his writings the notion of *coniettura*.

²²² N. MACHIAVELLI, *Prima legazione a Roma*, 279 (2 dicembre, 1503), in ID., *Legazioni, commissarie, scritti di governo*, vol. III, edited J. J. Marchand M. Melera-Moretini, Salerno, Roma, 2005 («Edizione Nazionale delle opere», V), p. 435 (my *emphasis*).

It may be argued that Machiavelli embraced the very same meaning that Aristotle had given to the word (namely, as an inference performed on the basis of empirical clues), and that is also applied to the same fields of knowledge introduced by the Philosopher (with particular attention, of course, to the field of politics).

Coniettura is definitely a term that Machiavelli used with a rigorously technical connotation, although many students and editors of his texts have failed to acknowledge it.²²³

²²³ Another instance of misinterpretation of Machiavelli's technical language has been provided by Vittoria Perrone Compagni with regards to the notion of *convenienza*. See V. PERRONE COMPAGNI, *Machiavelli metafisico*, cit., p. 227, n. 16.

3. Fortune and Anthropology.

The following pages will be devoted to the examination of a key-concept of Machiavelli's thought, namely the concept of fortune. There is no need to stress the importance of that notion within Machiavelli's *opera*, nor to remind of the attention it has always attracted among scholars.²²⁴ The uncountable analyses of political circumstances and historical phenomena, no less than his personal reflections about his own life and experiences, often led the Florentine to consider the whole course of events and to wonder about the role that such powers as fortune or chance are likely to play in human life. As a consequence of this, Machiavelli's reflections on the problem of fortune spread all throughout his writings (in the works in prose as much as in his poetic compositions), and they may be presented in very shifting ways according to the specific context in which they come to take place. In some cases, Machiavelli referred to fortune only as an undefined force which seems to control human lives, a force that men use to blame on when their projects fail in a way they consider unfair or unexpected.²²⁵ In some other cases, Machiavelli's allusions to fortune are associated to a set of symbols taken from popular culture (the wheel, the fickle woman, the raging

²²⁴ Among the most important studies, see M. SANTORO, *Fortuna, ragione e prudenza nella civiltà letteraria del Cinquecento*, Liguori, Napoli, 1966, pp. 179-231; E. GARIN, *Aspetti del pensiero di Machiavelli*, cit.; J. MACEK, «La fortuna» chez Machiavel, «Le Moyen Âge», LXXVII, (1971), pp. 305-328; T. FLANAGAN, *The Concept of Fortuna in Machiavelli*, in *The Political Calculus. Essays on Machiavelli's Philosophy*, edited by A. Parel, University of Toronto Press, Toronto-Buffalo, 1972, p. 127-156; G. SASSO, *Niccolò Machiavelli. Storia del suo pensiero politico*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 1980, pp. 385-402; O. BALABAN, *The human origins of Fortuna in Machiavelli's thought*, «History of Political Thought», XI, (1990), pp. 21-36; F. ADORNO, 'Fortuna' e 'virtù' in Machiavelli e Aristotele. Una 'barba' del Machiavelli, in ID., *Pensare storicamente. Quarant'anni di studi e ricerche*, Olschki, Firenze, 1996, pp. 305-321; A. FONTANA, *Fortune et décision chez Machiavel*, «Archives de Philosophie», LXII (1999), 2, pp. 255-267; A. LANG, *La dialectique de la fortune et de la virtù chez Machiavel*, «Archives de Philosophie», LXVI (2003), pp. 649-662; V. PERRONE COMPAGNI, *Machiavelli metafisico*, cit. Now see also D. FACHARD, «Fortuna», in *Enciclopedia Machiavelliana*, cit., I, pp. 568-573.

²²⁵ I am referring to such occurrences as, for instance, N. MACHIAVELLI, *Il Principe*, VII, cit., p. 128: «e se li ordini sua non li profittorono, non fu sua colpa, perché nacque da una straordinaria e estrema malignità di fortuna», or ID., *Discorsi*, II, 30, cit., I, p. 508: «Perché, dove gli uomini hanno poca virtù, la fortuna mostra assai la potenza sua», or ID., *Lettere*, 238 (N. Machiavelli to F. Vettori, 3 agosto 1514), cit., p. 465: «E veramente la Fortuna mi ha condotto in luogo, che io ve ne potrei rendere iusto ricompenso».

river) and later relayed by both the medieval and the humanistic literature.²²⁶ In some others else, his thoughts over fortune take the shape of a more learned topic of debate which was actually very common among the humanist authors of his time.²²⁷

This multiple-level approach to the problem of fortune in Machiavelli's works have led scholars to address this issue from very different perspectives. There are some who have focused on the particular literary images usually employed by Machiavelli to describe fortune, trying to explore his indebtedness to both the ancient and the medieval allegoric traditions. Some others have instead undertaken a comparative study between Machiavelli's own account of fortune and those that were formulated by other fourteenth- and fifteenth-century writers, in order to grasp the extent to which Machiavelli's view over fortune and chance owes to other humanistic conceptions of the same notions.

The study I will put forward in the following pages is an attempt to address Machiavelli's reflections on fortune from an essentially philosophical standpoint. As a matter of fact, his numerous considerations on the power of fortune and on the role of chance in human lives call into question a series of issues that are of the utmost relevance from a philosophical perspective. I am referring, for instance, to such problems as the existence and the actual extent of human free will, the possibility for human actions to be somehow determined by inner or outer causes other than will, or the role played by habits in our everyday choices. All these issues, which are frequently and extensively addressed by Machiavelli in his writings, involve one of the most significant questions of all the Western philosophical tradition, namely the one concerning the relation between human free will and determinism. According to these premises, I will treat Machiavelli's thoughts over fortune and chance as the "ideal place" where the Florentine dealt

²²⁶ The image of the wheel occurs in N. MACHIAVELLI, *Capitolo di Fortuna*, in ID., *Scritti in prosa e in poesia*, cit., pp. 75-90. The images of the fickle woman and the raging river occur in N. MACHIAVELLI, *Il Principe*, XXV, cit., pp. 300-310. On the former metaphor, see H. F. PITKIN, *Fortune is a Woman. Gender and Politics in the Thought of Niccolò Machiavelli*, University of California Press, Berkeley-Los Angeles-London, 1984, pp. 138-167.

²²⁷ The places within Machiavelli's *opera* in which the issue of fortune is addressed in a more systematic way are his 1506 *Ghiribizzi a Giovan Battista Soderini*, chapter 25 of the *Prince*, and chapter 9 in book 3 of the *Discorsi*. Of course, even if not as serious as the previous works in its approach, Machiavelli's *Capitolo di Fortuna* too must be listed among the pieces of writing relating his most genuine thought about fortune.

with highly philosophical matters. Rather than examining the different meanings of Machiavelli's numerous allegories of fortune, I will concentrate my study only on those aspects which prove especially noteworthy from a purely philosophical point of view.

Moreover, the philosophical question regarding human free will and determinism proves to be significant for its consequences on the anthropological plane too, since it implicitly raises a series of issues involving the definition and the status of human nature.

In doing so, it will be possible to bring out Machiavelli's genuine understanding of the relation between free will and determinism, and to grasp his deepest beliefs regarding the status and the limits of human nature.

More particularly, there are three main elements in Machiavelli's reflections on fortune that need to be singled out because of their highly philosophical relevance. These are: [1] the belief in a twofold level of causality affecting, respectively, the natural world and the moral dimension; [2] the idea of men's nature as something incapable of changing; [3] the view of fortune as an irrational power which men can hopefully beat by recurring to a just as much irrational conduct.

These three elements must be all ascribed to Aristotle, who had clearly addressed them both in his practical and in his physical writings. As long as we know, the Stagirite has never devoted to fortune an autonomous treatise, although he must have certainly regarded this topic as a quite central one, given the great deal of attention he paid to it in many different places of his works. It should not surprise, then, that a Latin compilation of the chapters on fortune taken from Aristotle's *Eudemian Ethics* and *Magna Moralia* was made available during the Middle Ages. The anonymous work, which was known under the title of *Liber de bona fortuna*, experienced an impressive degree of circulation up until the Sixteenth century, and it was also included in all the collections of *Auctoritates Aristotelis*.²²⁸

²²⁸ J. HAMESSE, *Les Auctoritates Aristotelis*, cit., pp. 249-250. On the *Liber de bona fortuna*, see V. CORDONIER, *Sauver le dieu du philosophe. Albert le Grand, Thomas d'Aquin, Guillaume de Moerbeke et l'invention du 'Liber de bona fortuna' comme alternative autorisée à l'interprétation averroïste de la théorie aristotélicienne de la providence divine*, in *Christian readings of Aristotle from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance*, edited by L. Bianchi, Brepols, Turnhout, 2011, pp. 65-114.

Evidently, Machiavelli was residing once again upon the main tenets of Aristotle's philosophy while shaping his own notion of fortune; and, once again, he was doing so without acknowledging his authority.

In the chapter 25 of the *Prince*, where Machiavelli provided the most comprehensive and sophisticated account of fortune, all the three elements mentioned above occur.

I will accordingly concentrate my analysis on that chapter, by addressing all of them in turn. I will then connect the account given in the *Prince* to all the other places within Machiavelli's *opera* that are relevant to the problem of fortune.

THE DOUBLE FACE OF FORTUNE: «IN UNIVERSALI» AND «IN PARTICULARI»

I. Chapter 25 of Machiavelli's *Prince* is, as known, a rather singular chapter. After a twenty-four-chapter-long highly technical discussion over purely political and historical questions, the author of the *opuscolo* set out to devote an entire section to the examination of a quite specific subject-matter: fortune.

The reasons of such a choice have always challenged all Florentine's interpreters, and still do so. In some cases, Machiavelli's chapter of fortune has been read as a passing section designed to connect the strictly technical parts of the *Prince* with the more passionate exhortation given in the next and last chapter of the work.²²⁹

In some other cases, Machiavelli's decision to deal with the problem of fortune within a treatise on politics was connected to the literary genre of the *Specula*

²²⁹ See the quite compelling interpretation given by E. CUTINELLI-RENDINA, *Introduzione a Machiavelli*, Laterza, Bari-Roma, 2003 (or. ed., 1999), pp. 45-46. Cutinelli-Rendina rejects the opinion of those who assigned to Machiavelli's exhortation provided in chapter 26 of the *Prince* a merely rhetorical purpose. In fact, the scholar argues, Machiavelli's final exhortation can be fully understood only at the light of his analysis on fortune given in chapter 25. On chapter 26 and its relation with the overall project of Machiavelli's *Prince*, see M. MARTELLI, *La logica provvidenzialistica e il capitolo XXVI del Principe*, «Interpres», IV, (1982), pp. 262-384; G. SASSO, *Del ventiseiesimo capitolo, della «provvidenza» e di altre cose*, in ID., *Machiavelli e gli antichi e altri saggi*, cit., II, pp. 277-349.

principum, since such works too used to devote a specific section to the analysis of that issue.²³⁰

Whether or not these interpretations may be correct, my purpose in the following pages is to show that chapter 25 of the *Prince* should be regarded as one of the most philosophically significant places of all Machiavelli's *opera*. Under the pretense of a discussion on fortune, Machiavelli actually provided a detailed and very consistent account of the processes that govern both natural world and human actions.²³¹ In other words, chapter 25 may be said to offer Machiavelli's own view of the world and of man, a view which plays as theoretical foundation for both his historical and political discourse.

Chapter 25 may be internally divided into three main parts, according to the different issues that are dealt with. After a brief introduction (parr. 1-3), the first part of the chapter (4-8) is devoted to the definition of the so-called «fortuna in universali»; the second part (9-24) deals with the analysis of the «fortuna in particolari»; the third one (25-27) plays as a final exhortation to impetuosity and toil.²³²

In the following paragraph, I will focus on the distinction between «fortuna in universali» and «fortuna in particolari», showing the extent of the debt which this distinction owes to Aristotle's account of chance and fortune given in the *Physics* and in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. The reliance of Machiavelli's analysis of fortune on Aristotle's theory has been already pointed out by Vittoria Perrone Compagni

²³⁰ A. H. GILBERT, *Machiavelli's Prince and its Forerunners. The Prince as a Typical Book De Regimine Principum*, Duke University Press, Durham (NC), 1938, pp. 204-221; F. GILBERT, *The Humanist Concept of the Prince and the Prince of Machiavelli*, «The Journal of Modern History», XI, (1939), 4, pp. 449-483; Q. SKINNER, *The foundations of modern political thought*, cit., I, pp. 120-122. Differently from Alan H. Gilbert's analysis of the *Prince*, Felix Gilbert and Quentin Skinner acknowledged that Machiavelli's work, while inheriting many features from the previous literature of advice-books for princes, also came to introduce a number of totally new elements. Machiavelli's indebtedness to the medieval tradition of mirrors-for-princes has been recently dealt with by T. DEWENDER, *Il Principe di Machiavelli e la tradizione medievale degli specula principum*, in *Politica moralità, fortuna. Riflessioni storico-filosofiche sul Principe di Machiavelli*, a cura di E. Erculei e G. Grimaldi. Prefazione di T. Kobusch, Carocci, Roma, 2015, pp. 51-75.

²³¹ In his English edition of Machiavelli's *Prince*, Arthur Burd defined chapter 25 as «one of the most remarkable in Machiavelli's works», and argued that «in order to settle a political question, he is forced to leave the domain of politics, and enters into a wider field. [...] From the following discussion it is clear that what we call the question of free will had assumed for Machiavelli the form, 'What is the influence of fortune?'" (N. MACHIAVELLI, *Il Principe*, edited by L. A. Burd, with an Introduction by Lord Acton, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1891, p. 355, n. 9).

²³² The division of chapter 25 of Machiavelli's *Prince* into "three times" («tre tempi») may be found in G. SASSO, *Niccolò Machiavelli. Storia del suo pensiero politico*, cit., pp. 385-402.

in her 2012 article on Machiavelli's philosophy.²³³ Her contribution lays at the basis of many of the arguments I will put forward in the next pages, and it will serve as a starting point for my own examination.

In the opening of the chapter, Machiavelli stated to be aware of the opinion of those who have claimed that «the things of the world are governed by fortune and by God, that men, with their prudence, cannot correct them, and that instead they have no remedy for them whatsoever».²³⁴ The author also admitted he was sometimes inclined to this opinion, because of the great changes in things beyond any human expectation and control. Nonetheless, he went on, «so that our free will may not be eliminated, I judge that it may be true that fortune is the arbiter of half of our actions, but that she indeed allows us to govern the other half of them, or almost that much».²³⁵

After this brief introductory section, Machiavelli came immediately to the point:

E assomiglio quella [*scil.* fortune] a uno di questi fiumi rovinosi, che, quando s'adirano, allagano e' piani, ruinano li alberi e li edifizii, lievono da questa parte terreno, pongono da quell'altra, ciascuno fugge loro dinanzi, ognuno cede allo impeto loro, senza potervi in alcuna parte obstare; e benchè sieno così fatti, non resta però che li òmini, quando sono tempi quieti, non vi potessino fare provvedimenti e con ripari e argini, in modo che, crescendo poi, o andrebbero per uno canale o l'impeto loro non sarebbe né sì licenzioso né sì dannoso. Similmente interviene della Fortuna, la quale dimostra la sua potenza dove non è ordinata virtù a resisterle, e quivi volta li sua impeti, dove la sa che non sono fatti li argini e li ripari a tenerla; [...] E questo voglio mi basti avere ditto quanto allo opporsi alla Fortuna *in universali*. Ma, restringendomi più a' particolari, dico come si vede oggi questo principe felicitare e domani ruinare, senza averli veduto mutare natura o qualità alcuna; il che credo che nasca prima dalle cagioni che si sono per lo adrieto lungamente discorse, cioè che quel principe che s'appoggia tutto in sulla fortuna, rovina come quella varia.²³⁶

²³³ V. PERRONE COMPAGNI, *Machiavelli metafisico*, cit., pp. 234-236.

²³⁴ N. MACHIARELLI, *The Prince*, 25, cit., p. 116.

²³⁵ N. MACHIARELLI, *The Prince*, 25, cit., p. 117.

²³⁶ N. MACHIARELLI, *Il Principe*, XXV, cit., pp. 302-304.

Critics have tended to ascribe a merely methodological purpose to the distinction between «fortuna in universali» and «fortuna in particolari»; that is to say, they have viewed Machiavelli as giving a generic description of fortune in the first part of the chapter, and then, in the second one, deciding to illustrate it in detail.²³⁷

However, this reading presents at least two weak points. In the first place, it does not seem fair to charge Machiavelli's account of «fortuna in universali» with simply relaying a vague and indefinite notion of fortune, in opposition to the allegedly more detailed view given in the following section. In fact, rather than giving two different accounts of fortune, being the one more general and the other more accurate, Machiavelli seems here to simply address the question from two different points of view. In other words, «fortuna in universali» and «fortuna in particolari» do not parallel the distinction between a less and a more rigorous description of fortune. They do parallel the distinction between two different aspects of the same thing.

This reading is further confirmed by the second aspect I wish to examine. The real meaning of Machiavelli's distinction may be grasped by referring to another quite famous piece of writing in which the Florentine had dealt with the problem of fortune, namely his 1506 letter to Giovan Battista Soderini (which is also known with the title of *Ghiribizzi*). Discussing about the fickleness and unpredictability of fortune, Machiavelli argued that:

Ma perché e tempi e le cose *universalmente* e *particularmente* si mutano spesso, e li uomini non mutono le loro fantasie né e loro modi di procedere, accade che uno ha un tempo buona fortuna et uno tempo trista.²³⁸

In Machiavelli's sentence, the two adverbs «universalmente» and «particularmente» are clearly referred to fortune, which exercises her power by

²³⁷ See especially G. SASSO, *Niccolò Machiavelli*, cit., p. 393 (but, for the whole analysis of chapter 25, see pp. 385-402). The same reading is given by Mario Martelli in his edition of N. MACHIAVELLI, *Il Principe*, XXV, cit., p. 304, n. 24 and 25. Differently from Sasso and Martelli, A. J. PAREL, *The Machiavellian Cosmos*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1992, p. 68 claimed that «fortuna in universali» represents fortune as she affects countries, and «fortuna in particolari» stands for fortune as she affects human affairs.

²³⁸ N. MACHIAVELLI, *Lettere*, 121 (N. Machiavelli to G. B. Soderini, 13-21 September 1506), cit., p. 244 (my *emphasis*).

giving raise to unexpected changes in the times and things. They do not concern two different ways of describing fortune, but rather the two ways in which fortune is actually expressed in the world. According to this reading, the two adverbs may be said to involve a matter of ontology, and not simply a matter of description as implied by most interpreters.

The idea expressed by Machiavelli in chapter 25 of the *Prince* and in the passage of the *Ghiribizzi* is that fortune operates at two different levels: universal the one, particular the other. Fortune is one only, though she has two well-distinct jurisdictions. Furthermore, the very examples provided by Machiavelli in the chapter of the *Prince* help us to understand [to better define] which these jurisdictions actually are. As far as the «fortuna in universali» is concerned, Machiavelli set out to exemplify it through a metaphor taken from the physical world (the raging river). At this level, fortune seems to be connected to the whole course of events rather than to specific or individual happenings. Here, the account given by Machiavelli is general (not generic, though) for he addresses the problem of fortune from the macro-perspective of the great natural processes. No reference to single events or persons may be found in this part of the chapter.

On the other side, the point of view he endorsed in the section devoted to «fortuna in particolari» is completely different. In this part, are the single individuals that become the exclusive targets of his analysis, as he makes clear from the very beginning by referring to particular historical figures («Ma, restringendomi più a' particolari, dico come si vede *oggi questo principe* felicitare e domani ruinare»).

According to these elements, it seems well more appropriate to see behind Machiavelli's distinction between «fortuna in universali» and «fortuna in particolari» a distinction between two different sides of fortune rather than two different ways of describing it. What is more, it is even not so hard to grasp what stands in the background of Machiavelli's double account of fortune.

Machiavelli's clear distinction between «fortuna in universali» and «fortuna in particolari» has actually a very precise origin. It proves to be nothing but the way the Florentine meant to interpret Aristotle's account of chance and fortune.

The Greek philosopher devoted a great deal of attention to the study of fortuitous and casual events, a problem he perceived at the same time as both physical and

ethical in nature.²³⁹ Not surprisingly, his most significant remarks on this issue are to be found in the *Physics* and in his moral treatises. More particularly, it is in the second book of his *Physics* that Aristotle provided the most extensive account concerning chance (*automaton*) and fortune (*tyche*). He argued:

In Greek *tyche* and *automaton* differ in this, that *automaton* is the more general term and includes *tyche* as a special class. [...] It is clear, then, that when any causal agency incidentally produces a significant result outside its aim, we attribute it to *automaton*; and in the special cases where such a result springs from deliberate action (though not aimed at it) on the part of a being capable of choice, we may say that it comes by *tyche*²⁴⁰.

The distinction made by Aristotle is indeed very clear: as long as a casual event happens outside the human deliberation, that event pertains to chance (*automaton*); if it springs from a deliberate human action, then it must be ascribed to fortune (*tyche*). This distinction plays actually a pivotal role in Aristotle's philosophical discourse, for it proves to be nothing but the natural consequence of his idea that only human beings are capable of deliberately purposeful actions. In the section of the ninth book of the *Metaphysics* devoted to the problem of fortune, for instance, Aristotle emphasized the relation between luck and human purposefulness, stating that «luck is an accidental cause of normally purposive teleological events», and thus concluding that «luck and thought have the same sphere of action, for there is no purpose without thought».²⁴¹

According to this view, only men may be considered lucky or unlucky in a proper sense, while any other casual event happening outside the human agency must be referred to chance as its most appropriate source. Aristotle made this point in book 5 of the *Physics*, where he stated:

²³⁹ See J. DUDLEY, *Aristotle's Concept of Chance. Accidents, Cause, Necessity and Determinism*, State of New York University Press, Albany, 2010.

²⁴⁰ ARISTOTLE, *Physics*, II, 6, 197a 37-197b 23, edited by P. H. Wicksteed-F. M. Cornford, London-New York, Heinemann-Putnam's Sons, 1929, pp. 157-159. In this case, I preferred the translation given by Wicksteed and Cornford to the one made by R. P. Hardie and R. K. Gaye included in J. Barnes' edition.

²⁴¹ ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysics*, IX, 7, 1065a 30-33, edited by H. Tredennick, London-Cambridge, Heinemann-Harvard University Press, 1935, p. 93.

Clearly then luck itself, regarded as a cause, is the name we give to causation which incidentally inheres in deliberately purposeful action taken with respect to some other end but leading to the event we call fortunate. [...] That is why neither inanimate things nor brute beasts nor infants can ever accomplish anything by *tyche*, since they exercise no deliberate choice; nor can such be said to have good or bad *tyche*, except by a figure of speech, as when Protarchus speaks of the ‘fortunate’ stones that have been built into altars and are treated with reverence, while their fellows are trampled under foot.²⁴²

The idea laying at the basis of Aristotle’s account is to acknowledge that fortune may be referred to with two different names according to the type of events it applies to. Chance (*automaton*) is the general name we give to any causal event affecting the extra-moral dimension. All the random occurrences happening in the natural world and involving the whole course of events outside the sphere of human actions are, as such, to be ascribed to chance. On the other side, as far as a given cause «incidentally inheres in deliberately purposeful action» – to say it with Aristotle – that cause will fall within the realm of fortune (*tyche*).

This idea is precisely what underlays Machiavelli’s distinction between «fortuna in universali» and «fortuna in particulari». Even if not expressed with the same Aristotelian language, it seems hard to question Machiavelli’s endorsement of Aristotle’s account in the shaping of his own notion of fortune. «Fortuna in universali» and «fortuna in particulari» are nothing but the two terms Machiavelli adopted in order to render the Aristotelian concepts of *automaton* and *tyche*. More precisely, «fortuna in universali» is the equivalent to Aristotle’s *automaton* and concerns all those processes that do not depend on human deliberation. It is not a coincidence that in this part of the chapter Machiavelli talks about men in a general way («ognuno», «gli uomini»), referring to them simply as the inhabitants of the sublunary world, which is subject to the cycles of generation and corruption. He uses the raging river as his metaphor to express natural causation. In this dimension, man’s role consists more in curbing the power of fortune than

²⁴² ARISTOTLE, *Physics*, II, 5, 197a 5-7 and II, 6, 197b 6-12, cit., pp. 150-151 and 158-159.

in a properly positive activity: when the weather is quiet, the author stated, men must «take precautions with both embankments and dykes».²⁴³ In a way that is totally consistent with Aristotle's notion of chance, Machiavelli's «fortuna in universali» was intended to describe the particular kind of causality connected to the whole *ordo rerum*. In this part of the chapter, Machiavelli endorsed the point of view of nature (as made clear by the metaphor he decided to employ), and he accounted for all those casual events occurring in the external world.

On the other side, «fortuna in particulari» parallels the Aristotelian concept of *tyche* for it refers to the dimension of human choices and actions. In both authors, fortune is thought of as pertaining to human agency only, for it is only the sphere of men's actions that has to do with probable events that depend on our deliberation («We deliberate about things that are in our control and are attainable by action»)²⁴⁴. Hence, «fortune in particular» may be said to embody the dimension in which human activity can be fully expressed. It is in this very sphere that men are able to select the most suitable means for accomplishing their ends, thus being not completely exposed to the vagaries of fortune. It is not a coincidence that the famous “theory of the adaptation” (“riscontro”) appears in this very part of the chapter²⁴⁵: «I believe, too, that the man who conforms his way of proceeding to the quality of the times is happy, and similarly that he whose proceedings the times disagree with is unhappy»²⁴⁶. The central paragraphs of the chapter are devoted by Machiavelli to the examination of a historical exemplarity, i.e. Pope Julius II.

Therefore, as Vittoria Perrone Compagni has pointed out, the first two sections of chapter 25 in the *Prince* should be seen as the place in which Machiavelli

²⁴³ The image of the embankments and dykes occurs also in N. MACHIAVELLI, *Discorsi*, II, 17, cit., I, pp. 406-419; ID., *Lettere*, 219, (N. Machiavelli a F. Vettori, 10 agosto 1513), cit., p. 404; *Ivi*, n. 292 (N. Machiavelli a F. Guicciardini, 3 agosto 1525), pp. 547-548. See also M. PALMIERI, *Vita civile*, III, cit., p. 124: «In el tranquillo mare non si debbe per alcuno disiderare contraria tempesta: quando fia venuta, ministrare i ripari et valentement sobvenire è proprio ufficio de' valenti».

²⁴⁴ ID., *Nicomachean Ethics*, III, 3, 1112a 33-35. But see also: *ibid.*, VI, 7, 1141b 9-12, cit., p. 345: «But no one deliberates about things that cannot vary nor yet about variable things that are not a means to some end, and that end a good attainable by action».

²⁴⁵ On this point, see Giorgio Inglese in N. MACHIAVELLI, *Il Principe*, XXV, nuova edizione a cura di G. Inglese. Con un saggio di F. Chabod, Einaudi, Torino, 2014, pp. 175-176, n. 10.

²⁴⁶ N. MACHIAVELLI, *The Prince*, 25, cit., p. 117 (ID., *Il Principe*, XXV, cit., p. 304-305: «Credo ancora che sia felice quello che riscontra el modo del procedere suo con le qualità de' tempi, e similmente sia infelice quello che con il procedere suo si discordano e' tempi»).

expressed his belief in a twofold level of causality affecting, respectively, the natural world and human sphere.²⁴⁷ «Fortuna in universali» represents fortune as she affects the whole course of events, i.e. the whole *ordo rerum*. «Fortuna in particulari» is the representation of the fortune affecting men and their lives.

As we have seen, this view must be traced back to Aristotle's account of chance and fortune as its most suitable source. Furthermore, Machiavelli's idea that fortune affects things at two different levels seems to be well more consistent with the passage of the *Ghiribizzi* mentioned above. Machiavelli's assertion that «e tempi e le cose universalmente e particolarmente si mutano spesso» proves to be nothing but the reaffirmation (at an earlier stage, though) of the view held a few years later in the chapter of the *Prince*. In his letter to Soderini, Machiavelli clearly stated that the times and the things do experience a twofold kind of changing, namely universal and particular. Moreover, one should not overlook Machiavelli's double reference to the times and the things, for it might provide a useful clue for the correct understanding of the passage. It does not seem inappropriate to interpret these two terms as an allusion to the more general course of events, on the one hand («e tempi»), and to the sphere of human affairs on the other («le cose»). It is well known that the *Ghiribizzi* was by no means written in one go by its author, in a way one would expect from a normal letter. The *Ghiribizzi* is in fact a piece of writing which must have cost a good deal of meditation to Machiavelli, for it anticipates some of the key-thoughts that will be later unfolded in the major works.²⁴⁸ Thus, it would be quite misleading to consider Machiavelli's account given in the *Ghiribizzi* as relaying a less serious and rigorous explanation of his thought. There is no doubt that the Florentine made a very appropriate use of every single word we can read in the text, and

²⁴⁷ V. PERRONE COMPAGNI, *Machiavelli metafisico*, cit., pp. 234-235.

²⁴⁸ On the *Ghiribizzi*, a work that has arisen much debate in the 1970s Italian scholarship, see at least: M. MARTELLI, *I Ghiribizzi a Giovan Battista Soderini*, «Rinascimento», XX, (1969), pp. 147-180; R. RIDOLFI-P. GHIGLIERI, *I Ghiribizzi al Soderini*, «La Bibliofilia», LXXII, (1970), pp. 53-74; M. MARTELLI, *Ancora sui «Ghiribizzi» a Giovan Battista Soderini*, «Rinascimento», X, (1970), pp. 3-27; R. RIDOLFI, *Ancora sui «Ghiribizzi» al Soderini*, «La Bibliofilia», LXXIV, (1972), pp. 1-7; G. SASSO, *Qualche osservazione sui Ghiribizzi al Soderino di Machiavelli*, in ID., *Machiavelli e gli antichi e altri saggi*, cit., II, pp. 3-56; A. FONTANA, *Fortune et décision che Machiavel*, cit.; C. GINZBURG, *Diventare Machiavelli. Per una nuova lettura dei «Ghiribizzi al Soderini»*, «Quaderni storici», XLI, (2006), 1, pp. 151-164.

there is no doubt that his twofold allusion to the times and the things was not casual or meaningless at all.

II. Machiavelli's re-elaboration of Aristotle's distinction between chance and fortune was by no means the only attempt to introduce Aristotelian categories into the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century discussion on fortune. Plainly, Machiavelli was the only one who did it by appealing to the notions of «fortuna in universali» and «fortuna in particulari». However, there are many other authors whose account of fortune was firmly grounded on the same Aristotelian distinction which will be later adopted by the Florentine. In the following paragraphs, I will take into exam the formulations of two authors Machiavelli was certainly acquainted with, namely Cristoforo Landino e Giovanni Pontano. Their remarks on the problem of fortune find place, respectively, in the pages of the *Comento sopra la Comedia* (1481), and in the treatise *De fortuna* (1512).

The examination of these two writers will prove useful both in itself and also for its possible connections with Machiavelli. On the one hand, it will show the extent to which Aristotle's account of chance and fortune was common among the humanists' discussions on that subject. On the other hand, the presence of the Aristotelian distinction between chance and fortune in the writings of two authors Machiavelli was surely familiar with, might explain how Aristotle's account of fortune could reach and affect Machiavelli's view on the same notion.

II.1. Cristoforo Landino.

Commenting on the VII *Canto* of Dante's *Inferno*, Landino met up with the passage where Dante asked Vergil to explain what fortune is («Maestro mio – dix'io – hor mi dí anche: / questa fortuna di che tu mi tocche, / che è, ch'e ben del mondo ha sí tra branche?»). The description given by the Latin poet is quite detailed (lines 70-96) and it is informed by all the motifs traditionally connected to the image of fortune.²⁴⁹ The commentary that Landino gave on that passage,

²⁴⁹ «Perch'una gente impera, et l'altra langue» is *fortuna in utramque partem*. «Le sue permutation non hanno triegue»: constantly in movement. «Quest'è colei che tanto è posta in croce / pur da color che le dovrien dar lode»: people use to blam on fortune even when many of their achievements should be ascribed to her. «Volge la sua spera»: the wheel.

instead, is largely based on Aristotle, as he made clear from the beginning by stating that first of all «dobbiamo intendere che secondo e peripatetici philosophi tre sono le generazioni de' beni, cioè d'animo, di corpo, et di fortuna».²⁵⁰

Moreover, it is worth-noticing that the perspective from which Landino approached the topic is the same as Machiavelli's in chapter 25 of the *Prince*, for he too aimed to address the problem of fortune in such a way as to preserve human free will. Machiavelli's words «nondimanco, perchè el nostro libero arbitrio non sia spento» seem to echo the statement of purpose given by Landino in the first lines of his account: «giudico essere utile riferire [...] che chosa sia fortuna circunscrivendola in forma *che per quella non si diminuisca el libero arbitrio nostro*».²⁵¹

After outlining the three kinds of goods described by Aristotle – «d'animo, di corpo, et di fortuna» – Landino made a double distinction between chance and fortune on the one hand, and between providence and fate on the other. He maintained:

Ma è chosa prolipsa et laboriosa disputare a pieno della fortuna et del caso.
Perchè difficilmente si può explicare senza la cognitione della providentia et del fato.

Providence and fate are the two elements introduced by Landino in order to make Aristotle's view on chance and fortune compatible with Christian religion. In addition to *caso* and *fortuna*, terms that in Aristotle did not imply any kind of connection with the divine plan, Landino referred in his *Comento* to *providentia* and *fato* as the two most visible displays of the divine power.

²⁵⁰ C. LANDINO, *Comento sopra la Comedia*, edited by P. Procaccioli, 4 voll., Salerno, Roma, 2001, II, pp. 503-504.

²⁵¹ C. LANDINO, *Comento sopra la Comedia*, cit., II, p. 503 (my *emphasis*). For an even more consistent statement with Machiavelli's assertion, see Landino's commentary on *Purgatorio* XVI in C. LANDINO, *Comento sopra la Comedia*, cit., III, p. 1294: «*Voi che vivete*: questa è la ragione, che dimostra gl'huomini esser ciechi, conciosia che arrechino ogni cagione al cielo, *i. attribuischino ogni cagione delle nostre operationi allo 'nfluxo celeste, chome se e' cieli di necessità ci spignessino a fare, et non fare, et a operare o male o bene, secondo la natura di tale influxo, et noi non ce ne potessimo difendere. Il che se fussi sarebbe spento in noi el libero arbitrio*» (this last *emphasis* is mine).

Et è la divina providentia secondo Boetio una somma ragione in Dio, la quale tutte le chose ordina et dispone. El fato è certa dispositione nelle chose mobili, per la quale la providentia conlega et compone ciascuna chosa per certo ordine.²⁵²

Once the notions of providence and fate have been fully accounted for, Landino went on in dealing with the concepts of chance and fortune. His description clearly resides upon the same passages of Aristotle's *Physics* mentioned above, and it proves to be totally consistent with the view given by Machiavelli in the *Prince*. He stated:

Ma tornando alla fortuna, dicono quella essere solamente nell'animale dove è ragione, el quale diriza ogni sua operatione a certo proposito. Il perché né chosa alcuna inanimata, né bruto animale, né e piccoli fanciullini possono haver fortuna. Perché non operando secondo alcuno proposito, non può loro intervenire alcuna cosa fuori di loro intentione et proposito. Il che è proprio della fortuna, ma hanno caso.²⁵³

Following Aristotle, Landino claimed that chance and fortune differ only with regards to the kind of objects they refer to. If the casual event occurs outside the human deliberation, it will be ascribed to chance; if it springs instead from the purposeful action of a being capable of choice, then it will be pertaining to fortune.

Similarly to many other humanistic accounts of fortune, Landino's writing too resides very heavily upon Aristotle – even if not quoted directly but, rather, through the recourse to the commentary literature. An evidence of this fact is the presence in Landino's text of the famous image of the farmer who accidentally finds a treasure while digging his field.²⁵⁴ The example is given by Aristotle only

²⁵² C. LANDINO, *Comento sopra la Comedia*, cit., II, p. 504.

²⁵³ C. LANDINO, *Comento sopra la Comedia*, cit., II, p. 505.

²⁵⁴ C. LANDINO, *Comento sopra la Comedia*, cit., II, p. 505: «Ma credo che 'l poeta in questo luogo voglia indextinctamente confondere el fato et la fortuna. Perché nell'uno et nell'altra sono le cause onde procedono gli effecti, ma nella fortuna ci sono incognite. Il perché lo ignorante che arando truova el thesoro dirà che sia buona fortuna. Ma lo strologo, che per la sua natività cognosce la causa che gliene fa trovare, affermerà quello esser fato».

once in his works, in a passage of his *Metaphysics* that is not certainly among the most famous and frequently appealed places of his *opera*.²⁵⁵ Besides that, there are only two references, respectively in the *Rhetoric* and in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.²⁵⁶ However, they prove to be nothing but very quick allusions which do not even provide the full version of the example. Despite its very low occurrence in Aristotle's genuine writings, the example of the farmer was so successful in all the later commentary literature that it became a real *topos* of his philosophy. It is for this very reason that the presence of this motif in such a work as Landino's *Comento* should not surprise at all.

As a matter of fact, Aristotle was the author whose account affected fifteenth- and sixteenth-century discussions on fortune most pervasively. There is no work on this topic which did not draw upon his authority as a central – if not exclusive – point of reference.²⁵⁷

According to these elements, it is rather hard to believe that only Machiavelli was (quite exceptionally indeed) not influenced at all by Aristotle while giving his own account of fortune in the *Ghiribizzi*, in the *Prince*, and in the *Discorsi*. What is very likely, instead, is that the Florentine was well acquainted with at least the key-features of Aristotle's reflections on fortune. One of them was certainly the distinction between two different aspects of fortune: the one affecting the natural world, the other connected to human actions. This is what Machiavelli must have had in mind while providing his double account of fortune – «in universali» and «in particulari» – in chapter 25 of the *Prince*.

Finally, as far as a possible influence of Landino's *Comento* on Machiavelli is concerned, this hypothesis is undoubtedly worth-considering. As a matter of fact, Machiavelli's acquaintance with this work may be taken from granted, as

²⁵⁵ ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysics*, V, 30, 1025a 15-16, cit., II, p. 1619: «We call an accident that which attaches to something and can be truly asserted, but neither of necessity nor usually, e.g. if one in digging a hole for a plant found treasure».

²⁵⁶ ARISTOTLE, *Rhetoric*, I, 5, 1362a 6-9, cit., II, p. 2165: «Luck is also the cause of good things that happen contrary to reasonable expectation: as when, for instance, all your brothers are ugly, but you are handsome yourself; or when you find a treasure that everybody else has overlooked»; ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics*, III, 3, 1112a 23-28, cit., II, p. 1756: «But no more we do deliberate about the things that involve movement but always happen in the same way, whether of necessity or by nature or from any other cause, [...] nor about chance events, like the finding of treasure».

²⁵⁷ A work taking Aristotle as exclusive point of reference is, as it will be shown shortly, Giovanni Pontano's *De fortuna*.

Francesco Bausi showed some ten years ago.²⁵⁸ As for the particular section of the *Comento* that we called into exam, Machiavelli's familiarity with that may be further brought out by paying attention to a couple of clues embedded in Landino's text.

The first of them is Landino's explicit quotation of the famous sentence ascribed to Ptolemy «sapiens dominabitur astris»:

Né ci può quella [*scil.* the virtue] esser tolta, né questo [*scil.* the vice] essere dato per influxo di cielo. Perché, come dice Ptolomeo, el savio signoreggia alle stelle.²⁵⁹

The proverb is also quoted in Machiavelli's *Ghiribizzi* to G. B. Soderini («E veramente chi fussi tanto savio, che conoscessi e tempi e l'ordine delle cose et accomodassisi a quelle, arebbe sempre buona fortuna o e' si guarderebbe sempre da la rista, e verrebbe ad essere vero ch' *l' savio comandassi alle stele et a' fati*»).²⁶⁰ Ptolemy's sentence was of course a real *topos* of the astrological literature, yet its presence in two very different kinds of writing dealing with the problem of fortune might prove a further indication of Machiavelli's reliance on the *Comento*.²⁶¹

The second aspect that is worthwhile to be stressed is Landino's account of the great historical variations that caused the succession of empires. Commenting on the line where Dante wrote «di gente in gente, et d'un in altro sangue» (l. 80), Landino made the following point:

Chome veggiamo gl'imperii essere chon assidua mutatione di gente in gente trasferiti. Furono gli Assyrii e primi de' quali si legga che regnassino nelle

²⁵⁸ F. BAUSI, *Machiavelli e la tradizione culturale toscana*, cit., pp. 81-115, esp. 83-90.

²⁵⁹ C. LANDINO, *Comento sopra la Comedia*, cit., II p. 506.

²⁶⁰ N. MACHIAVELLI, *Lettere*, 121 (N. Machiavelli to G. B. Soderini, 13-21 September 1506), cit., p. 244 (my *emphasis*).

²⁶¹ On Ptolemy and Machiavelli, with particular regards to chapter 25 of the *Prince*, see A. PAREL, *Ptolemy as a Source of the Prince* 25, «History of Political Thought», XIV, (1993), pp. 77-83; ID., *Farewell to Fortune*, «The Review of Politics», LXXV, (2013), pp. 587-604.

parti orientali per la virtù di Nino e di Semyramis. Ma da chostoro si trasferí lo
'mperio a' Medi, et da' Medi a' Persi, de' quali el primo re fu Cyro.²⁶²

An account relaying the same sequence of empires is provided by Machiavelli in the preface to the second book of his *Discorsi*:

Solo vi era questa differenza, che dove quello aveva prima allogata la sua virtù in Assiria, la collocò in Media, dipoi in Persia, tanto che la ne venne in Italia e a Roma.²⁶³

Also in this case, the closeness between Landino's and Machiavelli's texts should not be overestimated, being the succession of empires given by them a real *leitmotif* of political and historical discussions.

However, the presence in both authors of similar motifs and images, along with the endorsement of the very same perspective in approaching the problem of fortune, further corroborate the hypothesis of Machiavelli's acquaintance with the pages of Landino's *Comento*.

II.2. Giovanni Pontano.

I will now turn to an author who has always attracted the attention of Machiavelli's students, since his name happened to be mentioned in one of the most frequently cited places of the Florentine's private correspondence. The name of Giovanni Pontano occurs no less than twice in the Machiavelli-Vettori epistolary exchange of 1513-1515, the first time in a letter Vettori sent to Machiavelli on 15 December 1514, and the second one in Machiavelli's own reply written five days later.²⁶⁴

In his letter, Vettori referred to Pontano and to his treatise *De fortuna* more specifically. The aim of such an allusion is to emphasize the crucial role that

²⁶² C. LANDINO, *Comento sopra la Comedia*, cit., II, pp. 507-508.

²⁶³ N. MACHIAVELLI, *Discorsi*, II, proemio, cit., I, p. 298.

²⁶⁴ On the correspondence between Machiavelli and Francesco Vettori, see J. M. NAJEMY, *Between Friends. Discourses on Power and Desire in the Machiavelli-Vettori Letters of 1513-1515*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1993.

fortune plays in human life and thus to let Machiavelli know that, given the many troubles the Curia was experiencing those days, he could not intercede for him at that moment.

Legi, superioribus diebus, librum Pontani *De Fortuna*, noviter impressum, quae ipse ad Consalvum magnum direxit: in quo aperte ostendit nihil valere ingenium neque prudentiam neque fortitudinem neque alias virtutes, ubi fortuna desit. Rome, de hac re, quotidie experimentum videmus.²⁶⁵

Machiavelli replied five days later by arguing that he was forced to experience the vagaries of fortune every single day of his life, and he too mentioned Pontano:

E conosco ogni dì, che gli è vero quello che voi dite, che scrive il Pontano; e quando la fortuna ci vuole cacciare, la ci mette innanzi o presente utilità o presente timore, o l'uno e l'altro insieme.²⁶⁶

Leaving aside the question whether or not Machiavelli's assertion could be taken as the evidence that he had actually read Pontano's *De fortuna*, it suffices here to lay stress on the fact that Pontano was certainly among the authors Machiavelli might have been acquainted with.

He was by all means one of the most successful writers between fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Italy, and all the more in the Renaissance Florence. The edition of his entire *opera* was completed by the Giunta publishing house by the early 1521, and it was entrusted to such learned editors as Giovanni Corsi and Antonio Francini.²⁶⁷ Giovanni Corsi, who personally met Pontano in Naples between 1501 and 1503 and obtained a manuscript copy of his *De prudentia* that he eventually edited in Florence, was also a member of the Orti Oricellari during the very first years of the Sixteenth century, and hence in touch with many figures who were

²⁶⁵ N. MACHIAVELLI, *Lettere*, 242 (F. Vettori to N. Machiavelli, 15 December 1514), cit., p. 479.

²⁶⁶ N. MACHIAVELLI, *Lettere*, 244 (N. Machiavelli to F. Vettori, 20 December 1514), cit., pp. 485.

²⁶⁷ See at least P. O. KRISTELLER, *Un uomo di Stato e umanista fiorentino: Giovanni Corsi*, in: *La Bibliofilia*, XXXVIII, (1936), pp. 242-257. See also P. MALANIMA, *Corsi, Giovanni*, in: *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, 29, pp. 567-570. F. BACCHELLI, *Francini, Antonio*, in: *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, 50, pp. 142-143.

very close to Machiavelli,²⁶⁸ such as Bernardo and Palla Rucellai, as well as Francesco Vettori.²⁶⁹ As Felix Gilbert's seminal study on the Orti Oricellari has shown, Pontano and his works were certainly among the most debated issues at the reunions held in the Rucellai's garden.²⁷⁰

In addition to these elements, another important clue to illuminate the relationship between Pontano and Machiavelli may come from the poet Michael Marullus, a member of Pontano's Academy and a close friend of the Humanist. Marullus was often in Florence during the last years of the Fifteenth century, and around 1496 he married Alessandra Scala, the daughter of Bartolomeo, former Chancellor of the Florentine Republic and closest friend of Bernardo Machiavelli. It is thus very likely that Scala and Bernardo, who regarded each other very highly, were both well aware of Pontano's work and used to discuss about it.²⁷¹

As for the treatise *De fortuna* more particularly, it was first published posthumously in Naples in 1512 and experienced a considerable degree of circulation up until the end of the Sixteenth century.²⁷²

Even more than the pages of Landino's *Comento* examined above, Pontano's *De fortuna* was designed to relay and make Aristotle's discussion on fortune more accessible to the general audience. The account he gave in his *De fortuna* resides

²⁶⁸ See P. CRINITO, *De honesta disciplina*, XI, XII, edited by C. Angeleri, Bocca, Roma, 1955, p. 256: «Numquam videor magis in otio et honestis litteris versari quam eo tempore, quo Joanne Corseo et Lacetio Nigro de optimis studiis atque omni antiquitate disseritur. [...] Itaque nuper in Hortis Oricellariis inter alia complura quaesitum est de Sedigito Volcatio deque eius iudicio, quod ab eo factum est de ingenio et ordine decem Comitorum, qui apud Latinos in pretio habitati sunt [...]».

²⁶⁹ Palla Rucellai and Francesco Vettori were the dedicatees of two translations of Plutarch that Corsi edited between 1512 and 1513 (P. O. KRISTELLER, *Un uomo di Stato*, cit., pp. 249-250).

²⁷⁰ F. GILBERT, *Bernardo Rucellai and the Orti Oricellari. A Study on the Origin of Modern Political Thought*, in «Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes», XII, (1949), pp. 101-131 showed that «after Ficino's death, his role as intellectual oracle and guide to the leading Florentine citizens fell to the Neapolitan humanist and statesman, Giovanni Pontano, and Rucellai shared wholeheartedly this admiration for Pontano» (p. 105). On Pontano as a topic of debate in the Orti Oricellari see also F. BACCHELLI, *Appunti sulle concezioni religiose di Giovanni Pontano, Antonio Galateo, Mario Equicola e Pier Andrea da Verrazzano*, in *Il pensiero simbolico nella prima età moderna*, edited by A. Angelini-P. Caye, Olschki, Firenze, 2007, pp. 21-57: 32-33, n. 18.

²⁷¹ One of Scala-Machiavelli discussions is famously reported by B. SCALA, *Dialogue on Laws and Legal Judgments*, (ed.) D. Marsh, in: ID., *Essays and Dialogues*, (ed.) R. N. Watkins, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (MA), 2008, The I Tatti Renaissance Library, pp. 158-231. On the relationship between Marullus and the Scala family, see C. KIDWELL, *Marullus: Soldier Poet of the Renaissance*, Duckworth, London, 1989, pp. 178-185.

²⁷² The *editio princeps* was IOANNIS IOVIANI PONTANI, *De fortuna*, edited by P. Summonte, Sigismondo Mayr, Napoli, 1512 (see *Nota al testo*, in: G. PONTANO, *La Fortuna*, edited by F. Tateo, La Scuola di Pitagora, Napoli, 2012, p. 61).

almost exclusively upon those sections of the *Physics*, the *Magna Moralia* and the *Eudemian Ethics* where Aristotle had dealt with the problem of chance and fortune.²⁷³

Not surprisingly, one of the issues on which Pontano focused more systematically is the distinction between chance and fortune, which relays Aristotle's argument given in book 2 of the *Physics*. That distinction plays actually a crucial role in Pontano's *De fortuna*. The issue is addressed and analyzed in many different places within the work, and the author set out to clarify it several times. In the central part of the first book, Pontano even devoted an entire chapter to explaining the difference between chance and fortune. Unsurprisingly, the title of the chapter is «Fortunam in iis solum versari quae ad hominem spectent». He argued:

Quo fit ut, quod in iis contingerit, de quibus homines ipsi et consultant et decernunt, illud ad fortunam referatur, quae in aliis ad casum.²⁷⁴

Aristotle's double account of fortune could not be explained more clearly than so. As a matter of fact, the presence of Aristotle's distinction between chance and fortune in the pages of such a successful text as Pontano's *De fortuna* is another evidence of how pervasively Aristotle's thought affected fifteenth- and sixteenth-century discussions on that topic. It is not a coincidence that the central passages of Pontano's chapter draw upon Aristotle's aforementioned argument that only men can be considered lucky in a proper sense (*Physics*, II, 5):

Plane tenes, exque iis colligere etiam potes, fortunatas nec pecudes, nec coetera animalia inanimaliaque recte dici posse, cum humanae tantum res sub fortuna laborent, ipsique homines uni de dubiis consulent et ad finem sibi propositum contendant. Quocirca, si quando secula quoque fortunata

²⁷³ See F. TATEO, *Introduzione*, in G. PONTANO, *La Fortuna*, cit., pp. 17-60. On the recovery and the circulation of the *Eudemian Ethics* and the *Magna Moralia* in Renaissance Italy, see L. BIANCHI, *Continuity and Change in Aristotelian Tradition*, in *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Philosophy*, edited by J. Hankins, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2007, pp. 49-71: 51; also D. A. LINES, *Humanistic and Scholastic ethics*, in *Ivi*, pp. 304-318: 307.

²⁷⁴ G. PONTANO, *La Fortuna*, cit., p. 120.

dicimus, ad homines ac principes, qui sub ea tempora fortuna bene usi fuerint, referimus.²⁷⁵

Whether or not Pontano's treatise had a direct role in the shaping of Machiavelli's own notion of *fortuna*, what really matters is that the account provided there relayed the dominant view of fortune held at that time. In other words, Pontano's *De fortuna* brings out the concept of fortune that was the most common in Machiavelli's cultural setting.

Even if it did not affect Machiavelli's conception directly, the *De fortuna* still proves of the highest importance for it stands as a striking example of how fortune was thought of in Machiavelli's own context.

The notion of fortune that was endorsed by all fifteenth-century authors had roots in Aristotle's philosophy, and more particularly in his physical and ethical thought. At the very basis of Aristotle's conception there was the distinction between two aspects of fortune, the one connected to events happening in the natural world, the other one concerning all those episodes that spring from human actions.

This view was so well-known and commonly accepted among humanist authors that it became a real common place. Therefore, in Machiavelli's distinction between «fortuna in universali» and «fortuna in particulari», sixteenth-century readers of the *Prince* could certainly catch the allusion to a theory they were very much familiar with. Even if the Florentine did not use the traditional Aristotelian vocabulary, the description he gave and the particular examples provided show his reliance on the Greek philosopher quite clearly.

MACHIAVELLI'S ANTHROPOLOGY. THE PROBLEM OF THE «SECOND NATURE»

I. In the second part of chapter 25 of the *Prince*, Machiavelli's attention shifts towards the description of the «fortuna in particulari». In this section the

²⁷⁵ G. PONTANO, *La Fortuna*, cit., p. 122.

Florentine focuses on the examination of particular actions made by single individuals, taken both from the ancient and the recent history. This analysis enables the author (and his readers, too) to get acquainted with the deeds and the particular behaviors of historical characters, and thus to know how some historical figures re-acted in response to some specific circumstances. The aim of the inquiry is to judge whether the conduct a given personage performed in a given situation is worthy to be imitated, and, if it is, how to put such an imitation into practice. To say it in Machiavelli's words, this section of the chapter aims to show how good some historical characters have been in harmonize their conduct with the particular contingencies they happened to face in their life.

Accordingly, it is in this very part of the chapter that Machiavelli formulates his famous theory of the adaptation («riscontro»), which is also presented in the *Ghiribizzi* and in book 3 of his *Discorsi* (chap. 9). He argued:

Ma, restringendomi più a' particolari, dico come si vede oggi questo principe felicitare e domani ruinare, senza averli veduto mutare natura o qualità alcuna. [...] Credo ancora che sia felice quello che riscontra el modo del procedere suo con le qualità de' tempi, e similmente sia infelice quello che con il procedere suo si discordano e' tempi.²⁷⁶

Machiavelli dealt with the problem of «adapting the way of proceeding to the nature of the times» in many of his writings, so that the issue must be considered as an essential component of his political discourse.²⁷⁷ While giving his advices to both current and prospective rulers, he could not help noticing that men usually find a great deal of difficulties in shifting their conduct according to the

²⁷⁶ N. MACHIAVELLI, *Il Principe*, XXV, cit., pp. 304-305.

²⁷⁷ Among the many occurrences, see at least: N. MACHIAVELLI, *Parole da dirle sopra la provvisione del danaio, fatto un po' di proemio e di scusa*, in ID., *Scritti politici minori*, cit., p. 452: «perchè io vi dico che la fortuna non muta sentenza dove non si muta ordine, nè e' cieli vogliono o possono sostenere una cosa che voglia ruinare ad ogni modo»; ID., *Discorsi*, III, 9, cit., II, p. 610: «Quinci nasce che una repubblica ha maggiore vita e ha più lungamente buona fortuna che uno principato, perchè la può meglio accomodarsi alla diversità de' temporali, per la diversità de' cittadini che sono in quella, che non può uno principe»; ID., *De Fortuna Capitulum*, ll. 115-117, cit., p. 84: «Però, se questo si comprende e nota, / sarebbe un sempre felice e beato / chi potessi saltar di rota in rota»; ID., *Lettere*, 247 (N. Machiavelli a F. Vettori, 31 gennaio 1515), cit., pp. 489-490: «Questo modo di procedere, se a qualcuno pare sia vituperoso, a me pare laudabile, perchè noi imitiamo la natura, che è varia; e chi imita quella non può essere ripreso».

requirements of the times. The main obstacle to this accomplishment is the very nature of men, which is basically fixed and not able to adapt itself to the variations of circumstances.

Né si truova omo sí prudente che sappi accomodare a questo [*scil.* to the changing of way of proceeding], sí perché non si può deviare da quello a che la natura l'inclina, sí *etiam* perché, avendo sempre uno prosperato camminando per una via, non si può persuadere partirsi da quella; e però lo omo rispettivo, quando elli è tempo di venire allo impeto, non lo sa fare, donde rovina, ché, se si mutassi di natura con li tempi e con le cose, non si muterebbe fortuna.²⁷⁸

Machiavelli's view of human nature as incapable of changing is not at all a topic that has been overlooked by the scholarship. However, it has been usually taken as nothing but a deep belief which owed to direct experience and personal encounters more than to anything else. There is no doubt, of course, that Machiavelli's life experiences – both as a Secretary of the Florentine republic and as a private man – must have certainly contributed in corroborating this belief. However, his idea that men's nature can hardly change has a well earlier origin, for it dates back to his youth, when the Florentine was exposed for the first time to Aristotle's account of moral virtues. While reading through the pages of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, and even more through Donato Acciaiuoli's commentary on that work, he could find this view expressed in a very rigorous and detailed form. The lesson of Aristotle was in fact what first shaped Machiavelli's belief on human nature. Later on, all the experiences he had at the courts of those European leaders he was introduced to (like Cesare Borgia, the emperor Maximilian, the king of France, pope Julius II) proved to be nothing but the confirmation that what he had learn from Aristotle was true.

According to these premises, I will try to show that Machiavelli's idea of human nature as unchanging originated in Aristotle's account of moral virtues given in the second book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Therein, the Philosopher

²⁷⁸ N. MACHIAVELLI, *Il Principe*, XXV, cit., pp. 306-307.

claimed that moral virtues spring from habit, and that this habit leads to the emergence of a second nature in the human being. In other words, the more we reiterate a given behavior, the harder will be to cease appealing to it. Second nature is in fact the name given by Aristotle to that set of dispositions (*habitus*) which arose from the habit (*consuetudo*) and makes our behaviors rigid and unchanging.

This doctrine should be considered as a basic tenet within Aristotle's anthropological thought, and Machiavelli was clearly residing upon it while unfolding his own view of human nature.

In the final part of the paragraph, I will show that the Aristotelian theory of the second nature was quite common in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, especially among practitioners of politics and practical-minded authors who found in Aristotle's doctrine a compelling explanation for the irresolute or eccentric conduct of their rulers.

To begin with, it must be noticed that Machiavelli's concern for the problem of fixity in human nature was greater than usually assumed. His remarks on that issue spread all throughout his works, and they are not limited only to those places where he dealt with the question of fortune. In fact, the sheer number of references to this topic shows that Machiavelli's view of human nature as unchanging was a deeply-rooted belief which he must have endorsed since his very youth. In addition to the few occurrences traditionally mentioned by scholars, one could quote some passages from book 3 of the *Discorsi* (chap. 22). In this chapter, Machiavelli gave a concrete historical example in order to explain how it is possible that two persons who proceed differently can arrive at the same result.²⁷⁹ Discussing about two great generals in the Roman history – Manlius Torquatus and Valerius Corvinus – Machiavelli argued:

E' furno in Roma in uno medesimo tempo due capitani eccellenti, Manlio Torquato e Valerio Corvino, i quali di pari virtù, di pari trionfi e gloria vissono in Roma; e ciascuno di loro, in quanto si apparteneva al nimico, con

²⁷⁹ The same claim will be presented in all the other places within Machiavelli's *opera* which address the issue of fortune more systematically, i.e. his 1506 *Ghiribizzi a Giovan Battista Soderini*, chapter 25 of the *Prince*, and chapter 9 in book 3 of the *Discorsi*.

pari virtù l'acquistarono, ma quanto si apparteneva agli eserciti e agli intrattenimenti de' soldati, diversissimamente procederono. Perché Manlio con ogni generazione di severità, senza intermettere a' suoi soldati o fatica o pena, gli comandava; Valerio, dall'altra parte, con ogni modo e termine umano, e pieno di una familiare domestichezza, gl'intratteneva. [...] Nondimeno, in tanta diversità di procedere, ciascuno fece il medesimo frutto e contro a' nimici, e in favore della republica e suo.²⁸⁰

After outlining the very different ways of proceeding put forward by the two Roman captains, Machiavelli went on to explain the reason why Manlius used to be so severe with his soldiers. He claimed:

Debbesi dunque credere che Manlio fusse costretto procedere sí rigidamente dagli straordinari suoi imperii, *a' quali lo inclinava la sua natura*; [...] Sí che Manlio fu uno di quelli che con l'asprezza de' suoi imperii ritenne la disciplina militare in Roma, *costretto prima dalla natura sua*, dipoi dal desiderio aveva si osservasse quello che il suo naturale appetito gli aveva fatto ordinare.²⁸¹

A few pages later, in chapter 25, Machiavelli dealt with one of the features that made Rome so great, namely the poverty of its citizens. He argued that such a condition prevailed there for at least four hundred years without causing any trouble. The reason was that the path to honors and preferment was close to none. Therefore, it could happen quite often that poor people came to occupy the most prestigious positions in the public life, and then, on returning to private life, they became more humble and frugal than before. Machiavelli was so impressed by this fact that he could not help commenting in the following way: «pare impossibile che uno medesimo animo patisca tale mutazione».²⁸²

The reason why human nature can hardly change according to the requirements of times lays, for Machiavelli, in the habit. A long reiteration of the same conduct makes us more and more incapable of putting into practice other ways of

²⁸⁰ N. MACHIAVELLI, *Discorsi*, III, 22, cit., II, pp. 673-674.

²⁸¹ N. MACHIAVELLI, *Discorsi*, III, 22, cit., II, pp. 677-678 (my *emphasis*).

²⁸² N. MACHIAVELLI, *Discorsi*, III, 25, cit., II, p. 692.

proceeding. In other words, the more we repeat the same behavior, the less flexible in behaving we become. Machiavelli's endorsement of this view appears very clearly in his portrait of Piero Soderini given in book 3 of the *Discorsi*:

Piero Soderini, altre volte preallegato, procedeva in tutte le cose sue con umanità e pazienza. Prosperò egli e la sua patria mentre che i tempi furono conformi al modo del procedere suo; ma come e' vennero dopo i tempi dove e' bisognava rompere la pazienza e la umiltà, non lo seppe fare, tale che insieme con la sua patria rovinò.²⁸³

Although most of critics have failed to acknowledge this fact, Machiavelli's idea that men can hardly behave in contrast to their habits has roots in Aristotle's treatment of moral virtues given in book 2 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. For Aristotle, none of the moral virtues (such as the courage, the mildness, the magnanimity) arises in us by nature. Men cannot be said to be brave or mild-mannered by nature, for moral virtues manifest themselves only in action. By nature we are given only the capacity to receive these virtues. In fact, moral virtues arise out of habit, for they prove to be nothing but the result of our long-lasting practice of them.²⁸⁴ Only after many courageous actions can someone become brave, since moral virtues require time until they lead to the emergence of a stable state of character in the individual.

Virtue, then, being of two kinds, intellectual and moral, intellectual virtue in the main owes both its birth and its growth to teaching (for which reason it requires experience and time), while *moral virtue comes about as a result of habit*, whence also its name *ethike* is one that is formed by a slight variation from the word *ethos* (habit). From this is also plain that none of the moral virtues arises in us by nature; for nothing that exists by nature can form a habit contrary to its nature. [...] Thus, in one word, *states of character arise out of like activities*. This is why the activities we exhibit must be of a certain kind; it is because the states of character

²⁸³ N. MACHIAVELLI, *Discorsi*, III, 9, cit., II, p. 610.

²⁸⁴ J. HAMESSE, *Les Auctoritates Aristotelis*, 12 (26), cit., p. 234: «Ex actibus multum iteratis fit habitus».

correspond to the differences between these. *It makes no small difference, then, whether we form habits of one kind or of another from our very youth; it makes a very great difference, or rather all the difference.*²⁸⁵

Here the same passages in John Argyropoulos' translation:

Cum autem virtus sit duplex, intellectiva inquam atque moralis, intellectiva quidem ex doctrina plurimum et generationem habet et incrementum. Quapropter experientia indiget temporeque. Moralis autem ex consuetudine comparatur, idcirco e nomen habuit tale. Ex quo patet nullam fieri virtutem morum in nobis natura. Nihil enim earum quae sunt natura aliter assuescit. [...] Atque ut uno verbo totam sententiam comprehendam, omnes habitus ex operationibus similibus efficiuntur ac oriuntur. Quapropter tales operations reddamus oportet, quales habitus acquirere volumus, ob ipsarum namquam differentias tales ac tales habitus ipsi succedunt atque secuntur. Non igitur parum sed plurimum, quin potius totum refert homines hoc an illo modo statim adolescentia consuescant.²⁸⁶

Plainly, what Aristotle is claiming is that our states of character are the result of a reiterated activity (the habit). By appealing to the same kind of behavior for many times, we get used to it so that it becomes an essential part of our personality.²⁸⁷

For Aristotle, moral virtues have the aspect of a second nature because as time passes by they end up overlapping the dispositions we have acquired by birth (i.e. our "first" nature). This point, which was explicitly addressed by Aristotle, was even more clearly relayed by the later commentary tradition. The sentence «consuetudo est altera natura» became a real way of saying during the Middle

²⁸⁵ ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics*, II, 1, 1103a 14-1103b 25, cit., II, pp. 1742-1743, with slight variations (my *emphasis*).

²⁸⁶ ARISTOTELIS *Ethicorum ad Nicomachum*, cit., pp. 37-39. J. HAMESSE, *Les Auctoritates Aristotelis*, 12 (37), cit., p. 235: «Virtus est habitus, quia habentem se perficit et opus ejus laudabile reddit».

²⁸⁷ ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics*, II, 2, 1104b 1-3, cit., II, p. 1744: «for by being habituated to despise things that are terrible and to stand our ground against them we become brave, and it is when we have become so that we shall be most able to stand our ground against them».

Ages, and it occurred no less than four times in the pages of the collections of *Auctoritates Aristotelis* that were so successful up until the end of the Sixteenth century.²⁸⁸ In addition to this very famous sentence, the *Auctoritates* provided two more extracts designed to explain this very aspect of Aristotle's moral thought, respectively: «Difficile est resistere consuetudini, quia assimilatur naturae, facilius tamen est transmutare consuetudinem quam naturam»;²⁸⁹ and: «Quod consuetum est, velut innatum est, quia consuetudo est similis naturae».²⁹⁰

Furthermore, as far as the commentary literature on Aristotle's ethics is concerned, it is worth-noticing that one of the works which paid the greatest deal of attention to Aristotle's account of moral virtues was Donato Acciaiuoli's commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Acciaiuoli devoted several pages to the explanation of such Aristotelian concepts as *habitus* and *consuetudo*. The passage below may give an example of how significant was his contribution to both relay and clarify some key-points of Aristotle's doctrine:

Deinde affert [*scil.* Aristotle] modum quo generatur moralis virtus et in quo differ ab intellectiva. Et dicit quod *ea generatur ex consuetudine* unde etiam habuit nomen, quod ad verbum graecum referendum est, quia mos et consuetudo latine non videtur consonare ut *ithos* et *ethos* apud graecos, quasi dicat moralis virtus fit ex consuetudine, sed etiam nomen indicat quia dicitur quasi consuetudinis virtus apud graecos. [...] Dicit enim quod in iis quae insunt nobis natura prius habemus potentias operandi, deinde operamur ut exemplo sensuum patet: prius habemus vim videndi, postea videmus. *In virtutibus moralis fit econtra: prius operamur et per consuetudinem operandi acquirimus habitum.* [...] Sed generatur virtus ex operationibus frequentibus.²⁹¹

In a nutshell, the idea expressed by Aristotle is that once a given state of character (*habitus*) has become steady through the habit (*consuetudo*), it is very hard to get rid of it and to behave differently. It is precisely this idea that

²⁸⁸ J. HAMESSE, *Les Auctoritates Aristotelis*, 2 (48), p. 144; 7 (64), p. 200; 12 (125), p. 241; 19 (24), p. 272.

²⁸⁹ J. HAMESSE, *Les Auctoritates Aristotelis*, 12 (124), p. 241.

²⁹⁰ J. HAMESSE, *Les Auctoritates Aristotelis*, 16 (23), p. 265.

²⁹¹ DONATI ACCIAIOLI FLORENTINI *Expositio super libros Ethicorum*, cit., pp. 82-85.

underlays Machiavelli's claim that «men cannot deviate from that toward which their nature inclines them».²⁹² Plainly, the nature Machiavelli referred to (in the *Prince* as well as in all the other places where he dealt with the problem of men's fixity in behaviors) has its roots in Aristotle's notion of «second nature».

Although the very expression of “second nature” is not to be found in any of Machiavelli's writings, the language he made use of while discussing about men's inability to change clearly betrays the Aristotelian origin of that issue. In the first book of the *Discorsi*, for instance, Machiavelli explained that a people used to be corrupt will not be able to live in a republic, since corruption can be dealt only with unusual and very violent remedies that are incompatible with a free government. Only the virtue of a great leader can remove corruption for a while; then, as soon as the leader died, Machiavelli went on, the people «ritorna nel suo pristino *abito*», because «non può essere uno uomo di tanta vita che 'l tempo basti a avvezzare bene una città lungo tempo male avvezza».²⁹³ The «*abito*» Machiavelli explicitly talked about is not simply a synonym of “custom”, as implied by most editors, but the Vernacular translation of the Latin word *habitus*.²⁹⁴ In a way that is totally consistent with Aristotle's account of moral virtues, Machiavelli used the term «*abito*» to mean a state of character arisen from habit (a concept that he rendered through the verb «avvezzare»). Once again, Machiavelli's technical terminology was mistaken for ordinary vocabulary.

As far as the notion of “second nature” is concerned, a relevant passage occurs in *Discorsi*, I, 40. Commenting on the creation of the Decemvirate in Rome, Machiavelli dwelled on the figure of Appius Claudius, one of its most crafty and ambitious members. During Appius' appointment, the whole authority of the Decemvirate came to be centered in his hands, due to the favor in which he was held by the common people. This was actually a much unexpected fact, having Appius been always regarded as a cruel persecutor of the people. In describing Appius' changing in attitude, Machiavelli argued as follows:

²⁹² N. MACHIAVELLI, *The Prince*, 25, cit., p. 118 (with slight variations).

²⁹³ N. MACHIAVELLI, *Discorsi*, I, 17, cit., I, p. 111 (my *emphasis*).

²⁹⁴ In his 2001 edition of Machiavelli's *Discorsi*, Bausi considered the term *abito* simply as a synonym of «condizione» (N. MACHIAVELLI, *Discorsi*, I, 17, cit., I, p. 111, n. 34).

Appresso ad Appio si ridusse tutta l'autorità degli altri suoi compagni, per i favori che gli faceva la plebe; perché egli s'era fatto in modo popolare con le dimostrazioni, che pareva maraviglia ch'egli avesse preso sí presto *una nuova natura* e uno nuovo ingegno, essendo stato tenuto, innanzi a questo tempo, uno crudele persecutore della plebe.²⁹⁵

As we have seen, for Aristotle habit leads to the emergence of a second nature forcing men to behave constantly. In fact, the case of Appius Claudius seems to contradict this opinion, since he was able to change his character in a sudden and to act in opposition to his nature. Machiavelli's reference to the "new nature" («una nuova natura») should be taken as a clear allusion to the set of moral dispositions that, in Aristotle, were told to shape our state of character. What really struck Appius' contemporaries (and Machiavelli, too) was that his changing was so quick and radical that one might think Appius was not even touched by the influence of habit.

Furthermore, Machiavelli's utilization of such terms as «abito» or «nuova natura» is not the only evidence of his endorsement of Aristotle's anthropology. The Florentine was also aware of the way how the habit (*consuetudo*) takes shape in the individual. Following Aristotle, he believed this shaping to be mostly beholden to education and laws.

Aristotle made this point in the last book of his *Nicomachean Ethics*, where he claimed:

At enim difficile est ut rectam educationem ad virtutem quispiam consequatur nisi sub talibus fuerit legibus enutritus. Modeste nanque vivere continenterque plerique hominum, prefertum iuvenibus, non est iocundum. *Quapropter educationem ac exercitia a legibus proficisci oportet.* Non enim dolorem afferrent *si fuerit consueta.* Fortasse autem non sufficit homines cum sunt iuvenes rectam educationem et curam esse adeptos. Sed cum oporteat viros quoque factos *exercere ipsa ac assuescere.* Circa haec etiam et omnino circa omnem vitam legibus est

²⁹⁵ N. MACHIAVELLI, *Discorsi*, I, 40, cit., I, p. 200 (my *emphasis*).

*opus. Plerique nanque necessitati magis quam rationi et penis quam honestati parent.*²⁹⁶

As for the issue of laws more specifically, Aristotle argued that one of their most significant goals is to induce habit in the citizens. By observing laws, citizens will acquire a way of behaving that they will tend to reproduce “automatically” in their lives. In other words, law owes much of its strength to the habit. This point is addressed by Aristotle in book 2 of his *Politics*, where he claimed that laws should not be changed when citizens will not gain so much by the change as they will lose by the habit of disobedience. Below the passage in Leonardo Bruni’s widespread edition:

Sed incidit haec [*scil.* the topic Aristotle was previously discussing] in aliam quaestionem et considerationem aliam: utrum damnosum sit vel utile civitatibus leges patrias mutare, si sit alia melior. [...] Cum utilitatis quidem accessio parva sit, assuescere vero faciliter leges mutare improbandum. Constat vero errata quaedam esse toleranda et legum latorum et magistratuum. Non enim tantum proderit qui corrigere perget, quantum nocebit assuefactio superioribus non perendi. Mendax est de artibus exemplum. Neque enim simile est mutare artem atque legem. *Namque lex nullam viam habet quo sibi stetur nisi ex more, mos autem non fit nisi temporis longitudine.* Quare faciliter mutare leges ex presentibus in alias novas, *infirmitatem facere est vim legis.*²⁹⁷

²⁹⁶ ARISTOTELIS *Ethicorum ad Nicomachum*, cit., p. 226 (my *emphasis*), corresponding to ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics*, X, 9, 1179b 31-1180a 5, cit., II, p. 1864: «But it is difficult to get from youth up a right training for virtue if one has not been brought up under right laws; for to live temperately and hardily is not pleasant to most people, especially when they are young. For this reason their nurture and occupations should be fixed by law; for they will not be painful when they have been come customary. But it is surely not enough that when they are young they should get the right nurture and attention; since they must, even when they are grown up, practice and be habituated to them, we shall need laws for this as well, and generally speaking to cover the whole life; for most people obey necessity rather than argument, and punishments rather than the sense of what is noble» (with slight variations).

²⁹⁷ ARISTOTELIS STAGIRITAE *Politicorum libri octo Leonardo Aretino interprete*, apud Eucharium Silber, Romae, 1492, pp. 283-284 (my *emphasis*), corresponding to ARISTOTLE, *Politics*, II, 8, 1268b 25-1269a 24, cit., II, pp. 2013-2014: «This question involves another. It has been doubted whether it is or is not expedient to make any changes in the laws of a country, even if another law be better. [...] For the habit of lightly changing the laws is an evil, and, when the advantage is small, some errors of both lawgivers and rulers had better be left; the citizen will not gain so much

The same point is also addressed by Donato Acciaiuoli in his commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics*:

Quod virtus generatur a consuetudine testimonio legum latorum, qui cupiendo cives suos bonos efficere non relinquunt hoc nature; sed condunt leges quibus ponunt premia bonis, penas vero malis ad hoc *ut cives se exerceant in bonis operationibus et sic acquirant bonos habitus* idest virtutes et fiant boni, et hoc est propositum omnium qui vere sunt latores legum et vere legis.²⁹⁸

To sum up the question, there are in Aristotle two ways through which men can assimilate habit: these are education and laws. Both of them play the lion share in shaping our states of character, since they force us to put the same behavior into practice repeatedly. If handled appropriately, education and laws turn out to be two very remarkable resources for the state, for they can affect the character and habits of citizens very heavily.²⁹⁹

Machiavelli was certainly acquainted with Aristotle's treatment of education and law, since he too referred to these concepts as the ways through which habit settles on human beings.

As far as laws are concerned, Machiavelli illustrated their influence in the first book of his *Discorsi*:

Però si dice che la fame e la povertà fa gli uomini industriosi, e le leggi gli fanno buoni. E dove una cosa per se medesima senza la legge opera bene, non è necessaria la legge; ma quando quella buona consuetudine manca, è subito la legge necessaria.³⁰⁰

by making the change as he will lose by the habit of disobedience. The analogy of the arts is false; a change in a law is a very different thing from a change in an art. For the law has no power to command obedience except that of habit, which can only be given by time, so that a readiness to change from old to new laws enfeebles the power of law».

²⁹⁸ DONATI ACCIAIOLI FLORENTINI *Expositio super libros Ethicorum*, cit., pp. 83-84 (my *emphasis*). The passage on which Acciaiuoli comments is *Eth. Nic.*, II, 1, 1103a 15-1103b25.

²⁹⁹ See J. HAMESSE, *Les Auctoritates Aristotelis*, 15 (108), cit., p. 260: «Non est facile civitatem permanere sine legibus et consuetudinibus compositam».

³⁰⁰ N. MACHIAVELLI, *Discorsi*, I, 3, cit., I, pp. 31-32.

Following Aristotle, the Florentine believed the habit to spring from laws. The entire discussion developed in this chapter is carried out under the aegis of «those who reason on the civil life», to whom Machiavelli referred in the very first line. Although most of critics have been reluctant to see in this sentence more than a vague and meaningless allusion, I think that Machiavelli's statement should be taken as a clear reference to Aristotle's political theory and to the later commentary tradition stemming from it.

Turning now to the issue of education, Machiavelli's remarks on that concept confirm his consistency with Aristotle's doctrine. One could quote a sheer number of passages where the Florentine focused on the importance of education in building the character of both peoples and single individuals. In book 3 of the *Discorsi*, for instance, he claimed the following with regards to the nature of men in general:

Vero è che le sono le opere loro ora in questa provincia più virtuose che in quella, e in quella più che in questa, secondo la forma della educazione nella quale quegli popoli hanno preso il modo del vivere loro.³⁰¹

Unsurprisingly, the title given by Machiavelli to the chapter is: «Che gli uomini, che nascono in una provincia, osservino per tutti i tempi quasi quella medesima natura».

The last extract I will take into account is a passage from *Discorsi*, III, 46. Therein, Machiavelli wondered how the characteristics of families come to be perpetuated. The explanation he provided clearly resided upon Aristotle's account of moral virtues presented in book 2 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*:

E' pare non solamente che l'una città dall'altra abbia certi modi e istituti diversi, e procrei uomini o più duri o più effeminati; ma nella medesima città si vede tale differenza essere nelle famiglie l'una dall'altra. Il che si riscontra essere vero in ogni città; e nella città di Roma se ne leggono assai esempi, perché e' si vede i Mallii essere stati duri e ostinati, i Publicoli

³⁰¹ N. MACHIAVELLI, *Discorsi*, III, 43, cit., II, pp. 768-769.

uomini benigni ed amatori del popolo, gli Appii ambiziosi e nimici della Plebe, e così molte altre famiglie avere avute ciascuna le qualità sua spartite dall'altre. Le quali cose non possono nascere solamente dal sangue, perché coviene che varii mediante la diversità de' matrimoni; ma è *necessario venga dalla diversa educazione* che ha l'una famiglia dall'altra. Perché gl'importa assai che un giovinetto da' teneri anni cominci a sentire dire bene o male d'una cosa, perché *conviene di necessità ne faccia impressione, e da quella poi regoli il modo del procedere in tutti i tempi della sua vita.*³⁰²

The idea expressed by Machiavelli at the ending of the passage is the same we can find in those places of his *opera* which he devoted to the discussion of fortune, such as the *Ghiribizzi*, *Prince* 25, and *Discorsi*, III, 9. That is, the state of character we acquired from childhood and made stronger through the habit will influence our way of proceeding forever.

Unsurprisingly, Machiavelli's last sentence («Perché gl'importa assai che un giovinetto da' teneri anni cominci a sentire dire bene o male d'una cosa: perché conviene di necessità ne faccia impressione, e da quella poi regoli il modo del procedere in tutti i tempi della sua vita») seems to be considerably close to Aristotle's argument given in *Nicomachean Ethics* II, 1 and later translated by John Argyropoulos: «Non igitur parum sed plurimum, quin potius totum refert homines hoc an illo modo statim adolescentia consuescant».³⁰³

If such figures as Fabius Maximus, Julius II, and Piero Soderini failed to adapt themselves to the nature of times it was precisely because their way of behaving had become fixed due to the habit. The education they received, along with the reiteration of the same conduct over the time, made them unable to put different resolutions into practice.

This idea, as we have seen, must be traced back to Aristotle's notion of "second nature" as the set of dispositions that we get used of in our life and make our way of proceeding constant and predictable.

³⁰² N. MACHIAVELLI, *Discorsi*, III, 46, cit., II, pp. 779-780 (my *emphasis*).

³⁰³ ARISTOTELIS *Ethicorum ad Nicomachum*, cit., p. 39.

II. Machiavelli's endorsement of Aristotle's anthropological conception should not surprise that much. His view of human nature as unchanging was quite common among Medieval and Renaissance authors, especially among those whose writings were more involved in practical and political questions.

As it is known, political literature began from the Thirteenth century to rely to a great extent on Aristotle as a central, if not exclusive, point of reference. From that moment, all the most influential writings belonging to the political genre could not but being massively informed by the main tenets of Aristotle's practical philosophy. The main outcome of such enduring influence on Medieval and Renaissance thinkers was the impressive dissemination of themes and ideas directly connected to Aristotle's political theory.

Among them, his thoughts on human nature occupied of course a very remarkable position.

In the following paragraphs I will focus on three eminent authors, from both the Middle Ages (Brunetto Latini and Giles of Rome) and the Renaissance time (Matteo Palmieri) in order to show how pervasively was their political thought influenced by the Aristotelian notion of "second nature" that will be later adopted by Machiavelli.

II.1. Brunetto Latini.

In Brunetto Latini's *Tresor*, the Aristotelian motif of "second nature" is addressed repeatedly. The sentence «Difficile est resistere consuetudini, quia assimilatur naturae, facilius tamen est transmutare consuetudinem quam naturam», given in the collections of Aristotle's excerpts,³⁰⁴ was translated literally in the Vernacular version of Brunetto's work: «Mutare l'usanza è più leggiera cosa che mutare natura; forte cosa è però mutare usanza, perché l'usanza è simile alla natura».³⁰⁵

Brunetto's interest in Aristotle's notion of "second nature" is even more evident in the second part of book 2, devoted to the examination of virtues and

³⁰⁴ J. HAMESSE, *Les Auctoritates Aristotelis*, 12 (124), cit., p. 241.

³⁰⁵ B. LATINI, *Il Tesoro*, II, 1, 38, cit., III, p. 124. Here the same passage in the original French version: «Remuer le mors et les us est plus legiere chose qu[e] remuer nature, et neporquant remuer usaige est grief chose por ce que il est semblables a nature» (B. LATINI, *Tresor*, II, 40, cit., p. 404).

vices. Discussing about perseverance («costanza»), Brunetto referred the opinion of Juvenal about people who persist in doing evil actions: «Quum scelus admittunt, superest constantia: quid fas / atque nefas, tandem incipiunt sentire peractis / criminibus; tamen ad mores natura recurrit / damnatos» (*Sat. XIII*, 237-240). Brunetto's rendering of Juvenal's verses shows the extent of his debt to Aristotle's anthropological doctrine. He translated in the following way:

La natura delli cattivi, è tuttavia varia e mobile: quando elli misfanno, ancora hanno fermezza tanto che conoscono bene e male. E quando elli hanno fatte le cattive azioni, *natura sì si ficca ne' costumi dannati*, e non se ne sanno rimutare.³⁰⁶

Brunetto did not follow Juvenal's argument that the nature of evil men tends to "turn back" to evil behaviors. Rather, he meant to emphasize that their nature is "made fixed" by the reiteration of evil behaviors. The verb he made use of (*ficcarsi*) is intended to describe a different action from the one expressed by Juvenal through the verb *recurrere*. Clearly, Brunetto's rendering is well more consistent with Aristotle's view for it stresses on the role of habit in building constant and "no-more-changeable" behaviors. More precisely, the term *ficcarsi* seems to be particularly appropriate insofar as it expresses a twofold action. On the one hand, it means the kind of action expressed by the Italian verb "ficcarsi" (to dive under); on the other hand, it is also used as a synonym of the Italian "fissarsi" (to stick to). Aristotle's idea that habit influences and makes our nature unchangeable could not be described better than Brunetto did.³⁰⁷ The Florentine notary resided upon the opinion of Juvenal but, at the same time, he altered the original statement by introducing an element derived from Aristotle's philosophy.

³⁰⁶ B. LATINI, *Il Tesoro*, II, 2, 40, cit., III, pp. 371-372 (my *emphasis*).

³⁰⁷ The passage in Brunetto's original French version follows the Vernacular translation literally. See B. LATINI, *Tresor*, II, 88, cit., p. 538: «La nature des mauvais est tozjors vaire et muable; quant il mesfont, encores ont il fermeté tante que il il comencent a conoistre bien et mal; et quant il ont fait les crimes, *nature se fiche es mors damnés* et ne s'en set remuer» (my *emphasis*).

In addition to the passages taken into exam, many others could be mentioned as an evidence of how heavily was Brunetto's work indebted to Aristotle's anthropological conception.³⁰⁸

II.2. Giles of Rome.

We shall now turn to an author who should not be neglected while dealing with Machiavelli's cultural background and influences. Machiavelli's acquaintance with the political writings by Giles of Rome, and with his *De regimine principum* more specifically, is a fact which has never been questioned by the scholarship.³⁰⁹ The familiarity Machiavelli must have had with Giles' treatise is testified by a passage from book 1 of the *De regimine* which seems to have inspired one of Machiavelli's arguments given in the *Prince*. As a matter of fact, Machiavelli's sharp accusation to flatterers provided in chapter 23 («non ci è altro modo a guardarsi dalle adulazioni, se non che li òmini intendino che non ti offendano a dirti il vero») parallels Giles of Rome's argument that «i lusinghieri sono molto da odiare, [...] chè i gentili uomini, quand'ellino non sono ripresi dai mali ch'ellino fanno, anzi ne sono lodati dai loro lusinghieri che sono intorno di loro, ellino sono disposti in ciò ch'ellino non si conoscano, e ched'ellino seguiscano le loro malvagie volontà».³¹⁰

Giles' *De regimine* is, as known, a work which experienced a significant fortune up until the end of the Sixteenth century, being it one of the most influential

³⁰⁸ See, for instance, B. LATINI, *Il Tesoro*, II, 1, 57, cit., III, pp. 178: «Però che non è possibile che quelli che sono indurati nella malizia, ch'elli si possano correggere per parole». Ivi, II, 2, 25, pp. 309-310: «Li giovani si debbono travagliare di cuore e di corpo, sì che lo loro insegnamento vaglia ad officio della loro città, cioè a dire, ch'egli si deano adusare da giovani a ben fare sì che elli lo ritengano tutto tempo della loro vita, chè 'l vasello guarderà e manterrà l'odore ch'egli prese quando fu nuovo». See the closeness of this passage to N. MACHIAVELLI, *Discorsi*, III, 46, cit., II, p. 780: «Perché gl'importa assai che un giovinetto da' teneri anni cominci a sentire dire bene o male d'una cosa, perché conviene di necessità ne faccia impressione, e da quella poi regoli il modo del procedere in tutti i tempi della sua vita».

³⁰⁹ See, among the most recent contributions, T. DEWENDER, *Il Principe di Machiavelli e la tradizione medievale degli Specula Principum*, cit., esp. pp. 68-73. A number of relevant connections between Machiavelli's *Prince* and Giles of Rome's *De regimine principum* have been brought out by Rinaldo Rinaldi in his edition of the *Prince*. See N. MACHIAVELLI, *De principatibus*, XVI, in ID., *Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Tito Livio, Dell'arte della guerra e altre opere*, 2 voll., a cura di R. Rinaldi, UTET, Torino, 2006, I, p. 276, n. 1; ivi, XVIII, p. 302, n. 93; ivi, XIII, p. 363, n. 22.

³¹⁰ EGIDIO ROMANO, *Del reggimento de' principi*, volgarizzamento trascritto nel 1288, pubblicato per cura di F. Corazzini, Le Monnier, Firenze, 1858, I, 4, 5, pp. 119-120.

examples of advice-books for princes. The wide circulation of the writing all throughout Europe is testified by the impressive number of surviving manuscripts.³¹¹ Unsurprisingly, as soon as the printing press was made available on a large scale during the Fifteenth century, Giles' *De regimine* was among the texts that were printed sooner: in 1473 in Augsburg, in 1482 in Rome, and in 1498 and 1502 in Venice.³¹²

Moreover, slightly after the work was completed by Giles (before 1285), the *De regimine* was also translated into Italian Vernacular by an anonymous. The Vernacular version of the writing (from which I quote) circulated very widely until at least the Latin text was edited in the late fifteenth-century Italy.

According to these elements, Machiavelli's acquaintance with this work should not surprise at all. While reading through the pages of Giles' *De regimine*, the Florentine was expoused once again to Aristotle's practical philosophy. The work is divided into three books, each one devoted to a specific aspect of the active life. Following the traditional Aristotelian scheme, book 1 deals with individual ethics and relies to a great extent on the *Nicomachean Ethics*; book 2 concerns instead the sphere of household management, being it largely based on the *Economics*; finally, book 3 is entirely devoted to political life and has its roots in Aristotle's doctrine given in the *Politics*.³¹³

As far as Aristotle's view of human nature is concerned, Giles maintained very resolutely that human behaviors are heavily influenced by habits. Residing upon Aristotle's account of moral virtues given in book 2 of his *Nicomachean Ethics*,

³¹¹ See AEGIDIUM ROMANI *Opera Omnia*, I.1/11, Catalogo dei manoscritti (1001-1075). *De regimine principum*. Città del Vaticano – Italia, a cura di F. Del Punta e C. Luna, Olschki, Firenze, 1993 which describes the 75 manuscripts of the *De regimine* still extant in Italian libraries and in the Vatican Library. The number of surviving manuscripts in all Europe amounts to more than 350 (ivi, prefazione, p. V). On the *De regimine*'s textual history, see C. F. BRIGGS, *Giles of Rome's De regimine principum. Reading and writing politics at court and university, c. 1275-c. 1525*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge-New York, 1999, pp. 13-19.

³¹² See C. H. LOHR, *Latin Aristotle Commentaries*, «Traditio», XXIII, (1967), pp. 332-334.

³¹³ Further discussion on this aspect may be found in R. LAMBERTINI, *The Prince in the mirror of Philosophy. Uses of Aristotle in Giles of Rome's De regimine principum*, in *Les philosophies morales et politiques au Moyen Âge – Moral and Political Philosophies in the Middle Ages*, Actes du IX Congrès internationale de Philosophie Médiévale (Ottawa, 17-22 août 1992), edited by B. C. Bazán, E. Andújar, L. G. Sbrocchi, 3 voll., Legas, New York-Ottawa-Toronto, 1995, III, pp. 1522-1534; L. LANZA, *La Politica di Aristotele e il De regimine principum di Egidio Romano*, «Medioevo e Rinascimento», XV, (2001), pp. 19-75 offered a very comprehensive yet detailed account of Aristotle's legacy to Medieval political discussion, with a specific focus on Giles' *De regimine*.

Giles argued that «le virtù delle buone opere, l'uomo acquista per *costumanzia* di ben fare». ³¹⁴

Giles' indebtedness to Aristotle's practical thought appears all the more clearly in a passage from book 3 of his *De regimine*. Therein the author relayed Aristotle's argument concerning the advantages and disadvantages a city could get by changing laws (*Politics*, II, 8, 1268b 25-1269a 24). By endorsing the opinion of Aristotle, Giles claimed that laws should not be changed when citizens will not gain a really outstanding advantage by the change. Since much of laws' strength lays in their capacity to induce habits in the people, a frequent changing in laws would cancel the positive effects deriving from a reiterated practice. He argued:

Ed anco con tutto che le leggi nuove fossero più sufficienti che le vecchie, non si debbono essere mutate, perciò che le novelle leggi tollono il lungo uso delle vecchie, per le quali le leggi áno forza e virtù; chè la cosa che l'uomo molto usa è quasi come in natura nell'uomo, dond'elli la die lassare peggio volentieri. ³¹⁵

Giles of Rome's *De regimine principum* played of course a pivotal role in relaying Aristotle's practical philosophy to the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century minds. Together with such works as Brunetto's *Tresor* or Acciaiuoli's *Expositio*, this text should be listed among the numerous "Aristotelian readings" which came to hand of the young Niccolò Machiavelli and contributed to shape his deepest beliefs about men's nature and behaviors. ³¹⁶

³¹⁴ EGIDIO ROMANO, *Del reggimento de' principi*, I, 2,1, cit., pp. 24-25 (my emphasis).

³¹⁵ EGIDIO ROMANO, *Del reggimento de' principi*, III, 2, 28, cit., p. 274.

³¹⁶ Further evidence of Giles' role in transmitting Aristotle's view of human nature may be found in a passage from the third and last book of his *De regimine*, devoted to the examination of how a good prince should behave in war time. See EGIDIO ROMANO, *Del reggimento de' principi*, III, 3, 3, cit., p. 285: «Nell'ottavo libro della Politica, 'l filòsafo dice, che dai quattordici anni innanzi, l'uomo die ei giovani uomini accostumare a sofferire li travagli della cavalleria e i travagli della battaglia: ed a ciò s'accorda Vegezio, nel libro della cavalleria; chè ciascuno ama molto quello ch'elli à accostumato a fare nella sua giovinezza, e si diletta molto in farlo». This central aspect of Aristotle's anthropology seems to be echoed by Machiavelli in the *Art of war*, where he claimed: «E voi sapete come nelle cose consuete gli uomini non patiscono» (N. MACHIAVELLI, *Arte della guerra*, III, cit., p. 156).

II.3. Matteo Palmieri.

Among the many writings authored by Matteo Palmieri, Machiavelli was not certainly acquainted with his *Comento sopra la Comedia* only.

It is widely accepted, in fact, that the *Vita civile* too (printed in 1529 but largely circulating in manuscript all over the second half of the Fifteenth century) can be regarded as one of the texts Machiavelli was well familiar with.³¹⁷ Due to the strong emphasis put in the praise of active life, along with the full endorsement of two main authorities (Aristotle and Cicero), Palmieri's *Vita civile* stands out as a striking and very influential example of civic humanistic literature.³¹⁸

The aim of the work, as Palmieri made clear from the very beginning, is to provide non-Latin readers with an easily accessible collection of rules and advice on political life given by the leading writers of Antiquity, both Latin and Greek.

Per questo numerate carti [*sic*] di più et più libri rivolgendo, ho trovato molti precepti accomodati a admaestrare la perfecta vita de' civili, i quali, diligentissimamente scripti da varii auctori latini et greci, sono stati lasciati per salute del mondo. [...] Rivolto poi verso i mia carissimi cittadini, in me medesimo mi dolsi, molti vedendone che, disiderosi di bene et virtuosamente vivere, senza loro colpa, solo per non avere notitia della lingua latina, mancavano d'numerabili precepti che molto arebbono giovato il loro buono proposito.³¹⁹

The work is divided into four books devoted, respectively, to the education of children, to the analysis of moral virtues, to the examination of justice, and to the discussion on what is useful for a state or a city. As it was common among practical-oriented writings of Italian *Quattrocento*, Palmieri's *Vita civile* too is

³¹⁷ On Machiavelli's knowledge of Matteo Palmieri's works, see F. BAUSI, *Machiavelli e la tradizione culturale toscana*, cit., pp. 83-90. On the manuscript tradition of the *Vita civile*, see *Introduzione*, in M. PALMIERI, *Vita civile*, cit., pp. IX-XIX. Further discussion on the *Vita*'s manuscript tradition was later provided by G. TANTURLI, *Tradizione di testi in presenza dell'autore. Il caso della «Vita civile» di Matteo Palmieri*, «Studi Medievali», XXIX, (1988), 1, pp. 277-315 (where Belloni's edition of the work is widely discussed). On the genesis and date of composition of Palmieri's *Vita civile*, see ID., *Sulla data e la genesi della Vita civile di Matteo Palmieri*, «Rinascimento», XXXVI, (1996), pp. 3-48.

³¹⁸ On this point, see G. TANTURLI, *Sulla data e la genesi della Vita civile di Matteo Palmieri*, cit., p. 21.

³¹⁹ M. PALMIERI, *Vita civile*, proemio, cit., pp. 4-5.

informed by a large variety of historical examples, taken from both the Ancient and the Medieval world.

Given the features and the specific aim of the work, it should not surprise that in his *Vita civile* Palmieri devoted a great deal of attention to the problem of fixity in human nature, a question he perceived to be relevant, at the same time, from both an ethical and a political standpoint.

The second book, dealing with the analysis of moral virtues, includes a section entirely devoted to the role of habit («dell'uso») in social and political life. According to Aristotle's account of moral virtues, Palmieri claimed that habit plays the lionshare in building up men's customs and behaviors. He argued:

Grandissima forza è quella dell'uso in ne' costumi civili, et molte cose vitupera le quali ha già prima aprovate, poi di nuovo le ripiglia e fa, pure che e' voglia così.³²⁰

Clearly, Palmieri's point is that the influence exercised by habit is far stronger than any other human impulse or faculty (including, evidently, reason). For human beings it is thus very hard to deviate from that toward which, to say it with Machiavelli, their nature inclines them.

By sticking to Aristotle's account firmly, Palmieri believed habits to be mostly beholden to education. What we learnt from childhood and got used to over the years shapes our states of character in such a way as to prevent us from changing. We have already seen that this principle, which is central in Aristotle's practical discourse, was later endorsed by both Giles of Rome and Machiavelli as a criterion of military selection.³²¹ The same principle was held by Palmieri, too, while giving advice on how to grow up children:

³²⁰ M. PALMIERI, *Vita civile*, II, cit., p. 92.

³²¹ EGIDIO ROMANO, *Del reggimento de' principi*, III, 3, 3, cit., p. 285: «Nell'ottavo libro della Politica, 'l filòsafo dice, che dai quattordici anni innanzi, l'uomo die ei giovani uomini accostumare a sofferire li travagli della cavallaria e i travagli della battaglia: ed a ciò s'accorda Vegezio, nel libro della cavallaria; chè ciascuno ama molto quello ch'elli à accostumato a fare nella sua giovinezza, e si diletta molto in farlo». N. MACHIAVELLI, *Arte della guerra*, I, cit., p. 67: «Ed essendo in quella [*scil.* in Rome] consueti gli esercizi militari dove i giovanetti si esercitavano, ne nasceva che, sendo scelti poi per ire in guerra, erano assuefatti in modo nella finta milizia, che potevano facilmente adoperarsi nella vera».

None scilingui [*scil.* the mother] né parli mozo, acciò che il fanciullo non s'avezi a parlare che poi sarà cresciuto gli sia fatica lasciarlo.³²²

Palmieri's consistency with Aristotle's anthropological view is further confirmed by a passage from book 4 of his *Vita civile*. Discussing about the best way for a man to achieve and preserve physical health, Palmieri betrayed the Aristotelian origin of his own argument by appealing to the notion of *habitus*:

La prima diligentia di chi vuole essere sano sta in conoscere la sua natura et in e suoi exercitii observare quali sieno le cose gli nuocano et guardarsi da esse, usare i cibi et l'ordine della vita che più il conserva sano, travagliarsi, posare et dormire a' debiti tempi, guardarsi che i dilette, gli appetiti et voglie non ci facciano transcorrere in disordine che ci nuoca et pel quale corrompiano nostra natura, diventando deboli et infermi di corpo et insieme, *per habito facto*, corrotti e vitiosi nell'animo.³²³

Through the expression «habito facto» Palmieri evidently meant the particular condition of those whose line of conduct has become unchangeable due to the habit. The adjective “*facto*” aims to emphasize that the “process of habituation” has achieved its completion and can no longer be put into reverse.

It is hard to believe that Machiavelli had not the same (Aristotelian) formulation in mind while describing such historical figures as Fabius Maximus or pope Julius II.

As we have seen, Aristotle's idea that human nature is made rigid and unchangeable by habit was extremely successful in Medieval and Early Modern political literature. His notion of “second nature” as a set of behaviors that men can hardly (if not impossibly) get rid of became a real common place within fourteenth- and fifteenth-century political discussions. It was insistently addressed by many leading authors of the time, including those (like Giles of Rome or Matteo Palmieri) who layed at the basis of Machiavelli's early education. While reading through the pages of such works as *De regimine principum*, *Vita civile*, or

³²² M. PALMIERI, *Vita civile*, I, cit., p. 20.

³²³ M. PALMIERI, *Vita civile*, IV, cit., p. 173 (my *emphasis*).

Donato Acciaiuoli's commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics*, the Florentine could not but being introduced to Aristotle's concept of "second nature".

Unsurprisingly, the use Machiavelli did of Aristotle's theory was not only totally consistent, but also very appropriate from a linguistic point of view. In explaining why such figures as Fabius Maximus or Julius II failed to adapt their way of proceeding to the requirements of time, Machiavelli did nothing but drawing upon such a commonly accepted theory that there was not even need to mention its origin.

BATTERE LA FORTUNA. MACHIAVELLI'S IMPETUOUSNESS AND ARISTOTLE'S «FORTUNATI»

We shall now turn to examine the third and last part of chapter 25 in the *Prince*, a section that has often raised the curiosity of many Machiavelli's students. After giving a quite detailed account of «fortuna in particulari» and corroborating his arguments through the recourse to history, Machiavelli seems to move towards an unexpectedly hasty conclusion.

In the last two paragraphs of the chapter the author made the following, indeed very sharp, statement:

Io iudico bene questo, che sia meglio essere impetuoso che rispettivo, perchè la Fortuna è donna, e è necessario, volendola tenere sotto, batterla e urtarla; e si vede che la si lascia più vincere da questi che da quelli che freddamente procedano e però sempre, come donna, è amica de' giovani, perché sono meno rispettivi, più feroci e con più audacia li comandano.³²⁴

It has been often assumed that Machiavelli's conclusion should be seen as nothing more than a call for impetuous conduct, its aim being to remedy (at least in part)

³²⁴ N. MACHIAVELLI, *Il Principe*, XXV, cit., p. 310.

the inadequacy of men in the struggle against fortune.³²⁵ More convincingly, Rinaldo Rinaldi suggested that Machiavelli's claim that men are doomed to be beaten by fortune because of their inability to adapt their action to the requirement of circumstances (held in the second part of the chapter), could possibly frustrate the entire project embodied by his *Prince* (which is, above all, of a practical and personal nature).³²⁶ For this reason, Machiavelli's exhortation to impetuosity and toil would serve as ultimate assurance that men, if they behave vigorously and do not give up, will hopefully succeed against fortune.

Rinaldi's remarks invite us to consider Machiavelli's conclusion as closely intertwined with the rest of the chapter – and not, as implied by most interpreters, as an autonomous and eminently rhetorical section. He argued that the Florentine's call for impetuous action is intended to parallel the image of fortune outlined at the beginning of the chapter, where Machiavelli described fortune as a furious onrush. According to this view, Rinaldi concluded, the more impetuously one behaves, the more probable will be to be favoured by fortune.³²⁷

The importance of Rinaldi's reading lays on two main elements. On the one hand, it makes clear that Machiavelli's exhortation should not at all be considered as an isolated "appendix" with merely rhetorical purposes. On the other hand, it also helps to understand on which notion is Machiavelli's argument actually centred. The concept of impetus is in fact identified by Rinaldi as the key-element of the whole discussion carried out from the very beginning of the chapter. What is more, Rinaldi was the first one to notice the Aristotelian origin of that concept.³²⁸ Machiavelli's reference to the notion of impetus is nothing but a clear allusion to Aristotle's theory on the so-called «fortunati» (or «bene fortunati»), namely those individuals whose actions always succeed, albeit they are not wise

³²⁵ See, for instance, what has been pointed out by Mario Martelli in N. MACHIAVELLI, *Il Principe*, XXV, cit., p. 310, n. 56: «L'opinione che qui M. dichiara di professare non si allontana dal vulgatissimo proverbio secondo il quale "Audaces Fortuna iuvat"».

³²⁶ N. MACHIAVELLI, *De principatibus*, XXV, cit., p. 381, n. 101: «Questa impossibilità di adattare la propria *natura* ai *tempi*, che è quella già predicata nei *Ghiribizzi*, incrina drammaticamente, a pochi passi dalla conclusione, il progetto stesso del *De principatibus*».

³²⁷ N. MACHIAVELLI, *De principatibus*, XXV, cit., p. 384, n. 144: «A ben guardare la scelta machiavelliana dell'*impeto* non è del tutto arbitraria, poiché il "naturalis impetus" o l'"animi impetus" è consustanziale alla fortuna. [...] scegliere l'*impeto* significa avere maggiori probabilità di essere "fortunatus"».

³²⁸ N. MACHIAVELLI, *De principatibus*, XXV, cit., p. 383, n. 125.

and their reasoning not prudent at all. Aristotle dealt with this issue both in his *Magna Moralia* and *Eudemian Ethics*.³²⁹

Unfortunately, Rinaldi's remarks rest on the simple hypothesis that Machiavelli might have relied on Aristotle's view intentionally, but they do not provide any further specification on that.

Prompted by his suggestion, it is actually possible to further evidence Machiavelli's indebtedness to the Greek philosopher on this point.

To begin with, it must be noticed that Machiavelli's representation of fortune as an impetus is not at all an image occurring in the *Prince* only. It takes place in many others of his writings, for it was in fact one of the most common ways humanistic literature used to describe this uncontrolled force.³³⁰ One should actually reckon with this simple fact before assuming that Machiavelli's reference to the notion of impetus within his chapter of fortune had no particular meaning.

Actually, Machiavelli's claim that an impetuous conduct can better attract the favour of fortune has roots in Aristotle's moral doctrine.

In his *Magna Moralia* and *Eudemian Ethics*, Aristotle dealt with the problem of fortune and provided his own definition of 'lucky person' («fortunatus»). I will quote the relevant passages from the former work, which was available in the 1498 widespread Venice edition made by Giorgio Valla:

Est igitur prosperitas rationis expers natura, nanque *fortunatus est qui sine ratione ad bona impellitur*, eaque consequitur: id vero natura est. Nam animae inest huiusmodi a natura quo sine ratione *impellamur ad ea unde bene habemus*. Eousque, ut si quis roget ita habentem curnam id tibi libet

³²⁹ More precisely: *Magna moralia*, II, 8, 1206b 30-1207b 19; *Eudemian Ethics*, VIII, 2, 1247a 1-1248b 7.

³³⁰ The image occurs, most famously, in N. MACHIAVELLI, *Capitolo di fortuna*, ll. 151-159, cit., pp. 86-87: «Come un torrente rapido, ch'al tutto / superbo è fatto, ogni cosa fracassa / dovunque aggiugne el suo corso per tutto, / e questa parte accresce e quella abbassa, / varia le ripe, varia il letto e 'l fondo, / e fa tremar la terra donde passa; / così Fortuna col suo furibondo / impeto molte volte or qui or quivi / va tramutando le cose del mondo». In addition to this, all Machiavelli's representations of fortune as a furious river should be considered as instances of this metaphor too. On this topic, see F. TATEO, *L'Alberti fra il Petrarca e il Pontano. La metafora del fiume, «Albertiana»*, X, (2007), pp. 45-67.

agere? Nescio, inquit, sed libet, simile propemodum lymphaticis: siquidem lymphatici *citra rationem ad aliquid agendum impelluntur*.³³¹

According to Aristotle, lucky are all those individuals who present a natural impulse (*impellere, impulsus*) leading them to the ends they selected. Their deliberation (*consilium*) does not follow the normal rational process, and, for this very reason, they have more chance to harmonize their actions with the chain of events (i.e. fortune). In other words, given the a-rational character of fortune, an impulsive way of proceeding (Aristotle's reference to frantic people – *lymphatici* – is not a matter of coincidence) may prove to be the most suitable way of acting. Aristotle's «fortunati» do not even need to reflect on which means to select in order to better accomplish their ends. On the contrary, they succeed in what they do just because they let their natural impulse guide them. What they put into practice is nothing but an a-rational conduct, which proves to be successful precisely because it perfectly matches the a-rational and unpredictable nature of fortune.

Machiavelli's exhortation to impetuosity in chapter 25 of the *Prince* (and in other writings too) clearly relies on this central and very well-known motif of Aristotle's moral philosophy. Moreover, Machiavelli's decision to place this call for impetuous conduct right at the end of his account of fortune seems to be completely consistent with the overall project of the chapter, and it further confirms the Aristotelian origin of the final paragraphs. According to the threefold division of Machiavelli's chapter outlined above, we may legitimately argue the following: in the first part (parr. 4-8) the author set out to provide a more general description of fortune as a force operating at the “macro-structural level” of natural phenomena («fortuna in universali»); in the second part of the chapter (parr. 9-24) he dealt with fortune as affecting the particular actions of individual men («fortuna in particulari»). If compared with fortune's, men's power proves to be very weak in this dimension, being they hindered by their very nature, which is

³³¹ ARISTOTELIS *Magna Moralia* Georgio Valla Placentino interprete, II, 8, per Simonem Bevilaquam, Venetiis, 1498, p. 269 (my *emphasis*). On the late fifteenth-century printed editions of this work, see *Repertorio delle traduzioni umanistiche a stampa. Secoli XV-XVI*, 2 voll., a cura di M. Cortesi e S. Fiaschi, Sismel-Edizioni del Galluzzo, Firenze, 2008, I, pp. 272-273.

basically fixed and unable to shift according to circumstances. For this reason, Machiavelli set out to conclude his account by appealing to the Aristotelian image of the «fortunatus» (parr. 25-27). The last part of the chapter is nothing but a clear attempt to provide a concrete solution for the natural weakness of men Machiavelli has just accounted for. As we have already argued, the *Prince* is above all a practical and very contingent project, its aim being to allow Machiavelli to reenter public service under the new Medici regime. The image of the prince he outlined in his masterpiece could not certainly be that of a failing leader, inexorably doomed to give in to the vagaries of fortune. It is for this very reason that Machiavelli decided to conclude the chapter with his famous exhortation; and, following the content of the rest of the chapter, he did so by appealing to Aristotle.

It has now to be noticed that Machiavelli's choice to reside upon Aristotle's theory of 'fortunate men' while outlining his ideal model of prince should not surprise at all. He was actually handling a very common topic of both Medieval and humanistic literature on fortune. This very aspect seems to have been overlooked by most scholars, who failed to acknowledge the real extent of Machiavelli's indebtedness to the earlier literary and philosophical tradition on this point.

As a matter of fact, Aristotle's doctrine of 'lucky men' presented in his *Magna Moralia* and *Eudemian Ethics* owes much of his fortune during the Middle Ages to the so-called *Liber de bona fortuna*, an anonymous Latin compilation of the chapters on fortune taken from the two aforementioned moral treatises.³³² What is more, not only did the *Liber* experience a remarkable degree of circulation up until the end of the Sixteenth century, but it was also included in all the collections of *Auctoritates Aristotelis*, a fact which assured an enduring and impressive fortune to that text. Within such collections, in the section devoted to the *Liber*, one could read:

³³² See V. CORDONIER, *Sauver le dieu du philosophe. Albert le Grand, Thomas d'Aquin, Guillaume de Moerbeke et l'invention du 'Liber de bona fortuna'*, cit. Valérie Cordonier has been working on the text of the *Liber* for many years. The work is now soon to be published in the *Aristoteles Latinus* collection.

Illi sunt bene fortunati quicumque directe agunt sine ratione ut in pluribus.³³³

Thanks to such works as the *Liber de bona fortuna* or the collections of *Auctoritates*, Aristotle's own view on fortune could reach and affect fifteenth-century thinkers.

In Machiavelli's own cultural context, the Aristotelian motif of the 'lucky men' was relayed by a sheer number of quite successful texts.

One could meet up with a clear allusion to that doctrine while reading, for instance, through the pages of Pico della Mirandola's *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem*. In the second book, Pico claimed that astrological predictions are always useless, whether they be favourable or unfavourable for men. If favourable, they prove to be useless because men would be led to the best end anyway. He argued:

Neque enim aliud est esse fortunatum, si fortunatus aliquis est a coelo, quam vim nostram imaginariam, famulam rationis, ita coelitus moveri ut his et modis et temporibus unumquodque faciendum suscipiamus, quibus quam felicissime votum perfici possit. Quocirca dixit Aristoteles non prodesse fortunatum consilium, in ea scilicet re in qua eum natura formavit, ne forte alio te consilium distrahat et abducat, quam institutus *ille animi impetus* te vocabat.³³⁴

It is interesting to observe that in Pico's passage the key-word is not *impulsus* (as it was in Giorgio Valla's translation of *Magna Moralia*), but *impetus* – a term which is all the more consistent with Machiavelli's exhortation in *Prince* 25.

According to Aristotle's moral doctrine, Pico confirmed that 'lucky men' do not avail themselves of any kind of rational or prudent deliberation while acting. In fact, following the normal process of deliberation would not help at all («dixit Aristoteles non prodesse fortunatum consilium»). They succeed in their actions rightly because they follow nothing but their natural *impetus*.

³³³ J. HAMESSE, *Les Auctoritates Aristotelis*, 13 (7), cit., p. 249.

³³⁴ G. PICO DELLA MIRANDOLA, *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem*, II, 2, a cura di E. Garin, 2 voll., Vallecchi, Firenze, 1946, I, p. 108 (my *emphasis*).

Aristotle's image of the «fortunatus» was also restated by another very important writing, namely Pontano's *De fortuna*.

More than any other fifteenth-century work on fortune, Pontano's treatise was designed to relay and clarify Aristotle's moral thought. According to this aim, the *De fortuna* devoted a great deal of attention to the problem of 'lucky men'. One only needs to skim the headlines of the chapters to see how insistently did Pontano address this issue.³³⁵

Similarly to Giovanni Pico, Pontano too preferred the term *impetus* rather than *impulsus*. This choice can be explained on the grounds of his definition of fortune as an «impetus naturae».³³⁶ The same definition, as we have seen, will be followed by Machiavelli in the first part of chapter 25 in the *Prince* («assomiglio quella a uno di questi fiumi rovinosi, che, quando s'adirano, allagano e' piani, ruinano li alberi e li edifizii, [...] ciascuno fugge loro dinanzi, ognuno cede allo impeto loro»)³³⁷.

Among the many passages within Pontano's *De fortuna* that are relevant to the issue of 'lucky men', one seems to be particularly consistent with Aristotle's account quoted above:

Impetus illi motusque irrationales excitant, aptant, dirigunt hos ipsos, quos fortunatos dicimus, ad consequenda fortunae favorabilis dona fructusque eius huberrimos.

Quocirca, ut dictum est, cum sine ratione, sine consilio consultationeque aliqua repente ad aliquid excitanterque moventur, quod illis postea bene vertit, eos tunc si percunctabere, quaenam vos commovet causa, quae ratio ad haec ipsa sequenda? «Atqui – respondebunt – nobis ita quidem dictat animus. Sic nobis placitum est hocque nostrum nobis cor innuit». [...] Itaque inesse animus eorum videtur a natura, ut instinctu quidem atque impulsu

³³⁵ In book 1: «Qui dicantur esse fortunati», «De fortunatis», «Diversa esse genera fortunatorum hominum». In book 2: «De variis generibus fortunatorum», «Qui proprie dicendi sint fortunati», «Fortunatos infortunatosque a natura esse institutos», «Fortunatos a natura institutos esse», «Cur natura in hominibus fortunandis minime fuerit ordinata», «Quae signa sint naturaliter fortunatorum», «De genere duplici fortunatorum», «De fortunati qui sunt rudi et crasso ingenio».

³³⁶ G. PONTANO, *De fortuna*, II, 12, cit., p. 218: «Fortunam ad naturae impetum referendam esse». The same topic is dealt with in many other places within the work. See, for instance, *ivi*, I, 37, p. 176: «Quare fortuna sit impetus quidam», or *ivi*, II, 23, p. 238: «Circa quos naturae imputus fortuna versetur».

³³⁷ N. MACHIAVELLI, *Il Principe*, XXV, cit., pp. 302-303.

tantum illo, ratione vero ac consultatione nulla adhibita, ad ea ferantur raptim, atque ex incogitato ad quae natura ipsa illos trahit, vel raptare potius cernitur.³³⁸

It is not difficult to realise that Machiavelli and Pontano are asserting the very same thing. Following Aristotle, they both claimed that an impulsive and irrational conduct («impetus illi motusque irrationales») can more easily be in agreement with fortune – being she, too, a non-rational entity.

According to these elements, it seems quite unfair to ascribe a vague or eminently rhetorical purpose to Machiavelli's exhortation in chapter 25. In calling his prince for an impetuous conduct, in fact, the Florentine did nothing but endorse a theory which was very common among fifteenth-century discussions on fortune – and could therefore be caught with ease by all his readers. He made a move that was certainly perceived as rather natural, given the specific context in which it took place.

Finally, Machiavelli's explicit reference to young men should not be considered as fortuitous either. His argument that fortune is the friend of the young («è amica de' giovani») must be seen as directly related to the notion of «fortunatus» he just made use of. According to Aristotle, *impetus* is a feature specifically ascribed to young people, as he made clear in book 6 of his *Nicomachean Ethics*.³³⁹ As in the case of Aristotle's doctrine of 'lucky men', his thought on the impetuosity of young people too was a point that Medieval and Early Modern philosophical tradition did not overlook. The belief that young men are inclined by nature to behave impetuously has its roots in the Ancient theory of the four temperaments (or humors). According to this theory, the prevalent humor in the young is choler (which inclines towards impulsive and impetuous behaviors), while in old people is phlegm (which inclines, instead, towards calm and more thoughtful behaviors).

The theory, which must be originally ascribed to Hippocrates, was relayed by Aristotle in his writings and became a real common knowledge in Medieval

³³⁸ G. PONTANO, *De fortuna*, I, 38, cit., p. 182.

³³⁹ ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI, 8, 1142a 6-30.

medical science. Unsurprisingly, Machiavelli too showed to be somehow acquainted with that, while dwelling, in the *Art of war*, on the old people's inability for war: «Questi altri [*scil.* old people], per aver già il capo bianco e avere i sanguis ghiacciati addosso, parte sogliono essere nimici della guerra, parte incorreggibili».³⁴⁰

An explicit connection between the young and the impetuous way of acting may be found in one of the most successful dialogues by Pontano, namely the *Charon*:

MINOS: Verissimum hoc quidem. Sed tamen, nescio quomodo, quod nobis pueris contingebat, vehementior quidem instinctus adolescentes impellit ad virtutem et laudem; in senibus tarda ac remissa sunt omnia.

AEACUS: Maior est in illis impetus, ratio imperfectior.³⁴¹

Among the many texts we have taken into account, Giles of Rome's *De regimine principum* too dealt with the same issue. His explanation of the reason why young people can more easily succeed against fortune sounds like a direct reply (indeed very anachronistic) to Machiavelli himself:

Ei giovani possono fare contro a quello che la natura gl'inchina.³⁴²

Machiavelli's conclusion of chapter 25 in the *Prince* has, as we tried to show, a much richer background than usually assumed. His call for impetuous action is not at all an off the cuff exhortation to do not give up. On the contrary, the entire discussion carried out by the author is well grounded on Aristotle's philosophy, for it centred on his notion of 'lucky men' («fortunati»). This particular category of individuals proceed in their actions as they were guided by a natural and irrational impetus. Thanks to that, they are more likely to harmonize with fortune.

³⁴⁰ N. MACHIAVELLI, *Arte della guerra*, I, cit., p. 70.

³⁴¹ G. PONTANO, *Charon*, in ID., *Dialoghi*, a cura di C. Previtiera, edizione critica, Sansoni, Firenze, 1943, pp. 3-45: 9.

³⁴² EGIDIO ROMANO, *Del reggimento de' principi*, I, 4, 4, cit., p. 118.

According to this view, young people are those who can more easily attract her favour, being their way of behaving impetuous by nature.

4. Machiavelli's treatment of philosophical authorities. A Hypothesis.

No student of Machiavelli ignores how challenging is the task of identifying the authorities embedded in Machiavelli's writings. To begin with, apart from the major Roman historians, ancient and medieval authors hardly deserve Machiavelli's acknowledgment. Apparently, the Florentine did not care to disclose his sources, an attitude which proves even more radical as far as philosophical sources are concerned.³⁴³

More specifically, two aspects need to be singled out from the very beginning: [1] the remarkably low amount of explicit references throughout Machiavelli's *corpus* (whether they be to authors or to specific writings); [2] his barely-concealed distaste for professional philosophers and intellectuals.

As for the first aspect, one cannot help starting with the three occurrences of Aristotle's name:: the first in a letter of 26th of August 1513 to Francesco Vettori,³⁴⁴ the second in the *Discorsi* (1517-'18), book 3, chapter 26,³⁴⁵ and the

³⁴³ See E. GARIN, *Aspetti del pensiero di Machiavelli*, cit., p. 66: «Che poi di certe letture non facesse esplicita menzione non stupisce, se nel '13 osterà col Vettori ignoranza anche della *Politica* di Aristotele, che pure ben conosceva e usava»; G. SASSO, *Niccolò Machiavelli. Storia del suo pensiero politico*, cit., pp. 28-29: «[...] è pur vero, che, sempre, in ogni stagione della sua vita, nel dichiarare le "fonti" della sua cultura, Machiavelli fu tanto avaro quanto, in genere, detestava l'ostentazione culturale, la facile esibizione della dottrina»; G. INGLESE, *Per Machiavelli*, cit., pp. 108-109: «In molte importanti occasioni Machiavelli non rivela quali sono gli autori che utilizza e discute. Sono state necessarie, perciò, difficili e pazienti ricerche per dare qualche nome – culturalmente e storicamente giustificato – ai "molti che dicono Roma essere stata una repubblica tumultuaria"; o ad "alcuno filosofo" che vuole "l'aere pieno di intelligenze"; o a "quegli filosofi che hanno voluto che il mondo sia stato eterno" e così via».

³⁴⁴ N. MACHIAVELLI, *Lettere*, 222 (N. Machiavelli to F. Vettori, 26 August 1513), cit., p. 417: «Né so quello si dica Aristotile delle republiche divulse; ma io penso bene quello che ragionevolmente potrebbe essere, quello che è, e quello che è stato, e mi ricorda avere letto che i Lucumoni tennono tutta l'Italia insino all'Alpe, et insino che ne furono cacciati di Lombardia da' Galli».

³⁴⁵ N. MACHIAVELLI, *Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Tito Livio*, III, 26, cit., II, p. 694: «E Aristotile, intra le prime cause che mette della rovina de' tiranni, è lo avere ingiuriato altrui per conto delle donne, con stuprarle o con violarle o con rompere i matrimoni». The date given in the text (1517-'18) refers to Machiavelli's most likely completion of his *Discorsi*. However, it is known that he went on to modify the work during the following years. On the date of composition of Machiavelli's *Discorsi* see, among the most recent contributions, F. BAUSI, *I 'Discorsi' di Niccolò Machiavelli. Genesi e strutture*, Sansoni, Firenze, 1985.

third in the *Discursus Florentinarum rerum post mortem Iunioris Laurentii Medices* (1520).³⁴⁶ Furthermore, among these references, only the one from the *Discorsi* can be considered a quotation proper, the other two amounting to fairly broad references to the Greek philosopher.

As for the second aspect, it is fair to say that Machiavelli never concealed his negative attitude towards philosophers, most notably the contemplative-minded type of philosopher. Beside a well-known passage from the chapter 15 of the *Prince*, where Machiavelli criticized the many who «have fancied for themselves republics and principalities that have never been seen or known to exist in reality», another similar statement occurs in a far less frequently cited place of his work, i.e. *Istorie fiorentine* VIII, 29. While considering the role played in Genoa by the bank of San Giorgio during the second half of the fifteenth century, Machiavelli argues that:

Le quali [*scil.* le leggi di Genova] infino a questi tempi non sono state alterate, perché, avendo arme, e danari, e governo, non si può, senza pericolo d'una certa e pericolosa ribellione, alteralle. Esemplo veramente raro e da i filosofi in tante loro immaginate e vedute repubbliche mai non trovato, vedere dentro ad uno medesimo cerchio infra i medesimi cittadini, la libertà e la tirannide, la vita civile e la corrotta, la giustizia e la licenza: perché quello ordine solo mantiene quella città piena di costumi antichi e venerabili.³⁴⁷

The almost complete lack of explicit references to philosophical sources throughout Machiavelli's writings, along with his little patience for intellectuals

³⁴⁶ N. MACHIAVELLI, *Discursus Florentinarum rerum post mortem Iunioris Laurentii Medices*, in ID., *Scritti politici minori*, cit., p. 640: «E è stata stimata tanto questa gloria dagli uomini che non hanno mai atteso ad altro ch'a gloria, che non avendo possuto fare una republica in atto, l'hanno fatta in scritto, come Aristotile, Platone e molt'altri: e' quali hanno voluto mostrare al mondo che se, come Solone e Licurgo, non hanno potuto fundare un vivere civile, non è mancato dalla ignoranza loro, ma dalla impotenza di metterlo in atto». See also P. FALZONE, «Aristotele», in *Enciclopedia machiavelliana*, cit., I, pp. 94-100.

³⁴⁷ N. MACHIAVELLI, *Istorie fiorentine*, VIII, 29, cit., II, p. 765. See also *ivi*, V, 1, p. 449: «Onde si è dai prudenti osservato come le lettere vengono dietro alle armi, e che nelle provincie e nelle città prima i capitani che i filosofi nascono».

and men of letters, have led a number of scholars – mostly Italian – to deny any philosophical quality and purpose to Machiavelli's project.³⁴⁸

In this chapter, I will argue that this understanding of Machiavelli's thought rests on a fairly questionable reading of his writings. More specifically, I will call into question the way some interpreters mistake Machiavelli's distinctive, if idiosyncratic, policies of quotation for a lack of acquaintance with the Western philosophical tradition. To give just an example, there can be no doubt that Machiavelli was well acquainted with Aristotle's *Politics*, a work he made an intensive use of while composing both the *Discorsi* and the *Prince*. Despite the absence of any quotation from Aristotle's text, a good number of significant resemblances between some sections of Machiavelli's two chief-works and chapters 10 and 11 from book 5 of Aristotle's treatise make hard to believe that Machiavelli was not familiar with it.³⁴⁹ It follows that Machiavelli's assertion, made in the letter to Vettori, that he did not know what Aristotle had argued in the *Politics* about confederated republics, should be taken seriously but not literally.³⁵⁰

³⁴⁸ M. MARTELLI, *Machiavelli e i classici*, in *Cultura e scrittura di Machiavelli*, cit., pp. 279-309: 299: «È urgente, improcrastinabile anzi, disfarci del Machiavelli filosofo di professione, del Machiavelli agguerrito umanista, del Machiavelli indefesso studioso, per tornare in possesso dell'unico Machiavelli esistito, dell'uomo politico, che di politica e nient'altro che di politica, perché d'altro non poteva, s'interessò»; F. BAUSI, *Machiavelli*, cit., pp. 15-16: «Nelle pagine che seguono, pertanto, non si troverà quasi traccia – in primo luogo – del Machiavelli filosofo, la cui consistenza dovrebbe agli occhi di ognuno essere messa in forse dalle frequentissime e gravi aporie concettuali disseminate nelle sue opere, dalla limitatissima cultura filosofica da lui posseduta, dal suo disinteresse per le astratte e autosufficienti elaborazioni concettuali».

³⁴⁹ A complete comparison between the text of Machiavelli's *Discorsi* and that of Aristotle's *Politics* has been carried out by Leslie J. Walker in his edition the former: *The Discourses of Niccolò Machiavelli*, Translated from the Italian with an Introduction and Notes by L. J. Walker, 2 voll., Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1950 (see esp. *ivi*, II, pp. 273-277). Walker's edition has been later discussed by G. SASSO, *Review to The Discourses of Niccolò Machiavelli*, Translated from the Italian with an Introduction and Notes by L. J. Walker, «Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa», XXIX (1951), pp. 156-163. Sasso praised the outstanding scholarship shown by Walker in the identification and explanation of a great number of sources embedded in the text, while rejecting the overall image of Machiavelli given by the Jesuit Father, an image which Sasso charged with naivety.

³⁵⁰ See E. GARIN, *Aspetti del pensiero di Machiavelli*, cit., p. 66. G. INGLESE, *Per Machiavelli*, cit., p. 38 has pointed out that Machiavelli's alleged display of ignorance is actually the very evidence that he knew that «la *Politica* non tratta mai delle repubbliche "divulse". Machiavelli non deride dunque la parola degli antichi, ma la vana e superficiale sapienza formulare di politici come il Vettori, usi a citare le *auctoritates* a casaccio». G. SASSO, *Niccolò Machiavelli. Storia del suo pensiero politico*, cit., pp. 29-33 and J. M. NAJEMY, *Between Friends*, cit., pp. 308-309 have shown that there is a subtle irony surrounding many of Machiavelli-Vettori letters, so that it would be wrong to take all their statements literally.

What I would like to suggest is that a possible way out of this impasse is by setting Machiavelli's use of classical philosophy, and above all of Aristotle's philosophy, against the intellectual background within which Machiavelli's project took its shape; in particular, I will test his allegedly negative attitude towards philosophical speculation by measuring it against the debate over active and contemplative life which took place in Florence at the turn of the fifteenth century. This step seems to call for some preliminary clarifications.

In the first place, it will be necessary to approach the unfolding of the dispute over active and contemplative life in the intellectual setting of fifteenth-century Florence. It was during this period that this opposition began to involve a number of issues other than moral. This shift in perspective was mainly due to the revival of Platonic philosophy brought about in the second half of the century by its foremost advocate, Marsilio Ficino. Ficino set out to place contemplation at the very core of his theological interpretation of Platonism, according to which contemplation was to be acknowledged as a dimension essential to human beings. This persuasion could not help affecting also the quarrel over active and contemplative life, which came about as a controversy between the followers of Plato's contemplative doctrine and the heirs of the civic humanism tradition. After introducing the main features of this debate, I will show how and to which extent Machiavelli's methodological approach and literary style were affected by them.

I. In his 1985 article on *The active and the contemplative life in Renaissance Humanism*, Paul Oskar Kristeller offered a historical account of the key features characterizing the debate over active and contemplative life taking place in Italy in the period from the fourteenth to the late fifteenth century.³⁵¹ Kristeller's analysis enables to appreciate the shifts and transformations of the problem from Petrarca onwards. Arguably, Francesco Petrarca was the first humanist to identify the two types of life, first in *De vita solitaria* (1346) and later in *De otio religioso* (1357). Even if some important differences may be pointed out between the two

³⁵¹ P. O. KRISTELLER, *The Active and the Contemplative Life in Renaissance Humanism*, cit., pp. 197-213 (originally published in *Arbeit Musse Meditation. Vita activa – Vita contemplativa*, edited by B. Vickers, Verlag der Fachvereine, Zürich, 1985, pp. 133-152).

writings – being the former a defense of solitary life mainly addressed to lay scholars, and the latter a praise of monastic life written for the brother Gherardo (a Carthusian monk) –³⁵² in both of them Petrarca seems to have thought the relation between active and contemplative life as a strictly ethical problem. His main concern was to present a comparison between two different lifestyles (namely, between intellectual and active life in his *De vita solitaria*, and between ascetic and worldly life in his *De otio religioso*) followed by the conclusion that a solitary life, whether it be devoted to prayer or to learning, was more decent and commendable than a lifetime spent in businesses and practical activities.

Sive itaque Deo servire volumus, [...] sive artibus bonis ingenium excolere, [...] sive aliquid meditando et scribendo nostri memoriam posteris relinquere, atque ita dierum fugam sistere et hoc brevissimum vite tempus extendere; sive simul hec omnia prestare propositum est nobis, fugiamus, oro, iantandem et id quantumcunque quod superest in solitudine transigamus.³⁵³

In the same frame of mind as Petrarca's writings is Coluccio Salutati's *De seculo et religione* (1381 ca.). Like Petrarca's *De otio religioso*, Salutati's work too is dedicated to a monk, Girolamo da Uzzano (Niccolò, before he took on the religious name), a friend of Coluccio's who had entered the Camaldulensian order.³⁵⁴ Salutati's *De seculo et religione* may be said to belong to the tradition of medieval ascetic literature and its main target is the sensual life.³⁵⁵ Coluccio set

³⁵² Ivi, p. 204. A new Italian edition of Petrarca's *De otio religioso* has been recently published: F. PETRARCA, *De otio religioso*, edited by G. Goletti, Le Lettere, Firenze, 2006.

³⁵³ F. PETRARCA, *De vita solitaria*, II, in ID., *Prose*, edited by G. Martellotti and P. G. Ricci, E. Carrara, E. Bianchi, Ricciardi, Milano-Napoli, 1955, p. 568 (cited, with some variations, in P. O. KRISTELLER, *The Active and the Contemplative Life in Renaissance Humanism*, cit., p. 204, n. 19).

³⁵⁴ C. SALUTATI, *De seculo et religione*, ex codicibus manuscriptis primum edidit B. L. Ullman, Olschki, Firenze, 1957. ID., *On the World and Religious Life*, translated by T. Marshall. Introduction by R. G. Witt, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (MA)-London, 2014 («The I Tatti Renaissance Library», 62).

³⁵⁵ See R. G. WITT, *Introduction to C. SALUTATI, On the World and Religious Life*, cit., p. VIII. It is worth reminding that Coluccio was by no means a champion of contemplative life, but, on the contrary, one of the leading lights of Florentine civic humanism. His *De seculo et religione* is obviously an occasional piece which, however, has puzzled some modern historians, as pointed out by P. O. KRISTELLER, *The Active and the Contemplative Life in Renaissance Humanism*, cit., pp. 203-204. On Coluccio Salutati's commitment as Chancellor of the Florentine republic and as

out to describe the mundane life that Girolamo had just abandoned as the realm of sin (*campus diaboli, temptationum palestra, officina malorum, fabrica vitiorum, naufragium virtutum*, among the many expressions provided), in opposition to religious life, which Coluccio describes as the domain of greatest purity and of true glory. In the treatise, the opposition between active and contemplative life amounts to a conflict between worldly life and religious life, and the problem of their relation is addressed from a merely ethical standpoint.

If we turn now to a later writing on the same topic, i.e. Ermolao Barbaro's *De coelibatu* (1472), we will immediately realize that a significant shift of perspective must have occurred. While both Petrarca and Coluccio were committed in praising contemplative life as the most commendable option for human beings – whether the purpose be «to serve God» or «to cultivate our mind through the liberal arts» – Ermolao took a fairly different direction which included some epistemological consideration as well. In the fourth and last book of his treatise, after comparing the lives carried by married and unmarried people as well as acknowledging unmarried life as more conducive to the pursuit of contemplation, Ermolao introduced the disciplines the command of which is required for the single man who is willing to pursue a contemplative life («quarum disciplinarum esse studiosus debeat coelebs contemplator»)³⁵⁶.

Divisere maiores nostri disciplinas in duo potissimum genera: unum earum ut esset quae ad corporis actionem pertinerent, alterum quae ad animae. Populimus iam a coelibe omnis eas artis, quae negotiosae nuncupantur; reliquas tantum eas illi fecimus, quae prestantiores sunt proculdubio et sanctiores.³⁵⁷

Here Ermolao is marking an important difference from the past. The liberal arts, which in Coluccio Salutati's *De seculo et religione* could still be conceived of as a whole, fully compatible with a life of contemplation, in Ermolao's treatment seem

the foremost Florentine representative of active life in general, see V. KAHN, *Coluccio Salutati on the Active and Contemplative Lives*, in *Arbeit, Musse, Meditation*, cit., pp. 153-179.

³⁵⁶ E BARBARO, *De coelibatu*, IV, 2, in ID., *De coelibatu, De officio legati*, critical edition by V. Branca, Olschki, Firenze, 1969, p. 136.

³⁵⁷ *Ibidem*.

to require some qualifications. The Venetian patrician urges the single man, on the one hand, to disregard all the disciplines «*quae negotiosae nuncupantur*» and, on the other hand, to devote himself entirely to those arts that contribute to the growth of his soul. Among the branches of knowledge that Ermolao includes in the “curriculum” there is grammar (whose study should be completed by the end of childhood), followed by the arts of the so-called *Quadrivium* and by natural philosophy, which is to be further divided into two categories: the study of worldly nature (physics), and the study of divine nature (metaphysics/theology):

Et primum quidem id sciat, non esse sibi grammaticae insudandum diu: id enim assequutus, dum puer fuerat. Nam officium illud non modo est illiberale, sed etiam turpe, in sene vero turpissimum. [...]

Geometriae, Musicae, Arithmeticae [...] tantam dare operam velit, quanta animum assidua rerum sublimium indagine fatigatum parumper levet. [...]

Pariter et Astrologiae non esse ignarum oportebit, quemadmodum neque alterius ullius, quae ad Mathematicos attineat, disciplinae. [...]

Naturalem vero disciplinam, quam in duo genera intelligi volumus separatam, in divinarum scilicet et mortalium rerum cognitionem, tanto studio complectatur quanto fieri maximo potest: hinc enim proximus erit ad metam gradus et fini contiguus.³⁵⁸

The very disciplines laying at the foundations of public life and political activity find no place in Ermolao’s account; if anything, they need to be rejected in that they prevent human beings from achieving true knowledge and happiness in life. The first discipline to be excluded is rhetoric, insofar as it pertains entirely to the practice of law and politics:

Eloquentiam vero frustra requiri in huiusmodi homine video, quippe quae ad usum tantum forensium et urbanarum sit reperta, nisi forte credere oportet gaudere etiam hac virtute deos, quibuscum sit coelebs assiduo loquuturus.

³⁵⁸ E BARBARO, *De coelibatu*, IV, 2, cit., pp. 136-142.

[...] Quis autem ignorat eloquentiae usum spectare ad rerum publicarum administrationem, non ad solitariam atque lucifugam vitam?³⁵⁹

In addition, Ermolao's list includes poetry, oratory and even history:

Poeticae quoque studium acre et multa praelectio oratorum et longa cum historicis consuetudo abhorrere videtur ab eo fine quem figimus. Ista autem semel est utile forsitan percurrisse, non quod prodesse multum possint, sed quod profectum aliquem creant ex sententiarum varietate, in ea praesertim aetate quae puerorum est. [...] Sed neque poetas omnis neque oratores sicut neque historicos legisse velit: plerique enim ex iis libris, quos nostra iuventus in sinu gerit, ita impuri impudicique solent circumferri, ut non modo non sint aperiendi aut legendi, sed ne nominandi quidem.³⁶⁰

The role of history in Barbaro's scheme looks rather puzzling. By opposing the tendency widespread among humanists of attaching the greatest importance to the study of the past, Barbaro seems to care more about the cruelty and depravation in history than he does about the lessons history can teach. This is why his program allows for the reading of a very small selection of exemplary cases in history (the so-called «*historiae minus trepidae*»), while rejecting the idea that the knowledge of the past should always be considered as useful and productive.

The principle underlying Barbaro's treatment of disciplines is the necessary distinction between disciplines that enable us to perceive and understand the world as God's creation and disciplines that fail to do so.

Diximus iam quae oporteat caelibem contemplari quantumque in quaque re sit studium impendendum: non enim eodem ardore atque intentione scire omnia velle debet aut eandem operam singulis artibus indulgere, sed

³⁵⁹ E BARBARO, *De coelibatu*, IV, 2, cit., p. 138.

³⁶⁰ E BARBARO, *De coelibatu*, IV, 2, cit., p. 140. Some passages later Ermolao deals with another discipline, the dialectic. His opinion about this branch of knowledge is rather neutral. See *ivi*, p. 141: «Verum, ut in plerisque, male bonis uti coeptum est: nam et hanc ipsam Dialecticam, quum disputandi ars esset, non nulli in minutulas argutiunculas contraxerunt, quorum tamen studium aliquanto fortasse tolerabilius est, quia ad acuendum ingenium repertum esse videatur».

tantum in scientia qualibet laborare quantum ad cognoscendam Opificis
magnitudinem infinitatemque videbitur opportunum.³⁶¹

The purpose of Barbaro's work is to prepare men to contemplation and to turn them away from what is not stable but changing, not permanent but perishable. To this end, the only disciplines the knowledge of which is mandatory are those enabling us to recognize the signs of God in the natural world; they can teach us to understand external world as the first step in the ascent towards true knowledge and glory.

Behind Barbaro's discussion of the dignity of disciplines and the role assigned to contemplation, it is not difficult to detect the influence of Platonism. As Vittore Branca has pointed out, there is a strong «Platonic enthusiasm» that penetrates Ermolao's *De coelibatu*.³⁶² This attitude becomes all the more evident in the case of Barbaro's condemnation of poetry (which draws on *Republic*, II, 377 d-III, 395 e and X, 595 a-608 b), as well as of his attack on rhetoric (*Gorgias*, 447 a-481 b). As a matter of fact, the revival of Platonic philosophy in fifteenth-century Florence affected the debate over active and contemplative life in a way that could not be reversed. This process, which begun with the first translations of Plato's dialogues,³⁶³ culminated in the unprecedented project of Marsilio Ficino, who set out to place contemplation at the very center of a Christian re-appropriation of the whole Platonic tradition.³⁶⁴ As Eugenio Garin has argued, it is at this point that «l'ideale di vita del primo umanesimo fiorentino, civile e politico, viene a misurarsi col platonismo che ormai si va affermando».³⁶⁵

The Florentine intellectual setting became the battlefield where the heirs of the so-called civic humanism had to cross swords with the advocates of a new *pia philosophia* carried out under the aegis of Plato. By now the conflict did not have an ethical character only, as it came to entail a number of epistemological and

³⁶¹ E BARBARO, *De coelibatu*, IV, 2, cit., p. 148.

³⁶² V. BRANCA, *Introduction* to E. BARBARO, *De coelibatu*, cit., p. 8.

³⁶³ On 'pre-Ficinian' translations of Plato's dialogues, see J. HANKINS, *Plato in the Italian Renaissance*, 2 voll, Brill, Leiden- New York-København-Köln, 1990, I, pp. 27-263.

³⁶⁴ P. O. KRISTELLER, *The Active and the Contemplative Life in Renaissance Humanism*, cit., pp. 208-209. On this aspect, see also ID., *Il pensiero filosofico di Marsilio Ficino*, Sansoni, Firenze, 1953, pp. 66-123. And, more generally, *Marsilio Ficino e il ritorno di Platone. Studi e documenti*, 2 voll., edited by G. C. GARFAGNINI, Olschki, Firenze, 1986.

³⁶⁵ *Prosatori latini del Quattrocento*, edited by E. GARIN, Ricciardi, Milano-Napoli, 1952, p. 715.

methodological issues. To begin with, which kind of knowledge was more worthwhile to be attained; which disciplines should deserve greater attention in order for human beings to attain that knowledge; the selection of the most suitable method to be adopted in the search for knowledge. These issues gave rise to an important political question regarding philosophers and their role in the city, a question meant to challenge the idea that philosophers are always useful and valuable to the public life.

II. A work which may contribute to enlighten the many different features of the dispute between active and contemplative life in late fifteenth-century Florence is Cristoforo Landino's *Disputationes Camaldulenses* (1473 ca).³⁶⁶ The first of the four books making out Landino's work is entitled *De vita activa et contemplativa*. It recounts a conversation between Leon Battista Alberti and the young Lorenzo de' Medici reportedly held in Camaldoli in 1468, to the presence of other eminent figures such as Giuliano de' Medici, Alamanno Rinuccini, Pietro and Donato Acciaiuoli, Marco Parenti, Antonio Canigiani and Marsilio Ficino. Leon Battista Alberti plays as the advocate of contemplative life, whilst Lorenzo de' Medici is engaged in the praise of active life.³⁶⁷ The entire discussion is conducted from a strongly 'Platonizing' perspective, as is clear from the very beginning, when Lorenzo asks Alberti to explain the famous point made by Plato (who talks «ex ore Marsilii») that «unless either philosophers become kings in our states or those whom we now call our kings and rulers take to the pursuit of philosophy seriously and adequately, and there is a conjunction of these two things, political power and philosophical intelligence, while the motley horde of the natures who at present pursue either apart from the other are compulsorily

³⁶⁶ C. LANDINO, *Disputationes Camaldulenses*, edited by P. Lohe, Sansoni, Firenze, 1980. On the chronology of Landino's *Disputationes*, see C. LANDINO, *Scritti critici e teorici*, edited by R. Cardini, 2 voll., Bulzoni, Roma, 1974, I, p. 60, where the scholar locates the composition of the work between Leon Battista Alberti's death (April 1472) and the late 1473. See also R. CARDINI, *La critica del Landino dalla «Xandra» alle «Disputationes Camaldulenses»*, in ID., *La critica del Landino*, Sansoni, Firenze, 1973, pp. 1-65.

³⁶⁷ Leon Battista Alberti gave his account of active and contemplative life in the text *Fatum et fortuna* presented in the first book of his *Intercenales*. See L. B. ALBERTI, *Intercenales*, I, edited by F. Bacchelli and L. D'Ascia, with a preface by A. Tenenti, Pendragon, Bologna, 2003, pp. 42-57.

excluded, there can be no cessation of troubles for our states, nor, I fancy, for the human race either».³⁶⁸

Cum, quaecunque a Platone dicuntur, ea mihi ex ore Marsilii, qui praeter omnes tanti philosophi mentem tenet, iam omni oraculo veriora videantur, ardentissime scire cupio, quid id sit, quod tu illo auctore ab iis, qui in veri investigatione versantur, rei publicae gubernatori mutuandum esse censebas.³⁶⁹

The key passages of Alberti's speech occur in the final part of his reply, where the philosopher describes the contemplative ascent which enables men to raise themselves from the deceitful world of the senses to the realm of divine truths. Drawing heavily upon the main tenets of Plato's anthropology, Alberti (or, better, the character named after Alberti) aims here to make at least two fundamental points: the first one is to deny the possibility for any true knowledge to exist in actuality, given that what men attain by their senses is intrinsically misleading and illusory. In order to reach the real truth, one needs to turn away from the empirical world and to appeal to a higher kind of knowledge: the intellectual understanding provided by the knowledge of eternal realities, i.e. the ideas. Only those individuals who can attain such a privileged condition are reasonably to be called philosophers.³⁷⁰ From this it follows Alberti's second point, that is to say the notion that only philosophers can rightly and legitimately govern the state.

The relevant passage from Landino's *Disputationes* is worth quoting at length:

Videmus enim, quanvis exiguus illorum numerus sit, sed videmus tamen nonnullos, qui quibusdam veluti umbris atque imaginibus eorum, quae in sensus nostros cadunt, admoniti caelestium rerum tam ardenti amore

³⁶⁸ PLATO, *Republic*, V, 473 c – 473-e, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato. Including the Letters*, edited by E. Hamilton and H. Cairns, with Introduction and Prefatory Notes, Bollingen-Pantheon, New York, 1961, pp. 712-713.

³⁶⁹ C. LANDINO, *Disputationes Camaldulenses*, I, cit., p. 12.

³⁷⁰ On this point, see L. B. ALBERTI, *Fatum et fortuna*, in ID., *Intercenales*, I, cit., p. 54: «?An parum meruisse videtur hi, qui simplices et omni ex parte incorrupti a genere hominum dii habitus sunt? Ale, quas gestant, veritas et simplicitas; talaria vero caducarum rerum despicentiam interpretantur. Merito igitur vel has ob res divinas divi habentur, vel quod primi quas per fluvium cernis tabulas, maximum nantibus adiumentum, construxere titulosque bonarum artium singulis tabulis inscripsere [...]».

inflammantur, ut relictis curis negociisque omnibus, cum hactenus sensu corpora et imaginando corporum similitudines percepissent, deinceps ipsa ratione corporum naturam, intellectu incorporeos quidem, sed tamen creatos spiritus ac demum intelligentia id, quod increatum est, intueantur. Mirificus omnino progressus et per quem iis quae diximus additamentis animus noster paulatim ex molestissimo corporis carcere se subtrahens et ad supera erectus ex infima materiae faece ad divinitatis usque culmen ascendit. [...]

Quin et illud audebo dicere: neminem aut se domumque suam aut rem publicam recte administraturum, qui omni penitus doctrina expers fuerit. Quo enim pacto aut quid sit summum hominis bonum, aut quo modo id acquiratur cognoscam et hominis simul et rerum natura ignorata? Religionem autem quis recte colet, qui nulla ex parte rerum divinarum cognitionem attigerit? Non erit igitur expers earum rerum, qui rei publicae praeesse volet. Fateor tamen difficile esse illarum exactam omnino cognitionem habere eum virum qui assiduis privatis publicisque negociis occupetur.³⁷¹

A part from a number of quotations from such major ancient poets as Homer, Virgil, Horace, and Juvenal, Leon Battista Alberti's speech relies almost exclusively on the authority of Plato and of the sacred texts – arguably, sources that Landino is quoting together in order to emphasize the continuity between Plato's teachings and Christian religion. Surprisingly enough, Lorenzo de Medici's response too sticks to the tenets of Platonic philosophy, a fact showing

³⁷¹ C. LANDINO, *Disputationes Camaldulenses*, I, cit., p. 16, 25. In his edition of the first book of Landino's *Disputationes*, Eugenio Garin has deciphered «*modestissimo* corporis carcere», and not «*molestissimo* corporis carcere» as Peter Lohe did (see *Prosatori latini del Quattrocento*, cit., p. 738). Similar remarks to the ones made by Landino in the passage from his *Disputationes* may be found in the preface of his vernacular translation of Pliny the Elder's *Naturalis historia*. See C. LANDINO, *Istoria Naturale di C. Plinio Secondo tradotta di lingua latina in fiorentina per Cristoforo Landino Fiorentino al Serenissimo Ferdinando re di Napoli, proemio*, in ID., *Scritti critici e teorici*, cit., I, pp. 81-82: «Di nessuna cosa, serenissimo e invittissimo re Ferdinando, è più cupida la mente umana che di potere con sua cognizione con summa libertà penetrare per tutte le parte di questa universale machina, la quale per l'ammirabile suo ornamento da' Greci *cosmos*, da' Latini *mondo* è nominata. [...] E perché siamo rilegati in questa infima e bassa parte del mondo e fatti di quella non solamente abitatori ma cultori e ornatori [...] dal quale poi con le platoniche ali levandosi a volo, passa prima per questo a noi contermine e più grosso aere e in quello considera tutte le perturbazione che quivi si generano». See also L. B. ALBERTI, *Fatum et fortuna*, in ID., *Intercenales*, I, cit., p. 46: «? [...] Tibi enim ceterisque corpore oclusis animis non plus a superis velim esse concessum scias, quam ea tantum non penitus ignorare, que vos oculis intueamini [...]».

how pervasively Landino's *Disputationes* were influenced by, while also aiming to restate, the key points of Plato's doctrine. In his reply, Lorenzo takes issue with Alberti's praise of contemplation by raising two serious objections: firstly, he claims that contemplative men are not interested in dealing with all the practical issues related to the management of political power, being they more attracted to leisure and books; secondly, and consequently, even if they were interested in such duties – Lorenzo argues – they would not be able to provide any significant contribution to public health and security, because they have not mastered the skills of any specific profession that is useful to the city. While opposing the idle “contemplator” to the active citizen, Lorenzo clarifies his two points by an example:

Verum quo iam sole clarius appareat, quid inter vestrum otiosum et nostrum negotiosum intersit, proponamus nobis exaedificatam aliquam urbem, cui publica ac privata cuiuscunque generis aedificia, sacra itidem ac profana abunde magnificeque assint, adesseque sapientissimum virum, qui illam huiusmodi habitatoribus replere instituat, qui civitatem omnibus rebus affluentem reddant, in qua quemadmodum in animato corpore nullam partem adesse par est, quae non serviat toti, et ipse ad portas sedens nullum prius civem futurum admittat, quam singulos ingredi cupientes diligentissime consideret et, quem quisque civitati usum prudentia artificiove allaturus sit, penitus cognoscat. Itaque respondebunt alii se sapientes legum latores esse, alii consultores prudentes, alii oratores vehementes, alii iudices iustos. Erunt itidem, qui medicinam spondeant, qui civilis iuris ambigua interpretaturos promittant, qui militiam exerciturus profiteantur. Aderunt architecti, aderunt sculptores fectores pictores, aderunt ferri lignorumque fabri. [...]

Inter quos si vester hic sapiens otiosus oscitansque assit secumque et apud se in sua solus bibliotheca delitescens nusquam discedat nullique admisceatur, neminem salutet, nullam neque privatam neque publice operam praestet, quas illius in re publica partes esse dicemus? quod symbolum ad vitam humanam conferre? Ubi illum constituemus? Quo dirigemus? Eritne quispiam, qui illum in aliquo hominum numero habendum censeat?³⁷²

³⁷² C. LANDINO, *Disputationes Camaldulenses*, I, cit., pp. 28-29.

Lorenzo's opinion that philosophers are useless to society restates Adeimantus' argument at the beginning of book 6 of Plato's *Republic*. Towards the end of book 5 Socrates had defined the figure of the philosopher-king and argued that only he is allowed to rule insofar as he can «contemplate the very things themselves in each case», thereby being able to see not simply «many just things, but rather the justice itself».³⁷³ This is the reason why Plato refers to philosophers-kings as the true *philosophoi*, while labeling as *philodoxoi* those who did not attain a purely contemplative knowledge. Adeimantus' argument in book 6 occurs at this very point in the conversation:

I say this with reference to the present case, for in this instance one might say that he is unable in words to contend against you at each question, but that when it comes to facts he sees that of those who turn to philosophy, not merely touching upon it to complete their education and dropping it while still young, but lingering too long in the study of it, the majority become cranks, not to say rascals, and those accounted the finest spirits among them are still rendered useless to society by the pursuit which you commend.³⁷⁴

That Lorenzo's speech here is relying on Plato's *Republic* is confirmed by the presence in both texts of the metaphor of the ship. However, while in Socrates' reply to Adeimantus the shipmaster is compared to the philosopher insofar as he surpasses «in height and strength all others in the ship»³⁷⁵, in Landino's *Disputationes* the same image is nothing but overturned by Lorenzo. In his version the ship is a metaphor of the city, and the many activities the ship crew carry out on correspond to the different arts and professions in any given society; being the philosophers unable to provide whatsoever expertise to the ship-city, they should be prevented from entering.³⁷⁶

³⁷³ PLATO, *Republic*, V, 479 e, cit., pp. 719-720.

³⁷⁴ PLATO, *Republic*, VI, 487 c-d, cit., p. 724.

³⁷⁵ PLATO, *Republic*, VI, 488 a-b, cit., p. 724.

³⁷⁶ C. LANDINO, *Disputationes Camaldulenses*, I, cit., pp. 29-30: «Verum age liceat mihi bona venia te, quod scire cupio, rogare. An si classem adversus hostes ituram ea mente conscendas, ut neque gubernator ad temonem sedeas neque remex navigium impellas neque per foros currens ea, quae aut circa pedem faciendum aut circa antennas velaque administranda sunt, ipse facturis imperes neque imperanti pareas neque denique cum hostibus pugnaturus armis instructus consistas, sed solum onus navi afferas eumque otiosus locum in illa occupes, in quo alius usum

To Lorenzo's apology of active life, Leon Battista Alberti replies by insisting that the contemplative dimension always precedes active life; accordingly, the more one praises the importance of active life, and the more one underlines the preeminence of contemplation.³⁷⁷

The political arguments developed in the first book of Landino's *Disputationes Camaldulenses* involve a number of epistemological implications. These include the question whether a kind of knowledge exists that may succeed in taking into account the many aspects of politics. Should the statesman adopt a strictly empirical approach to human affairs, an approach based principally on his knowledge and analysis of history? Should he be equipped with the technical and rhetorical skills that used to be the main component of civic humanism? Or is it possible that this very approach is the obstacle to a proper understanding of politics? As theory is the condition of any practical activity, is not theoretical knowledge the most commendable way to being a good ruler?

All these questions are extensively addressed in Landino's work, a fact that shows the extent to which they came to affect the cultural environment of late fifteenth-century Florence. In the first part of his speech, Lorenzo celebrates the moral virtues laying at the basis of civil life («virtutes de vita et moribus, quibus civiles actiones diriguntur»),³⁷⁸ and argues that what attains to action comes first even than the seek for truth («praeponenda est igitur actio, quae hoc praestat veri investigationi, quae in sola mente curanda ita versatur»).³⁷⁹ To Lorenzo's arguments Alberti replies by claiming that intellectual knowledge is the necessary condition for every action to exist («non possunt igitur sine mentis investigatione

quempiam praestaret; si, inquam, huiusmodi consilio navem conscendas, ut neque opera neque consilio illam iuvare velis, nonne qui navibus praessent inutilem te et dignum, qui in mare praecipitareris, ducerent et fortasse, si paulo essent severiores, te praecipitent?». The same image of the contemplative philosopher as an individual who cannot lend any support to the ship is provided by L. B. ALBERTI, *Fatum et fortuna*, in ID., *Intercenales*, I, cit., p. 52: «[...] Nam illic inepti, inutiles, contumaces nullas in periculis porrigunt manum, in otio supini, in agendis rebus graves et morosi, ut facile que eos receperit navicula in quo hoc pondere pereat?».

³⁷⁷ C. LANDINO, *Disputationes Camaldulenses*, I, cit., p. 41: «Non possunt igitur sine mentis investigatione ea perfici. Quae circa actiones adhibetur. Quod in Martha Mariaque probe ostendunt. Non enim Maria auxilium Martham deprecatur, sed Mariam Martha, cum apud dominum queratur se ab ea esse destitutam. Poscebat igitur opem Martha, quia sine veri investigatione nihil paene perficit actio. Eo igitur excellentior erit veri inquisitio, quia et quas diximus in actione versari virtutes procreat illisque ad res agendas opitalatur et prater id eam divinitate, attingit, ad quam illa aspirare non valet».

³⁷⁸ C. LANDINO, *Disputationes Camaldulenses*, I, cit., p. 26.

³⁷⁹ Ibidem.

ea perfici, quae circa actiones adhibentur») ³⁸⁰, and thus concluding that the knowledge of the supreme and eternal realities, rather than of concrete ones, is mostly required for the people engaged in the management of political power («quae ad rerum publicarum administrationem utilia futura sint, non nisi per supremarum rerum investigationem ad hominibus excogitari posse»). ³⁸¹

Directly related to the epistemological question is the political one. Is the philosopher-king portrayed by Plato, and later revisited by Landino, really suitable to leading the state? Can his philosophical mastery be put at the service of the state? And, more generally, is there any way the contemplative type of citizen can be of any use to the city? Lorenzo's opinion is very negative indeed. He claims that contemplative spirits cannot lend any support to public affairs since their real goal is to turn away from this world and to seek for a knowledge which has nothing to do with political life (as it is clear from the metaphor of the ship). ³⁸² Moreover, even if the knowledge they acquired might be somehow useful to the city, philosophers would not be willing to share their insight with other people («rursus vero, cum eundem [*scil.* otiosum] illos conditos retinere animadvertam neque tantas divitias in aliorum libertatem convertere videam, ditissimo illum homini comparo, sed qui opes suas clam omnibus habens humique fodiens nec sibi nec aliis profuturus sit»). ³⁸³ On the other side, Alberti's view

³⁸⁰ C. LANDINO, *Disputationes Camaldulenses*, I, cit., p. 41.

³⁸¹ C. LANDINO, *Disputationes Camaldulenses*, I, cit., p. 42.

³⁸² On the ineptitude of contemplative philosophers in dealing with political issues, see also E. BARBARO, *Epistola* (E. Barbaro to G. Pico della Mirandola, with no date), in *Prosatori latini del Quattrocento*, cit., p. 858: «Quid tam arbitrarium est quam leges, quam iura, quam caeremoniae? Quis tamen ferat haec philosophum quamlibet egregium, quamlibet Deo proximum, vel novae vel immutare cupientem? Praesertim nobis, qui de contemplatore modo loquimur, et ab eo practicen discludimus, sine qua homo, qua homo, non philosophus est, inquit, sed stupor».

³⁸³ C. LANDINO, *Disputationes Camaldulenses*, I, cit., p. 31. The same image of the philosopher as someone who conceals his treasures (i.e. his doctrine) to the people occurs most famously in G. PICO DELLA MIRANDOLA, *Epistola de genere dicendi philosophorum* (G. Pico to E. Barbaro, 3 June 1485), in *Prosatori latini del Quattrocento*, cit., pp. 805-823: 812: «Quodsi vulgo, ut dicis, habemur sordidi, rudes, inculti, hoc nobis ad gloriam est, non ad contumeliam. Vulgo non scripsimus, sed tibi et tui similibus. Nec aliter quam prisca suis aenigmatibus et fabularum involucris arcebant idiotas homines a mysteriis, et nos consuevimus abstertere illos a nostris dapibus, quas non polluere non possent, amariori paulum cortice verborum. *Solent et qui thesauros occultare volunt, si non datur seponere, quisquiliis integere, vel rudibus, ut praetereuntes non deprehendant, nisi quos ipsi dignos eo munere iudicaverint. Simile philosophorum studium celare res suas populum*, a quo cum non probari modo nec intelligi illos deceat, non potest non dedecere habere aliquid quae ipsi scribunt theatrale, plausibile, popolare, quod demum multitudinis iudicio accomodare se videatur» (my *emphasis*). On this topic, see F. BAUSI, *Nec rhetor neque philosophus. Fonti, lingua e stile nelle prime opere latine di Giovanni Pico della Mirandola*

about the role of philosophers in the city is extremely optimistic. It is precisely because they have been able to grasp the true knowledge – i.e. that of eternal realities, which are not threatened by the fallacy of the senses – that they should be appointed by their fellow citizens to rule the state («verum maiores gratias his viris habendas censebimus, qui per summum otium ea excogitarint atque invenerint, quibus veluti norma quadam vestri illi patroni ad rem civilem administrandam utantur»).384

III. The rediscovery of Plato's work in the late fifteenth-century Florence brought about a significant change in the way intellectuals used to think the relation between political expertise and public activity. Plato's philosophy gave rise to an alternative understanding of what political philosophy was all about, an understanding which challenged the view traditionally associated with the so-called civic humanism. As Landino's *Disputationes* shows, the image of the civic humanist leading the city by means of his rhetorical training was no longer the only available. Next to him, one could find now the Platonic philosopher-king, whose ability in dealing with political matters lays on the knowledge of the eternal realities he acquired by ascending up to the realm of the pure contemplation. The rivalry of these two opposite views was nothing but the political repercussion of a much broader question that concerned the nature of philosophy and the role of the philosopher in general, a question that affected very heavily the cultural scenery of Florence from the late fifteenth century onwards.³⁸⁵

A work that permits insight into this question is Angelo Poliziano's *Lamia*, the opening oration to the course on Aristotle's *Prior Analytics* he held at the *Studium florentinum* in the academic year 1492-1493.³⁸⁶ The text of Poliziano's *praelectio*

(1484-87), Olschki, Firenze, 1996, («Studi pichiani», 3), pp. 13-92, esp. p. 14, n. 3; F. FROSINI, *Umanesimo e immagine dell'uomo: note per un confronto tra Leonardo e Giovanni Pico*, in *Leonardo e Pico. Analogie, contatti, confronti*, Atti del convegno (Mirandola, 10 May 2003), edited by F. Frosini, Firenze, Olschki, 2005, («Studi pichiani», 9), pp. 174-177, esp. pp. 174-175 n. 5.

³⁸⁴ C. LANDINO, *Disputationes Camaldulenses*, I, cit., p. 42.

³⁸⁵ I. CANDIDO, *The role of the philosopher in the late Quattrocento Florence: Poliziano's Lamia and the legacy of the Pico-Barbaro epistolary controversy*, in ANGELO POLIZIANO'S *Lamia*, cit., pp. 95-129.

³⁸⁶ A detailed list of the courses taught by Poliziano at the Florentine University between 1480 and 1494 is provided by L. CESARINI MARTINELLI, *Poliziano professore allo Studio fiorentino*, in *La*

was printed in Florence in 1492, slightly after the public oration gave by its author, and enjoyed a quite large diffusion.³⁸⁷ In the *Lamia*, Poliziano argues against his detractors who believed him to be not trained enough for lecturing on such a philosopher as Aristotle.³⁸⁸ In depicting his opponents through the features of the lamias, Poliziano had certainly in mind some colleagues at the university (Cristoforo Landino, in the first place), as well as other eminent intellectuals outside the academic environment, such as Marsilio Ficino.³⁸⁹ There were two main reasons laying at the basis of such a harsh criticism. On the one hand, Poliziano's university colleagues had called into question his method of interpreting texts, a method they considered too far from the traditional Scholastic approach.³⁹⁰ Also, Poliziano's didactic style too was accused, because seen as a dangerous attempt to cross the traditional demarcations of academic disciplines. On the other hand, Poliziano's historico-philological method raised a much broader question that touched the identification of the most appropriate way of dealing with the analysis of texts and, *a fortiori*, of reality. As Ari Wesseling has pointed out, in fact, «we have here a pointer to Poliziano's preference for the concrete, the historically verifiable – a preference which stands in sharp contrast to Ficino's tendency to enter into abstract speculations on the supernatural plane».³⁹¹

Hence, the discussion between Poliziano and the lamias which takes place in the *Lamia* resumes the same opposition between matter of concreteness and matter of

Toscana al tempo di Lorenzo il Magnifico. Politica economia cultura arte, 3 voll., Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi per le celebrazioni del V Centenario della morte di Lorenzo il Magnifico (Firenze, Pisa, Siena, 5-8 November 1992), Pacini, Pisa, 1996, II, pp. 463-481. During the last four years of his activity as a professor of rhetoric, Poliziano delivered courses on some eminently philosophical texts: he read and commented on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* in 1490-91; on Porphyry's *Isagoge*, Gilbert de la Porrée's *De sex rerum principiis*, as well as on Aristotle's *Categories*, *On Interpretation* and *Sophistical Refutations* in 1491-92; he gave classes on Aristotle's *Prior Analytics* in 1492-93; and, finally, he completed his introduction to Aristotle's *Organon* by lecturing on *Posterior Analytics* and *Topics* in 1493-94.

³⁸⁷ C. H. LOHR, *Medieval Latin Aristotle Commentaries*, «Traditio», XXIII (1967), pp. 313-413: 362 lists eight different editions between 1492 and 1524.

³⁸⁸ C. S. CELENZA, *Poliziano's Lamia in Context*, in ANGELO POLIZIANO'S *Lamia*, cit., pp. 1-45.

³⁸⁹ A. WESSELING, *Introduction* to A. POLIZIANO, *Lamia. Praelectio in Priora Aristotelis Analytica*, critical edition, introduction and commentary by A. Wesseling, Brill, Leiden, 1986, pp. XIV-XIX; I. CANDIDO, *The role of the philosopher in the late Quattrocento Florence*, cit., pp. 99-100.

³⁹⁰ A. GRAFTON, *On the Scholarship of Politian and Its Context*, «Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes». XL, (1977), pp. 150-188.

³⁹¹ A. WESSELING, *Introduction* to A. POLIZIANO, *Lamia*, cit., p. XVII.

abstraction, reality and speculation, that was at the core of Landino's account given in the first book of his *Disputationes*. Furthermore, Poliziano addresses the problem of philosophers' position in the city, as well as the issue of the best kind of knowledge in general, even more directly than Landino had done, and thus his witness proves to be pivotal in order to enlighten the main features of this opposition.

In order to strike back against the criticisms of the lamias, Poliziano seeks to demonstrate that his assignment of reading and commenting on Aristotle does not make him a philosopher in a proper sense, but, simply, an interpreter of philosophical texts. The central passages of Poliziano's oration are particularly relevant for our purpose. After presenting the apologue of the lamias, Poliziano steps forward and raises two questions: a) what is a philosopher? b) is being philosopher a vile and bad thing?

Videamus ergo primum quodnam hoc sit animal quod homines philosophum vocant. Tum, spero, facile intelligetis non esse me philosophum. [...] De hoc igitur primum, mox etiam de eo agemus, utrumne esse philosophum turpe ac malum sit. Quod ubi docuerimus non esse.³⁹²

These questions give rise to an intense conversation between Poliziano and the lamias: on the one side, the author intends to attach at least a not negligible philosophical weight to his work as a reader of Aristotle, while on the other side the lamias strive hard to convince Poliziano he is not a philosopher, by raising several objections to all his arguments.

Among the many points made by the lamias against their interlocutor, especially two of them deserve particular attention in that they exemplify two widespread and very sharp accusations usually addressed to philosophers at that time.

The first argument concerns the philosophers' ineptitude for social and political life, and restates one of the objections raised by Lorenzo de' Medici in Landino's *Disputationes Camaldulenses*. The aim of such criticism – which we must imagine as rather common – is to depict the philosopher as the pure contemplator,

³⁹² A POLIZIANO, *Lamia*, cit., p. 4.

looking at him as someone who gazes upon heaven and does not discern the things that are underneath his feet. According to this view, the philosopher is not only unable to lend any support to public life, but he also deserves to be derided by all the other fellow citizens for his bizarre behaviors:

Adde quod nec vicinum quidem suum cognoscit nec scit utrum sit albus an ater, utrum sit homo an belua. Sed nec illa ipsa cernit interdum quae sunt ante pedes. Itaque irrisus ab ancilla Thressa Milesius Thales dicitur, quod nocturnis intentus sideribus in puteum deciderat. ‘Stulte enim’ inquit illa ‘o Thales, celum videre studes, qui non videris quod erat ante pedes.’ Ergo si hominem hunc adducas in curiam aut praetorem aut item in contionem iubeasque de iis dicere quae tractentur quaeque ante oculos interque manus sint, haesitet, titubet, stupeat, caliget.³⁹³

Poliziano’s reply to the argument put forward by the lamias is apparently surprising. He actually admits they are right in charging the philosopher with ineptitude and clumsiness in civil life.³⁹⁴ The justification he offers for such a behavior is that philosophers believe political issues and public concerns to be worthless and not deserving enough for them.

Quid ad haec dicam? Quid respondebo? Equidem cuncta esse fateor veriora veris. Nescit forum philosophus, nescit lites, nescit curiam, nescit hominum conventicula, nescit flagitia. Partim aliena putat haec a se, partim minuta nimis et pusilla. Quocirca despicit ac turbae hominum sordidae relinquit, ut quibus idoneus esse possit etiam quilibet e populo. Themistocles ille dux magnus cum caesas a se in litore barbarorum copias inspectaret, monilia forte quaedam et armillas aureas iacentes conspicatus praeteriens ipse comiti cuidam suo monstravit et ‘Tolle’ inquit ‘illa tibi. Non enim tu es

³⁹³ A POLIZIANO, *Lamia*, cit., pp. 12-13.

³⁹⁴ I said “apparently” because the opinion defended by the lamias is that of Poliziano’s detractors (Landino, Ficino and some other champions of contemplative life), who depict a very stereotypical, and sometimes even caricatural, image of the philosopher. Hence, being Poliziano’s real concern to legitimate his title of ‘interpreter of philosophical texts’, he has no interest in defending or praising the figure of the purely contemplative philosopher embodied by Landino and Ficino.

Themostocles.’ Ita ergo et istis absinet philosophus ut vilibus, ut parum se dignis, adeoque interdum nescit ea ut etiam nescire se nesciat.³⁹⁵

Poliziano’s remarks about the snobbishness of philosophers (who do not care about the problems of the city because «partim aliena putant haec a se, partim minuta nimis et pusilla») confirm that a rather hostile feeling about purely contemplative spirits had emerged in the late Quattrocento Florence. And, in turn, Poliziano’s remarks themselves must have also contributed significantly to further diffuse such feeling within the cultural environment of the time.

Towards the end of the work, the lamias make another point which is worthwhile to be underscored. Trying to persuade Poliziano he is not at all an authentic philosopher, the lamias appeal very ironically to the following argument:

Euge, inquiunt Lamiae, concedimus ut vocere grammaticus, non tamen ut et philosophus. Quomodo enim tu philosophus qui nec magistros habueris nec id genus unquam libros attigeris? Nisi si fungino esse genere philosophos credis, ut una eos pluvia statim procreet, aut terrigenis illis similes quos poetae de glebis protinus et sulcis cum clypeo producunt et galea. Num forte illud dices, te tibi ipsum fuisse magistrum, sicuti de se aiebat Epicurus, aut noctu inspiratam tibi divinitus philosophiam, sicuti Aesopo fertur?³⁹⁶

The account given by the lamias touches – indeed in a very sarcastic way – the first fundamental question related to the dispute between active and contemplative life, i.e. the epistemological question (while the two other passages quoted before concerned – evidently – the political question about the role of philosophers in the city). The type of knowledge defended by the lamias as the distinctive feature of true philosophers is the one acquired by means of the intellectual experience provided by books and lectures («nec magistros habueris nec id genus unquam libros attigeris»). Poliziano – they argue – must rest content with the title of grammarian, since the one of philosopher concerns only those few individuals

³⁹⁵ A POLIZIANO, *Lamia*, cit., pp. 13.

³⁹⁶ A POLIZIANO, *Lamia*, cit., pp. 17.

who could achieve a superior rank of awareness thanks to their long dedication to books and to the practice of contemplation.³⁹⁷

IV. It must be noticed that the contrast outlined above had an extremely pervasive impact on the cultural scenery of Florence between fifteenth and sixteenth century, an impact that was particularly evident in the writings by practitioners of politics and practical-minded authors. The very sense of their expertise and social mission came in fact to be radically challenged. The revival of Plato's philosophy in the late fifteenth-century Florence was one of the main reasons leading to the emergence of an alternative way of approaching political matters. The followers of contemplative philosophy called into question the traditional concept of the statesman and his activity, which was grounded on the knowledge of well-defined disciplines (rhetoric, politics, and history) as well as on the concrete fieldwork.

Among the many texts showing the way how practical-minded writers hit back at philosophers' claims to the direction of the city, Francesco Guicciardini's *Considerazioni sui «Discorsi» del Machiavelli* (1530) occupies a privileged position. In the first place, in fact, the date of its composition makes evident how persistent has been the quarrel between the two opposite views we are dealing with, a quarrel which covered entirely both the childhood and the intellectual maturity of Machiavelli. In the second place, Guicciardini's witness proves

³⁹⁷ The opposition between grammar and contemplative philosophy (or *philosophia prima, speculativa, metaphisica*) in the system of sciences was a *topos* in the fifteenth-century Florence. See IOHANNIS ARGYROPOULI *Praefatio in libris Ethicorum quinque primis die IV. Februarii, hora XIV., die Veneris, 1456 habita*, in K. MÜLLNER, *Reden und Briefe Italienischer Humanisten*, Wilhelm Fink, München, 1970, pp. 3-18: 16: «Moralia quoque haec Nicomachia appellantur, quo nomine hoc liber is ab altero Moralium distinguatur ab eodem Aristotele scripto, qui quidem et Magna Moralia nuncupatur. [...] Ordo autem huius doctrinae cum aliis scientiis is est, ut a Peripateticis ipsis Platonicisque accepimus. Nam post grammaticam oratoriamque artem, si ad philosophiam pergere voluerimus, post argumentandi ratiocinandique artem, quae logica appellari solet, sine qua medius fidius nihil perfecte nec in activa nec in speculativa vita sciri atque percipi poterit, percipienda est statim philosophia moralis, quo eius doctrina tamquam cultura quadam vitiis extractis radicitus praeparatisque animis ad satus accipiendos semina speculativae philosophiae quam ordinate idoneeque suscipient». See also Ermolao Barbaro's reply to Pico's famous letter *de genere dicendi philosophorum*: E. BARBARO, *Epistola* (E. Barbaro to G. Pico della Mirandola, with no date), in *Prosatori latini del Quattrocento*, cit., p. 846: «"Picus, inquit, iste quisquis est, grammaticus opinor, parvo pedi calceos magnos circumdedit. [...]"».

particularly significant in that it applies to our author, to whom he was also bound by a lasting friendship.³⁹⁸

Commenting on the opening chapter of the first book – and, in particular, on the passage where Machiavelli had dealt with the choice of the site for a new city – Guicciardini disagrees with his friend. He claims that if the district is too much fertile, the citizens will be likely to become excessively idle. On the contrary, Guicciardini's persuasion is that their virtue will be increased if they are driven by the necessity to survive. After maintaining so, he points out:

E questo si discorre non in una città che voglia *vivere alla filosofica*, ma in quelle che vogliono governarsi secondo el commune uso del mondo, come è necessario fare, altrimenti sarebbono, essendo debole, oppresse e conculcate da vicini.³⁹⁹

This passage broaches many of the aspects we have analyzed above. Firstly, it restates the same opposition between matter of reality («el commune uso del mondo») and matter of abstraction («vivere alla filosofica») already put forward by all the aforementioned fifteenth-century authors. Secondly, it openly charges philosophers with inadequacy in coping with political issues, since any city which is not ruled by means of a concrete policy is necessarily doomed to collapse. Thirdly, in Guicciardini's words it is not difficult to perceive a strong sarcasm – with a hint of arrogance too – directed to all the self-styled kings-philosophers, whose alleged aptitude in handling political matters is later labeled by

³⁹⁸ On the relationship and reciprocal influences between Machiavelli and Guicciardini, see at least: F. GILBERT, *Machiavelli and Guicciardini*, «Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes», II (1938-1939), pp. 263-266 (later discussed by R. BIZZOCCHI, *Guicciardini lettore di Machiavelli*, «Archivio Storico Italiano», CXXXVI (1978), pp. 437-455); U. SPIRITO, *Machiavelli e Guicciardini*, Sansoni, Firenze, 1968 (ed. or., Roma, 1944), esp. pp. 85-108; F. GILBERT, *Machiavelli and Guicciardini. Politics and History in Sixteenth-Century Florence*, Princeton University Press, Princeton (NJ), 1965; G. SASSO, *Guicciardini e Machiavelli*, in ID., *Per Francesco Guicciardini. Quattro studi*, Istituto Italiano per il Medio Evo, Roma, 1984, pp. 47-158 (originally in *Francesco Guicciardini. 1483-1983, Nel V Centenario della nascita*, Olschki, Firenze, 1983, pp. 3-130); G. MASI, *Saper «ragionare di questo mondo». Il carteggio fra Machiavelli e Guicciardini*, in *Cultura e scrittura di Machiavelli*, cit., pp. 487-522; E. CUTINELLI-RENDINA, «Guicciardini, Francesco», in *Enciclopedia machiavelliana*, cit., I, pp. 685-695, esp. pp. 688 ff.

³⁹⁹ F. GUICCIARDINI, *Considerazioni sui «Discorsi» del Machiavelli*, in ID., *Opere*, edited by E. Lugnani Scarano, UTET, Torino, 2010, I, pp. 605-677: 609 (my *emphasis*).

Guicciardini through another and very sharp expression: «governarsi con le girandole e le arte [*sic*] della pace». ⁴⁰⁰ Guicciardini further confirms this position in his *Ricordi*, a work he completed simultaneously with the *Considerazioni*:

E' filosofi e e' teologi e tutti gli altri che scrutano le cose sopra natura o che non si veggono, dicono mille pazzie: perché in effetto gli uomini sono al buio delle cose, e questa indagazione ha servito e serve più a esercitare gli ingegni che a trovare la verità. ⁴⁰¹

The aversion often shown by Machiavelli for philosophers and contemplative spirits was evidently a feeling that he shared with many others in the Florence of his time, and it is not difficult to see why. The air of mysticism and pride which surrounded Ficino and his circle – being their acolytes so absorbed in the investigation of the highest realities and disgusted by the lowness of earthly life – must have turned out to sound rather annoying for many, especially for those who had a much more concrete approach to life. It is at the light of this particular feeling – of annoyance and sarcasm at the same time – that we must read, for instance, such a statement as the one made by Pacifico Massimi from Ascoli (1410 ca.-before 1506) in the preface of his first collection of poems known as *Hecatelegium* (1489). ⁴⁰² Pacifico's poetical works were widely spread during the second half of the fifteenth-century. The satirical and often indecent tone featuring his compositions contributed to a quite large fortune of his collections. ⁴⁰³ Moreover, Pacifico should not have been unknown to Machiavelli himself, since we learn from a letter sent to him by Agostino Vespucci in July 1501 that

⁴⁰⁰ F. GUICCIARDINI, *Considerazioni*, cit., p. 617.

⁴⁰¹ F. GUICCIARDINI, *Ricordi*, II, 125, in ID., *Opere*, cit., p.764.

⁴⁰² P. MASSIMI, *Les Cent Elégies, Hecatelegium, Florence, 1489*, Édition critique traduite et présentée par J. Desjardins, Ellug, Grenoble, 1986. The second collection of Pacifico's *Hecatelegium* has been recently edited: P. MASSIMI, *Hecatelegium (II). Les Cent nouvelles Élégies*, Texte inédit, publié, traduit et présenté par J. Desjardins Daude, Les Belles Lettres, Paris, 2008.

⁴⁰³ See A. MULAS, «Massimi, Pacifico», in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, 71, Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, Roma, 2008, pp. 777-779; ID., *Per l'Hecatelegium primum di Pacifico Massimi*, «Letteratura Italiana Antica», X (2009), pp. 593-614.

Machiavelli was informed about the presence of Pacifico in Rome during those days.⁴⁰⁴

The dedicatory letter to Francesco Soderini, bishop of Volterra, placed at the beginning of Pacifico's *Hecatelegium*, ends with the following exhortation:

Habes Platones, Aristoteles et philosophantes plures. Sed illi vitam et animum quandoque restringunt. Ego vero (lege me) relaxo, et angorem et bilem intercido. Vive laetus, et vitam ama.⁴⁰⁵

Pacifico could not have explained the meaning of his work better than so. These remarks further testify for the dissemination throughout the cultural pattern of late Quattrocento Florence of motifs and images typically attached to the dispute on the role and utility of philosophers. Pacifico invites his addressee to leave aside for a while the books written by those 'philosophists' (*philosophantes*) and to enjoy the reading of his poems. These, differently from the bothering dissertations made by those *Platones* and *Aristoteles*, can restore the spirit and make life more pleasant.

V. Every attempt to explain Machiavelli's treatment of philosophical authorities should entail an adequate assessment of the set of problems analyzed above. The debate over *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa* had in fact a so pervasive impact on the historical context Machiavelli lived in, that it is impossible to suppose he was not affected at all.

⁴⁰⁴ N. MACHIAVELLI, *Lettere*, 22 (A Vespucci to N. Machiavelli, 16 July 1501), in ID., *Opere*, III, edited by S. Gaeta, UTET, Torino, 1984, pp. 104-105: «*Spectabilis vir honorande etc.* È sul mezo di e io spiro del gran caldo è a Roma, e per non dormire fo questi pochi versi et etiam mosso da Raffaello Pulci che si trastulla con le muse. [...] con sanctà lo udiamo, et èmmi detto lui avere qualche dubio, che sendo di lui opinione e certeza di esser poeta, e che l'Academia di Roma lo vuole coronare a sua posta, non vorria venire in qualche pericolo circa pedicationem, perché è qui Pacifico, Fedro e delli altri poeti, qui nisi haberent refugium in asylum nunc huius, nunc illius cardinalis, combusti iam essent». On Machiavelli's likely acquaintance with Pacifico's works, and more particularly with the *Hecatelegium*, see F. BACCHELLI, *Cecilio Calcagnini, Pacifico Massimi e la simulazione*, «I Castelli di Yale», VIII (2006), pp. 119-140, esp. pp. 128-129. On the presence of Pacifico in Rome in July 1501, see also J. DESJARDINS, *Introduction to P. MASSIMI, Les Cent Elégies*, cit., pp. 9-11.

⁴⁰⁵ P. MASSIMI, *Les Cent Elégies*, proemium, cit., p. 32.

As a matter of fact, his intolerance for contemplative spirits was a rather common feeling among practitioners of politics and practical-minded figures in the late fifteenth-century Florence. Beside the two passages from Machiavelli's *Principe* and *Istorie Fiorentine* quoted at the beginning of the chapter – in which the author openly blames on philosophers because none of their writings provides with useful advices for handling political matters – there are other places in Machiavelli's works that betray a sharp sarcasm directed to the representatives of neoplatonic philosophy. One of these is the chapter 56 of the first book of the *Discorsi*, where Machiavelli deals with the question that «when great calamities are about to befall a city or country, signs are seen to presage, and seers arise who foretell them».

Donde ei si nasca io non so, ma ei si vede, per gli antichi e per gli moderni esempi, che mai non venne alcuno grave accidente in una città o in una provincia che non sia stato o da indovini o da rivelazioni o da prodigi o da altri segni celesti predetto.⁴⁰⁶

Machiavelli admits he ignores the reasons why great events in history are usually foretold by some heaven-sent sign; nevertheless, there are many examples, both ancient and recent, that may confirm this to be true. Machiavelli cites three modern examples (the invasion of Italy by Charles VIII foretold by Savonarola, the thunderbolt that rent Florence's cathedral before the death of Lorenzo de' Medici, the lightning that struck Palazzo Vecchio before Piero Soderini was dismissed from his office) and one ancient taken from Livy (the voice louder than mortal heard by the plebeian Marcus Ceditius before the invasion of the Gauls). After corroborating his argument through the recourse to history, Machiavelli concludes the chapter with an observation that is, actually, very ironic:

La cagione di questo credo sia da essere discorsa e interpretata da uomo che abbi notizia delle cose naturali e sopra naturali, il che non abbiamo noi. Pure, potrebbe essere che sendo questo aere, come vuole alcuno filosofo, pieno di intelligenze, le quali per naturali virtù preveggendo le cose future e avendo

⁴⁰⁶ N. MACHIAVELLI, *Discorsi*, I, 56, cit., I, p. 270.

compassione agli uomini, acciò si possano preparare alle difese gli avvertiscono con simili segni.⁴⁰⁷

It is not difficult to see behind the «intelligenze» Machiavelli is talking about a clear allusion to the neoplatonic demons that, in the pages of Ficino's *De vita coelitus comparanda*, were told to fill the aer and to connect lower and higher world by means of their sympathy (*compassione*).⁴⁰⁸ Nor is it difficult to perceive Machiavelli's arrogance and sarcasm in opposing his concrete and historically grounded arguments to the far more vague reasons of those «who have knowledge of causes natural and supernatural».

Another feature concerning Machiavelli's attitude towards purely contemplative philosophers that may explain why his aversion for them was so strong is his critique to Christian religion. In Machiavelli's Florence, in fact, contemplative philosophy and Christian religion came to be merged into Ficino's neoplatonic doctrine, and Machiavelli was deeply persuaded this union to be one of the greatest dangers for both the virtue and the freedom of political communities:

Pensando dunque donde possa nascere che in quegli tempi antichi i popoli fossero più amatori della liberta che in questi, credo nasca da quella medesima cagione che fa ora gli uomini manco forti, la quale credo sia la

⁴⁰⁷ N. MACHIAVELLI, *Discorsi*, I, 56, cit., I, pp. 272-273. A similar statement is provided by another fifteenth-century champion of active life, namely Giovanni Cavalcanti (1381- c. 1451), in his *Trattato politico-morale*: G. CAVALCANTI, *Trattato politico-morale*, edited by M. T. Grendler, Librairie Droz, 1973, pp. 113-114: «Ora lasciamo ricercare a' gran phisici e' sacreti della natura, e noi actendiamo alla doctrina del bel vivere pulito [*scil.* del vivere politico]». 'Trattato politico-morale' is the name given by modern editors to the third and last part of a broader treatise with no title written by Cavalcanti. The work survives in four manuscripts (respectively, two partial and two complete copies): Biblioteca Riccardiana di Firenze, ms. 2431 and ms. 403; Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze, ms. Ginori Conti, Appendice 3 and ms. Capponi 131. See M. T. GRENDLER, *Introduction to the text*, in G. CAVALCANTI, *Trattato politico-morale*, cit., p. 91.

⁴⁰⁸ M. FICINO, *De vita*, III, *De vita coelitus comparanda*, I, edited by A. Biondi and Giuliano Pisani, Biblioteca dell'Immagine, Pordenone, 1991, p. 206: «Adhibitibus autem quae ad stellam talem pertinent atque daemonem, stellae daemonisque huius proprium subito influxum, velut lignum per sulfur paratum ad flammam ubique praesentem. Atque hunc non modo per ipsos stellae daemonisque radios, sed etiam per ipsam mundi animam ubique praesentem, in qua et cuiuslibet stellae daemonisque ratio viget, partim quidem seminalis ad generandum, partim etiam exemplaris ad cognoscendum». Giorgio Inglese (in N. MACHIAVELLI, *Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Tito Livio*, introduzione di G. Sasso, note di G. Inglese, Rizzoli, Milano, 1984, p. 281) refers to CICERO, *De divin.* I.30.64: «quod plenus aer sit immortalium animorum in quibus tamquam insignitate notae veritatis appareant».

diversità della educazione nostra dall'antica, fondata sulla diversità della religione nostra dalla antica. [...] La religione antica, oltre a di questo, non beatificava se non uomini pieni di mondana gloria, come erano capitani di eserciti e principi di repubbliche. *La nostra religione ha glorificato più gli uomini umili e contemplativi che gli attivi*. Ha dipoi posto il sommo bene nella umiltà, abiezione, e nel dispregio delle cose umane.⁴⁰⁹

Machiavelli's intolerance for contemplative philosophers must be seen also at the light of his attack to modern religion.

As we have seen, the cultural pattern to which neoplatonic philosophy gave rise came to question the traditional expertise of the statesman. Its representatives meant to exclude such competences as the knowledge of history and rhetorical skills from the "curriculum" required to the ruler. As far as the historical knowledge is concerned, it is hard to imagine something more distant from Machiavelli's deepest conviction about history than the passage from Ermolao Barbaro's *De coelibatu* in which the author invites to neglect the books of history because of the crudity and immorality of the topics they may talk about.⁴¹⁰ In Machiavelli's view, such a distinction between good and evil histories would make no sense. On the contrary, the study of the past proves to be positive and useful in any case, insofar as it permits insight into bygone political events and military deeds and to judge what is imitation-worthy.

Machiavelli has never concealed his preference for the concrete, for what is historically founded, a preference that may explain why he draws well more frequently upon historians than upon philosophical works. In the latter kind of

⁴⁰⁹ N. MACHIAVELLI, *Discorsi*, II, 2, cit., I, pp. 317-318 (my emphasis). On the problem of religion in Machiavelli's thought, see at least: D. CANTIMORI, *Machiavelli, Guicciardini, le idee religiose del Cinquecento*, with an afterward by A. Prospero, Edizioni della Normale, Pisa, 2013 (or. ed., Milano, 1966 and 1967); A. TENENTI, *La religione di Machiavelli*, in ID., *Credenze, ideologie, libertinismi tra Medio Evo ed età moderna*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 1978, pp. 175-219; S. DE GRAZIA, *Machiavelli in Hell*, Princeton University Press, Princeton (NJ), 1989; E. CUTINELLI-RENDINA, *Chiesa e religione in Machiavelli*, Pisa, Istituti editoriali e poligrafici internazionali, 1998; C. J. NEDERMAN, *Amazing Grace. Fortune, God, and Free Will in Machiavelli's Thought*, «Journal of the History of Ideas», LX, (1999), 4, pp. 617-638; A. BROWN, *Philosophy and Religion in Machiavelli*, in *The Cambridge Companion to Machiavelli*, cit., pp. 157-172.

⁴¹⁰ E. BARBARO, *De coelibatu*, IV, 2, cit., p. 140: «Sed neque poetas omnis neque oratores sicut neque historicos legisse velit: plerique enim ex iis libris, quos nostra iuventus in sinu gerit, ita impuri impudicique solent circumferri, ut non modo non sint aperiendi aut legendi, sed ne nominandi quidem».

writings Machiavelli could find nothing but “theoretical republics”, as he pointed out in the final part of his *Discursus Florentinarum rerum* by talking about those men who «non avendo possuto fare una repubblica in atto, l’hanno fatta in scritto, come Aristotile, Platone e molt’altri».⁴¹¹ The same preference will be later expressed by Francesco Guicciardini along the pages of his *Ricordi*:

Quanto è diversa la pratica dalla teorica! Quanti sono che intendono le cose bene, che o non si ricordono o non sanno metterle in atto! E a chi fa così, questa intelligenza è inutile, perché è come avere uno tesoro in una arca con obbligo di non potere mai trarlo fuori.⁴¹²

Machiavelli founded his approach to the understanding of reality on the refusal of the contemplative pattern. His method of political analysis is firmly grounded on the interaction between direct experience and historical knowledge, a process which is conducted under the severe scrutiny of reason.⁴¹³ This is why vague references to authorities find no place in Machiavelli’s discourse, as he made clear in a letter sent to Francesco Vettori on 29 of April 1513. While discussing about the king of Spain, Ferdinand of Aragon, Machiavelli indicates his disagreement with his friend’s position and goes further to explain his own way of interpreting reality:

Nè crederrò mai che sotto questo partito ora da lui preso [sc. il re di Spagna] ci possa essere altro che quello che si vede, perchè io non beo paesi, nè voglio in queste cose mi muova veruna autorità senza ragione.⁴¹⁴

⁴¹¹ N. MACHIAVELLI, *Discursus Florentinarum rerum post mortem iunioris Laurentii Medices*, cit., p. 640.

⁴¹² F. GUICCIARDINI, *Ricordi*, II, 35, cit., p. 738.

⁴¹³ Another remark by Machiavelli frequently quoted by scholars is the one given in the preface of book 5 of the *Istorie fiorentine*, where Machiavelli maintains: «Onde si è dai prudenti osservato come le lettere vengono dietro alle armi, e che nelle provincie e nelle città prima i capitani che i filosofi nascono» (N. MACHIAVELLI, *Istorie fiorentine*, V, 1, cit., p. 449). Here Machiavelli not only confirms the preeminence of the ‘concrete’ («prima i capitani che i filosofi nascono»), but he also willingly resides upon the authority of the *prudenti* – the individuals provided with the political virtue *par excellence* – an authority which stands in sharp contrast with that of the philosophers themselves.

⁴¹⁴ N. MACHIAVELLI, *Lettere*, 212 (N. Machiavelli to F. Vettori, 29 April, 1513), cit., p. 379.

Machiavelli's reluctance to quote philosophical works should be considered as a conscious choice and an affirmation of his method rather than as an evidence of his poor command of that subject. If he does not rely on the opinion of philosophers very often is because he does not want his position to be confirmed by any authority other than reason and experience («non crederrò [...] ci possa essere altro che quello che *si vede*, [...] nè voglio in queste cose mi muova *veruna autorità senza ragione*»). Machiavelli's constant reliance on histories, in fact, is nothing but the effort to increase his historically restricted experience as a man.⁴¹⁵ Nothing would be more distant from his way of examining political phenomena than the frequent recourse to eminently theoretical writings. In Machiavelli's eyes, and in the eyes of any late fifteenth-century man, this would be the method of the contemplative writers, who larded their works with tags from as many authorities as they were able to, and who believed the true knowledge to derive only from books and lectures («nec magistros habueris nec id genus unquam libros attigeris», as the lamias say to Poliziano). Machiavelli's literary style – so rigorously sticking to historical and empirical data – embodies his complete refusal of any method of understanding political questions other than the concretely and historically founded one.

Most of times Machiavelli actually pretends to ignore the opinions of philosophers, as he does – for instance – in the aforementioned letter to Vettori on Aristotle's *Politics* («Né so quello si dica Aristotile delle repubbliche divulse; ma io penso bene quello che ragionevolmente potrebbe essere, quello che è, e quello che è stato, e mi ricorda avere letto che i Lucumoni tennono tutta l'Italia insino all'Alpe, et insino che ne furono cacciati di Lombardia da' Galli»). Machiavelli here is not interested in showing that he knows the *Politics* and agrees or does not agree with Aristotle; rather, he urges to emphasize that reason and experience are the best guides for the understanding of both historical and political phenomena, more so than any other authority. Hence, among the three types of arguments traditionally employed in the Scholastic method of questions – *argumentum ex experientia*, *argumentum ex ratione*, *argumentum ex auctoritate* – only the first

⁴¹⁵ On Machiavelli's reading of histories as an attempt to combine his present experience with the experience of different times and places, see V. PERRONE COMPAGNI, *Machiavelli metafisico*, cit., pp. 229-230.

two are considered by Machiavelli as completely reliable for the assessment of empirical reality, while the kind of reasoning based on authority proves to be not only useless but also dangerous. When Machiavelli resides upon the books of historians, in fact, he does not look for their authority as writers, but for the authority of the historical events they report. He does not quote the historians, but the *facts* provided by them.

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