Maintaining a Machiavellian perspective.

Marco F. Monoc
University of Massachusetts Amherst

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MAINTAINING A MACHIAVELLIAN PERSPECTIVE

A Thesis Presented
by
MARCO F. MONOC

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by

MARCO F. MONOC

Approved as to style and content by:

Jerome B. King, Chair

James Der Derian, Member

M.J. Peterson, Member

Eric S. Einhorn, Department Head
Political Science
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INTRODUCTION

Any study of a thinker as summarily categorized and universally trivialized as Niccolo Machiavelli must contend with centuries of interpretation. Not only must one cover already well-trodden ground, but one must also work through an extensive literature of very diverse commentary. Insights into the "true" message contained in Machiavelli's writings are hardly rare and certainly lacking in consensus. Such a fundamental want of consistency opens, or perhaps even forces, the way to a new and independent examination of this still very relevant political theorist.

Although this study does not claim to provide the ultimate word on the Machiavellian philosophy, it does enable us to reexamine Machiavelli's own works in a more open-minded way. By focusing our attention on a wide array of the Florentine author's major political tracts, we can begin to examine more critically much of the secondary literature through which he has been so often misrepresented. In this way, we can keep ourselves from becoming overly dependent upon a genre of commentary which is often prone to excessive simplification. Even more importantly, we can prevent Machiavelli's interpreters from turning him into a mere mouthpiece for ideologies with which he shared no allegiance.

Unfortunately for the cause of accuracy, Machiavelli is all too often dismissed as nothing more than a reactionary apologist for a very limited and static form of government. His name has come to represent a dark, immoral strategist of power politics who was guided by no other political
ideal than that of jealously guarding the monarchical status quo. To the detriment of his existing reputation, Machiavelli has become tritely known as the prophet of unprincipled opportunism (especially when it comes to discussing the desired behavior of a prince) and the defender of all nefarious political dealings in general. Perhaps most unfairly of all, the unscrupulousness which he supposedly advocated is commonly understood as a justification for keeping a reigning prince in power at all costs. According to prevailing opinion, Machiavelli was, to put it bluntly, a lackey of princes whose interests were confined to keeping the established order as placid and as undisturbed as possible.

An interpretation of this sort can only be arrived at by a very incomplete reading of the Florentine Secretary's multi-layered theory. Indeed, it is only in *The Prince*, by far his shortest and most politically motivated work, that Machiavelli even deals with the brute mechanics of a principality. The centerpiece of his theoretical writings, the *Discourses*, are devoted to examining the means by which a republic can survive through the collective exertions of its entire population. A treatise of this latter sort could hardly have been written by a single-minded monarchist interested solely in the preservation of an ossified political order. Of all his works, only *The Prince*, that short precis composed to bring himself back into the favor of the aristocratic Medici, is limited to outlining the kind of individualistic and necessarily monarchical actions which are needed to establish a state on a firm footing. He tells us that work of this nature can only be accomplished by a single individual who is dedicated to acquiring as much personal power as possible to complete the moment of founding. What is frequently overlooked by Machiavelli's interpreters is that the project of founding is clearly differentiated from that of
maintaining a state and is confined to the pages of *The Prince* alone. The problem of maintaining a state is what dominates Machiavelli's thoughts in the much longer and more fully considered *Discourses*. Maintenance is the issue to which Machiavelli devotes the greater part of his thought and which he believes is the most deserving of his attention since it requires a more lasting effort than founding. Preserving a political organization, he tells us, is ultimately the job of the people rather than of a single prince and, thus, must be dealt with in detail. It is when Machiavelli focuses himself fully on this task that he disproves the modern critics who are inclined to think of him only as the scheming advisor to princes. When we look at the dynamic and participatory conception of political maintenance which he advocates, we will be in a better position to judge the Florentine in a more complete and fair manner than is usually done. In the process, we will find that Machiavelli, far from being the unquestioning admirer and advocate of limited and static government, was a sincere republican who welcomed the transformative and irreverently non-aristocratic life accompanying political conflict.

It is my intention in this thesis to get beyond the simplistic reductionism which has so often plagued interpretations of Machiavelli by examining his thought through two historically diverse perspectives. Looking first at Francesco Guicciardini's very conservative recipe of political maintenance, I will show how his theory diverges from that put forth by Machiavelli. Proceeding in this fashion, it will be possible to see that Guicciardini was certainly not, as some have claimed, the first Machiavellian. Indeed, I will demonstrate that each man had fundamentally different views not only of politics but also of humanity's place and function in the more general realm of history. The fact that
Guicciardini was a contemporary and close governmental associate of Machiavelli will help us to differentiate their views all the more clearly, as we will be in a position to compare and contrast their uses of an identical political vocabulary. Unlike his fellow theoretician and compatriot, Guicciardini held internal peace and unbroken consensus to be most conducive to the maintenance of a state. His aim was to eliminate all the sources of internal political conflict which might possibly prove destabilizing to the aristocratic element. This rather passive preference was, in the final analysis, caused by his belief in humanity's impotence in the face of fortune (the very fortuna which Machiavelli approached with a respect significantly devoid of Guicciardini's resignation). Convinced that a policy of stasis was the only way to keep fortuna even moderately at bay, Guicciardini wished to see his ideal state guided by the cautious hand of an aristocracy whose own interests were to be found in preserving the status quo. As these various differences unfold, we will be able to see Machiavelli's republican convictions shine through all the more brightly. By distancing Machiavelli from Guicciardini's static idea of maintenance, we will not only remove Guicciardini from a tradition with which he has no substantive affiliation, but we will also allow Machiavelli to speak with his own voice for a change.

The issue of political maintenance will also help us to distinguish Machiavelli from the theorist who provides us with the second perspective in this study - Gaetano Mosca. As a comparatively recent thinker who has also been mistakenly labeled a Machiavellian, Mosca can provide us with another point of departure in our attempt to highlight Machiavelli's active and participatory concept of maintenance. By showing the ways in which Mosca departs from the Machiavellian
formula for preserving a state, it will become possible to again separate Machiavelli from the camp of aristocratic apologists with which he is so often identified. Throughout my examination of Mosca, my focus will be primarily limited to demonstrating how he confuses the distinct Machiavellian categories of founding and maintenance. It is my contention that Mosca effectively reverses the features which characterize and delineate these two very different political tasks. In essence, I will argue that Mosca severs all ties to Machiavelli when he claims that conflict is best confined to the founding moment and should be exorcised when a state assumes its normal level of existence (i.e., when it begins the project of maintenance). As will be shown in the first part of this work, Machiavelli takes a position which is fully opposite to the one taken by Mosca. Machiavelli is of the opinion that, while unity is important to complete an orderly founding, a certain amount of conflict is the best means of keeping a state virtuous and properly functioning after the moment of its creation.

Although the format of this study allows for the making of a number of comparisons between Guicciardini and Mosca, this is not the basic purpose of the thesis. My goal is not so much to compare Guicciardini and Mosca as it to show how Machiavelli's theory has been misrepresented by two theorists in two distinct epochs who have been clearly identified as heirs to the great Florentine's philosophy. While it cannot be denied that misunderstandings of Machiavelli go far beyond those penned by the hands of Guicciardini and Mosca, I believe that it is nonetheless beneficial to begin the chore of reinterpretation somewhere. Using Guicciardini and Mosca, we can pinpoint the places where both a contemporary and a modern analyst of Machiavelli missed the crux of his
argument - that having to do with political maintenance. Of even greater benefit, we can silence his interpreters long enough to allow Machiavelli to explain his own doctrine.

Brief Contrast of Thinkers

Faced with the task of reexamining Machiavelli’s ideas, perhaps it is best to begin by explaining what he did not believe. In this fashion, it will be possible to remove the layers of misunderstanding which surround much of his work. Having chosen to contrast and compare many of Machiavelli’s most basic teachings with those of Guicciardini and Mosca, it would be best if I at least outlined the general contours of each thinker’s position. Beginning with Guicciardini and then moving on to Mosca, I will show how each thinker leaves the Machiavellian penumbra in favor of a much more conservative line.

As an aristocrat who witnessed several unsuccessful attempts at self-government in Florence, Guicciardini did not have much faith in the ability of the masses to control their own destinies. At the time he began to write the vast majority of his works, the biggest challenge facing the newly returned Medici regime had to do with the preservation of its power;¹ in short, the maintenance of a very ordered status quo. Most of his political

career was passed under an aristocratically led government and, as a result, his efforts were turned in a direction which can hardly be described as populist. Even within the various histories he compiled are scattered disparaging remarks about the vileness and ineptitude of members of the middle classes who sat on Florence's Great Council. They were, according to him, "poor and ignorant" and had "little capacity", while the nobles were nothing less than "wise, able and intelligent men".2

The greatest difference between Machiavelli and Guicciardini lies in their divergent conceptions of the ways in which fortuna (fortune) and virtu (virtue) interact. For the latter, fortuna is a force in the face of which men are completely helpless, and is so powerful that only the foolish think they can use it for their own benefit. Unconquerable and unforgiving, fortune can never be opposed by that self-determining drive which Machiavelli believes brings nobility to the individual (regardless of his social standing). With Guicciardini, virtu is transformed into a type of calculating prudence which simply gives way to fortune's movements. As J.G.A. Pocock tells us

"Guicciardini is identifying (if not replacing) virtu with prudence, the steersman's or doctor's power to observe events and accommodate oneself to them, rather than seeking to shape or determine them; his is a politics of maneuver rather than of action."3

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2 Gilbert, Felix; pp. 78-81.

3 Pocock, J.G.A. The Machiavellian Moment; p. 238.
Thus, busy trying to deftly maneuver his way between all of the potential barbs which fortune may put in his path, the Guicciardinian man is too steeped in thought to act with any real boldness. Always seeking just the right time to assert his will, he is all too often constrained by a self-doubt which, at best, can only poke at fortune rather than courageously fight off its tyranny. Guicciardini believes that only after considerable deliberation can a person attempt to act. Thus, a certain type of knowledge and experience of events is required if one is to be a political actor. Considering that the luxury of such knowledge and experience is within the possession of a very limited number of individuals, this necessarily means that the politician must be an aristocrat, whose actions are deliberate and, above all, slow.

Machiavelli, in sharp contrast, thinks of fortuna not as an impenetrable wall of fate but rather as a presenter of opportunities which should be seized and dominated. Fundamentally, fortune is a malleable goddess* who favors those who are bold enough to accept her challenge. Instead of meekly bowing to fortune, the Machiavellian takes on the burden of trying to use it to his own benefit. This is exactly what it means to be virtuous. Virtu is not the ability to adapt oneself to circumstance; it is the ability to confidently and aggressively act for the sake of maintaining

* Although the use of such a terminology has not exactly endeared Machiavelli to modern-day feminists, it was the means that he chose to get his message across. Thus, while I do not condone the perpetuation of a sexist political lexicon, I do not believe that it is any more acceptable to water down Machiavelli’s message simply to make it more palatable or less offensive to modern sensibilities. Only by reading the unexpurgated Machiavelli can we come to appreciate and, when necessary, criticize his doctrine and the imagery with which he chose to communicate it. (I am grateful to Professor James Der Derian for encouraging me to explain the presence of this ’lacuna’. While the use of this term is itself interesting and perhaps a bit problematical in light of his critique, it does ultimately refer to an important issue.)
one's independence from fortune. This definition of virtue has nothing to do with traditional conceptions of morality not because it is supposed to undermine such notions, but because it transcends them. It was Machiavelli, after all, who regarded politics as, in the words of Federico Chabod, "an end in itself, i.e., as something beyond the realm of good and evil, unconditioned by any assumptions or aims that are not purely and simply political." Yet, in spite of what Chabod says, Machiavelli does have a very definite criterion of what constitutes the political, secular equivalent of good and evil (stated more precisely as good or wise versus undesirable action). He considers the good to be the individual's active attempts to subdue fortune, while that which is to be detested he finds in the resigned passivity of inaction. As Pocock reminds us,

"Machiavelli used the term virtu to denote the creative power of action to shape events, whereas Guicciardini had little faith in this power and did not use the term virtu to describe it."5

Action, or more specifically, the constant attempt to win fortuna to one's own cause, is so important to Machiavelli because he has an extremely fluid conception of political order. He believes that it is impossible to ever achieve stasis in the political realm. As a result, one must ceaselessly try to expand one's reach of influence. Given that change is the only constant, a ruler or a people in general simply cannot rest on their achievements and be content with what they have. They are either

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5 Pocock, J.G.A.; p. 269.
in a state of expansion or decline, for they can never be completely protected from the greed and bellicosity of others, or of themselves, for that matter. Thus, the only choice for an individual or a collectivity wishing to preserve autonomy from fortuna is to engage in open conflict with it. Although success is never guaranteed, this is the only way by which one can prevent being transformed into the passive recipient of chance.

While those in the Guicciardinian tradition, such as Mosca, are primarily concerned with preserving the established order, Machiavelli concentrates most of his energies on the ways by which a republic can attain glory. While it cannot be denied that Machiavelli's *Prince* is devoted to the establishment and grounding of the state by a single ruler, the emphasis is decidedly changed in his *Discourses*. In the former work, our author is trying to provide the potential savior of Italy with the means to preserve his newly unified state against immediate disintegration. In the latter, however, his attention is turned to finding ways to insure that the state survives and prospers beyond the reign of any one person. In short, Machiavelli's focus moves away from what constitutes the virtue of the individual prince to that which makes up the virtue of a society at large. Despite a number of subtle distinctions between them, the similarities are striking. In both cases, virtu is characterized by a boldness of action and a love of confrontation which goes beyond any specialized elitist knowledge and is founded on the will alone (a property which is not

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exclusive to any single social group). It is, when all is said and done, the enthusiasm for combat against the chance constructions of fate.

Conflict, according to Machiavelli, is what makes the attainment of glory possible. For the prince, it is conflict against fortune in the external realm having to do with relations between states. In the *Discourses*, however, that conflict is transferred to the internal politics of a nation. At each of the two levels, the tensions created by the conflict in question ultimately make the society stronger. The distinction our author finds between the two has to do with the fact that laying the foundations is a much different task than maintaining what has already been accomplished. In the first stage, the individual prince is exerting all of his virtu against the caprice of fortuna. Under these circumstances, he is so busy fulfilling the act of creation that there is no opportunity for his virtue to be corrupted. When however, the foundations have been laid and the external battle with fortuna has been brought to a less perilous stage, the original conflict must be replaced with another. It must now be brought within the state and spread out as much as possible in order to keep the populace in the habit of exercising its virtue. This is best accomplished with the establishment of a mixed form of government in which "the foundation of liberty" is guaranteed in a "balancing of forces."  \footnote{Burnham, James. *The Machiavellians: Defenders of Freedom*; p. 70.} These 'forces' are composed of differing political and especially social class interests which are distinctly separated and opposed against each other. Only in this way does Machiavelli believe it is possible to keep a society vibrant and capable of changing to meet the demands of a perpetually...
dissatisfied fortune. His belief in the virtues of conflict is so strong that he goes to the extent of saying that

"those who blame the quarrels of the Senate and the people of Rome condemn that which was the very origin of liberty, and... were probably more impressed by the cries and noise which these disturbances occasioned in the public places, than by the good effect which they produced...."8

Mosca, departing from this Machiavellian love of discord and leaning in the conservative direction of Guicciardini, held firmly to the belief that internal calm was the greatest good to be sought in a state. He gauged the health of a nation by the degree to which ideological and social differences are diluted and brought under the control of the ruling elite. Rather than allowing as many different social interests as possible to compete against each other in the political arena, he wanted to bring the vital energy of new movements into the established ruling class.9 His purpose was not to allow society to profit from the unfettered exercise of 'virtu', but rather to keep conflict at a minimum. Much like Guicciardini's, Mosca's conception of political virtue has less to do with audacity than with prudence and the art of compromise. Consequently, the ominous power of fortune is something to be feared instead of challenged. One must not, under any circumstances, allow the various humors of a society to clash as they will. The reason was that Mosca held

political stability and preservation of the status quo to be far more
important than the cultivation of a strong and vibrant people. The danger
in allowing groups and ideas to clash in order to determine which were
the stronger lay in the potential for such conflict to overturn the
established order.

Yet, in spite of his fears, Mosca realized that change was an
inevitable and constant presence in the political sphere. His task, then,
became to limit change as much as possible; which meant, in effect, to only
that amount which was strictly necessary. The solution he came up with
was to gradually allow the powerful forces of innovation to filter into the
already existing ruling class. Separate interests do not oppose themselves
in an open forum as Machiavelli would prefer, but rather are tamed and
watered down in order that they can be palatably received by those in
power. In this way, the incendiary potential of such movements can be
diffused without wasting their power to renew the old political elite and
prevent its ossification. The primary plan is to "control the social forces
that, at the given moment in the given society, are essential to the
possession and retention of power."10 Seen in this light, Mosca's project is
to manipulate the virtu of the people (i.e., those who are not part of the
political elite) for the benefit of a very limited group. Unlike Machiavelli,
who saw in an expanded social competition of interests the salvation of
the common good, he tries to accommodate only a limited interest. While
for Machiavelli there is no particular group or idea which naturally
deserves to take preeminence over others, for Mosca the right and good is
embodied in his ruling class.

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10 Ibid; p. xix.
Perhaps the primary reason why Mosca's major doctrines are often confused with those of Machiavelli can be traced to the fact that Mosca has chosen to interpret Machiavelli in only a partial sense. It is as if Mosca is content to base his entire interpretation of Machiavellian thought on *The Prince* alone. Choosing to ignore the emphasis which the Florentine placed upon the attainment of glory, Mosca sees him only as the brooding defender of princes against their restless subjects. This is made most clear when he observes that "During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries many writers, particularly in Italy, applied themselves to "politics". Yet they - beginning with Machiavelli, the most famous of them all - were less concerned with determining constant trends in human societies than with the arts by which an individual, or a class of individuals, might succeed in achieving supreme power in a given society and in thwarting the efforts of other individuals or groups to supplant them."\(^1\)

Clearly, Mosca has decided to focus solely on Machiavelli's founding phase when trying to defend the means by which he believes the state should be maintained. The problem with this is that while the concern of both men is, in many ways, the maintenance of the state, there is a critical difference in their conceptions of precisely what 'maintenance' involves. While Machiavelli moves beyond the defensive stance required to firmly establish a nation and eventually introduces the necessity of expanding political influence for the attainment of glory, Mosca remains hidden in his defensive shell. He cannot take the risks which are required

\(^1\) *Ibid*; p. 1.
to attain the heights of glory and, instead, chooses to protect from fortune as fiercely as possible what has already been achieved. Much as Guicciardini had done before him, Mosca 'renounced' Machiavelli's "grandiose dreams" and replaced them with his own brand of realism.12

This brief summary of some of the major differences between the Moscan and Machiavellian ideals should demonstrate why such a contrast is appropriate in a study like this. An extended inquiry into Mosca's thought is important because it is precisely he who is the father of the modern concept of a ruling class whose nature is specifically political; in other words, of a political hierarchy which is quite mistakenly called Machiavellian. Although it cannot be denied that the great Florentine was aware of the importance of firmly rooting a state through the agency of a single ruler and his immediate advisors, he also believed that such restricted access to government should be of a limited duration. After the political apparatus had been secured, it became necessary to shift a nation's priorities to the pursuit of glory by dividing power as much as possible. Only then could that nation's virtu be maintained in a vibrant condition, free from the dulling effects of disuse and, even worse, lack of will engendered by political apathy in the face of a dominant ruling clique.

After highlighting the specific points of difference between Machiavelli and his two supposed philosophical heirs, it is my belief that a more general contrast between the opposed perspectives (i.e., the Machiavellian and Guicciardinian/Moscan) will ultimately emerge. The fact that Guicciardini and Mosca deny the feasibility of ever again attaining the glory that was republican Rome's and concern themselves, instead,

12 Chabod; p, 197.
with defending the merely calm and stable indicates that their perspectives were fundamentally at odds with Machiavelli's. Although the latter is often distinguished for his sober realism and pessimistic view of human nature, there is, nevertheless, something of the romantic about him. He is, after all, hopeful that the Italy of his own day can, by imitating the republicanly inclined Romans, find a way to achieve real greatness. Within this expectation is also, quite significantly, a faith in "the possibility of revival"\textsuperscript{13} through the attentive imitation of Roman virtue. Machiavelli, then, has a view of politics which the other two thinkers in this study refuse to recognize. Mired in their own disillusionment about the effects of popular government, they cannot dare to hope for anything more than the preservation of what they consider to be good enough.

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid; p. 196.
CHAPTER 1

MACHIAVELLI, VIRTU, AND THE BALANCE OF POWER

"...For he who rests on down
or under covers cannot come to fame;
and he who spends his life without
renown leaves such a vestige of himself
on earth as smoke bequeaths to air or
foam to water."

Dante Alighieri
*The Divine Comedy*

The Historical Origins of Virtu

In order to fully appreciate the emphasis that Machiavelli placed
upon aggressive and bold action in the maintenance and preservation of a
state, it is important to first understand what he believed the sphere to be
like in which such action could take place. The mere fact that he put a
premium on political audacity indicates that he must have had a very
clear conception of the ways in which society and, by implication, the
world at large, functioned. Indeed, as a man who always prided himself
on his worldly wisdom, Machiavelli could not have simply constructed a
method of social action which was divorced from the practical realm. His
entire philosophy, especially that part having to do with political virtue,
was constructed in response to the immediate demands of reality. Always
concerned with getting beyond the illusory facades blocking the way to
knowledge of true political behavior, he could hardly have been accused of being lost in a utopian vision.

As one who was intimately involved in affairs of state, Machiavelli was well aware of the principles by which the mondo quotidiano operated. As a scholar who was familiar with the practices of antiquity, he also had firm beliefs about the movements of history and the concrete results which those temporal rhythms have on the social structure. He was, in short, respectful of the powerful changes which he believed history was constantly forcing upon individuals and collectivities. It was this fundamental perception of the historical process which caused him to formulate a theory through which fortuna - that most tyrannical agent of history - could be combatted. This is precisely where virtu comes into the picture and assumes its preeminent position in the hierarchy of Machiavellian political qualities.

In putting such emphasis on the attainment of glory through bold action, Machiavelli wished to give the individual a certain power over his own destiny. His purpose was, in many ways, to ennable humanity by demonstrating that it had a say in determining the direction which history took. Thus, to fully understand Machiavelli's definition of virtu, it is best to begin by examining its tense relationship with fortuna. This can most easily be done by first placing the entire virtu/fortuna relation into the more general context of historical change. In this way, it will be possible to see just how decisively it distinguishes Machiavelli from both Guicciardini and Mosca.

The relationship between fortuna and history is made clear when one considers that fortune is nothing less than that force which gives to individuals the opportunities they need in order to act in a temporal
setting. As Machiavelli conceived it, fortuna was what allowed the individual entry into the process of history. By presenting a person with the chance to act, fortune created an opening for the exercise of virtu. According to Machiavellian imagery, the various repetitions of the 'wheel of fortune' were what created the events which collectively composed history. If, as the metaphor suggests, history could be determined by the arbitrary movements of such a wheel, then change and unpredictability were the fundamental characteristics of the historical process. This meant, above all, that there was not a preestablished plan governing human events and that there was considerable room for individual action, if only the opportunities for such action were properly seized. In short, the realm of historical contingency made human initiative possible and was what caused our favorite Florentine to confidently assert that "fortune is the arbiter of half the things we do, leaving the other half or so to be controlled by ourselves."  

Although many of Machiavelli's interpreters stress how he tried to make history predictable by establishing patterns of decline and fall, his most basic contribution has to do with the extent to which he underlined the volatility of historical change itself. By stressing the unpredictable nature of events, he was able to transform the political actor from a passive recipient of historical circumstance to an active agent capable of

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15 De Grazia, Sebastian; p. 208.

16 Machiavelli, Niccolo. The Prince; p. 130.
influencing his own future. In a very real sense, then, Machiavelli's conception of history was significant because it was what ultimately determined the importance that he gave to individual virtu. Without first making this qualification, it would be rather misleading to include Machiavelli among those moderns whom J.G.A. Pocock indentifies as the cartographers of history. There was something quite fundamental which distinguished him from the scholastic zeitgeist under whose aegis

"Fortune's wheel became the image of repetition as well as of unpredictability [and through which] there arose the extremely important and, within limits, heartening consequence that if one knew what could have happened before, one could make predictive statements concerning the combinations in which things would happen again."17

Unlike those strict adherents to the Polybian school of thought, Machiavellian was not concerned with turning history into a bureaucratic exercise in prognostication. Far from being a mere calculator of diachronic percentages, he was deeply concerned with showing through historical example that virtu had and could again change the world. While recognizing that the wheel of fortune could never be "stopped from twirling,"18 and certainly never "nailed fast,"19 he nonetheless believed that its movements could be influenced and used to one's advantage. The glory which Rome had attained during the height of its republican period


18 De Grazia, Sebastian; p. 208.

19 Ibid; p. 208.
could be recaptured by the Italians of Machiavelli's own day only under the right conditions. According to both *The Prince* and the *Discourses*, these conditions would not simply occur through the good auspices of fortune, but rather had to be brought into existence by human hands. This is perhaps most readily apparent in *The Prince's* final chapter, in which Machiavelli exhorts Lorenzo de' Medici and his house to liberate Italy from the barbarians. After showing that all circumstances are favorable to "lead Italy to her salvation," he tells Lorenzo that

"The rest is up to you. God does not want to do everything Himself, and take away from us our free will and our share of the glory which belongs to us." 

The way has been cleared for humanity to act upon and ultimately determine the direction which history will take. No longer a reified process which forces every miniscule detail of daily life into its current, history is itself seen as the result of such relatively small and insignificant events. Indeed, Machiavelli attributes such great importance to individual actions that he feels compelled to declare that the rhythmical crests and troughs of time are nothing more than byproducts of human nature, which

"has created men so that they desire everything, but are unable to attain it; desire being thus always greater than the faculty of acquiring, discontent with what they

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21 Ibid; p. 135.
have and dissatisfaction with themselves result from it. This causes the changes in their fortunes; for as some men desire to have more, whilst others fear to lose what they have, enmities and war are the consequences; and this brings about the ruin of one province and the elevation of another."22

Such a view is far from being a precursor of the Neitzschean concept of the eternal recurrence. It is, instead, a philosophy which by looking upon change as the only reliable element of history, seeks ways to cope with this unstable reality. This is precisely where Machiavelli inserts his own brash response to what he has detected in his studies and observations. Indeed, here is the point at which virtu assumes its central position in the overall framework of his thought. Given that history is best characterized by a constant flux and motion in which "human things 'either rise or fall'"23 the individual can only respond to its demands in the same active manner. As Pocock succinctly puts it, "action is virtu,"24 for

"When the world is unstabilized and the unexpected a constant threat, to act... was to impose form upon fortuna. Aggression was the better part of value."25

Seen in this light, virtue is distinguished not so much by the ability to adapt to circumstance as it is by the ability to impose one's will on

22 Machiavelli, Niccolo. Discourses; p. 208.
24 Ibid; p. 177.
25 Ibid; p. 177.
fortune. The passivity implicit in amor fati is far removed from the strenuous assertion of will which is the essence of virtu. Thus, writers like Quentin Skinner are quite mistaken when they treat "moral flexibility" as the basic quality which constitutes virtu in a prince and a people. To rest one's definition of virtue solely on adaptation is to make the individual subservient to fortune and, thus, incapable of combatting it. The active nature of Machiavelli's virtu is perhaps most clearly explained by opposing the motion of history against the motion of the individual's own desire to dominate. When the two finally collide (and they must do so at one point or another), the casualties are bound to extend far beyond a few moral prejudices. After realizing that the relationship between human ambition and fortune is one of animosity and outright conflict, it is not difficult to conclude that in such a struggle there is little room for compromise.

By keeping virtu locked in the Christian discourse of morality, Skinner and those who follow his approach have undermined the exclusively political nature of the term. Machiavelli's purpose in constructing such a concept was to emphasize the secular character of politics in order to acquire an understanding of its daily workings, not to attack morality in an effort to replace it with a temporal utilitarianism. Although this might have been an understandable method for communicating the general contours of Machiavelli's iconoclasm in an Elizabethan age which did not yet make firm distinctions between the

26 Skinner, Quentin. Machiavelli; p. 40.

religious and political spheres, Skinner's method (which, despite its modern origins, is at times oddly reminiscent of such historically distant exaggerations) is insufficient if one wishes to truly understand the Florentine's conception of virtue. To get beyond what some are content to classify as merely a sign of Machiavelli's religious irreverence, it is necessary to keep in mind the distinction he made between virtu and "la vertue morale".28 While the latter criterion can still be used to judge a political action, it is not a useful means of evaluating the immediate effectiveness of that action in the everyday world.

It is of no small interest to note that Machiavelli considers ozio, or indolence, to be almost the exact opposite of virtu.29 The aggressiveness implicit in the concept of virtue is brought out very nicely by Sebastian de Grazia, who notes that "Niccolo... employs virtue in the sense of masculine, intending it as energetic activity."30 Energy of this kind, I would argue, is not primarily manifested in the toadying accommodations which Skinner believes the person of virtu makes to history. It is too filled with that type of arrogance which is convinced it can "beat and coerce"31 fortune in order to eventually subdue it and make it "submissive".32

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29 De Grazia, Sebastian; p. 242.

30 De Grazia, Sebastian; p. 243.


32 Ibid; p. 133.
In the realm of history, where the constant process of decline and fall makes stasis impossible, one cannot idly sit by and accept reality as it is. The desire to maintain the status quo is fruitless and even ridiculous after one realizes that permanence is merely an illusion. Thus, given that "worldly things are not by nature allowed to stand still," Machiavelli believes that one must be adept enough to anticipate what fortune will do. The lesson which the political actor must master is to act before fortune acts on him. As Machiavelli has his military protagonist assert in The Art of War, "it is better to try fortuna while she is still favorable than to try nothing and allow her surely to destroy you." In this brief piece of advice, we see the very tense and volatile relationship that the individual shares with fortune. On the one hand, fortune is that which gives each person the occasion to act in the first place and enter into the stream of events which composes history. On the other hand, however, fortune is also the entity which almost maliciously takes away that chance when it is not recognized or sufficiently used.

While fortune provides the occasion to act, it is still up to the person who has been offered that opportunity to take advantage of it through the exercise of his own virtue. Viewed from this perspective, fortune is hardly a benign goddess who dotingly leads her human charges to prosperity and happiness. She is, rather, a force which challenges each member of the political realm to demonstrate his virtue through the tiny openings which are left for such action. The reason that Machiavelli

33 Gilbert, Allan; p. 185.

34 Machiavelli, Niccolo. The Art of War; p. 122.
admires leaders like Moses, Cyrus, Romulus, and Theseus is that they all made the most of that very tiny amount of assistance (if this is what the opportunity for action can be called) that fortuna did give them. They did not let fate impose form on their lives, but rather forced their own wills upon the world around them as soon as they had the chance to do so; "fortune, as it were, provided the matter but they gave it its form."35 The implication, of course, is that if they had not acted so aggressively, fortuna would have battered them back and forth "like the water in the mouth of the Arno at Pisa in a north wind."36 Thus, although it is certainly true that fortune must provide "that occasion"37 without which the virtue of a person's "spirit"38 would be fruitlessly exhausted, it would be a mistake to conclude that fortuna and virtu work in complementary harmony. There is always the need to struggle to impose one's will on the aims of fortune, which "she pursues by dark and mysterious ways"39 so that the opportunity for action does not come in vain. This point is made very clearly in The Art of War when Machiavelli has his mouthpiece, the cavaliere Fabrizio, remark disparagingly about those Italian states which are the passive instruments of their more powerful neighbors:

"These states choose to live a lazy, indolent life, free from trouble and inconvenience, and to rely upon fortuna rather than their own virtu; for seeing that there is now such a

35 Machiavelli, Niccolo. The Prince; p. 50.

36 Gilbert, Allan; p. 71.


38 Ibid; p. 169.

39 Machiavelli, Niccolo. The Art of War; p. 78.
proportion of virtu left among mankind that it has but little influence in the affairs of the world - and that all things seem to be governed by fortuna - they think it is better to follow her train than to contend with her for superiority."  

The fundamental opposition existing between virtue and fortune is highlighted by Machiavelli's belief in the necessity of treating fortune as an enemy which must be combatted. The very fact that the ability to take bold action is the chief ingredient of Machiavellian virtu indicates that its relationship to fortuna is far from being a peaceful one. We must remember that as something which is "inconstant and fickle, Fortuna cannot be swayed by the worship accorded a normal deity." This means, above all, that one cannot submissively yield to its caprices but must engage in open battle with it. She admires those who are bold enough to, as Machiavelli says in a letter to Giovanni Soderini, "beat and jolt her." As a "friend of the young," fortuna loves those who are impetuous and throw themselves fearlessly into the fray of history without allowing the calm dictates of discretion to dampen their enthusiasm. Fortune, in short, will never aid the cautious and timid who defer to her every whim. She cannot love or even respect those who derive their counsel from the wisdom of their years rather than from the ardor of their spirits.

40 Ibid; p. 80.
41 De Grazia, Sebastian; p. 101.
42 Detmold, Christian E; p. 89.
43 De Grazia, Sebastian; p. 214.
Believing the old Latin saying that *fortuna iuvat audaces*,
Machiavelli often bewails the fact that the Italians of his own day are so lacking in the kind of virtue for which he admires the ancient Romans. These latter were loved by fortuna because they accepted its challenge and treated it as a worthy enemy:

"[They were never] tempted to do what we hear every day on the lips of the wise men of our generation, to make the most of the present time; rather, they made the most of their own prowess and prudence. Time sweeps everything along and can bring good as well as evil, evil as well as good."44

External Conflict and the Expression of Virtu

Machiavelli identified several ways in which virtue is actually demonstrated in the political realm. For him, the battle with fortuna takes place on several levels which are all very interdependent. We have already seen the general historical reasons which show why the active conflict with fortuna is so important. This section will deal with the various ways in which Machiavelli believed that the battle could be successfully sustained. His numerous responses to the challenges posed by fortune will be brought out primarily through the quite different and yet complimentary solutions of The Prince and the Discourses. In this way, it will be possible to see just how important an ingredient conflict is in both the cultivation and expression of genuine virtu, regardless of its agent or the level at which it is manifested.

After explaining that history is nothing but the result of the struggle between fortuna and virtu, Machiavelli immediately turns his attention to proving why a state must dedicate itself to a permanent policy of expansion if it is not to become a slave to fortune. He is careful to specify that even after a political community has been founded and put on a more or less stable footing by its prince, it cannot remain content with the mere fact of its existence.45 Despite what it has gained from its initial victory over fortune, its acquisition is never assured permanence for the simple reason that nothing in the historical realm ever remains "fixed."46

45 Butterfield, H.; p. 31.
Flanagan, Thomas; p. 153.

46 Ibid; p. 129.
"...It is impossible for a republic to remain long in the quiet enjoyment of her freedom within her limited confines; for even if she does not molest others, others will molest her, and from being thus molested will spring the desire and necessity of conquests, and even if she has no foreign foes, she will find domestic enemies amongst her own citizens, for such seems to be the inevitable fate of all large cities." 47

Since the unquenchable desire for ever greater conquests is a universal trait, a state will never "succeed in standing still and enjoying its liberties." 48 Under such unstable circumstances, the only solution is to treat attack as the best form of defense. To maintain what the individual prince has established, a political community must not suppose that a truce can be called with fortuna in the hope that it can fade away into peaceful obscurity and take pleasure in the fruits of its labors. This unpacifiable goddess will have nothing to do with such happy endings. Periods of rest and repose do not figure into the Machiavellian conception of history and, as a consequence, virtu is a quality whose need is felt continually. 49 Virtue is not merely a passing response to periods of particularly intense crisis. Its central characteristic is action, which can be most forcefully expressed through an open conflict with its nemesis. Acting as a singular entity, the state can demonstrate its virtu only in the

48 Ibid; p. 383.
49 Garin, Eugenio; pp. 36-42.
Hannaford, I.; pp. 185-189.
form of expansion. In a world which knows no real stability, "liberty at home" can be best accomplished by the "pursuit of dominion abroad." The maintenance of liberty, in other words, involves the assumption of an aggressive rather than an introspective stance.

Machiavelli's firm belief in expansion as the best means of keeping fortune at least under some control can be traced to his basically pessimistic view of all forms of compromise, especially that resulting from political naivete. According to him, there is no middle ground between glory and disaster, and the void separating the two is very small, indeed. Glory is the goal which societies permeated with the spirit of virtu seek to attain, while disaster in the form of political weakness and loss of liberty is the fate of those states dominated by fortuna.

Machiavelli found support for his stark outlook in the examples provided by Sparta and Venice. In each of these cities, he discovered the remnants of a type of greatness which could not live up to the demands placed upon it by history. Both Sparta and Venice limited their ambitions to nothing more than the defense of their independence, keeping the aims of their foreign policy quite modest. Their armies were intentionally held down to a small size and their governments controlled by an equally small elite. However, in an ironic twist of fate, this defensive policy proved far too successful, and they eventually began to dominate their respective neighbors to such a degree that the latter became little more than client states. Empire, in other words, had been achieved but by two states which...

50 Machiavelli, Niccolo. Discourses; p. 346.

51 Ibid; p. 387.
Machiavelli, Niccolo. The Art of War; p. 168.
were entirely unprepared to support it. They were, to use the simplified imagery of Machiavelli, like

"a tree whose branches are larger than the trunk, which will not be able to support them, and will be bent by every little breeze that blows."\(^{52}\)

Although Sparta and Venice both clearly decided against expansion, their strength was such that they grew through what can best be described as unintentional conquest. Thinking that by turning inward they could avoid all inconvenient contact with their neighbors, these cities engaged in a mortal game of self-delusion. In rejecting expansion, they subjected themselves to the same risks which would have accompanied a more aggressive stance, but without the means to defend themselves in any serious way. In more descriptive terms, they exposed themselves to fortune "without seeking to dominate her,"\(^{53}\) as if fortuna were not their deadliest foe. In these two examples, our author could see that although "the Roman path does not guarantee against ultimate degeneration, ...in the present and foreseeable future - in the world of accidental time, in short" (which is none other than that of history) - "it is both wiser and more glorious."\(^{54}\)

Thus, we see that for Machiavelli, the choice of a state's historical destiny was either glory or servitude, a life dedicated to the cultivation and display of virtu or one dominated by the vicissitudes of fortuna. This clear

\(^{52}\) Machiavelli, Niccolo. *Discourses*; p. 290.

\(^{53}\) Ibid; p. 292.

\(^{54}\) Pocock, J.G.A.; p. 198.
opposition between conquest and passivity is seen in Machiavelli's terse but eloquent description of the Roman project. By telling us that "the aim of Rome was empire and glory, and not repose," he is underlining the fact that anything less than an active response to fortune is the same as a surrender to her. Like a river, the reach of fortune must be limited to the greatest degree possible and she must certainly not be allowed to direct events without even being challenged. The only sure way to do this is to control as much of the immediate realm of contingency as possible. Expansion became the best means of defense because it was the furthest thing from passivity and resignation. If nothing else, Machiavelli well knew that "fortune shows her potency where there is no well-regulated power to resist her." 


56 Ibid; p. 388.
Internal Conflict and the Cultivation of Virtu

Throughout his *Discourses*, Machiavelli tries to show how intimately connected the success of a state's external conflict against fortuna is with the management and cultivation of its internal conflict—often referred to as its domestic balance of interests. To him, virtu cannot survive for very long if it is not allowed to find frequent expression throughout the various layers of a society. It must be given adequate room to grow if it is not to lose its true strength and nature. According to our author, this can best be done by allowing as many people as possible in a society to exercise their virtu in a more or less constant way. Instead of waiting for the opportunity to arise when they can fight against an enemy of the state, citizens at large can maintain their virtu by competing against one another through political means in the defense of their own specific interests. Such competition is important to Machiavelli because it keeps a people active and ever ready to combat fortuna's aggression at full strength. In addition and most importantly, it prevents virtu from becoming the ossified possession of a single group by opening up to all members of a society the avenues through which this quality finds its domestic expression.

Although this study reverses the order of the *Discourses* by examining the state's internal politics after having first dealt with foreign policy, the reversal does not obscure the connections originally made between the two. Whatever dispute there may be about such peripheral matters as Machiavelli's ethics, there is little doubt that our author was trying to find very definite ways of coordinating both the internal and external policies of a nation in such a way that it would be able to foil
fortune for as long as possible and perhaps even attain greatness in the process.

When one considers that Machiavelli's virtu was both conceived and given birth to in the midst of fortune's battleground, it is easy to understand why it can survive only through conflict. It is a quality which derives its sustenance in the heat of battle and which simply cannot be laid aside for the proper occasion, as if it were a fragile table ornament. Keeping all of this in mind, Machiavelli points yet again to the ways by which the Romans dispersed political virtue, for he realizes very well that kingdoms which depend entirely upon the virtue of one man or a limited clique "endure but for a brief time," for their virtue "passes away" with their rulers' lives. Since the aggrandizing policy required of maintenance involves the expenditure of so much energy, a state must make full use of all the resources at its disposal. For Machiavelli, a state can have no greater resource than its own people, and he believes that it should, as a consequence, include all of them in the process of government. This is significant because it means that the masses must participate in the practical operation of government and be given real power instead of merely a token role in the formulation of policy.

Just as conflict engaged in the external realm against fortuna is necessary to maintain the liberty and independence of a state, so a certain amount of internal conflict is equally important to preserve that state's virtu. In order to engage in the exhausting battle with fortuna, a society


58 Ibid; p. 148.
must be able to renew itself through a constant process of change. It must, if it wishes to keep its martial skills at their sharpest, make the most of its youthful energies and not be lulled into stasis. The difficulty with this plan is that it must be accomplished without weakening and eventually destroying the society which has chosen to adopt it. The trick, in short, is to maintain a certain amount of stability in a society which is perpetually renewing itself and in which power is not safely tucked away in the grasp of a single class.

It is precisely at this point that the Discourses take on their main significance in the overall scheme of Machiavelli's thought. They provide very specific answers to the problems posed by political life in the sphere of contingency, where such reassuring things as stability and permanence are nothing but relative terms. Indeed, Machiavelli took pride in declaring that this work was dedicated to republics which, not having attained the same perfection at their founding moment which the almost mythical Lycurgus had given to Sparta, had to struggle to improve themselves over time. Fully aware that very few states were so fortunate as to "have a legislator sufficiently wise" to provide them with laws of such excellence that there would never be "the necessity of correcting them," Machiavelli turned more and more to the model provided by


Rome. It was Rome, after all, which had managed to escape from fortuna only by the exertion of its own virtu. Its laws proceeded from nothing more divine than "the disorderly and chance-governed actions of particular men,"63 who were acting very much in the dimension of uncertainty. In Rome, then, we are far removed from comfortable earshot of the Delphic oracle from which Lycurgus received the principles of his now famous constitution.

Appreciating that the toilsome nature of Rome's development resembles that of all human societies, Machiavelli tries to draw concrete lessons from its history and apply them to the society of his own day. In the Discourses, he dedicates himself to solving the problem of maintenance through an examination of the forces which contributed to Rome's longevity. He notes that, above all, Rome was able to preserve her liberty for so long because she allowed the various classes which composed her population to compete against each other on a relatively equal footing. Interest was allowed to oppose interest within the established political apparatus in such a manner that neither blood was shed nor final victory claimed by any one faction.64 Indeed, Machiavelli was most impressed by the tense balance of power which the ancient Romans were able to sustain over such a long period of time. Their insistence upon keeping the different classes of their society distinct while at the same time involving them all in the more or less peaceful struggle for power was what,


Witt, Ronald G. 'The Rebirth of the Concept of Republican Liberty in Italy'; p. 190.
at least from the Machiavellian perspective, enabled them to maintain their independence for so long.

In the precarious environs of history, where a state is forced to either fight for its survival or perish, virtu cannot long remain the sole possession of the upper classes. It must, rather, be cultivated in all of the people if glory is ever to be achieved. For Machiavelli, the surest way to fill a society with virtu from head to foot was to create a republican form of government which was both mixed and stratified. Only by following this path could the weaknesses inherent in the strictly monarchical, aristocratic, and democratic forms of government be sufficiently overcome. This was a lesson which Asia learned the hard way, as Machiavelli has his protagonist explain in *The Art of War*. As Fabrizio declares, glory has remained elusive to that continent primarily because of its historically placid domestic politics:

"Asia... has not produced many men of virtu because, to a great extent, that part of the globe is subject to one monarchy alone - to so great an extent that most parts of it languish in indolence and cannot form any considerable number of men for great and glorious enterprises."66

The establishment of a republican system of government was such a fundamental part of Machiavelli's reform philosophy that he began its earnest explication in only the second chapter of his *Discourses*. According to the argument, Rome is to be envied because it had a mixed


government in which the different layers of society could freely mingle and represent their own interests in an open political forum. Its true greatness, however, lay in the fact that its diverse population was not watered down to the point of bland uniformity. By remaining distinctly separated, its various elements could preserve their own identities instead of having a false one imposed upon them from above. All that was really required to preserve this group autonomy was a system in which the scales of power could be kept at a relative state of equilibrium. In the republican form of government, Machiavelli found the solution, for

"when there is combined under the same constitution a prince, a nobility, and the power of the people, then these three powers will watch and keep each other reciprocally in check."\(^7\)

Much more than any of his contemporaries who were similarly taken with the project of unifying Italy, Machiavelli appreciated the benefits that would come from allowing the different elements of society to clash as equals.\(^8\) Rather than fearing the turbulence that accompanied life in an unhomogenized power structure, he believed that it could be harnessed and used in the battle against fortune. Not only could disharmony prevent the dominance of a single group, it could also spread the effects of virtu across a broad spectrum of society. The conflict of interests which Machiavelli favored in his republican model would, in other words, compel all members of a state to exercise their virtue on a frequent basis, as part of their daily political existence. The necessary and

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\(^7\) Machiavelli, Niccolo. *Discourses*; p. 114.

most beneficial result would be an enhanced ability to fight off fortune for a longer period of time. Thus, although Rome was deprived of perfection at its founding, it nevertheless managed to combine the three traditional layers of its society to such a degree that it "rendered the constitution perfect." 69 As Machiavelli repeatedly emphasizes, "this perfection was attained by" nothing more exotic than the "disunion of the Senate and the people...." 70

Seen from a more historical perspective, not only was conflict an essential part of the internal balance of power relationship in Rome, but it was also what created that balance in the first place. As Machiavelli tells us, the unchecked insolence of the nobles prompted the people to rebel against the Consuls and the Senate, and eventually earned them an equal amount of representation. The conflict engendered by political imbalance forced the aristocratically dominated branches of government to give the people access to the decision-making process through the establishment of the Tribunes. Only when this third governmental unit came into existence, Machiavelli insists, was the republic "strengthened and confirmed," 71 for only then was it "composed of the three elements" 72 which collectively constituted Roman society.

Machiavelli believes that the importance of maintaining this political balancing act can be demonstrated most clearly by looking at particular times when it was disrupted. He sees in the Decemvirs, for

70 Machiavelli, Niccolo. Discourses; p. 119.
71 Ibid; p. 119.
72 Ibid; p. 119.
example, an appointment which "cancelled that of the Consuls and Tribunes"\textsuperscript{73} by placing too much power in the hands of one group. This move prevented the other limbs of the governmental corpus from checking their power, and ultimately allowed them to assume a dominant position in the city. Thus,

"finding themselves alone, without Tribunes or Consuls, and without the necessity of appealing to the Roman people, and having therefore no one to watch them, they were enabled in the second year, instigated by the ambition of Appius, to become overbearing, and to abuse their power."\textsuperscript{74}

In the Machiavellian notion of internal struggle was to be found much more than simply a cathartic ritual of badinage between the diverse elements of society. Our author thought of this conflict, rather, as the well from which virtu could be drawn in ever fresh portions to sustain the battle against fortune. Following the logic put forth by Leonardo Bruni in his defense of a multipolar balance of power in ancient Tuscany, Machiavelli truly believed that the opposed social elements needed each other for the simple reason that "virtue was participatory and relational and required the virtue of others."\textsuperscript{75} He was convinced of the merits of the civic humanist claim that virtue had to be practiced among equals if it was to be preserved. A state could only gain in strength if its citizens remained true to themselves and their particular interests, without

\textsuperscript{73} Ibid; p. 205.

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid; p. 207.

\textsuperscript{75} Pocock, J.G.A.; p. 88.
succumbing to the hegemonic impulses of a single individual or group. Failure and ruin were inevitable if its members became dependent upon others, "corrupted by the virtue of the powerful as well as the powerless." 76 This was precisely why a tyrant could not, fundamentally, have sufficient virtue to prevail for very long over fortune. "He had no fellow citizens" 77 and, as a result, would not have the opportunity to strengthen his virtu by testing it against that of others in an impartial forum.

The importance which Machiavelli placed on conflict in the development of any humanly organized society cannot be overemphasized if we consider the central position it was given throughout the Discourses. The issue of conflict was, after all, intimately connected to what Pocock labels as nothing less than the first major hypothesis of that work. 78 From this point of view, the Discorsi were based on the principle that "the disunion and strife among nobles and people was the cause of Rome's attaining liberty, stability, and power." 79 Discord was, in short, more than just a dangerously anarchic tendency which threatened to bring civilization to a dramatic and horrible end. Instead, it was tangible proof that a society was still vibrant enough to change at its own pace, outstripping at least for the moment history's merciless current. The presence of conflict demonstrated that the different people in a state had not yet been homogenized into a single, passive

76 Ibid; p. 92.
77 Ibid; p. 88.
78 Ibid; p. 194.
79 Ibid; p. 194.
collectivity unable to even define, let alone defend, their unique interests. It was the much disparaged habit of contentiousness which, in the end, saved cities like Rome from catastrophe when faced with the prospect of tyranny:

"When the nobles in their turn became corrupt and arrogant, it was not necessary to destroy the whole frame of government in order to check their power, since that was already limited to some degree by the consuls. The tribunes of the people were established to give weight to the popular voice, and Rome was now a mixed and 'perfect' society in which each of the three elements was able to hold back the others from excess."\textsuperscript{80}

Machiavelli valued political conflict between distinct social groupings primarily because it was the means by which a true internal balance of power could be maintained. The presence of clear demarcations within a society meant that different interests could be pursued and eventually allowed to collide, leaving no faction unscathed enough to dominate the others. In an odd reversal of conventional wisdom, self-interest became the very fuel by which virtu was sustained and renewed within a body politic.\textsuperscript{81} Machiavelli believed that by jealously pursuing their own interests, the various social groups would diffuse their rivals' worst designs. In a system composed of a collection of competing groups with their own peculiar agendas, there was little danger that a single clique could unify the populace into a docile following. Although it didn't have

\textsuperscript{80} Machiavelli, Niccolo. \textit{Discourses}; p. 399.

\textsuperscript{81} Skinner, Quentin. \textit{Machiavelli}; p. 66.
quite the halcyon ring of idealism which characterized the philosophy of
the 'common good,' this very pragmatic strategy did contain a certain
reassuring tone of realism. It had, to put it bluntly, a utilitarian sureness
about it which Machiavelli believed could overcome its lack of intellectual
charm. Relying upon his knowledge of human nature rather than the
false optimism of those under the influence of utopian visions,
Machiavelli based his political formula on the solid ground of reality. He
made use of the otherwise disillusioning character flaws of humanity
because these were what could most easily and surely be counted upon.

Virtu, that strange product of dissension and outright struggle,
cannot find sustenance in the pursuit of something as bland and illusory
as the general welfare. To assume that the hypnotizing strains
accompanying the ideas of national fraternity and civic oneness could
sharpen the fundamentally martial nature of virtu is to mistake this
quality for piety. Although Machiavelli makes scattered references to a
"common fatherland"82 in which selfish interests are cast aside in favor of
the "general good,"83 he never reaches the point of moral self-indulgence.
When it comes to specifying exactly how the good is to be achieved, he
always reinserts the real-world vocabulary associated with a balance of
interests. He is not in the habit of passing off a state's success on the happy
coincidences of fortuna.

Much of the confusion surrounding Machiavelli's understanding
of the common good is cleared up when we put it in the context of the
internal struggle for power. According to the argument, so long as the

83 Ibid; p. 98.
pursuit of self-interest is kept open to a diverse number of social groups, good will automatically come to the public at large. The common interest is damaged only when the powerful are the sole members of society who "are able to propose measures, and do so 'not for the common liberty but for their own power.'"84 Self-interest, in other words, is only harmful to a society when its expression is limited to a single group. As Quentin Skinner describes it, Machiavelli's contribution to the public welfare was to

"frame the laws relating to the constitution in such a way as to engineer a tensely-balanced equilibrium between these opposed social forces, one in which all the parties remain involved in the business of government, and each 'keeps watch over the other' in order to forestall both 'the rich men's arrogance' and the people's licence. And, as the rival groups jealously scrutinize each other for any signs of a move to take over supreme power, the resolution of the pressures thus engendered will mean that only those 'laws and institutions' which are 'conducive to public liberty' will actually be passed. Although motivated entirely by their selfish interests, the factions will thus be guided, as if by an invisible hand, to promote the public interest in all their legislative acts: 'all the laws made in favor of liberty will result from their discord.'"85

The emphasis placed by Machiavelli upon such transgenerationally eschewed social phenomena as self-interest and discord helps to illuminate the connection he established between survival in the historical sphere and self-government. He believed that the independent

84 Skinner, Quentin. *Machiavelli*; p. 57.

85 Ibid; p. 66.
creation of identity was what kept a state in at least some control over its historical destiny. The preservation of distinct social groupings guaranteed that a state would continue to evolve in its own way, according to the compromises which its people made among themselves. Given that the quest for glory was the best way to keep fortuna at a safe distance, virtu has to be given as much room as possible within a society to grow. If it was to remain more than just a meaningless claim to aristocratic superiority, virtu had to be allowed free exercise by every social class in the turbulent arena of their mutual struggle for dominance. As the purest indicator of social difference, self-interest was the crucial point around which the entire virtue-sustaining conflict between the classes could revolve. Self-interest was, in other words, the ingredient which could be relied upon to keep virtu alive and well, for it was what fueled the internal struggle for power.

Throughout his political writings, Machiavelli stressed the important parallel which he saw between what can be generally referred to as self-government and a certain amount of independence from fortune. The internal freedom which virtu required to remain a vibrant force could only be secured by keeping alive the conflict inherent in the domestic balance of power. Passive obedience to a single ruling group, although it was sure to create peace and tranquility within a society, was also guaranteed to bring with it impotence in the face of fortuna. As a result, our author was drawn to the conclusion that any state which was determined to stay out of fortuna's chains had to "remain free from all
forms of political servitude, whether imposed 'internally' by the rule of a tyrant or 'externally' by an imperial power."86

Machiavelli's enthusiasm for conflict in the sphere of internal politics reflected his deep faith in the people at large. Not only did he trust the masses enough to give them equal access to the decision-making process in his proposed governmental system, but he also believed them to have special virtues which were superior to those found in a king or an aristocracy. Ignoring the accepted wisdom of his age, Machiavelli saw in the people a greater amount of both prudence and stability than were held by any other social group. Even more surprisingly, he thought them to have "better judgement"87 than a prince or other high magistrate raised in the chambers of government. This was an important concession because it meant that no special background or training was needed to possess sufficient judgement to participate in politics. In their almost uncanny ability (Machiavelli went to the extent of calling it an "occult virtue"88) to pick good and honorable men to fill public office, our author believed that the people had more than sufficiently demonstrated their aptitude for self-government.

So in awe was Machiavelli of the popular arm that he gladly echoed the ancient proverb holding that "the voice of the people is the voice of God."89 He saw in the masses the great font of virtue which had to be given access to the political domain if a state was to survive for any

86 Ibid; p. 73.
87 Machiavelli, Niccolo. Discourses; p. 72.
88 Ibid; p. 263.
89 Ibid; p. 263.
considerable period of time. Far from seeing any danger in the prospect of
popular participation in the internal balance of power, he believed that the
inclusion of the people in politics would be the very salvation of their
society. Again looking to the glorious history of Rome, he took note of the
domestic stability and external prosperity which the republic was able to
achieve through the labor of all its citizens. Rome achieved glory because
it made the most use of its human resources. Realizing that "the
foundation of the power of Rome consisted of the people of Rome
itself,"90 Machiavelli could not help but be favorably impressed with the
concept of mass participation in the daily operations of government.

If nothing else was sufficient to convince him of the relative safety
and stability of a truly mixed governmental system, the success which
Rome achieved even after it had armed its people must surely have put
the remainder of Machiavelli's doubts to rest. As those who were
responsible for creating the conditions under which their empire could
"conquer and hold the world,"91 the Roman plebs provided our author
with an excellent example of what could happen when power was
distributed over a broad spectrum of society. By arming even the lowliest
of her citizens, Rome benefitted from the unhindered display of their
martial spirit.92 Instead of having cause to lament the political power
which her people had acquired, she was able to reap the rewards of their
vigor and restlessness. In short, the Roman republic avoided the fate
which was reserved for the more cautious and aristocratic Venice of a later

90 Ibid; p. 277.
91 Ibid; p. 278.
92 Ibid; p. 289.
age because she "relied more upon the valor of her citizens" than "upon the chances of fortune." 93

The benefits to be derived by a society from conflict between its various social classes were so great in Machiavelli's estimation that his criticism of it was confined to situations in which he spoke from the perspective of a conquering tyrant. In the process of giving advice to a state which has acquired new territories, Machiavelli encourages its statesmen to crush all the sources of unrest within its new dominion:

"...Nothing is to be gained by attempting to control cities by means of keeping alive factions. For it is impossible either for prince or republic to preserve an equal influence over both the old factions, it being in the nature of man in all differences of opinion to prefer either the one side or the other. Thus, one of the parties being malcontent, you will lose the city on the occasion of the first war, it being impossible to hold it against enemies from without and within." 94

These words are clearly meant to be applied to a state's foreign policy rather than its internal political workings. A newly conquered territory, even after it has been somewhat coopted under the victorious nation, necessarily remains a source of potential instability. Thus, the only sensible policy for the victor to follow is to make its new acquisition as docile as possible. In this case, Machiavelli discusses internal conflict in terms of its possible manipulation by an outsider. His pessimism about the possibility of controlling a state via its domestic balance of power is

93 Ibid; p. 290.

94 Ibid; p. 491.
indicative of his entire republican philosophy. As we have seen, the relations between social groups and the manner in which power is distributed among them cannot be manufactured by an outside agent. In order to have any meaning at all, these interactions must arise spontaneously and be the result of genuine needs and interests within a given society. To assume that they can be "kept alive" by the subtle maneuverings of an outsider is to fundamentally misunderstand the meaning of a mixed governmental system, an error into which Machiavelli would have had considerable difficulty falling.

While Machiavelli did not wish to see society torn to shreds by uncontrolled factionalism, he did not believe that disaster would automatically follow from competition between diverse interests. As one of the most passionate admirers of "mistress Rome," he could not in good conscience have detracted from what he himself admitted was the cause of her greatness. Perhaps her life was a bit boisterous and inelegant in spots, but she was able to attain what her censors - the sober and dignified Venetians - could only envy from a considerable distance. What Machiavelli most admired in the Romans was their ability to understand that "a conflict of interests arises from the very nature of man." They, like he, knew very well that conflict was part of the historical process and that "its total extinction was found only among the dead." While others were content to speak in the mythical vocabulary of 'harmony' and the

95 Ibid; p. 491.
97 Ibid; p. xlii.
98 Ibid; p. xlii.
'common good', both the Romans and their Florentine spiritual descendant were virtuous enough to go beyond the realm of euphemism and engage their historical enemy in battle.
CHAPTER 2

MOSCA, GUICCIARDINI, AND THE DEFENSE OF ORDER

"It makes no difference whether I write or not. They will look for other meanings, even in my silence."

-Umberto Eco

A Brief Outline of the Guicciardinian and Moscan Positions

As perhaps the most well-known advisor to princes who has ever lived and an equally famous practitioner of realpolitik, Machiavelli is all too often mistaken for someone he was not. Modern interpreters who are content to label him according to a few uncontextualized quotes from The Prince completely miss the full substance of his thought. It is almost as if they consider anything that is said beyond the most terse and politically motivated of his works to be merely long-winded reiteration. The connections which he tried to establish between his major writings are, for the most part, completely ignored by these selective critics. They seem to brush aside the crucial distinction which he tried to establish between the conditions necessary at a state's founding moment and those later needed to maintain it. Given that each of these tasks revolves around two entirely different agents - a prince at the founding, and the people at large from that point forward - it is a rather fundamental error to conflate the two. Yet this is precisely what is done by many of those very people who claim to be following in Machiavelli's philosophical footsteps.
As one who has been cast in the role of the sober and realistically grounded Machiavellian despite a number of fundamental philosophical differences with his supposed mentor, Gaetano Mosca presents us with an ideal example of a thinker who has been mislabeled. There is to be found, throughout his work, a pattern which is quite distinctly at odds with the most important contributions of our Florentine author. By rejecting the Machiavellian ideal of conflict, for example, Mosca treats the major part of the famous Secretary’s thought as if it simply doesn’t exist. Concerned with presenting himself as politically savvy and undeceived by appearances, he ends up by distorting much of Machiavelli’s thought.

Although both men are concerned with the project of maintaining the state for as long as possible, they part ways in rather dramatic fashion when it comes to elaborating their proposals in more detail. Given this disagreement, an examination of Mosca is not out of order. By contrasting Mosca’s thought with that of his so-called ideological predecessor, we will be able to see even more clearly just how important such things as political conflict and self-interest were in the formulation of Machiavelli’s most basic doctrines. Perhaps more importantly, it will become possible to see from yet another perspective the conviction with which our Florentine philosopher emphasized individual action and initiative in the historical realm.

Unlike Machiavelli, who saw opportunity in each bellicose encounter with fortune, Mosca saw only an excessively dangerous and unwise risk of immediate disaster. While Machiavelli’s watchwords were boldness and aggression, Mosca’s were caution and circumspection. In many ways, then, the latter man presents a position which falls much
more into line with an aristocratically inclined thinker like Francesco Guicciardini than with the more liberally minded Machiavelli.

Despite being contemporaries and fellow Florentines, Machiavelli and Guicciardini were on completely opposed sides of the republican debate of their age. Although both were nominally republicans, they held very different opinions about "the character of the self-governing regime to which they wished to give their allegiance." While Machiavelli believed that there should not be a "preponderance of political authority" in any one class, his younger compatriot held to the notion that the aristocracy should be given the greater portion of governmental power. In short, the differences between these two were of such a significant nature that they can, if highlighted properly, be used to locate on which side a modern like Mosca tends to lean. It is my contention that, after placing Mosca squarely within this debate, we will be able to quickly see that he is far from what can truly be considered a Machiavellian.

Compared to his Florentine counterpart, Guicciardini was a bastion of conservatism. As a man who had what can best be described as a determinist conception of history, he was deeply sceptical of the ultimate "significance of human activity" in the formation of a state's destiny. While Machiavelli takes it for granted that the proper exertion of virtu can to some degree liberate both the individual and his state from the


100 Ibid; p. 135.

101 Ibid; p. 135.

102 Chabod, Federico; p. 22.
bonds of fortune, Guicciardini remains unconvinced of such a possibility. Thus, there is little need to cultivate virtu through a structure as conflict-ridden and unstable as a mixed government. Trying to maintain a perfectly calibrated internal balance of interests becomes unnecessary in a world in which fortune is so powerful that it is immune to human influence. Indeed, under these circumstances, an internal division of power among the different segments of society would actually be dangerous, for it would needlessly expose a state to possible disintegration. Mosca adopts much the same outlook when he argues in favor of a single, unified ruling class. By placing his hopes in one political body which is to be self-contained and always in complete control of the society over which it rules, he is betraying a very profound fear of fortune. Mosca's sole proposal for dealing successfully with fortuna is to organize a ruling elite so united and tightly coordinated that it can rapidly respond to changes in its historical circumstance. This reactive posture is clearly at odds with Machiavelli's belief in shaping events through the aggressive exertion of will. It is distinguished far less for its audacity than for its humble aims and servile relationship to fortuna.

The appealing inclination to place a thinker like Mosca into the Machiavellian tradition simply because he uses a general method which the latter made famous is dangerous, for it can lead to the complete misunderstanding of both men. In examining the substantive aspects of each man's political theory, we can attempt to stop the modern tendency to water down Machiavelli's thought to the point of insignificance.

Clarification of the major differences between these two doctrines will, then, help eliminate much of the misunderstanding which still surrounds Machiavelli's work. By showing the exact points where his self-described 'modern disciple' departs from his teachings, we will be in a position to better understand Machiavelli and the doctrines for which he will be forever known.
Guicciardini's Politics of Exclusion

As a man who had personally experienced the vagaries of fortune both as a Florentine political thinker and, more generally speaking, as an Italian, Francesco Guicciardini shared little of Machiavelli's confidence in humanity's ability to direct the course of its historical development. Such a sense of disillusionment is quite understandable in light of the number of large defeats he experienced in a relatively short period of time. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that he lost everything that he held most dear in a single catastrophic series of related events. Not only did he lose his position as minister to Pope Clement VII after the League of Cognac was roundly defeated by the imperial forces of Charles V,104 but he also witnessed the return of republican government to Florence when the Medici, his long-time political sponsors, were overthrown.105 In little more than the blink of fortune's eye, Guicciardini, the very man who had chased power and position since youth, was reduced to the obscurity of life as a private citizen.106

Witnessing his country's final collapse at the hands of the new European powers, Guicciardini's hope was overpowered by fortuna's sheer strength. As a result, by the time he began to write the major bulk of his political treatises, he had completely surrendered to fortune.

   Grayson, Cecil; pp. xi-xiii.

105 Ibid; p. xiii.

106 Ibid; p. xiii.
Convinced that he was "living in an age of irreversible catastrophe,"107 the unhappy Francesco forsook Machiavelli's optimistic attempt to instruct his readers in the means of achieving lasting greatness and glory through historical example. As Quentin Skinner observes, after

"Abandoning the humanist belief that the main duty of the historian is to furnish his readers with useful precepts and advice, Guicciardini devotes his entire narrative efforts to recounting the tragedy of Italy's progressive exploitation and collapse."108

Although he devotes much of his scholarship to the analysis of history, he is unable to pull out of it any patterns which might make fortuna slightly more predictable and, thus, capable of being fought off. Analysis of the past reveals only an endless series of examples which serve to underline her might. Strewn across the battleground of history, the same site where Machiavelli saw a clash between relative equals, Guicciardini finds only human casualties. Looking over the remains of fortuna's vanquished, he notices several familiar faces which seem to attest to man's helplessness. In Francesco Valori, for example, he sees a man who "had enjoyed great authority, following, and favor, and was undoubtedly the leading citizen of the city" before "fortune suddenly turned against him."109 In the mere passage of a day, our author informs us, this unfortunate, who was for so long the envy of all Florence, was

107 Skinner, Quentin.  The Foundations of Modern Political Thought; p. 188.

108 Ibid; p. 188.

reduced to a point beyond despair: "his house was sacked, his wife was killed before his very eyes, and he was basely murdered by his enemies almost in the same instant."110

Examples like the previous one brought Guicciardini to the conclusion that fortune was an entity which should not be tampered with. He believed that, as far as possible, leaders should do their best to avoid placing themselves in any situation which might be accompanied by undue risk. Given that fortune was so naturally cruel even to those who had done nothing to offend her, it was wise to keep a safe distance from obvious danger. Having been instructed by both his own failures and those of others, Guicciardini understandably chose to approach life in a defensive posture. He knew very well that, as one who shrouded herself in mystery, fortune was not amenable to challenge and would, as she had demonstrated so many times before, bring the overzealous back to a quick realization of her power. Thus, she should be given a wide berth, for she did not associate kindly with the ambitious.

Chastened by the examples of the past, Guicciardini viewed fortune in a very different light than did Machiavelli. While the latter thought of fortuna as being at least partially vulnerable to human influence, Guicciardini saw her only as an impenetrable wall of fate. Rather than being an enemy which could be fought with the proper amount of virtu, she was all powerful and held the reigns of history very tightly, indeed. Transformed by Guicciardini into a mysterious and unequalled force, she was

110 Ibid; p. 141.
"more implacable than the goddess... whom Machiavelli felt could still be taken by assault, the lady who yielded at least fifty percent of the time to man's intervention."\textsuperscript{111}

Filled with an "increased sense of the imbalance between fortuna's powers and man's capacities,"\textsuperscript{112} Guicciardini turns his efforts in a more conservative and much less ambitious direction than does Machiavelli. He becomes the prophet of caution when it comes to dealing with matters of a state's foreign policy and, even more importantly, the unqualified advocate of tranquility on the domestic scene. The fact that fortune is so "impersonal" and "distant"\textsuperscript{113} means that her actions are beyond prediction and the influence of even the most perfectly cultivated virtue. As a result, an internal political order geared to the development of virtu in the Machiavellian sense is completely unnecessary. The messy conflict which naturally accompanies a mixed form of government no longer has to be endured, for all human efforts are inadequate in the face of fortune. There is no remedy for the tyrannical grip which fortuna has on human affairs. Thus, the attempt to make a citizenry virtuous by dividing power among its various elements for the sake of keeping it fit enough to challenge her no longer serves a useful purpose.

Although Guicciardini continues to make reference to virtu throughout his works, the term has a very different meaning than it had with Machiavelli. Instead of being the quality of character which hungers for battle and the possibility of conquest, it comes to denote a prudent and

\begin{enumerate}
\item[111] Guicciardini, Francesco.  \textit{History of Italy}: p. xviii.
\item[112] Skinner, Quentin.  \textit{The Foundations of Modern Political Thought}: p. 187.
\item[113] Guicciardini, Francesco.  \textit{History of Italy}: p. xviii.
\end{enumerate}
temporizing approach to fortune's challenges. The unsavory elements of Machiavelli's virtue have been, if not entirely eliminated, at least watered down to accommodate a more passive outlook. When referring to his more famous Florentine contemporary, Guicciardini involuntarily allows his disapproval of Machiavelli's bold style to show through. As a man who was remembered for always taking "an excessive delight in extraordinary and violent remedies," Machiavelli did not provide a model for his peace and order-loving compatriot.

In its new role as omnipotent arbiter of historical destiny, fortuna was impervious to human tampering. Thus, the aggressive and expansionist character of Machiavelli's virtu was left behind in favor of a defensively oriented policy whose ultimate value was an ordered status quo. With the advent of this new approach, behavior which Machiavelli considered bold suddenly came to be called rash and imprudent. Lorenzo de Medici, the same man to whom Machiavelli dedicated his Prince with the greatest of praise, became the subject of Guicciardini's intense criticism. Lorenzo, it seems, was too prone to foreign adventure during his term as supreme ruler of Florence. Although "his judgement was sound and wise," it was not "of a quality comparable to his intellect." He was much too immoderate and didn't seem to realize the magnitude of fortune's strength or the extent of its wrath. Led by this fatal naivete,


Lorenzo "committed several rash actions"\textsuperscript{117} which, although they finally redounded to Florence's credit, Guicciardini points to with horror in his \textit{History of Florence}. There was, for example, the

"war against Volterra, in which by trying to deprive the Volterrans of their alum mines, he (Lorenzo) forced them to rebel, thereby igniting a fire that could have turned Italy upside down."\textsuperscript{118}

It should be noted that this Guicciardinian criticism is sustained solely at the theoretical level since, as our author himself admits with some hesitancy, Italy was not turned upside down, and "all came out well in the end."\textsuperscript{119} In an effort to find support both for his position on Lorenzo and for the modest political qualities (such as patience and caution) which he endorsed, Guicciardini had to resort to the realm of hypothesis. By, in effect, beating the drumroll of Armageddon when condemning Florence's militaristic stance against its much inferior neighbor, he was betraying the deep fear which he harbored of fortuna. The mere fact that Lorenzo brought Florence into a conflict which, as we have been told, could have ended quite differently than it did, meant that he lacked the necessary wisdom and patience for his high office. Thus, although reality did not support his verdict, Guicciardini found ample justification for assaulting Lorenzo's behavior in an almost equally palpable domain - that of his fears.

\textsuperscript{117} Ibid; p. 171.

\textsuperscript{118} Ibid; p. 71.

\textsuperscript{119} Ibid; p. 71.
So entrenched is the value of moderation in Guicciardini that the vast majority of his writing takes on the form of a paean sung in devotion to it. His histories consist of little more than endless examples of actions which their author would consider either prudent or overly ambitious. Without exception, the audacious are always humbled and brought back down to their miniscule human size, as was Lorenzo de Medici. The cautious, however, take on heroic dimensions and become the new virtuosi. Men like Cosimo de Medici are raised to the heights and presented as being worthy of emulation because they know how to survive in fortuna's world. When compared to his great grandson, for instance, Cosimo turned out to be the "greater man,"\textsuperscript{120} for he "had better judgment"\textsuperscript{121} and exercised his power without arousing any great opposition. He was, to put it crudely, a man who could get along quietly and did not feel the need to constantly acquire more than he already had. Thus, he earned Guicciardini's highest praise as a leader who was able to preserve his power "without diminishing his safety."\textsuperscript{122} In contrast, Pope Leo X did not measure up so well when the same criteria were applied to him. Guicciardini heaps criticism upon him for stirring up war between Francis I and Charles V in 1521 simply because of his desire to seize Ferrara. Behavior of this sort, it is argued, was not required since Leo's kingdom was not at all threatened by any foreign power. On the contrary, "The Pope possessed tranquilly, and with great obedience,

\textsuperscript{120} Ibid; p. 76.

\textsuperscript{121} Ibid; p. 76

\textsuperscript{122} Ibid; p. 87.
the very large estate of the Church; and Rome and all the court were flourishing and in a state of felicity."123

Similarly, Emperor Charles V is taken to task for demonstrating qualities which Machiavelli would have prized in a political ruler. In Guicciardini's brief commentary, Charles is accused of having led "a life which, motivated more by impetuousness than virtue, had upset the world, and was threatening at the time of his death to upset it again."124 The opposition that is here created between impetuous and virtuous action is extremely revealing of our Florentine aristocrat's entire philosophy. By placing these two forms of action at opposite poles, Guicciardini is clearly rejecting one of Machiavelli's basic premises. According to the latter, there could be no distinction of the kind proposed by Guicciardini, for the very substance of virtu is boldness and impetuosity. In a setting inhabited by the ever vigilant and opportunistic fortuna, action is the only sure way to preempt and foil her tyrannical designs.

The message communicated by Guicciardini in all of the previous examples is that one should be content with what fortuna has ceded and not grow too greedy or bold. In this way, he moves even further away from Machiavelli's belief in the participatory nature of history. Fortuna rules everything and humanity should simply be happy with its meager allowance of power and autonomy. Thus, he instructs us that "if a man is well off and has a reasonable share of things, he should be satisfied and


124 Ibid; p. 326.
not try to get more, for most of the time the attempt fails."125 With this as his guiding principle, Guicciardini recounts with affection the story of yet another man of state who approached fortuna with the proper deference and timidty. Prospero Colonna, although certainly far from being a Machiavellian man of virtu, is nonetheless singled out for his exceptionally cautious approach to military affairs. He was, from the author's point of view, a captain whose hesitancy in times of war was an attribute rather than a defect, for it did not offer either fortune or his enemies an easy chance to defeat him:

"...Very slow by nature in all of his actions, and one to whom you would deservedly give the title of malingerer, ...he nonetheless deserves praise for having managed the wars more with counsels than with the sword, and had taught men to defend their states without exposing themselves, except of necessity, to the fortunes of war."126

Always on the defensive, then, the Guicciardinian man is too preoccupied to become a meaningful actor in the historical process. He lacks the audacity which is needed to force his will on a less than receptive fortune. "His is a harsh world" in which "true security consists in a situation in which your enemies, although they wish to do so, are unable to harm you."127 In such a world, history loses its heroic aspect and becomes nothing but a record of human bondage to chance. No longer the primary goal after which a state strives with the whole of its resources and


the full commitment of its people, glory is replaced by the comparatively modest desire for a continuation of the status quo. Since fortune cannot be overcome, the best that one can hope for is more of the same. Machiavelli's wish to achieve equal influence with fortune over the direction which history is to take is, from this perspective, hardly realistic.

As if the magnitude of fortune's power weren't enough to consign human action to almost complete irrelevance, it is even further undermined by the slow nature of history itself. According to Guicciardini, events move at such a laborious pace that action at the human level becomes quite meaningless.128 History crawls along so slowly that sporadic attempts to control its course are destined to fail. Thus Guicciardini cautions that

"If you see a city beginning to decline, a government changing, a new empire expanding, or any such phenomenon, ... be careful not to misjudge the time they will take. By their very nature, and because of various obstacles, such movements are much slower than most men imagine. And to be mistaken in these matters can be very harmful to you. Be very careful, for it is a step on which people often stumble. The same is true even of private and personal affairs; but much more so of public and general matters, for these, because of their bulk, move much more slowly and are subject to many more accidents."129

Having fatalistically resigned himself and the rest of humanity to a secondary and rather insignificant role in the historical process,

128 Ibid; p. 50.
129 Ibid; p. 59.
Guicciardini turns his attention in the direction of domestic government. Convinced that the cultivation of virtu in the Machiavellian sense is no longer necessary, he begins to outline a decidedly limited governmental scheme. In it, the type of conflict which Machiavelli tried so hard to encourage is rooted out as much as possible. The social tension which his older contemporary attempted to keep alive between the various classes and interests of society is relaxed to a considerable degree by Guicciardini. The internal conflict once thought to be a society's greatest source of virtue is now considered a useless and even dangerous source of instability.\textsuperscript{130} Given that fortuna is immune to human influence, a virtu-sustaining clash of interests is quite unneeded and, in fact, perilous to the established order. With glory far out of human reach, there is simply no reason to weather the convulsions which accompany a truly mixed form of government. In short, it is foolishly dangerous to tamper with the small amount of order and tranquility which fortuna has allowed a society, for once it has been destroyed such stability is hard to recreate.

Speedily departing from the Machiavellian conception of mixed government, Guicciardini looks with ever greater fondness upon the ideals of unity and harmony when constructing his own political model. Where the Florentine Secretary sees the possibility of conflict leading to beneficial results, Guicciardini sees only the specter of anarchy.\textsuperscript{131} The "opposed ambitions"\textsuperscript{132} of the nobility and people are sure to lead to nothing less dramatic than the ruin of a nation. Even Rome, that

\textsuperscript{130} Skinner, Quentin. \textit{The Foundations of Modern Political Thought}; pp. 182-183.

\textsuperscript{131} Chabod, Federico; pp. 74, 196.

\textsuperscript{132} Guicciardini, Francesco. \textit{History of Italy}; p. 381.
seemingly shining testament to the merits of conflict, is criticized by Guicciardini for her perpetual disunity. Although he never gets around to clearly specifying the real causes of her greatness, Guicciardini nevertheless maintains that it was certainly not "the division between plebs and senate which made Rome free and powerful."133 If anything, he believes that it was her military discipline which helped the empire to overcome its divisiveness and to survive for so long.134

The system which Guicciardini designs to meet the demands of fortuna is very much tailored to the preservation of internal harmony and order. Although still referred to as a 'mixed' political structure, it shares few of the traits which distinguished Machiavelli's model. It lacks, for example, a truly popular base, for the people are not judged to be capable of self-government. Seen as nothing but "a treasury of ignorance and confusion,"135 the masses are not entrusted with any real power in Guicciardini's ideal state. Instead, the aristocracy is given most of the power to decide important matters and to keep discord to a minimum. The result is that there is not an equally distributed balance of power among the three levels of society as Machiavelli would have liked. One class comes to dominate the government and, as a result, popular participation assumes a merely nominal character. As Mario Domandi observes, in spite of superficial appearances, Guicciardini's "ideal always remains the same: a mixed constitution, with checks and balances, but

133 Guicciardini, Francesco. Considerations on the Discourses; p. 68.

134 Ibid; p. 103.

135 Ibid; p. 105.
with most of the power to make decisions residing in the hands of the aristocrats."136

The disdain with which Guicciardini views the popular element of society is perhaps made most apparent in his Ricordi, where he notes with an arrogant flourish that "to speak of the people is to speak of a madman, a monster full of confusion and errors, whose vain opinions are as far from the truth as Spain, according to Ptolemy, is from India."137 With this less than complimentary opinion to guide him, Guicciardini is led to conclude that political power is best used when placed in the more capable hands of the aristocracy.138 Only those who have experience in the handling of the affairs of state can act with the proper amount of caution and can, when necessary, curb the excitable mob. Ultimately, the purpose of this limited government is to save the people from themselves by keeping them as far out of the political fray as possible. In this way, conflict can be diffused and perhaps even eliminated altogether before it threatens the established order. By preventing the expression of any significant discord, the state can prevent fortuna from making yet another infringement on humanity's already small portion of independence. Thus, we are told that a limited government is best because

"a small number gives more unity, greater ability, and effectiveness. There is more order in things, more thought and foresight into affairs, more resolution."139


137 Guicciardini, Francesco. Ricordi; p. 125.


139 Ibid; p. 64.
Guicciardini's deep distrust of the people betrays the fact that he is not eager to support the establishment of a genuinely mixed form of government. Such a system would, of necessity, place what he regards as the unqualified multitudes in a position of political equality with their more capable aristocratic compatriots. The result, Guicciardini argues, would be the eventual disintegration of the all-important element of order and, ultimately, the collapse of the state itself. The important message to be derived from all of this is, in short, that political liberty can be attained without the complete involvement of every social group and class. In fact, problems begin to occur only when "men are not satisfied to be free and secure" but want also "to govern."140 Demands of this sort cannot be justified since "the fruit of liberties and the end for which they were instituted is not government by everyone, for only the able and deserving should govern."141

While it is true that the 'able and deserving' can, theoretically at least, come from any portion of the social body, in actual practice it is the aristocrats who really govern under this system. Guicciardini says as much in his Considerations on the Discourses of Machiavelli, when he responds to Machiavelli's descriptions of the different kinds of republics. While examining the very section in which Machiavelli sings the praises of the conflictual nature of mixed government, Guicciardini proposes a course of action which would effectively remove the people - an integral

140 Ibid; p. 69.

141 Ibid; p. 69.
source of such conflict - from the political equation. No state can survive, he argues, if it is based on a constitution which fosters internal turmoil and a perpetual sense of restlessness in the population. His solution is to give the people nothing more than a secondary and infrequent role in the operations of government. Thus, he declares that

"one should not give the people power in any important matters, all except those which, were they in any other hands, would endanger freedom, such as the election of magistrates, the creation of laws."142

Although the above-mentioned concessions to popular government are made to seem significant, a look beyond the democratic rhetoric reveals their merely token nature. When, for example, he speaks of the people 'creating' their laws, Guicciardini has something very different in mind than does Machiavelli. In fact, the use of the term 'creation' is misleading, for it implies that the people are somehow involved in the process of proposing legislation. As Guicciardini goes on to admit, his idea of government has little to do with the expression of popular will and the attempt to formulate laws which correspond to it. Hidden behind the republican catch-phrases is an endorsement of a very reactive form of popular government. In this system, interests are kept from messily bumping against each other by excluding the people from the activity of actually making law. Instead, Guicciardini puts the masses in the secondary role of either approving or disapproving already existing legislative proposals. These, he tells us, "should not come to the people

142 Ibid; p. 72.
until they have been well digested and approved by the supreme magistrates and the senate."143

Viewed from this angle, Guicciardini's mixed government shares little more than its name with that proposed by Machiavelli. As we have seen, conflict is limited to such an extent that Guicciardini is led at one point to conclude that "there should not be a free debate for that is the principal instrument of sedition...."144 Thus, our Florentine aristocrat tells us in his Discourse of Logroño that his city's problems are due in large part to its excessive reliance on the popular will.145 His solution, not surprisingly, is to look to the example of Venice. He declares that it would be best for the Florentines to introduce a senate consisting of roughly two hundred ottimati which could sift through the most important legislation and, in effect, lead the government. This system would help to bring the masses back under the control of the much wiser and more politically adept aristocrats in, as Skinner calls it, "the approved Venetian style."146 Most importantly of all, it would keep the people relatively pacified without in any way conceding them too much authority.

Throughout Guicciardini's writings can be found a sincere distrust of change and the instability which necessarily accompanies it. Unlike Machiavelli, he cannot boldly accept fortuna's uncertain shifts and look upon them as opportunities for achieving glory. His concern, rather, is to

\[\text{143 Guicciardini, Francesco.} \textit{Considerations on the Discourses}; \text{p. 66.}\]

\[\text{144 Ibid; } \text{p. 66.}\]

\[\text{145 Guicciardini, Francesco.} \textit{Discourse of Logroño}; \text{pp. 81-82.}\]

\[\text{146 Skinner, Quentin.} \textit{The Foundations of Modern Political Thought}; \text{p. 172.}\]
simply find a way of surviving for as long as possible in the realm of historical contingency without attracting too much attention. The constant and unstoppable motion of expansion and decline which Machiavelli believes characterizes history can, from Guicciardini's point of view, be frozen still if only a state does not become too greedy or adolescently daring in its relationship with other states. If it can remain happy with its own relatively comfortable subjection to fortune, a state can also avoid having to endure the internal upheavals which accompany the demands of empire.

Following a line of argumentation which was later to influence many staunch prophets of conservatism, Guicciardini was enough of an aristocrat to remain remarkably unaffected by the major intellectual currents of his own age. At the same time that most of his contemporaries were defending the merits of increased democracy, he was quite content to remain one of the lone voices of privileged dissent. Thus, his familiarity with and even grudging admiration for the more liberally minded Machiavelli was not enough to soften his elitist predilections. Always wary of fortuna's might, Guicciardini was unwilling to place any great amount of confidence in humanity's ability to control its own future. The aggressive expression of virtù which Machiavelli so admired smacked to Guicciardini of an all too immodest bravado. While the former man saw the opportunity for greatness in bold and relatively unfettered human action, the latter saw only the threat of disaster at fortuna’s destructive hands. As Felix Gilbert noted in his reflections on the History of Italy, the most lasting impression which Guicciardini left behind was simply of "the

147 Guicciardini, Francesco. History of Italy: p. 203.
helplessness and impotence of man in the face of fate."148
Disillusionment of this profound sort could not be sweetened even by
Machiavelli's hopeful attempts to resuscitate Rome's ancient valor.

Mosca's Conception of Limited Change

The fact that it has become such a commonplace to think of Machiavelli as a ruthless apologist for a very limited and static form of government can in large part be attributed to the misrepresentations of modern thinkers like Mosca. In an effort to bring a greater amount of historical legitimacy to his own work, Mosca eagerly placed himself within the realistically grounded Machiavellian tradition. As Ettore Albertoni rather baroquely puts it, by vowing "to be a realist at all times, explode myths and tirelessly reveal the truth hidden behind ideology and metaphysics," Mosca in effect made a "declaration of loyalty to Machiavelli and his method."149 Unfortunately for students of political theory, this one-sided association has also resulted in the tendency to mistake Mosca for someone who is faithfully developing the entire Machiavellian philosophy in greater detail. Thus, we see with depressing frequency that something as important as Machiavelli's conception of mixed government can be conflated with Mosca's advocacy of a comparatively tepid form of political stasis. Not only does this overzealous attempt at continuity subtract from the emphasis which Machiavelli placed upon internal conflict, but it also tends from a more general perspective to cast in doubt the Florentine Secretary's deep republican convictions.

For Mosca, the internal struggle between diverse and separate interests was unproductive at best and downright destructive of a state's future chances of survival at worst. This is made quite apparent in The Ruling Class, where we are told in almost apocalyptic terms that

149 Albertoni, Ettore A. Mosca and the Theory of Elitism; p. 3.
"nations are... marked for death when they suffer a
dwindling of those moral forces which hold them together
and make it possible for a considerable mass of individual
efforts to be concentrated, disciplined and directed toward
purposes related to the collective interest.”

Mosca’s theme thus begins to take on a very Guicciardinian flavor.
This becomes most obvious when we examine exactly which group he
wants to have ‘direct’ the general social ‘effort’. He introduces his
political philosophy with the interesting declaration that there should be a
single ruling class. Although access to this class is to be kept relatively
open to the different social layers, it is hardly infused with the
Machiavellian spirit of republicanism. In fact, when studied in detail, it is
nothing more than a clever way to minimize internal conflict and social
change by keeping the lower classes sufficiently pacified. Under Mosca’s
plan, the lone ruling class is periodically renewed by accepting new
members who have the requisite talent to guide the state and to keep the
existing social structure intact. By eliminating possible sources of
contention through slow assimilation, the ruling class can maintain its
position with ease. The key to its success revolves around the fact that
the political elite can control the rate of social change by preventing the
formation of distinct political groups with their own unique interests.
The importance which Mosca places on this kind of manipulation by a


151 Albertoni, Ettore A. *La Teoria della Classe Politica nella Crisi del
Parlamentarismo*; pp.
16-22, 53-54.
limited clique is made extremely clear when it comes to defining precisely what he means by a ruling class. As he explains it,

"a man rules or a group of men rules when the man or the group is able to control the social forces that, at the given moment in the given society, are essential to the possession and retention of power."152

Control of this sort is not at all what Machiavelli had in mind when outlining his idea of mixed government. Instead of wishing to curtail the clash of diverse social forces, he favored letting those forces loose at each other. Only in this way could glory be attained and virtu be cultivated throughout the entire population. For Mosca, on the other hand, the project is not to achieve greatness but rather to preserve the existing level of social organization. The Machiavellian belief in the cyclical nature of history as a result of expansion or decline is replaced by the very Guicciardinian notion that the status quo can be maintained indefinitely if only change can be controlled through the limitation of social conflict.

While he does not use the terminology of virtu and fortuna, Mosca does nevertheless endorse a type of political organization which is still a reaction to the modern conception of this dichotomy. Much like Guicciardini before him, Mosca is motivated by a fear of the type of uncontrolled historical change which is the latter-day equivalent of the medieval fortuna. Change must be limited as much as possible because if it is allowed to occur as it will, there is a chance that the current order may be replaced by another one. This insistence on keeping things as they are

152 Ibid; p. xix.
can be traced back to Mosca's intense dislike of the undirected mob. Internal peace and stability are all-important to him because their survival is what insures that the people will not gain control of government. As he often declares, "no democracy would endure if it followed the will of the ignorant masses instead of the aggressive leadership of the enlightened few." A perception of this sort does not exactly provide the greatest justification for a political balance of interests.

Taking his dislike of the popular element into account, one is forced to conclude that Mosca's idea of a mixed government has very little in common with that endorsed by Machiavelli. Indeed, there is one illuminating point in his A Short History of Political Philosophy where Mosca explicitly defines his conception of a mixed political structure and, in the process, shows just how far he has diverged from his supposed teacher. In such a system, different interests are not opposed against one another in an effort to strike a virtu-sustaining balance. Instead, an attempt is made to establish a conservative structure in which

"neither the autocratic nor the liberal system prevails and the aristocratic tendency is tempered by a slow but continuous renewal of the ruling class, which thus allows it to absorb those elements of healthy power that are slowly emerging among the ruled classes." 

Clearly from this quote it can be seen that conflict is not exactly a desirable component in any political organization supported by Mosca. If

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153 Ibid; p. xxiv.

154 Mosca, Gaetano. A Short History of Political Philosophy; p. 256.
this is not sufficient, one needs only to look at what our modern-day
Guicciardinian has to say about the importance of assimilation in the
process of renewing a ruling class. Although it would require a
considerable gesture of generosity, one might from a superficial glance at
Mosca be tempted to think that his project of renewing a ruling class
would actually be conducive to real social change. After all, if it is
assumed that the point of entry into the upper political echelons is open
wide enough to allow for a truly fluid exchange between the established
ruling elite and talented members of the lower classes, a genuine
republicanism, however peculiar in form, might still be preserved. Such
naive hopes are quickly dashed when one listens more closely to what
Mosca is proposing. His plan does not involve the complete renewal of
the ruling class, only its gradual supplementation by as few new elements
as are needed to keep the establishment healthy and strong. As he so
revealingly declares,

"penetration into the upper classes by elements coming from the lower is helpful when it takes place in due propor-
tion and under such conditions that the newcomers at once assimilate the best qualities of the old members. It
is harmful when the old members are, so to say, absorbed and assimilated by the newcomers. In that event an
aristocracy is not replenished. It turns plebs."

Despite the very conservative overtones of his governmental plan,
Mosca stubbornly insists on the fundamentally democratic nature of his
ideals. Through his rather loose application of an already long-established

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political vocabulary, he is able to make himself appear as nothing less than the proponent of true government by the people. It is also thanks to this self-classification that Mosca has for so long been confused for a Machiavellian with modern republican leanings. Misunderstandings of this sort can be put to rest with even the most cursory of references to the actual Moscan philosophy. When this is done, we find that his allusions to such concepts as democracy are characterized by a rather heavy reliance upon euphemism. Accurate use of the adjective 'democratic', he tells us, is made when describing "the tendency which aims to replenish the ruling class with elements of the lower classes."156 A subtle but instructive contrast is presented in the form of the aristocratic tendency which, we are informed, "aims to stabilize social control and political power in the descendants of the class that happens to hold possession of it at the given historical moment."157 Tiny distinctions of this pedantic nature between two political schemes which are at such opposite poles for Machiavelli hardly justify placing Mosca within the former's tradition of republican thought.

The mere fact that Mosca is opposed to hereditary office does not mean that he can be called an advocate of mixed government in the truly Machiavellian sense. After all, even Guicciardini voiced considerable criticism of calcified hereditary systems in which power "very often... passes from a wise man to a madman who then plunges" a state "into the abyss."158 The fact that the aristocratic Florentine disapproved of Piero de

156 Ibid; p. 395.

157 Ibid; p. 395.

Medici's succession to power after the death of his father Lorenzo only meant that he did not wish to see government dominated by the inept. It did not imply that he was a supporter of a full meritocracy in which accession to power is based solely upon talent without regard to social status. Mosca, similarly, is motivated by a desire to keep the political aristocracy filled with enough competent members to prevent its replacement by the lower classes.159 As a consequence, strict hereditary succession is something which has to be abandoned if the ruling class is to be periodically revitalized by new members. Perhaps Mosca's ideal is best understood when we realize that, for him, the "democratic tendency" is really a "conservative force."160 As he says, the sufficient manipulation of democracy

"enables ruling classes to be continually replenished through the admission of new elements who have inborn talents for leadership and a will to lead, and so prevents that exhaustion of aristocracies of birth which usually paves the way for great social cataclysms."161

The danger Mosca sees in the maintenance of distinction between political interests is that such division weakens the ruling class' ability to lead society. Without a strong sense of direction imposed from above, he believes that the social organism is doomed to collapse. Since the people


160 Mosca, Gaetano. The Ruling Class; p. 416.

161 Ibid; p. 416.
are distinguished only by their woeful "inadequacy of training," a diminution of the elite's power would leave a state essentially ungoverned. Thus, because of the people's inability to look after themselves, he thinks it important to warn that "the most dangerous among the consequences that may result from differences in social type between the various social classes, and from the reciprocal isolation of classes that necessarily follows in their wake, is a decline in energy in the upper classes, which grow poorer and poorer in bold and aggressive characters and richer and richer in 'soft', remissive individuals." 

The passion with which Mosca defends the political status quo has its origin, as was the case with Guicciardini, in his fear of the uncertainties surrounding change through an internal balance of interests. Rather than using the governmental apparatus as a means of cultivating a greater political involvement and sense of responsibility in the people at large, Mosca treats it as an instrument of exclusion. He knows that, with only a limited number of participants, there is little chance that society will undergo any great transformations which may leave it in the hands of the unruly mob.164 Thus, although he speaks with disdain of 'remitive individuals', it is only in reference to members of the ruling class. Under his system, the softness which he so despises in the elite would be allowed to permeate the remainder of society. This would clearly ensure the


163 Mosca, Gaetano. The Ruling Class: p. 117.

demise of that kind of interactively acquired virtu which Machiavelli so loved. While it is true that conflict would be quelled and replaced by a surer and more comfortable sense of stability, the active commitment to greatness which characterized virtu would also be lost in the process. In short, the balance of political power would be decidedly tipped in favor of a single class, making a vast segment of society the passive tool of a small caste. In this way, the Venetian paradigm would finally find its modern reincarnation.

In spite of the vastly different aims propelling them, Mosca is able to claim rights of theoretical lineage to Machiavelli because his misunderstanding of the latter is of such a profoundly sincere sort. Far from wishing to intentionally misrepresent his hero's doctrine, Mosca really believes that he is being true to the Machiavellian ideal. He is convinced that Machiavelli has written from the unchanging perspective of a defender of limited government. This is why he cannot distinguish between the Florentine's words about founding and those devoted to the project of maintenance. It is also why he can see himself as a modern Machiavellian who does nothing more subversive than to expand upon the original teachings of his mentor. To Mosca, Machiavelli does not fully deal with the issue of maintaining the established order. With this in mind, the former can claim that he is simply taking the Machiavellian philosophy to its logical conclusion by addressing how a state is to survive after it has been established. Mosca is, thus, in a position to confidently assert that, although Machiavelli has devised a prescription for saving or

reviving "an aging institution," this remedy is not sufficient to keep it in good working order. Taking a society back to its first principles is too convulsive an exercise to be repeated with excessive frequency, for it would keep the political organization mired in chaos. Faced with this problem, Mosca introduces his conservative plan of maintenance, safe in the assurance that

"no state can grow in strength, no system can endure, if the revolutionary atmosphere continues and if, worse still, those who are in control of power persist in fomenting revolution instead of cultivating the sentiments, passions and ideas that are directly opposed to it."167

Guided by this ever-present fear of cataclysmic change through popular participation, Mosca dedicates himself to the task of demonstrating exactly why the preservation of a single political class is necessary. He notes with a tone of concern for the common good, the genuineness of which is reminiscent of Guicciardini, that a restricted political process is best not only for the elite who are its immediate beneficiaries, but also for the population at large who is spared the worries inherent in an open competition for power. As a result, Mosca reminds his readers not to be deceived by the grand promises of democracy, for

"it is not so certain... that it would be altogether beneficial to the collectivity to have every advantage of birth eliminated in the struggle for membership in the ruling class and for high position in the social hierarchy. If all individuals

166 Ibid; p. 313.

167 Ibid; p. 313.
could participate in the scramble on an equal footing, struggle would be intensified to the point of frenzy. This would entail an enormous expenditure of energy for strictly personal ends, with no corresponding benefit to the social organism, at least in the majority of cases.\textsuperscript{168}

Mosca's repeated attempts to make the interests of a single class synonymous with the general welfare indicate that he was far from being an admirer of the civil conflict to which Machiavelli lent so much of his support. Wishing to diffuse the major sources of internal discord by coopting talent into the ruling class, Mosca's plan was, in essence, to drain the lower social strata of the elements they needed to organize themselves into distinct groups representing diverse interests. In this way, opposition to the elite would be very cleverly nipped in the bud. The structure of mixed government by which Machiavelli hoped to divide power was to find in Mosca a frosty reception, indeed. Not only was difference eliminated in government, but the bold initiative which Machiavelli labeled virtu was taken entirely out of the political equation. Human action lost its significance in the sphere of politics and was replaced by an almost manic desire for stability at all costs. It is in this fundamental change of focus that, ultimately, the most important difference between Mosca and Machiavelli can be found. Choosing to follow the defensive theoretical precedent set by Guicciardini, Mosca abandoned the Machiavellian quest for greatness through increased political involvement. Only by acknowledging this difference can we really see the extent of Machiavelli's devotion to the republican ideal. It was, after all,

\textsuperscript{168} Ibid; p. 419.
in the "recognition of the austere, dramatic importance of our actions"
that "the human grandeur of Machiavelli as a representative of the Italian
Renaissance" became most manifest.169

169 Chabod, Federico; p. 125.
Although an analysis of this limited scope cannot possibly remedy all misrepresentations of Machiavelli, it is nonetheless a starting point on the very long journey to a better understanding of the Florentine writer. By focusing our attention on Machiavelli's conception of political maintenance, we have been able to appreciate his fundamentally republican leanings and, in so doing, have made his reputation as a staunch monarchist and general defender of limited government at least problematical. Having distanced Machiavelli's doctrine from the partial and misleading interpretations of two thinkers who have mistakenly come to be known as his philosophical disciples, we can now allow Machiavelli to speak to us as the republican that he truly was.

While the overt intent of this thesis was to uncover Machiavelli's republicanism through an analysis of his formula for maintaining a state, there was a second and equally important purpose guiding it along. Implicit in the attempt to present the liberal message of the Discourses was the necessity of separating their author from the misinterpretations of two theorists who are generally considered his followers. This was done in order to prevent Machiavelli's doctrine from being fundamentally transformed and ultimately coopted into a political view which he did not share. In this sense, it was absolutely imperative not only to return to Machiavelli's own works but, in addition, to look upon the secondary literature from at least a moderately critical perspective. If nothing else,
this study helps to support the cause of treating theoretical interpretation, especially that relating to a thinker who has been the subject of as much commentary as Machiavelli, as something less than the final word.*

Confined to the relatively small parameters of my own study, I am hardly in a position to claim for my conclusions any greater finality than that accorded to other mere interpreters. With this sobering realization to guide me, I can only attempt to point out some of the many implications contained within this analysis. The first and certainly most important conclusion to be derived from this thesis is that Machiavelli is clearly a modern thinker who has left the Middle Ages far behind. Rather than taking up the medieval belief in humanity's impotence in the face of fate, Machiavelli declares that humankind has at least some hand in the creation of its own destiny. Wishing to show the way by which the political actor can take control of the circumstances surrounding his existence within the state, Machiavelli comes out in favor of the Renaissance goal of empowering the individual to act with greater freedom in the creation of a better life. Although fortune remained a conspicuous presence in his works, it was not a force against which one was completely powerless. In short, the medieval spirit of passive martyrdom was something for which Machiavelli had no fondness.

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* By this point it will be apparent that I do not approach the interpretation of Machiavelli from a hermeneutical perspective. I believe very strongly that Machiavelli had a specific message which he was trying to get across in the Discourses and that, as a result, certain interpretations of this work can be out and out wrong. Although I do not claim to have a premium on 'the truth', I firmly believe that those who ignore Machiavelli's republicanism fundamentally distort his message.
In line with this empowering conception of humanity's role in the political cosmos is also a belief in the importance of having many political actors to insure the smooth operation of a state. Machiavelli, convinced that when it comes to taking up the task of maintenance more participation is better than less, helps to expand the political arena. Under his theory, all people are capable of acquiring the virtue necessary to keep their state free from complete subjection to fortune and, as a result, all should be included in the political process. The fact that virtue can be dispersed throughout a society means to Machiavelli that it should be tapped from all sources. When this is done, a society can increase its chances of preserving its independence from the varying whims of fortune.

Machiavelli's identity as a modern can also be traced to the fact that his cosmological view is closely related to, and in fact helps to determine, his political view. Accepting that the world isn't determined and that the gods refrain from directing the course of human events, Machiavelli concludes that the realm of politics must also be free of divine control. As a consequence, human beings can and must take responsibility for assuming the reins of government.

Having left behind the medieval belief in political determinism, Machiavelli leads us to yet another basic implication of his work - that conflict determines his conception of history. Convinced of the importance of concrete human action in the political sphere, he loses all tolerance for theories which tend to portray politics as a process which is pulled along by its own inertia. Thus, it is of no surprise to find that
something as far-reaching as his understanding of history can be defined
by something as crudely specific as conflict.

Machiavelli finds support for this position in what he considers the
equally apparent and well-established fact of human nature itself. Human
nature, he informs us, is of necessity conflictual and aggrandizing. Given
this, conflict cannot be overcome by even the best intentioned of people
but, at best, can only be directed and used for beneficial purposes.

Proceeding from the belief that its permanence is assured, Machiavelli
tells us that it is important for conflict to be incorporated into the state
because it is only by doing this that the state can actively enter into the
process of history. Only by managing its internal conflict can a political
unit become actively participant in a process which is itself the continuing
record of the wider conflict between virtu and fortuna. If it fails to manage
this virtue-sustaining conflict, the state is doomed to lose its historical
autonomy and become the passive instrument of another state which has
dealt with this task more successfully.

Finally, this study leaves us with the implication that the very axis
of Machiavelli's argument can be located in the distinction between
founding and maintenance. Not only is it the place where we can find his
republicanism, but it is also the best way that we can come to reconcile
both The Prince and the Discourses. In specifying that the jobs of founding
and maintenance are best accomplished by different actors through the use
of different means, Machiavelli at once acknowledges the role of brute
power without discrediting the importance of a republican form of
government. He does this by telling us in The Prince that the founding is
and should be accomplished by naked force employed by a single ruler. In
saying this, however, he does not give up on the possibility of later
instituting a republican government, as can be seen in the *Discourses*. By acknowledging that even republican states are founded upon non-republican principles, he discredits the myths of origin which republican states have been known to create in order to hide their less than morally inspiring beginnings. In the process, Machiavelli teaches that a state does not require ideally noble and pristine circumstances at its birth in order to enjoy greater liberty later on in its life. Founding is not an either/or proposition which forever determines the route that a state will take. There is, in other words, room for individuals to change their respective societies for the better, just as was done by the Romans of the republic.


Wood, Neal. 'Machiavelli’s Concept of Virtu Reconsidered', *Political Studies 15* (1967).