

Between the end of the sixteenth and the beginning of the seventeenth centuries, the language of politics underwent a radical transformation. The author argues that this transformation amounted to a "revolution of politics," global in scope, and wide-ranging in its intellectual and moral implications. Not only did the meaning and the range of application of the concept of politics change, but also the status of political science, the role of political education and the value of political liberty. For three centuries politics had enjoyed the status of the noblest human science, but emerged from the revolution as an ignoble, sordid and depraved activity. It was no longer the means of fighting corruption, but the means of perpetuating it. This "revolution of politics" has received little attention, despite its importance. Viroli's study fills a gap in the history of political thought, and attempts to return to a conception of politics as an activity worth committing ourselves to.

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# FROM POLITICS TO REASON OF STATE

*The acquisition and transformation of the language of  
politics 1250–1600*

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*For Quentin Skinner*

## *Introduction*

Between the end of the sixteenth and the beginning of the seventeenth century, the language of politics underwent a radical transformation which could be called "the revolution of politics," even if the word "revolution" sounds somewhat too dramatic. Like all serious revolutions, it was global in scope, and had a wide range of intellectual and moral implications. Not only did the meaning and the range of application of the concept of "politics" change, but also the ranking of political science, the role of political education and the value of political liberty. The revolution entailed a loss of prestige. Having enjoyed for three centuries the status of the noblest human science, politics emerged from the revolution as an ignoble, depraved and sordid activity: it was no longer the most powerful means of fighting corruption, but the art of conforming to, and perpetuating, it.

In spite of its magnitude, the "revolution of politics" has received very little attention. This study attempts to fill this gap in the history of political thought. The story begins in the thirteenth century, when a shared language of politics reappears in Italy, and ends in the seventeenth century, when politics became a synonym for reason of state. To be sure, all through the seventeenth century, learned men continued to invoke the restoration of the idea of politics as the noble art of good government. Their efforts, however, did not succeed in fighting back reason of state, nor did they prevent the decline of the notion of politics as the art of good government.

The chronological and geographical boundaries of the story are, to a degree, arbitrary. Different stories of politics and reason of state could be told which would certainly be more interesting. One could begin with Plato's contrast between the political man and the tyrant and trace the dispute between the champions of *Realpolitik* and the advocates of political ethics up to the present.<sup>1</sup> In addition to Italy, a

<sup>1</sup> This objection was made by Norberto Bobbio and Michelangelo Bovero during a seminar in Turin on December 21, 1990. I am deeply grateful to both for their criticisms.

skilled historian could also consider France, England, Spain and Germany. This would indeed be an interesting completion of the story that I am telling here.

However, I believe that there are historical grounds for beginning the story in the thirteenth century and concluding it in the seventeenth century. We have reasonable evidence that philosophers and learned men of the thirteenth century realized that, unlike their immediate predecessors, they had available a new science and a new language – the science and the language of politics. Whereas an anonymous student of the twelfth century complained of the lack of a science of the political good, Giovanni Villani recorded that Brunetto Latini had taught the Florentines the principles of politics. Three centuries later, the learned community acknowledged, either with regret or with approval, that a major change had taken place: politics no longer meant the art of ruling a republic according to justice and reason (to paraphrase Brunetto Latini's famous definition) but instead had come to mean reason of state – in the sense of the knowledge of the means of preserving domination over a people. Later on, the new notion of politics as reason of state also pervaded ordinary language: in the 1705 edition of the *Vocabolario degli Accademici della Crusca*, after Latini's conventional definition, we read that politics also means “ragione di stato, jus regni.” Although the contrast between politics as the art of good government and politics as reason of state existed and still exists, the seventeenth century marks a turning point of a story that I believe is a real one and is worth telling both for its historical importance and for its consequences for our current language of politics.

In this study, I portray the genesis of the language of politics from the traditions of political virtue, civil law and Aristotelianism. I then reconstruct the intellectual and ideological transition from the language of politics, in the sense of art of good government, to that of reason of state. I stress that the triumph of the language of reason of state coincided with the demise of the language of politics that was elaborated in the second half of the thirteenth century and that enjoyed its moments of glory in the epoch of Civic Humanism.

We are accustomed to labeling “political” any practice of government, legislation and jurisdiction. But, for the people who concern me, politics was understood as being but a way of legislating, ruling and exercising jurisdiction. The story that I have tried to reconstruct reveals the distinction between politics as the art of preserving a

*respublica*, in the sense of a community of individuals living together in justice, and politics as the art of the state – the art of preserving a state, in the sense of a person's or group's power and control over public institutions (for instance the *stato* of the Medici). Undoubtedly, the concept of state was also used to mean dominion in general and in this sense it included the concept of republic as a particular form of dominion. However, odd as it may sound to us, the contrast between the state *of* somebody, and republic, was a fundamental component of the language of politics in early modern Italy. As is often the case, we must leave aside for a moment our mental habits, if we want to understand that “state” [*stato*] and “republic” were used in some instances as mutually exclusive concepts. If a citizen manages to create a network of partisans and to control the government and the magistrates, the city can no longer be said to belong to the citizens as a whole. It is no longer a republic, but the state *of* someone – a creation of the art of the state, not of politics. The art of the state and the art of the republic aim at establishing and preserving two alternative arrangements of public life. Historically, as I hope to show, the art of the state was the antagonist of politics and the predecessor of reason of state.

Latini's *Livres dou Tresor* (1266) and Botero's *Della Ragion di Stato* (1586) can be regarded as convenient milestones in the story. Latini elaborated the definition of politics that constituted the nucleus of the conventional language of politics until the sixteenth century; Botero forged the definition of reason of state that was later to become the core of the new language of politics. The two definitions – of politics as the art of ruling a republic according to justice and reason, and of reason of state as the knowledge of the means of preserving and enlarging a state – reveal at first glance the difference between the two arts – a difference that concerns the ends as well as the means. In the case of politics, the aim is the republic; in the case of reason of state the goal is the state, regardless of its origins and its legitimacy. The goal of politics has to be preserved through justice and reason; the goal of reason of state can be pursued by any means.

The presence of the term “reason” in both Latini's and Botero's definitions does not imply a conceptual affinity. Rather, it signals another important difference. In the definition of politics, “reason” stands for the Ciceronian reason – the *recta ratio* – which teaches us the universal principles of equity that must govern our decisions in legislating, counselling, ruling and administering justice. In the case



of reason of state, "reason" has an instrumental sense, meaning the capacity to calculate the appropriate means of preserving the state. Certainly, both the advocates of politics and the champions of reason of state praised prudence as a fundamental virtue of rulers. However, for the former, prudence was understood as *recta ratio in agibilium*, and therefore never to be detached from justice. For the latter, prudence was the capacity to decide what is most appropriate for the preservation of the state. Ludovico Zuccolo, one of the most perceptive theorists of reason of state, admitted that one can speak of the tyrant's prudence; however, no civic humanist would have agreed: the tyrant may be cunning or shrewd, but never prudent.

The language of politics and that of reason of state were not incommensurable, but the transition from politics to reason of state was a profound change in the manner of speaking about, and thinking of, politics. It could be said that this entailed a mere change of vocabulary. I would respond that it was indeed a matter of words, but would add that words were used to sustain, advocate or condemn political practices, and that the whole story is one of a profound change in the common way of assessing and interpreting politics.

It would be naive to believe that before the triumph of reason of state political action was always good, and rulers, princes and citizens were only committed to the common good. Brunetto Latini, and later humanist political writers, were rhetoricians who deliberately produced eulogistic definitions of politics. In their writings, they aimed to persuade their readers to pursue a praiseworthy ideal. Those who wrote about the art of the state and reason of state were instead describing actual political life. It is, then, plausible to consider the transition from politics to reason of state as a salutary passage from political rhetoric to a realistic view of politics. Who would seriously deny that Machiavelli's *Prince* or Guicciardini's *Dialogo del reggimento di Firenze* are an enormous philosophical and intellectual improvement on Palmieri's *Vita Civile* or Bruni's *Laudatio Florentinae Urbis*?

We should not forget, however, that the theorists of reason of state, just like the humanist rhetoricians, also intended to sustain, advocate or invoke particular courses of political action. It would, then, be misleading to characterize the distinction between politics and reason of state as a contrast between a persuasive and a realistic definition of politics. Historically, the contrast was between two ideologies that were meant to uphold certain political practices and condemn others. An obvious example is that all the advocates of the art of the state

justified, and indeed invoked, the policy of distributing offices and money to the friends of the prince; in contrast, all the advocates of politics as the art of the republic condemned it as the most corrupt practice.

History, and life, are more complex than definitions and concepts, and this holds true also for the concepts of politics and reason of state. The distinction does not exclude overlappings. Just as republics were also states, politics, at times, overlapped with the art of the state. A republic is a state *vis à vis* other states and their subjects, if it possesses a dominion, as was the case with Florence. Moreover, the republic is also a state in the sense of a power structure built upon the apparatus of coercion. In dealing with other states, subjects or rebels, the representatives of the republic may easily find themselves "necessitated," as they used to say, to apply the same rules of the art of the state: fighting unjustly an unjust war, treating the subjects harshly, repressing a rebellion with cruelty. The most perceptive theorists of Renaissance Italy, Machiavelli and Guicciardini, clearly spelled out the need for a ruler to be prepared to use both the art of good government and the art of the state.

The theoretical and practical overlappings between politics and the art of the state do not alter the fact, however, that the two ideologies competed in the Italian scenario as fundamental enemies, even if they did occasionally look at each other with interest or even fascination. There was not, and there could not be, room for both: either the city of all and for all, or the state (*stato*) of someone.

In Italy, it turned out to be the state of someone. The free city-republics were superseded by principalities and tyrannies, and the language of politics was supplanted by that of reason of state. The transition took the form of a process of exhaustion: the language of politics gradually became obsolete. After all, what was the point of using it in a principality or in a tyranny? Neither the prince nor the subjects had any reason to do so. Instead of speaking the language of politics, the rulers and their counselors, as well as the scholars, began to speak openly the language of the art of the state. Originally regarded as an inferior practice, the art of the state had, by the end of the sixteenth century, assumed a respectable role. It was recognized as "the new politics," later simply as "politics."

The story that I have tried to portray deals only with Italy and focuses only on a particular issue. It neither pretends to have a world-wide scope, nor to cover the whole ideological history of Italy

from the Middle Ages to the late Renaissance. We have available now scholarly studies that provide us with excellent comprehensive surveys of the period in which the transition from politics to reason of state took place. We have also available studies that have substantially enriched our knowledge of the major political thinkers of early modern Italy. To my knowledge, however, a story of the intellectual and ideological transition from the notion of politics as art of the republic to politics as reason of state has not yet been written. Like other stories, it occurred in part independently of the intentions of those who actually contributed to its occurrence. When Guicciardini introduced the concept of reason of state in the *Dialogo del reggimento di Firenze* he meant to point out to the intellectual pupils of Cicero that justice is not enough to preserve republics which hold dominions. Nevertheless, he made available a concept that confirmed a pre-existing set of beliefs and practices and was soon to become the nucleus of a new understanding of politics. By not using the word *politico* when he spoke about the art of the state, and by using it only for the art of the republic, Machiavelli helped instead to preserve the conventional republican meaning of politics. Whether he did so deliberately or not, we shall probably never know. And it is not terribly important to know. What matters is that he used different vocabularies for politics and the art of the state and used both consistently.

The transition from politics to reason of state is, I think, an important story that compels us to reconsider several long-established interpretations of the origins and transformation of the modern language of politics such as the idea that the modern history of politics begins with the Aristotelian renaissance of the second half of the thirteenth century. Before the diffusion of the Latin translations of Aristotle's *Politics*, the Ciceronian tradition of political virtues and Roman "civil wisdom" had already provided the basic idioms of a shared language of politics. Even after the acquisition of the main body of Aristotle's political thought, the Ciceronian tradition and Roman civil philosophy continued to be one of the major components of the conventional notion of politics and political man.

We should also reconsider the image – this, too, a commonplace – that the Quattrocento was above all the century of the *querelle* between civic humanists and advocates of the life of solitude, between the bards of the beauty of civil life and its critics. All this is true, yet it is also true that the fifteenth century witnessed the ascent of the art of

the state as the practice and ideology that was later to supplant the language of politics. The contrast between republic and state was no less important a feature of the ideological panorama of the time than the well-documented contrast between civil and contemplative life.

The distinction between politics and art of the state is also important to understand the historical meaning of the notion of reason of state. What was the point of forging this new concept? What sort of practices was it intended to sustain? To answer these questions we have to consider the conventional language of politics of the time and focus on the fact that politics held the monopoly of reason: ruling in justice, shaping just laws, framing and preserving good political constitutions were, in fact, regarded as the most genuine achievements of reason. The practices of the art of the state could claim no rational justification. Given the identification of politics and reason, the only way to provide some sort of justification for the art of the state was to invent another reason and assert the impossibility of ignoring it. Waging an unjust war, treating the citizens unjustly, using public institutions for private purposes – all practices that the language of politics regarded as contrary to reason – attained, through the new concept of reason of state, a justification of some sort. They were no longer practices that contravened the principles of reason, but practices accomplished on behalf of a new notion of reason: the reason of the states.

We cannot understand the birth of the modern concept of reason of state by looking at its Roman equivalents (*ratio publicae utilitatis*, *ratio necessitatis*). Even though the words are similar, their meaning is different. To understand what Guicciardini meant to say when he used the term reason of state, we have to take into account the context of the conventional language of civil philosophy. He resorted to the locution “reason of the states” to point out the fundamental incompleteness of the current language of politics which granted the blessing of reason only to ruling in justice and making just laws and well ordered constitutions. In putting the term “reason of the states” in the mouth of his spokesman in the *Dialogo del reggimento*, Guicciardini intended to criticize the conventional language of politics, and advocate the necessity of practices hitherto regarded as repugnant to reason. He ultimately meant to justify the state as a product of mere force, and to absolve its art, the art of the state.

As with the language of politics, the language of reason of state also underwent developments and transformations. From the formulation

of Guicciardini to the definition of Botero, an important change took place. While Guicciardini had explicitly pointed to the illegitimate origin of all states (with the exception of republics, in the strict sense of the community of citizens), Botero assumed the existence of the states as a fact. From the perspective of reason of state, it is irrelevant whether the state is legitimate or not. As a result, the concept of state was rescued from the negative connotations that had accompanied it during the intellectual hegemony of civil philosophy. Endowed with its own reason, the state attained a respectable status. It was ultimately the reason of force, the force of those who had been capable of founding and consolidating states, a reason perhaps less splendid than the reason of politics, but certainly more powerful.

Both the language of politics and that of reason of state were the product of many hands, though some philosophers or political writers left a stronger mark than others. In discussing their works, my main concern has been to ascertain how they contributed to the formation of the notion of politics, or, conversely, how they sustained the rise of the language of reason of state.

Brunetto Latini, for instance, emerges as a central character in the story, as the writer who condensed in a general definition the notion of politics that had emerged from the tradition of political virtues and the Roman "civil wisdom." His pupil Dante expanded the concept of politics as the art of ruling in justice into the art of founding and preserving right political constitutions, thereby summarizing one of the main innovations produced by the rediscovery of Aristotle's *Politics*.

Baldus of Ubaldis distinguishes himself as one of the main exponents of the notion of politics as art of the city. By assimilating politics to "civil discipline", the science of justice, he continued the Roman tradition of civil philosophy and paved the way for the humanist identification of politics and legislation.

Coluccio Salutati, in spite of his intellectual and ideological uncertainties, emerges as the author of the humanist manifesto of politics as the highest expression of human rationality which alone can create the conditions within which men can enjoy civil happiness. Later Humanists like Leon Battista Alberti and Poggio Bracciolini perceptively observed the increasing prominence of the art of the state and the gradual obsolescence of the language of politics.

Machiavelli's *Prince*, to cite the most illustrious example, is a work on the art of the state, not on politics, as he understood the word. Still,

if we consider the whole body of his political works, Machiavelli appears to be one of the most robust defenders of the notion of politics as art of the republic, and not the spiritual father of the idea of politics as reason of state, as he is almost universally credited to have been. Francesco Guicciardini, another illustrious character in the story, advocated the necessity of integrating the art of the republic with the art of the state – as his friend Machiavelli did – but also championed a conventional interpretation of the art of the state. Much more than Machiavelli, he may be regarded as the symbol of a transitional epoch: throughout his life he remained attached to the ideals of civility, and yet was the creator of the concept of reason of state.

Donato Giannotti was not the abstract imitator of classical doctrines that he has been labeled, but a thinker who tried to prove that the art of the republic can successfully compete with the art of the state on the very grounds of stability and order where the art of the state had attained its most brilliant triumphs. He embarked on the revision of the art of the state having in view a specific political project. Trajano Boccalini, to cite the last example, was not just the ironic satirist of the political life of the counter-reformation, but also one of the first writers who acknowledged, albeit reluctantly, that politics had assumed the meaning of reason of state, and who understood the ideological and political implications of this process.

When the transition was completed, the language of civil philosophy had ceased to be the conventional language of politics. It had become a sort of language of nostalgia or utopia – a language apt to dream about republics of the past or to long for a republic to come. At the same time, the language of the art of the state attained, step by step, a predominant position. It became an important component of the advice-for-princes books and assumed the respectable name of reason of state. “Reason of state” later became the synonym of political prudence itself. It was, however, a prudence separated from justice and the law, unlike the old notion of politics. The concept of politics that emerged from the experience of the city-republics was the intellectual daughter of Law and Ethics; the politics of the age of the principalities and tyrannies repudiated the connection with them both.

I hope that the story that I have tried to reconstruct helps us understand an important phase of modern political thought. I also hope that the study of the past might help to elaborate a theory that permits us to understand politics better and to prefigure a

conception of politics to which it is worth committing ourselves. In the “Epilogue,” I venture to offer some suggestions for a possible alternative to current theories of politics. Those who are only interested in the story may disregard the “Epilogue”; those who are interested in the theory may disregard the story. My personal preference is for a theory rooted in history.

## CHAPTER I

### *The acquisition of the language of politics*

Even though the words "politics" and "political" were absent from the documents of popes, kings and feudal lords, the Middle Ages maintained some relics of the classical language of politics.<sup>1</sup> Philosophers, erudites and theologians of the twelfth century knew of a science of politics and discussed political virtues. References to political science appear in the context of comprehensive classifications of sciences or encyclopedias, while political virtues were mentioned within broader analyses of the various types of moral virtues and their relative merits. Inserted in a new intellectual context, the words and idioms of the classical language of politics were almost unrecognizable, like pieces of a Greek or Roman temple disseminated within the stones of a gothic palace. It is only in the thirteenth century that the scattered ruins of the Athenian and Roman wisdom were elaborated to form a coherent and shared language of politics as art of the city and a recognizable image of the political man. The historical context of this renaissance was the experience of the free city-republics that flourished in the *Regnum Italicum* in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Although the language of politics that became conventional by the end of the thirteenth century was not the exclusive ideology of republican or popular governments, the main political challenge that stimulated its rebirth was the institution and the preservation of free cities against the threats of tyranny.

Three major intellectual traditions cooperated in the work of reconstructing the language of politics: the tradition of the political virtues, Aristotelianism and Roman law. In the subsequent chapters, I shall try to interpret the contribution of each of them and illuminate their complex interplays.

<sup>1</sup> See W. Ullmann, *Principles of Government and Politics in the Middle Ages*, London-New York, 1974, pp. 111-114, and P. Michaud-Quantin, *Universitas*, Paris, 1970, pp. 5-6; M. Grabmann, *Die Geschichte der Scholastischen Methode*, Fribourg, 1911, II, pp. 28-54.



## THE TRADITION OF THE POLITICAL VIRTUES

As the foreign travelers of the time noticed, most of the towns of Liguria, Lombardy, Emilia, Romagna and Tuscany had adopted a form of government that was not to be found elsewhere in Europe. Referring to Genua, the Jewish traveler Benjamin of Tundela remarked that the citizens are brave men who do not obey princes or kings but only the senators that they have appointed.<sup>2</sup> The German chronicler Otto of Freising, who traveled throughout Italy in 1156–8, made a similar observation. Italian cities, he wrote, are so fond of liberty and fear so much the insolence of the rulers that they govern themselves through consuls rather than kings or princes. Furthermore, in order to prevent the magistrates' lust for power from breaking forth, the citizens change their consuls almost every year. In ordering their cities and preserving their republics, he also remarked, they imitate the skill of the ancient Romans.<sup>3</sup>

He was a perceptive observer. The Roman Law ("civilis sapientia") and the Ciceronian tradition of the "political virtues" were the fundamental components of the political ideology of the Italian city-republics, and indeed the main sources of the rebirth of the vocabulary of politics. The literature on city-government that flourished in the thirteenth century offers abundant evidence of the presence of Roman legal and political thought. As has been emphasized, the main focus of the tracts on city-government was the *Podestà* or *Potestà*, the highest magistrate of the city entrusted with supreme powers. He possessed in fact judicial, military and administrative power as well as being the representative of the city in foreign politics, and in spite of his power, his status was that of an elective officer bound by the statutes of the city, not of a king.<sup>4</sup> Not only did he not possess legislative power, but at the end of his tenure in office he had to report to a council of Syndics on the way he used the authority that the citizenry had committed to him. Hence, the writers on

<sup>2</sup> "Cives sunt viri fortes: ideoque nec regi nec principi parent; sed senatoribus quos sibi praeficiunt," *Itinerarium Benjaminis*, Lyon, 1633, p. 16.

<sup>3</sup> "In civitatum quoque dispositione ac rei publicae conservatione antiquorum adhuc Romanorum imitantur sollertiam," Otto von Freising, *Ottonis et Rahewini Gesta Friderici I. Imperatoris*, Hannover, 1884, p. 93.

<sup>4</sup> See Q. Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, Cambridge, 1978, I, pp. 3–48; A. Sorbelli, "I teorici del reggimento comunale," *Bullettino dell'Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medio Evo*, 59 (1944), pp. 31–136; for a general survey see D. Waley, *The Italian City-Republics*, London, 1969. On the legal structure of the Italian city-republics see H. J. Berman, *Law and Revolution. The Formation of the Western Legal Tradition*, Cambridge (Mass.), 1983, pp. 386–403.

city-government regarded the *Podestà* as the foundation of the city's liberty and devoted most of their tracts to describing how a good *Podestà* should act.

Although a few works on the Commune's rule and the *Podestà* were composed also in the fourteenth and even in the sixteenth century, the literary genre as such came to an end by the beginning of the fourteenth century, when most of the city republics changed their form of government into the more or less apparent rule of a *signore* or a family.<sup>5</sup>

Between the second half of the thirteenth and the end of the fourteenth century, more or less open forms of princely rule supplanted republican governments in the cities of north and central Italy. The transition from republican to princely rule (*signoria*) took place in different ways. Azzo VII d'Este, for instance, became *de facto* prince of Ferrara simply by holding the office of *Podestà* from 1243 to 1264. He did not claim a particular title, but he made the council of the Commune promise that after his death they would recognize his nephew Obizzo *signore* of Ferrara. As the chronicles of the times report, in 1264 Obizzo was actually acclaimed *signore* with power to rule the city according to his will.<sup>6</sup>

In Verona the transition was more controversial. After the long rule of Ezzelino da Romano under the title of Imperial vicar (1237–59), the faction of the da Romano succeeded in appointing Mastino della Scala, who was already chief of the powerful corporation of the merchants (*Domus Mercatorum*), *Podestà* and Captain of the People. In 1269, Mastino passed his titles to his brother Alberto, who was later proclaimed *defensor* of the Commune and the Corporations. In 1311, Alberto della Scala succeeded in transforming his position into an hereditary *signoria*.

In 1272, the Marchese d'Este, backed by local supporters, attempted to seize power in Mantua. His plans were frustrated by Pinamonte de' Buonacolsi and the Count Federico di Marcaria. Later on, Pinamonte got rid of Duke Federico and obtained the title

<sup>5</sup> A. Sorbelli, "I teorici del reggimento comunale," *Bullettino dell'Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medio Evo*, 59 (1944), p. 123. On the origins of the *signorie* see E. Sestan, "Le origini delle signorie cittadine: un problema storico esaurito?" *Bullettino dell'Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medio Evo*, 71 (1962), pp. 41–69, reprinted in G. Chittolini (ed.), *La crisi degli ordinamenti comunali e le origini dello stato del Rinascimento*, Bologna, 1979, pp. 53–75; N. Valeri, *L'Italia nell'età dei principati*, Milan, 1969; L. Simeoni, *Le Signorie*, Milan, 1950, 2 vols.

<sup>6</sup> See the text of the solemnis conferment of the Signoria of Ferrara on Obizzo of Este in 1264, in Waley, *The Italian City-Republics*, p. 169.

of Captain of the People. Yet, it was only in 1291 that Pinamonte was openly recognized as *signore* of the city. After many vicissitudes, the *signoria* of Mantua passed into the hands of the Gonzaga family and in 1328 Luigi Gonzaga was granted the title of General Captain of the Commune and the People, with the right to appoint his successor. In Milan the *signoria* was consolidated, in 1396, when Gian Galeazzo Visconti was granted unrestricted powers, and sanctioned in 1397 when he received the title of Duke of Milan.

There were similar stories with the Da Camino in Treviso, the Carrara in Padua, the Malatesta in Rimini, the Varano in Camerino, the Montefeltro in Urbino, the Ordelaffi in Forlì, the Bentivoglio in Bologna, the Manfredi in Faenza, the Gambacorti and the Appiano in Pisa, the Castracani and the Guinigi in Lucca.

Some cities, particularly Bologna and Genoa alternated republican regimes and *signorie*. Others, such as Siena and Florence, fiercely defended their republican institutions and capitulated only in the sixteenth century. Yet, the general tendency from the end of the thirteenth century onward was the institution of the *signorie*.

In spite of its relative brevity, that of the city-republics was an important intellectual and political period. The theorists of the city-rule of the thirteenth century redefined the image of the ideal political man and constructed the notion of politics as the art of ruling a city with justice – two themes that were to represent the core of the conventional view of politics until the sixteenth century.

The image of the political man received, however, more consideration than the notion of the art of politics. This was in part because of the compelling political and ideological need of shaping the model of the good *Podestà*, in part because the Roman tradition itself did not directly focus on the general concept of a science or art of politics. Instead of theorizing on the nature and the goal of the science of politics, the Roman authors spoke of a “civil reason,” or “civil science” in passing, as a component of philosophy, but above all as the knowledge or the skill that the orator and rulers must possess.

For the theorists of city-government the main source for the elaboration of the ideal of the political man was Macrobius' *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*. From Macrobius, they derived the idea that the ruler of the city must possess the political virtues: prudence, fortitude, temperance and justice. It is the actual possession and display of those virtues that makes him a political man able to rule a city in the Ciceronian sense, that is a community of men

bound together by principles of justice. From the text of Cicero, through the mediation of Macrobius, the idea of the political man, as defined by the possession of a specific set of virtues, came again into circulation. In this respect, Macrobius' text represented an important intellectual bridge between the Roman political philosophy and late medieval republican thought.<sup>7</sup> The *Somnium Scipionis* was in fact the conclusive part of Cicero's *De republica* and Macrobius' *Commentary* saved it from the oblivion suffered by the other parts of the work. Macrobius was an erudite, probably a senator of the fifth century and a native of Sicily or Spain. He composed the *Commentary* around 430 and dedicated it to his son Eustachius, or Eustatius, who is also the dedicatee of the *Saturnalia*, Macrobius' other major work.

The crucial passages concerning the political virtue and the political man are in chapters 8–10 of Book 1, where Macrobius comments upon the following words that Publius Cornelius Scipio Africanus says to his nephew Scipio Africanus the younger.

That you may be more zealous in safeguarding the commonwealth, Scipio, be persuaded of this: all those who have saved, aided, or enlarged the commonwealth have a definite place marked off in the heavens where they may enjoy a blessed existence forever. Nothing that occurs on earth, indeed, is more gratifying to that supreme God who rules the whole universe than the establishment of associations and federations of men bound together by principles of justice [*iure sociati*], which are called commonwealths [*civitates*]. The governors and protectors of these [*rectores et servatores*] proceed from here and return hither after death.<sup>8</sup>

The key issue that we must discuss in order to understand Cicero's text properly, comments Macrobius, is the connection between the pursuit of political virtue and the attainment of happiness. His polemical target is the view, held by "some philosophers,"<sup>9</sup> that virtues can be found only in men devoted to philosophical contemplation, and all others, including good rulers, cannot therefore attain happiness. To refute this view, Macrobius resorts to a fourfold classification of virtues into political virtues, cleansing virtues, virtues of the purified mind, and, finally, exemplary virtues. The political

<sup>7</sup> See Paul Henry, s.j. *Plotin et l'Occident*, Louvain, 1934, pp. 248–250, where the author provides an excursus on the circulation of Macrobius' and Plotinus' doctrine of virtue among medieval philosophers.

<sup>8</sup> Macrobius, *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, W. H. Stahl, (ed.), New York, 1952, p. 120. For the Latin text, I have used the *Comento al Somnium Scipionis*, M. Regali (ed.), Pisa 1983.

<sup>9</sup> According to P. Courcelle, Macrobius refers to the Pythagoric–Platonic tradition. See P. Courcelle, *Recherches sur S. Ambroise*, Paris, 1973, p. 12.

virtues are proper to man as a social animal. By these virtues, upright men serve the republic, protect their city, revere parents, love their children, look after their relatives and the welfare of their fellow-citizens, and treat the allies of the republic with liberality and justice.

Macrobius then gives the details of the virtues proper to the political man. The prudence of the political man (*politici*) consists in the capacity of directing his action by reason, wishing or doing nothing but what is right.<sup>10</sup> He must also possess fortitude which means to fear only disgrace, not danger, to stand firmly in adverse fortune and maintain the right balance in prosperity. Temperance is for the political man the capacity of keeping his own desires and passions under the rule of reason. Finally, he must be just, giving each man his due. Possession of all these virtues allows the upright man (*vir bonus*) to be the master of himself, as well as to rule the republic in justice, looking after the welfare of his fellow-citizens.

Having explained that there are also political virtues and what they consist of, Macrobius concludes that, if the political virtues are virtues similar to all the others, they are conducive to happiness. Hence, what Cicero meant to say through the fiction of Scipio's dream was that not only philosophers, but also political men (*rerum publicarum rectores*) attain perennial happiness.

For the source and authority for his critique of the view that only contemplation is conducive to happiness, Macrobius quotes Plotinus' treatise *On the virtues*. Yet, his whole argument does not so much endorse but turn on its head Plotinus' doctrine. In Bk. 1 of the First *Ennead*, Plotinus concedes that the political virtues to some degree help man to attain "likeness to God," our most important aim and only hope to escape from the evil that is haunting this world by necessary law.<sup>11</sup> The political virtues lead man towards likeness to God because they are principles of order and beauty and set bounds and measure to our desires and passions. By introducing order and measure, they make man's soul similar to the order and measure of the transcendent world. Yet, political virtues are not sufficient to attain the desired likeness to God. As Plato said, likeness to God is a flight from this world's ways and things. What we really need, then, are virtues that purify and cleanse our soul.

<sup>10</sup> "Et est politici prudentiae ad rationis normam quae cogitat quaeque agit universa dirigere ac nihil praeter rectum velle vel facere humanisque actibus tamquam divinis arbitris providere," *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, Bk. 1, 8, W. H. Stahl (ed.), p. 122.

<sup>11</sup> Plotinus, *Ennead*, 1, 1, in Plotinus, *The Ethical Treatises*, S. Mackenna (ed.), London and Boston, 1926, p. 41.

Macrobius' reasoning proceeds in exactly the opposite way. He nobilitates, rather than discounts, the political virtues as a means to achieve happiness. Against the Neoplatonic tradition that celebrated the contemplative versus the political virtues, Macrobius reevaluates Cicero's position that the good rulers who displayed the political virtues achieve perennial happiness.

Macrobius' own position is that both he who devotes himself to serve the republic and he who pursues philosophical inquiry will go to heaven and enjoy perennial happiness. In taking this position, he was recovering the core of Cicero's moral philosophy. The *Somnium Scipionis*, remarks Macrobius in the last chapter of his *Commentary*, contains the principles of moral philosophy, as well as natural and rational philosophy. And the moral philosophy is condensed in the exhortation to pursue virtue and love one's own fatherland. There is nothing, concludes Macrobius, more perfect than this work of Cicero.

In addition to the recovery of the Ciceronian ideal of the political man, Macrobius' *Commentary* contributed also to keep alive another no less important tenet of republican political ethics, namely the notion that good rulers and founders of cities deserve a quasi-divine status. Great political men possess status partly because through their virtue, they preserve or found commonwealths, and nothing is more dear to God than commonwealths, where men live in justice under the laws, and partly because pursuing a life of virtue, they already live divinely while they are still on earth. Not suprisingly, ancient people venerated the founders and the reformers of commonwealths as gods.<sup>12</sup>

Macrobius' *Commentary*, then, not only transmitted the image of the political man as defined by the possession of the political virtues of prudence, fortitude, temperance and justice. It also conveyed the idea that the great political man is in fact closer to God than ordinary men are. In life he already displays some traits of divinity. In heaven he will help the gods in ruling the universe; on earth he will never die in men's memory.

The tradition of the political virtues enjoyed great influence in the Middle Ages. In addition to Macrobius' *Commentary* itself, other tracts on moral virtues helped in keeping alive the ideal of the political man endowed by the four virtues. Among them, one must at least mention St. Martin of Braga's *Formulae vitae honestae*, composed between 570

<sup>12</sup> Macrobius, *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, Bk. 1, 9, W. H. Stahl (ed.), p. 125.

and 579, and for long wrongly attributed to Seneca.<sup>13</sup> The *Formulae* (which according to Petrarch all people read with great avidity) discusses the four virtues following Seneca's scheme: prudence, magnanimity, continence, justice. Bishop Martin recommends the political virtues to King Miro, the dedicatee of the work, stressing that they are particularly important for him who devotes his life to others, not only to his own interests.<sup>14</sup> Under the guidance of the virtues the ruler will succeed in keeping, in different times and circumstances as well as in dealing with different individuals, the right middle course, avoiding both temerity and pusillanimity.

The doctrine of the political virtues reappears also in the anonymous *Moralium Dogma Philosophorum*, another influential text in the Middle Ages. Composed between 1145 and 1170, we know of about fifty manuscripts of the original Latin text surviving from the twelfth, thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and of thirty-eight copies of the Old French translation of the late thirteenth century.<sup>15</sup> The *Prologue* that accompanies the text describes the tract attributed to Gualterus ab Insulis as an imitation of Cicero and Seneca's moral philosophy "*ethicam Tullianam et Tullium et Senecam imitari*".<sup>16</sup> Practical philosophy, continues the *Prologue* (following Aristotle's classification), consists of economics, politics and ethics, three disciplines that instruct us how to rule the household, citizens (*ad regendum cives*) and ourselves, respectively. The *Moralium Dogma Philosophorum* is actually a work of moral philosophy in general, as it teaches not only how to rule ourselves, but also others. After an Aristotelian account of the virtues we encounter the Macrobian fourfold division of the types of virtues into political (*politice, id est civiles*), purgative, soul-cleansing and exemplary.<sup>17</sup> The political or civil virtues, we read in the *Prologue*, are the virtues appropriate to those who rule the republic "*illis qui regunt rempublicam*".

The Ciceronian principle of the priority of the *honestum* is reiterated also in the main body of the text; to live a truly honest life we must possess all the four virtues: prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance.<sup>18</sup> Prudence comes first because it bears the responsibility of making the right choice, and deliberation of course precedes action.

<sup>13</sup> See C. W. Barlow, *Introduction to the Formulae*, pp. 204–210 in Martini Episcopi Bracarenensis, *Opera Omnia*, C. W. Barlow, (ed.), New Haven, 1950.

<sup>14</sup> *Formulae vitae Honestae*, *ibid.*, pp. 249–250.

<sup>15</sup> See John Holmberg's *Introduction to Moraliū Dogma Philosophorum des Guillaume de Conches*, Uppsala, 1929, pp. 12–15 and 39–40.

<sup>16</sup> *Moralium Dogma Philosophorum*, p. 77.

<sup>17</sup> *Moralium Dogma Philosophorum*, p. 79.

<sup>18</sup> *Moralium Dogma Philosophorum*, pp. 6–7.

Second comes justice, the virtue that preserves humane society and the life of the commonwealth. In society, men have possessions of different sorts – if justice did not assure everybody his due, society would dissolve because of envy and sedition.<sup>19</sup> Justice must face two equally insidious enemies: truculence and negligence. The first is the will to offend and harm others out of fear, greed, ambition. The second consists in tolerating offences and harm done to others when we have the power to thwart them. While under the heading of truculence it is easy to recognize the tyrant, negligence clearly describes the pusillanimous ruler and citizens lacking civic virtue. The third virtue, fortitude, teaches us to stand firmly in adverse fortune. Temperance, finally, is the capacity of submitting our passions and emotions to the rule of reason.

If we follow these principles, we will surely live a tranquil life under the guidance of reason. Kings should never pay attention to advice such as that which Lucan reports was given to the Macedonian King Ptolemy, namely that kings lose their power if they begin to care for justice, and that virtue is incompatible with supreme power.<sup>20</sup> On the contrary, for the author of the *Moralium Dogma* considerations of interest can never prevail over honesty and justify the dismissal of virtues. And this holds true for private and domestic, as well as for public, life.<sup>21</sup> The same virtues must inform the conduct of the private citizen and of the political man in charge of ruling the republic.

The theme of the political virtues was widely discussed also by the theologians of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. In their work, however, the notion of political virtue does not refer to the ruler, as was the case in the *Somnium Scipionis* and the *Moralium Dogma Philosophorum*. Their main concern is whether or not political virtues are sufficient to attain salvation.

Simon de Tournai (c. 1130; d. c. 1201), a pupil of the school of Pierre Abélard and Gilbert de la Porrée, distinguishes between political and catholic virtues on the ground of the duty proper of each sort of virtue (*officium*) and the aim that the virtue seeks to attain (*finis*). A duty, he writes following Cicero, is an act concordant to the laws and the

<sup>19</sup> "Justicia est virtus conservatrix humane societatis et vite communitatis." *Moralium Dogma Philosophorum*, p. 12.

<sup>20</sup> "Ut distant et flamma mari, sicut utile recto./ Sceptrorum vis tota perit, si pendere iusta/[. . .] Virtus et summa potestas non coeunt." M. Annaei Lucan, *De Bello Civili*, Bk. 8, 485–495.

<sup>21</sup> "Nulla enim vite pars, neque publicis, neque privatis, neque forensibus neque domesticis in rebus, morali philosophia vacare potest." *Moralium Dogma Philosophorum*, p. 6.



institutions of the city. A *civil* or *political* duty is then a duty sanctioned by civil law ("*civili iure*") or approved by the city ("*a civitate*"). A civil aim is the preservation and the unity of the republic. A quality of the mind informed by a political duty and aiming at a political goal has therefore to be called political virtue. The qualification "political," comments Simon de Tournai, comes from *polis*, which means multitude or city. To be 'political' a virtue must in fact be approved by the city. Political virtues may also be found in the pagans and the jews, but they are not sufficient for salvation, for which catholic virtues are needed, that is, the virtues through which we discharge the duties of catholic religion having God as our sole aim.<sup>22</sup>

For Alain de Lille (c. 1114–20; 1202) political virtues cannot be said to be simply virtues ("*non dicuntur simpliciter virtutes*") but constitute a particular class, in the sense that they are virtues of the *polis*, virtues recognized by the customs of the cities ("*secundum usum civitatum*"). Political virtues are hence inherently particularistic, as opposed to the catholic virtues which are universal ("*catholice, quia universales*").<sup>23</sup>

Can political virtues become catholic virtues, asks Alain de Lille? They certainly can, if they are informed by charity. The aims of political virtues, stresses Simon de Tournai, are glory, dignity, greatness. They are laudable, but insufficient to deserve eternal life. However, if political virtues are informed by faith, charity and hope, they attain the status of catholic virtues and therefore open the pathway to salvation.<sup>24</sup>

Other texts of the same period mention three sorts of virtues: natural, political and catholic, instead of two, political and catholic. For Godefroid de Poitiers, who composed in 1213–15 a *Summa theologica*, the political virtues are a medium between natural and theological (catholic) virtues. Meaning by natural virtues the innate habit of virtue that every man possesses by nature ("*habitus innatus*") and by political virtues the habit ("*habitus acquisitus*") that men acquire through the reiteration of virtuous acts.<sup>25</sup>

Also for Odo Rigaldus (–; d. 1275) we call justice, prudence,

<sup>22</sup> See O. Lottin, *Psychologie et Morale aux XIIe et XIIIe Siècles*, Gembloux, 1949, t. III, 2nd part, pp. 106–107. <sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 112.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118. Less convinced about the possibility of the transubstantiation of the political into catholic virtues was Etienne Langton, a pupil of Pierre Lombard, who qualifies the political virtues as acts consonant to right reason ("*naturale consonum rationi*"); *Ibid.*, p. 122, n. 1. <sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 125.

fortitude and temperance political virtues because they are the product of the customary behavior which is typical of the life of the *polis*. While for Odo Rigaldus and the other theologians *polis* means simply multitude ("pluralitas"), in Saint Bonaventura (c.1217; d.1274) and Albert the Great (c.1200; d.1280) we find an interpretation of the *polis* as a community of men living in an ordered and virtuous way. Political virtues, wrote Saint Bonaventura, are called in this way because they make man well ordered to live with his fellow-men ("bene ordinatum ad vivendum inter homines").<sup>26</sup> They are called political virtues, adds Albert the Great, because they keep the republic perfect according to the best state (condition) of the citizens ("secundum optimum statum civium") and the sign of that is that all the legislation reinforces the virtue of the citizens.<sup>27</sup>

Although Albert the Great's account restores in part the original meaning of the notion of political virtues, it is only with the writers on communal self-government that the vocabulary of political virtue is used again to portray the republican ruler. An appropriate example is the Bolognese Guido Faba, a convinced champion of the commune, who composed around 1230 a *Summa de vitiis et virtutibus*.<sup>28</sup> At the outset of his treatise, after an outline of the Macrobian types of virtues, Faba explains that the political virtues pertain to him who rules the republic according to reason (*cum ratione*).<sup>29</sup> However, his own catalogue of the four active virtues presents an important emendment to the Macrobian ordering. Justice is now first, followed by fortitude, temperance, and prudence. The four virtues shine on the just man's head like a crown made of precious stones: in the forefront is justice, that judges only about things that we are absolutely certain of; in the back is prudence, that guides us in deciding about uncertain matters; on the right side is temperance, that prevents us from exalting in good fortune; on the left is fortitude, that sustains us in adverse fortune.

All four virtues are necessary for the good ruler of a city, but justice deserves priority. The *Podestà* must devote his best energies to the administration of justice, holding the scales in his hands and not allowing mercy to alter his judgment. As long as he preserves justice

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 179.      <sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 180.

<sup>28</sup> Guido Faba, "Summa de vitiis et virtutibus," V. Pini (ed.), *Quadrivium*, I (1956), pp. 41-152.

<sup>29</sup> *Summa de vitiis et virtutibus*, p. 128.

he has nothing to fear, as God never abandons those who maintain his justice on earth.<sup>30</sup>

The preeminent rank of justice among the qualities that the political man must possess emerges also in the *Oculus Pastoralis*, an anonymus tract written in 1222, or 1242, to instruct new *rectores*. At the end of the work, the author inserts a dialogue between Justice and the *Podestà*, who must respond to the charge of having transgressed the laws. Out of your vain desire for glory, says Justice, you have violated the vow of ruling according to the laws that you have solemnly taken in assuming office. In response to the *Podestà's* apology that the extreme corruption of the times compelled them to resort to arbitrary decisions, Justice replies that she is no longer prepared to tolerate the excesses perpetrated against the subjects because they would dissolve the bonds that protect the people. Human society is kept together through the bonds made by the principles of civil wisdom (*nexibus praeceptorum civilis sapientiae*), which consists above all in the correct administration of justice and the respect for laws. "I exhort and admonish you," concludes Justice, "to follow my example: avoid unjust sentences and unlawful collections, and restrain from oppressing those who are not under your jurisdiction."<sup>31</sup>

The first and foremost duty of the ruler, we read in the model-speech to be delivered by a new *Podestà* if the city is in peace, is in fact to devote every effort and diligence to preserving justice (*servando justitiam*), with pure faith and unswerving commitment. If the *Podestà* preserves justice, the city will enjoy peace and tranquillity, become prosperous and flourishing and the citizens will live in concorde and friendship among them.<sup>32</sup>

The image of the political man as the ruler who secures justice and peace by means of the virtues is developed in greater detail in John of Viterbo's *Liber de regimine civitatum*, composed in the 1240s. The *De regimine civitatum*, by far the most complete and articulated work on

<sup>30</sup> *Summa de vitiis et virtutibus*, p. 133. In a model speech composed by Faba, the new *Podestà* solemnly declares that he came to the city to be communal and assure justice to every person ("son veg[n]uto per essere comunale e fare e mantig[n]ere ad onne persona rason"). In another speech for the election of a new *Podestà* the citizens of the council remark that without a man who assures justice ("s'el no fosse chi tenesse rason") men's life would be impossible. G. Faba, "Parlamenta et Epistole," in *La Prosa del Duecento*, C. Segre and M. Monti (eds.), Milan-Naples 1959, pp. 15, 18.

<sup>31</sup> "Oculus Pastoralis," in D. Franceschi (ed.), *Memorie dell'Accademia delle Scienze di Torino*, 4, 11 (1966), p. 66 ("Invectiva Iusticie contra rectores gentium"); see also D. Franceschi, "L'Oculus pastoralis e la sua fortuna," *Atti dell'Accademia delle Scienze di Torino*, II, *Classe di Scienze Morali, Storiche e Filologiche*, 99 (1964-5), pp. 206-261. <sup>32</sup> *Oculus Pastoralis*, pp. 24-27.

the rule of the *Podestà* opens with a definition of *regimen* that specifies the goals of the ruler. *Regimen*, he writes, is the steering by which a city is governed and ruled. Like a ship governed by the sailor through the mast and the helm, the city is ruled and governed through justice and the law by a *Podestà* or a governor or a chief.<sup>33</sup>

The exercise of governing consists above all in restraining and moderating men for the purpose of protecting them from their own excesses. As is declared in the oath that the new *Podestà* must solemnly deliver before the citizenry, his duty is to rule, lead, govern, maintain and preserve the city and its inhabitants, nobles as well as ordinary citizens, with particular care for widows, children, orphans and others who are in need; to guard the laws and the statutes; to protect the city and the district; to take care of public buildings, churches, hospitals, streets; and to protect merchants and pilgrims. For the whole period of his tenure, the *Podestà* must leave aside any sentiment of love, or friendship, or hatred, as well as deceit or fraud, or sophism, and serve the commune with all the purity of his heart and mind.<sup>34</sup>

Having explained the notion of government, he then introduces the idea of city (*civitas*) as "the liberty of the citizens or the immunity of the inhabitants," stressing, with Cicero, that commonwealths were founded with a view to ensuring the free enjoyment of properties and, with Plato, for the purpose of enjoying the good life.<sup>35</sup>

After illustrating what ruling consists of and what a commonwealth is, John of Viterbo proceeds to describe the qualities that a ruler must possess in order to perform his duty successfully and hence preserve the city, preventing it from deviating from the goals that constitute its reason to exist. Following Martinus of Braga's *Formulae vitae honestae*, and Seneca, he lists the familiar set of virtues: prudence, magnanimity, continence, justice, urging that these virtues are particularly necessary for those who are responsible for the many, not only for themselves.<sup>36</sup> In following these virtues, however, the rulers

<sup>33</sup> "Et sicut navis malo et temone a nauta gubernatur, sic civitas iustitia et iure a preside sive potestate vel rectore gubernatur et regitur, et sine hiis perire sepe solet." John of Viterbo, "Liber de regimine civitatum," G. Salvemini (ed.), *Biblioteca Iuridica Medii Aevi*, III, Bologna, 1901, p. 218 (quotation from Justinianus' *Authenticis*). <sup>34</sup> *De regimine civitatum*, p. 228.

<sup>35</sup> *De regimine civitatum*, pp. 218-219.

<sup>36</sup> *De regimine civitatum*, p. 255. In his massive *Summa virtutum et vitiorum*, composed in 1250, Guillaume Peyraut adopts the same ordering of virtues and qualifies them as "cardinal virtues." He also mentions Macrobius' doctrine of the political virtues as the virtues of the political man ("*politice hominis*"), that is, the good man who serves and protects the republic. He also provides, following Macrobius, an interesting account of political prudence: Bk. 1, Part 3, 6, fol. 140. Peyraut's account of Macrobius, however, is nothing more than a mere

must always maintain the right measure, according to the time and the circumstances, without exceeding the appropriate terms. An excess of prudence becomes cunning; he who exceeds the right measure in magnanimity becomes a threatening, restless, savage man; too much continence degenerates into thriftiness, suspicion and timidity. In justice, too, we must keep the right measure and avoid both negligence and harshness.

It is of the utmost importance for a city to appoint a ruler who actually possesses the political virtues. In the chapter on the choice of the *Podestà*, John of Viterbo provides us with a detailed description of the good ruler. The citizenry must find a man who is capable of ruling the city in justice and equity ("*in iustitia et equitate*"). They should above all consider his habits and the nobility of his soul, not his lineage or the family he belongs to. He must be a lover of wisdom and justice from which prudence must never be divorced.<sup>37</sup> He must possess a good mind, a subtle intelligence, love for truth, fortitude and magnanimity. He must not be addicted to vainglory or pomp, or love flatterers and riches. The thirst for glory or riches undermines the liberty of the city ("*glorie cupiditas . . . eripit enim libertatem*"). His magnanimity must be totally devoted to defending, not to despoiling liberty. At the end of his term, the good ruler must gladly leave his office, and during his tenure he must be immune from ambition, fear and irascibility. He must be a tranquil, constant and serene man. He must of course be a good orator, in order to be able to give public speeches, receive foreign ambassadors and administer justice. But he should not be loquacious: a person who cannot restrain his tongue cannot be a good ruler. Finally, provided he possesses all the necessary virtues, it is advisable that the ruler has the "persona" appropriate for the position that he occupies.

A ruler who does not possess the political virtues fails to meet the expectations and the hopes that the city has placed on him. What the citizens expect from their *Podestà* is that he rules with virility and strength, in justice and equality; respects and obeys the statutes of the city in their integrity; maintains the city's peace and quiet, punishing and extirpating malefactors and thieves. Through the reins of justice

erudite digression, as his position on the relative excellence of the contemplative vs. the active life is at odds with Cicero's commentator. See Bk. 4, Part 4, 8 "*De preminetia vite contemplative respectu active.*"

<sup>37</sup> *Liber de regimine civitatum*, p. 220; John of Viterbo is quoting here from the *De Officiis* (1, 61–62): "Nihil autem honestum esse potest quod iustitia vacet; nullum enim tempus est quod iustitia vacare debeat."

and the laws, the city may be ruled pacifically and consequently become rich and flourishing.<sup>38</sup> But if the citizens appoint a ruler who lacks the virtues, stresses John of Viterbo, all the good effects of government vanish.<sup>39</sup> No longer is there security, peace and prosperity, but crime, discord and misery.

The ideal of the political man that emerges from the literature on city-government, then, is essentially a magistrate entrusted with supreme political powers: jurisdiction, legislative authority, military and police command. His authority confers upon him the greatest majesty. He is the head of the city and deserves to be honored accordingly. Power, authority and majesty, however, are entrusted to him as a public, not a private, person. In entering office, the *Podestà* commits himself to act as the representative, or the embodiment of the city.<sup>40</sup> He is the supreme magistrate and, at the same time, the servant of the city. His stay in office normally does not last more than one year. At the end he must report to a committee of syndics. His political power then is bound by the laws and the statutes of the city. In discharging his duties, the ruler must leave aside all private passions and concerns. He is not entitled to hate or envy or even love anyone. Neither can he be concerned with his own wealth or glory. If he allows private passions and concerns to interfere with his duties, he ceases to be a public person and becomes an individual with great powers in his hands. He is requested to possess and cultivate the *political* virtues. Only through these virtues can he be, and remain, a public person, the servant of the common good and justice.

The image of the political man constructed by the theorists and advocates of city-government consists essentially of the combination of two elements: the notion of public person and the possession of the virtues. Both were derivations from Roman authorities. Reworking Cicero's and Seneca's moral philosophy, the political writers of the thirteenth century produced a recognizable image of the political man as the model for the rulers and magistrates of the free city-states. They did not speak of an art or science of politics. Nor did they produce definitions of politics. To see a notion of the art of politics

<sup>38</sup> "Per hec enim frena civitates reguntur et tenetur pacifice, crescunt, ditantur et maxime recipiunt incrementum," *De regimine civitatum*, p. 231.

<sup>39</sup> "cessantibus virtutibus in preside, cesset bonus effectus regiminis," *De regimine civitatum*, p. 221.

<sup>40</sup> The importance of the Ciceronian principle that a magistrate must *se gerere personam civitatis* has been emphasized by Q. Skinner, "Ambrogio Lorenzetti: The artist as a political philosopher," *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 77 (1986), p. 24.

added to the conventions of the literature on city-government, we must wait until the 1260s, when Brunetto Latini completed his immensely influential *Tresor*.

Brunetto Latini, wrote Giovanni Villani in his *Chronicle*, was too mundane a man, but he deserves a particular mention because he was the first who taught the Florentines to speak well and to steer and rule their republic "according to political science."<sup>41</sup>

Villani's portrait of Latini as a master of rhetoric and politics was a recognition of the important contribution of the *Tresor* to the literature on city-government. One of the distinctive features of the experience of Italian city-republics was in fact the revival of the practice of public speech and self-government: the *Tresor* collected in a single work the most complete and authoritative treatment of rhetoric and politics and stressed their conjunction, thereby providing a text eminently fit to respond to ideological and political life of the communes.<sup>42</sup>

We also owe Latini a general definition of the science of politics. In his description of the three components of practical philosophy, after the definitions of ethics and economics, he presents the science of politics (*politique*) as the highest among the humane sciences and the most noble activity of man because its aim is to teach how to rule the inhabitants of a kingdom and a city (*ville*), and a people and a commune, both in times of peace and war according to reason and justice ("selonc raison et selonc justice").<sup>43</sup> The science of politics, continues Latini paraphrasing Aristotle, orders the arts and the knowledge that are to be cultivated in the city, and through language preserves civil order. Essential components of politics are, then, the sciences that teach us how to speak: grammar, dialectic and rhetoric.

Latini derives his description of politics as the most noble and highest human art from the passage of the *Nicomachean Ethics* where Aristotle introduces the famous notion of politics as architectural art.<sup>44</sup> However, the core of his definition of politics, namely that

<sup>41</sup> "Fu mondano uomo, ma di lui avemo fatta menzione, perch'egli fu cominciatore e maestro in digrossare i Fiorentini, e farli scorti di bene parlare, e in sapere guidare e reggere la nostra repubblica secondo la politica," *Cronica*, Florence, 1845, Bk. 8, ch. 10.

<sup>42</sup> On the revival of public speech and rhetoric see P. O. Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought and its Sources*, M. Mooney (ed.), New York, 1979, p. 114.

<sup>43</sup> B. Latini, *Li Livres dou Tresor*, F. J. Carmody (ed.), Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1948, Bk. 1, 4.

<sup>44</sup> "Son livre definiroit en politique, c'est à dire des governemens des cité, ki est la plus noble et la plus haute science et li plus nobles offices ki soit en tiere, selonc Aristotles preuve en son livre" *Li Livres dou Tresor* Bk. 3, 73. See also Latini's abridgment of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, in Bk. 2, 2. There is no agreement among the scholars on which edition of the *Nicomachean Ethics*

politics is the science of ruling according to reason and justice, is an elaboration of one of the central themes of the literature on city-government, not of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. As we have seen, the formula "ruling the city in justice [*in iustitia*]" was a commonplace of the tracts on the *Podestà* rule. And so was the notion of ruling according to reason (*cum ratione*). In his *Summa de vitiis et virtutibus*, for instance, Guido Faba speaks of the political virtues as the virtues suitable to those who rule the republic according to reason.<sup>45</sup> Latini's own definition of politics, which became a piece of conventional wisdom, was the product of the conjunction of these two ideas already present in the works of the theorist of the commune's rule, and by placing Latini's definition in the intellectual context of the literature on the *Podestà* we may succeed in identifying what he really meant by politics.

Even though Latini says with Aristotle that politics encompasses all the arts that are necessary for the life of the *polis* and is therefore the noblest humane art, in fact he discusses only what pertains to the person and the duties of the ruler ("*au cors dou signor et a son droit office*"). Furthermore, even if he includes in his definition of politics the rule of the inhabitants of a kingdom, Latini does not discuss at all either lifetime *signorie* such as kings or emperors, or temporary magistracies of the sort that existed at the time in France, where the king used to sell the governorship of cities regardless of the buyer's virtues and the interest of the citizens. His definition of politics and his subsequent comments refer only to the Italian city-states, where the citizens elect

Latini used for his *compendium* and the *Tresor*. Th. Sundby maintains that Latini consulted Robert Grosseteste's translation, whereas Skinner suggests the text translated from Arab in 1240 by Hermanus Allemannus. See Th. Sundby, *Della vita e delle opere di Brunetto Latini*, Florence, 1884, p. 144; Skinner, "Ambrogio Lorenzetti: The artist as a political philosopher," *ibid.* p. 4. See also N. Rubinstein, "Marsilius of Padua and Italian political thought of his time," in J. R. Hale, J. R. Highfield and B. Smalley (eds.), *Europe in the Late Middle Ages*, Evanston, 1965, p. 51, n.3. Whatever his source, Latini in his summary was largely adapting Aristotle's text to his political ideals. An example is the paraphrase of the passage from the 10th book where Aristotle discusses the forms of government and says that monarchy is the best one ("*Harum autem optima quidem regnum pessima timocratia*"); Latini makes Aristotle say that the best form of government is the republic: "Signories sont de III manieres: L'une est des rois, la seconde est des bons, la tierce est des communes. Laquele est la très millour entre ces autres." On the Latin translations of Aristotle in the thirteenth century see M. Grabmann, "Forschungen über die Lateinischen Aristoteles-Übersetzungen des 13th Jahrhunderts," in C. Baumker, *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie des Mittelalters*, xvii, n.5-6, Münster, 1916.

<sup>45</sup> "Politice virtutes dicuntur civiles que conveniunt illis qui rempublicam cum ratione gubernant": *Summa de vitiis et virtutibus*, p. 128.



as their *Podestà*, or *signour*, the man who they think is the most apt to carry out the common good of the city and the citizens.<sup>46</sup>

For Latini, "politics" is the rule, according to reason and justice, of an elective *signore* over the citizens of a free city. His model of the political man is the same as that which the previous writers had portrayed in their work on city-government. Drawing on the *Nicomachean Ethics* he ennobled the art of the *Podestà*, elevating it to the dignity of the most excellent of practical sciences.

Following the scheme of Giovanni da Viterbo's *Liber de regimine civitatum*, Latini begins his tract with a Ciceronian account of the origin and the nature of the city. Cities were instituted for the sake of protection against the arrogant men who, out of their ambition, wanted to enslave the others. To curb the arrogant and live in peace, men instituted laws and customs. Properly speaking, the city is then a people gathered to live in the same place under the law.<sup>47</sup>

Following Cicero again, Latini stresses that language is the prerequisite of the city and civil life. Without language there can be no justice, no friendship, no humane community.<sup>48</sup> Through language men can express not only pain or pleasure, as the animals do, but they can also argue about what is just and unjust and have conversation with their fellow-men. The proper place where men can express themselves through speeches and conversation is the political community, which must be seen as the natural place for men living a truly humane life.<sup>49</sup> Aptly, then, Cicero said that rhetoric is the most important, and the noblest, component of the science of ruling a city.<sup>50</sup>

The origin of cities themselves was ultimately the work of language. The founders of commonwealths were above all else wise men who knew how to speak ("*sages hommes bien parlans*") and persuaded their fellow-men to forego their savage lives and gather in society to live according to justice and reason. Through wisdom and persuasion, they succeeded in rescuing the world from disorder and in instituting

<sup>46</sup> *Li Livres dou Tresor*, Bk. 3, 73.4.

<sup>47</sup> "Por ce dist Tuilles ke cités est uns assablemens de gens a abiter en un lieu et vivre a une loi." B. Latini, *Li Livres dou Tresor*, Bk. 3, 73, 3.

<sup>48</sup> "Car se parleure ne fust cités ne seroit, ne nus establissements de justice ne de humaine compaignie," *Li Livres dou Tresor*, Bk. 3, 1, 2.

<sup>49</sup> On the central role of rhetoric in the tracts on *Podestà*-rule, see E. Artifoni, "I podestà professionali e la fondazione retorica della politica comunale," *Quaderni Storici*, 63 (1986), pp. 687-719.

<sup>50</sup> "Et Tuilles dist que la plus haute science de cité gouverner si est rectorique, c'est à dire la science du parler," *Li Livres dou Tresor*, Bk. 3, 2.

civil society. Deservedly, then, they were regarded as similar to the gods.<sup>51</sup> The combination of wisdom and the ability to persuade, which presided over the foundation of commonwealths, is also essential for their preservation. Divorced from wisdom, rhetoric may destroy civil life as it excites, not moderates, passions, or helps to impose factional interests. In both cases the consequence would be the dissolution of the city.

Civil life nurtures litigation and conflict that have to be settled through persuasion, if civil war was to be avoided.<sup>52</sup> The ruler must then know the art of rhetoric to persuade individual citizens, as well as groups or families, to moderate their claims with a view to the preservation of friendship and concord.

As for Cicero, Latini's ruler must be both a good man and a skilled orator in order to safeguard properly the three foundations of the republic: justice, reverence and love. Justice must be firmly rooted in his heart, so that he gives to each his due, never favoring one member of the city at the expense of others. In turn, the citizens and subjects must be reverent toward their magistrates because reverence sustains faith and helps to overcome the difficulties that any city faces. The ruler must love his subjects faithfully, and watch day and night over the common good of the city and of every man. The citizens must love their *signour* wholeheartedly and assure him of all the help he needs to discharge his onerous office.<sup>53</sup>

The office of *Podestà* of a city-state, stresses Latini, is the highest honor that a man can enjoy in worldly life. The citizenry has freely elected him for his virtues and entrusted upon him the supreme powers.<sup>54</sup> The outstanding nobility conferred upon the chief of a republic is entirely due to his merits. It is a sort of nobility that benefits the city as a whole – a nobility which is essentially public in character because it is conferred by a public body and because its justification is the common good.<sup>55</sup> The ruler must be content with this sort of nobility and with the yearly salary that the republic pays him. He must not long for a greater or different type of superiority.<sup>56</sup>

As long as the ruler does not transgress the boundaries of his office,

<sup>51</sup> *Li Livres dou Tresor*, Bk. 3, 1.

<sup>52</sup> *Li Livres dou Tresor*, Bk. 3, 4.

<sup>53</sup> *Li Livres dou Tresor*, Bk. 3, 74.

<sup>54</sup> "Et puiske vous m'avés fet le plus grand honour ke gens puissent faire en cest siecle vivant, c'est a faire de moi conduiseour et segnor de vous par vostre bon gré, je espoir et croi veraïement que vous serés estables et obeissant a mes honours et a mes commandemens, meisement por le proufit et por le gouvernement de vos et des vostres," *Li Livres dou Tresor*, Bk. 3, 82.6.

<sup>55</sup> *Li Livres dou Tresor*, Bk. 3, 79.

<sup>56</sup> *Li Livres dou Tresor*, Bk. 3, 82.

and rules according to justice, reason and virtue, the city will surely remain in peace and flourish both in wealth and in the number of inhabitants. On the other hand, a bad ruler brings about divisions, and war, the ultimate ruin of the city. Unfortunately, comments Latini, the Italian city-states more often than not are unwise in their choice of rulers. They appoint them by giving weight above all to lineage and power instead of virtue. In this way they generate their own ruin themselves.<sup>57</sup>

Like the previous writers on city-government, Latini focuses on the duties and the qualities of the ruler. The liberty and peace of the city are regarded as contingent upon the skill of the *signour* rather than on the constitutional arrangements. Accordingly, his work is mainly addressed to the *signour* and to the citizens, to instruct them to choose wisely and to obey gladly the commands of a good ruler. Although he did not invent the doctrine of city-government, Latini's contribution to the acquisition of the concept of politics was one of importance. He summarized in a general definition the conventional values and wisdom of city-government, and implanted Aristotelian idioms in the body of the Roman language of civil wisdom.<sup>58</sup> In this way he made available a definition of political science that integrated the image of the political man that had been derived from the tradition of the political virtues. The most noble science of politics incorporated civil wisdom, completing the noble image of the political man. Latini was surely the master of politics, as Villani wrote; of politics, one must add, as the art of good government.

#### THE ARISTOTELIAN RENAISSANCE

The rediscovery of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics* in the thirteenth century inaugurates a new phase of the acquisition of the language of politics. Before Robert Grosseteste issued in the 1240s his Latin translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics* and William of Moerbeke completed that of the *Politics* in the 1260s, twelfth-century students of

<sup>57</sup> *Li Livres dou Tresor*, Bk. 3, 75.

<sup>58</sup> Another example of the fusion of the language of political virtues and Greek idioms may be found in Fra Paolino Minorita's treatise *De regimine rectoris*, composed between 1313–15. Prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance, he wrote, are called political virtues from the Greek "plurality" (he was confusing *pólis* with *polys*) because through them men are organized to live together in an ordered way: "le iiij dite politiche en lengua grega, quasi da pluralitade, chè per ese se ordena la moltitudine de li homini a viver horddenademenre l'un con l'altro," Fra Paolino Minorita, *De Regimine Rectoris*, A. Mussafia (ed.), Vienna-Florence, 1898, p. 3.

moral philosophy knew the Aristotelian notion of politics as the science of ruling the city.<sup>59</sup> In his *De divisione philosophiae*, composed in the mid twelfth century, Dominicus Gundissalinus spoke of a book of Aristotle that treats of Politics and is a part of Ethics (“*in libro Aristotelis qui politica dicitur, et est pars ethice*”). Politics, he writes in the chapter on the division of practical philosophy, is the science of ruling the city (“*scientia est gubernandi civitatem*”) otherwise said “civil reason” (“*civilis racio*”). The presence of Roman and Greek idioms is not surprising. Besides Aristotle, that he knew from Arab sources, Gundissalinus knew and used also the works of Cicero.<sup>60</sup>

His knowledge of Aristotle's *Politics* was indeed quite vague, as he tells his readers that what we learn from that book is what sorts of inclinations and qualities are to be encouraged in a prospective king to make him a perfect one (“*rex perfectus*”). Civil reason, on the other hand, seems to have a decided moral connotation, as its goal is to inquire upon voluntary actions and habits to lead men to beatitude. Since the good habits of the subjects are largely the consequence of the virtue of their ruler, the possession of regal virtue (“*virtus regia*”) on the part of the ruler is the necessary condition for the subjects to live virtuously and happily. Regal virtue, explains Gundissalinus, adapting the Aristotelian division, consists of three components: the science of legislation, the science of ruling the household and the science of ruling one's self.<sup>61</sup>

In the same period Hugues of St. Victor (1098–1142), who taught at the Abbey of St. Victor and founded there an important theological school, elaborated a systematic classification of sciences in which theoretical, logical and practical sciences, as well as mechanical arts, are considered the servants (*famuli*) of theology. In his *Didascalicon*, Hugues follows the Aristotelian tripartite scheme, but he also elaborates a definition of politics based upon the language of political virtues. Practical philosophy, he writes, is divided into ethics, economics and politics (*politica*). Politics comes from the Greek *polis*, which means in Latin *civitas*. We speak then of a political, that is a

<sup>59</sup> See J. Kraye, “Moral Philosophy,” in Ch.B. Schmitt (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, Cambridge, 1988, p. 303.

<sup>60</sup> Dominicus Gundissalinus, “*De divisione philosophiae*,” in L. Baur (ed.), *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie des Mittelalters*, IV, n.2–3, Münster, 1903, p. 134.

<sup>61</sup> D. Gundissalinus, *De divisione philosophiae*, pp. 134–137; on the Aristotelian renaissance in political philosophy see G. de Lagarde, *La naissance de l'esprit laïc au déclin du Moyen Age*, II, Louvain-Paris, 1958, pp. 10–27; see also C. Martin, “Some medieval commentaries on Aristotle's *Politics*,” *History*, 36 (1951), pp. 29–44.

civil, philosophy (“*politica, id est civilis*”). Another word for “political” is “public” (“*publica*”), as distinguished from private (“*privata*”) and individual (“*solitaria*”). Individual moral philosophy teaches the pursuit of virtues and the attainment of happiness; the private instructs about the proper way of ruling the household; public philosophy guides men to rule the republic, taking care of the welfare of all through the solicitude of prudence, the measure of justice, the firmness of fortitude and the patience of temperance. Another word for political philosophy is civil philosophy, which is the philosophy through which one administers the interest of the whole city (“*totius civitatis utilitas administratur*”), as Isidore of Seville had explained in his influential *Etymologiarum*.<sup>62</sup> While the *solitaria* moral philosophy pertains to the individual, the private to the chief of the household, the public or civil or political is the wisdom of the rectors of cities (“*convenit . . . politica rectoribus urbium*”).<sup>63</sup>

Jean de la Rochelle (–; d. 1245) a franciscan theologian who taught at the university of Paris reproduces in his *Tractatus de divisione multiplici potentiarum animae* the same combination of Ciceronian language of political virtues and Aristotelian division of practical philosophy. He calls individual virtue “*monostica*,” which means that it teaches us to be our own keeper, and is aptly expounded in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Domestic or economic virtue, through which the husband rules over the household, is in turn to be learned in Cicero’s *De Officiis*. Political virtue, which guides man in governing the city, can be studied in the Justinian *Codex* and in Gratian’s *Decretum*.<sup>64</sup>

From the text of Jean de la Rochelle it appears that by the 1240s, inspite of the availability of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, politics did not possess its own basic book and was still to be investigated and taught using Roman and Canon law texts. The fragments of Aristotle’s moral and political thought that reached Europe through the Arab world were not enough to build a coherent and autonomous language.

<sup>62</sup> “Cuius partes sunt tres, moralis, dispensativa et civilis. Moralis dicitur, per quam mos vivendi honestus adpetitur, et instituta ad virtutem tendentia praeeparantur. Dispensativa dicitur, cum domesticarum rerum sapienter ordo disponitur. Civilis dicitur, per quam totius civitatis utilitas administratur”; Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiarum sive originum*, W.M. Lindsay (ed.), Oxford, 1911, II, p. 24.

<sup>63</sup> Hugues of St Victor, *Didascalicon*, II, 19, Ch.H. Butimer (ed.), Washington, 1939, pp. 37–38.

<sup>64</sup> Jean de la Rochelle, *Tractatus de divisione multiplici potentiarum animae*, III, 5, P. Michaud-Quantin (ed.), Paris, 1964, pp. 152–153.

Important advancements were made possible by Grosseteste's translation of the *Ethics* which provided philosophers with the complete meaning of Aristotle's notion of politics. Relying on Grosseteste's text, Aquinas divided moral philosophy into *monastica*, which concerns the individual conduct, *yconomica*, which deals with the rule of the household, *politica* which considers the conduct of men in civil society.<sup>65</sup> He also took up from Grosseteste's translation the notion that political science pursues virtue. Its practical goal is in fact to make the citizens good and law-abiding men, as the legislators of Crete and Sparta did by means of their excellent constitutions.<sup>66</sup> Since politics takes care of man's soul, it has therefore to be regarded as the most honorable and important art.

These advancements in the knowledge of Aristotle's political thought were not yet sufficient, however, to assure politics the status of an autonomous discipline independent from jurisprudence. For this change to occur the *Nicomachean Ethics* had to be accompanied with the *Politics*. The rediscovery of the *Politics* helped the students to consider politics not only as the art of ruling a city according to reason and justice but also as the science of the city in general ("*de civitate doctrina*").<sup>67</sup> The focus of political discourse was no longer the ruler but rather the constitution and the collective life of the city. Political inquiry shifted from the duties and the qualities of the political man to the assessment of the comparative merits of political regimes.

This ampler idea of politics informed the works of the Scholastic philosophers of the thirteenth and fourteenth century. Some of them corroborated with new arguments the conventional image of politics and the political man; others, instead, introduced major revisions and even modified the approach to politics itself.<sup>68</sup>

As Nicolai Rubinstein has correctly pointed out, the primary individual responsible for the shift from the political man to the

<sup>65</sup> Thomas Aquinas, "Sententia libri ethicorum," in *Opera Omnia*, Cura et Studio Fratrum Praedicatorum, XLVII, Rome, 1969, p. 4.

<sup>66</sup> "Civilis enim scientia secundum rei veritatem maxime videtur studere et laborare circa virtutem; intendit enim cives bonos facere et legibus oboedientes, sicut patet per legislatores Cretensium et Lacedaemoniorum, qui habebant civilitatem optime ordinatam, vel si qui alii sunt similes, leges ponentes ad faciendum homines virtuosos"; "Sententia libri ethicorum," in *Opera Omnia*, XLVII, p. 68.

<sup>67</sup> Aquinas, "Sententia libri politicorum," in *Opera omnia*, Cura et Studio Fratrum Praedicatorum, Rome, 1971, XLVIII, p. A 69.

<sup>68</sup> See B. Tierney, *Religion, Law and the Growth of Constitutional Thought 1150-1650*, Cambridge, 1982, p. 29.

political regime or constitution was William of Moerbeke. In his translation of the famous passage where Aristotle refutes the identification of the ruler of the city with the king or the despot, the political man becomes neuter ("*politicum*"), meaning the political regime as opposed to the monarchical and despotic.<sup>69</sup>

Following Moerbeke's translation, Aquinas focuses his commentary on the concept of political regime ("*regimen politicum*") and elucidates the distinction that separates political from economic and monarchical rule. A city, explains Aquinas, may be ruled either by a monarchical or by a political regime. In the monarchical regime, the ruler possesses unrestricted power ("*plenariam potestatem*"), whereas in the political regime the ruler's power is restrained by the laws of the city.<sup>70</sup> The difference between monarchical and political regimes is one of quality, not of mere quantity. In the former the exercise of supreme power is unrestricted; in the latter the ruler must exercise the supreme power in accordance with laws that are the product of political discipline, that is, laws designed to preserve the city.<sup>71</sup>

Political rule resembles that of the intelligence over the appetites; the despotic imitates that of the soul over the body. Whereas the body cannot resist the commands of the soul, the appetites can oppose those of intelligence. Similarly, in political rule over free men, the citizens may, and indeed often do, resist the commands of the ruler. Slaves cannot, just as the hands cannot refuse to obey the mind.<sup>72</sup>

In a political regime the citizens alternate in office. The interchange of rulers and ruled, comments Aquinas, is the consequence of their being by nature equals, though, of course, the magistrates have a superior status and are entitled to bear marks of honor.<sup>73</sup> Finally, the political regime is instituted for the common good of the subjects, not of the ruler.<sup>74</sup> Accordingly, the political regime dissolves when the

<sup>69</sup> N. Rubinstein, "The history of the word *politicus* in early-modern Europe," in A. Pagden (ed.), *The Languages of Political Theory in Early-Modern Europe*, Cambridge, 1987, p. 42; Moerbeke's text reads: "Quicumque quidem igitur existimant politicum et regale et yconomicum et despoticum idem, non bene dicunt," *Aristotelis Politicorum Libri Octo*, F. Sussehl (ed.), Leipzig, 1872, I, 1.2 (1252a 5-10).

<sup>70</sup> "secundum aliquas leges civitatis"; *Sententia libri politicorum*, p. A 72.

<sup>71</sup> "Quando enim ipse homo preest simpliciter et secundum omnia, dicitur regimen regale. Quando autem preest secundum sermones disciplinales, id est secundum leges positas per disciplinam politicam, est regimen politicum," *Sententia libri politicorum*, p. A 73.

<sup>72</sup> *Sententia libri politicorum*, p. A 87.

<sup>73</sup> "In politicis principatibus transmutantur persone principantis et subiecte; qui enim sunt in officio principatus uno anno subditi sunt alio, et hoc ideo quia talem principatum competit esse inter eos qui sunt equales secundum naturam et in nullo differunt naturaliter", *Sententia libri politicorum*, p. A 113. <sup>74</sup> *Sententia libri politicorum*, p. A 202.

citizenry is oppressed by a tyrant or when factions and sects disrupt civic concord and fight over the control of the city.<sup>75</sup>

Along with the concept of the political regime, Aquinas endorses Aristotle's celebration of the perfection and moral worth of the political community. Civil life is man's natural destination. Nature has endowed men with speech, not mere voice. Unlike other animals, he can therefore express judgments concerning right and wrong, convenience and inconvenience. Men are therefore naturally endowed for familial and civil life.<sup>76</sup> As Aristotle says, the city is the perfect community ("*communitas perfecta*"), as it guarantees self-sufficiency. Furthermore, civil life brings men to live in justice and virtue. The founders of commonwealths therefore have the merit of providing men with the necessary medium to attain their moral excellence.<sup>77</sup> However, Aquinas does not celebrate the founder of commonwealths. The elucidation of the identity and the qualities of the ruler is also remarkably contracted in comparison with the tracts on civil government composed before the Aristotelian renaissance. The sole relevant reference to the virtues of the political man ("*politicum, id est rectorem politie*") is in the commentary on the well-known passages from Bk. III, where Aristotle discusses whether the good man and the good citizen are one and the same. Aristotle's position is, comments Aquinas, that to be good a citizen must possess the same virtues that make a man good. A man cannot be said to be a good prince if he does not possess the moral virtues, particularly prudence.<sup>78</sup> Since politics is a part of prudence, the political man, that is, the ruler of the city, must be prudent. Therefore, concludes Aquinas, he must be good, as prudence is the capacity for making the right choice, the choice that is conducive to the good.

The text of Aristotle gives Aquinas the chance to diminish the status of politics and the political man. Just as he is not prepared to grant the political man the same semi-divine rank that he enjoyed in the Ciceronian tradition, he gladly emphasizes the passages of the *Politics* where Aristotle denies politics the rank of most excellent humane science. Politics still enjoys a noble station, but loses some of

<sup>75</sup> *Sententia libri politicorum*, p. A 175.

<sup>76</sup> *Sententia libri politicorum*, p. A 79.

<sup>77</sup> *Sententia libri politicorum*, p. A 80.

<sup>78</sup> "Nō enim dicitur aliquis esse bonus princeps nisi sit bonus per virtutes morales et prudens; dictum est enim in VI Ethicorum quod politica est quedam pars prudentie. Unde oportet politicum, id est rectorem politie esse prudentem et per consequens bonum virum," *Sententia libri politicorum*, p. A 194.



its splendor to the advantage of theology and contemplative knowledge. Since politics is concerned with the common good of the city and the common good is of course more perfect than the individual's, politics ("*ars civilis*") may be rightly called the most preeminent of human sciences. Equally correct is Aristotle in saying, at the end of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, that politics is the perfection of moral philosophy.<sup>79</sup> Politics deals with setting men in order, that is the constitution of the city.<sup>80</sup> And the city is the most important creation of human reason, the ultimate good for men on earth. Politics, the art of the city, therefore deserves the highest station among the practical sciences. Only among practical sciences that deal with human goals, though. Beyond human goals there are also the ultimate goals of the universe investigated by theology ("*scientia divina*"), which is therefore the most perfect of all sciences.<sup>81</sup> For it to be true that politics is the most excellent science, one should prove that man is the noblest creature, which is manifestly untrue. Leaving God and separate substances aside, there are still the celestial bodies that are superior to man. Furthermore, politics can never attain the same universality and necessity of contemplative knowledge and it is therefore bound to remain contingent and particular.

For Aquinas Aristotle is correct in distinguishing politics from prudence. Properly speaking, prudence is the art of ruling oneself, whereas politics deals with the rule of the many. Politics itself should then be properly divided into the art of legislation, that is prudence in making the laws, and prudence in executing the laws. Whereas the former should be labeled the science of legislation, the latter should maintain the name of politics.<sup>82</sup>

A more radical revision of the current image of politics and the political man was carried out by Giles of Rome, one of Aquinas' closest followers. In his influential *De regimine principum libri III*, completed in 1280, he introduces a new approach to politics. As he explains in the Proem, the topic of the book is the government of a kingdom according to reason and law ("*gubernatione regni secundum rationem, et legem*").<sup>83</sup> The wording is reminiscent of Latini's definition of politics, but Giles' political man who must rule according to reason

<sup>79</sup> "Si igitur principalior scientia est que est de nobiliori et perfectiori, necesse est politicam inter omnes scientias practicas esse principaliorum et architectonicam omnium aliarum, utpote considerans ultimum et perfectum bonum in rebus humanibus," *Sententia libri politicorum*, p. A 70. <sup>80</sup> "de hominum considerat ordinatione," *Sententia libri politicorum*, p. A 70.

<sup>81</sup> *Sententia libri ethicorum*, p. 9.

<sup>82</sup> *Sententia libri ethicorum*, p. 353.

<sup>83</sup> Giles of Rome, *De regimine principum*, Rome, 1607, Bk. 1, p. 2.

and law is a hereditary monarch. The fact that Giles's ideal king is endowed with some of the features of Latini's *rector* does not alter the fact that by presenting it as the art of the good king the *De regimine principum* introduces an important change in the range of application of the concept of politics. As we shall see, the change did not pass unnoticed. Most of the subsequent discussions among the Aristotelian philosophers focused in fact on the requirements that a regime and a ruler must meet to be considered "political".<sup>84</sup>

Following Aristotle's teaching, Giles states that the order of the inquiry must be both rational and natural. We must then discuss first the rule of oneself (Ethics), second the rule of the family (Economics), and conclude with the rule of the city (Politics). This order is rational because one must learn how to rule himself and his family before governing a city. And it is natural because it reproduces the natural scheme of evolution, which always proceeds from the less to the more complex and perfect. Since the rule of a kingdom is unquestionably more complex and perfect than ruling one's self, it must be the last to be investigated.<sup>85</sup>

In the first book, where he discusses the goals, the virtues, the passions and the customs of the prince, Giles constructs an image of the prince that embodies some of the elements that the republican writers had forged for the ruler of the commune. Like a good *Podestà*, the prince deserves to rule only if he possesses prudence and the other moral virtues. He who lacks virtue deserves to be a servant. Only a man who is capable of submitting his own passions and appetites to the rule of reason can succeed in keeping a kingdom united and peaceful.<sup>86</sup>

Princes must be perfectly virtuous and display all the virtues, not only some of them. The lack of one virtue affects all the others.<sup>87</sup> In his ordering of the cardinal virtues, however, Giles diverges both from the Ciceronian and the Senecan conventional accounts. Like Seneca he places prudence first because it must lead the others. But he then declares justice more important than fortitude and temperance.<sup>88</sup> The promotion of justice from fourth to second rank is due to Giles' strong and reiterated admonition that the prince must be above all

<sup>84</sup> *De regimine principum*, Bk. 1, 1.1.      <sup>85</sup> *De regimine principum*, Bk. 1, 1.2.

<sup>86</sup> *De regimine principum*, Bk. 1, 1.3, pp. 9-10.

<sup>87</sup> "Quare sic decet Reges, et Principes esse quasi semideos, et habere virtutes perfectas: decet eos habere omnes virtutes, quia perfecte una virtus sine alijs habere non potest," *De regimine principum*, Bk. 1, 2.31, p. 143.      <sup>88</sup> *De regimine principum*, Bk. 1, 2.5, p. 60.

the guardian of the laws. Although he is the living law ("*lex animata*"), he must also be the servant of justice.<sup>89</sup> God has entrusted the prince with the people for him to rule them in justice, not to oppress them like a tyrant.

Giles expands at great length the list of the virtues that the prince must possess. In addition to Prudence and Justice, he also discusses Fortitude, Temperance, Magnanimity, Liberality, Tameness, Truthfulness, Affability and Pleasantness as the virtues that a prince ought to possess.<sup>90</sup> He particularly emphasizes the importance of devotion to God and charity, two qualities that were not included in the original list of the political virtues. Whereas the Ciceronian good ruler needed only the political virtues to obtain access to heaven and enjoy perennial happiness, the scholastic prince must also be devoted to God, if he wants to be a perfect prince and attain perfect happiness.

Giles undertakes the revision of the image of the prince by discussing the Aristotelian notion of happiness as the aim of all humane agency. Since he has upon his shoulders the burden of leading his people along the pathway of happiness, the prince should know better than anyone else that true happiness does not consist in sensual pleasures, riches, honors, fame, glory, power or bodily goods, but in the love of God and in living according to perfect virtue. As Aristotle says, stresses Giles, the perfect virtue in political life is prudence and the prince that rules according to prudence attains political happiness ("*est felix politice*").<sup>91</sup>

Although he lists Prudence as the perfect political virtue, Giles does not retrieve from the *Nicomachean Ethics* the whole discussion on the connection between prudence and politics, nor does he expand on the notion of political prudence as much as his master Aquinas had done.

Commenting upon Book VI (1141b 22–1142a 5), Aquinas had stressed quite clearly that, for Aristotle, politics and prudence are in their essence the same habit of mind, as they both consist in the right judgment in practical matters.<sup>92</sup> But they are different insofar as prudence is the right judgement of the individual's good or evil, while politics considers the city's good or evil. Aristotle, writes Aquinas,

<sup>89</sup> "summopere studere debent Reges, et Principes ut servant Iustitiam"; *De regimine principum*, Bk. 1, 2.12, p. 82.      <sup>90</sup> *De regimine principum*, Bk. 1, 2.3, p. 51.

<sup>91</sup> "Cum igitur, perfecta virtus secundum Philosophum in vita politica sit Prudentia," *De regimine principum*, Bk. 1, 1.12., p. 37.

<sup>92</sup> "Politica et prudentia sunt idem habitus secundum substantiam," *Sententia libri ethicorum*, p. 356.

distinguishes between two components or aspects of politics: legislative prudence and "deliberative science." Legislative prudence is supreme and directive, or architectural, because it defines what others should do. The prince who gives laws to his subjects is like the architect who steers the work of the craftsmen. Instead, executive politics ("*politica executiva*") consists in deliberating, that is applying the universal norms discovered by political prudence to particular circumstances. Compared to the legislator, those who are engaged in government or administration are like craftsmen applying the rules laid down by the architect.

Political prudence consists then in counselling in legislative bodies, as well as deliberating on particular issues having always in view the common good of the city. Since it aims at the common good, which is superior to the individual good, political prudence is superior to economic and individual prudence. Finally, of the two components of political prudence, legislation has priority over government and administration and is indeed the most excellent human activity.<sup>93</sup>

Whereas Giles takes up from Aristotle and Aquinas only the notion of political prudence as the perfect political virtue, disregarding the discussions on the meanings and the components of political prudence, both themes are retrieved by Henry of Rimini, a scholastic philosopher who composed the treatise *De Quattuor Virtutibus Cardinalibus* in the first decade of the fourteenth century. Political happiness ("*politica felicitas*"), writes Henricus, consists in living according to prudence, which is the perfect virtue in practical matters. Prudence embraces the whole human and political good ("*totum humanum et politicum bonum*").<sup>94</sup>

On this issue Henricus follows Giles' footsteps. He goes much further, however, in elaborating on Aristotle's concept of political prudence. Prudence is the virtue most necessary to princes, particularly if they rule over many subjects. The prince's prudence is a sort of knowledge that embraces the common good of all. Through prudence the prince steers the subjects toward the good, but, if he lacks it, his regime degenerates into a tyranny. An imprudent ruler is one who cares for material goods, like riches and sensual pleasures, and spoliates and oppresses his subjects to satisfy his whims. The lack of

<sup>93</sup> "legispositiva est principalior inter partes politicae et simpliciter precipua circa omnia agibilia humana." *Sententia libri ethicorum*, p. 357.

<sup>94</sup> Henry of Rimini, *De quattuor virtutibus cardinalibus*, Ann Arbor (facsimile of the 1481 edition), 1975, I, 3 (no page numbers).

political prudence on the part of the ruler results, then, in the ruin of the city.<sup>95</sup>

Political prudence is particularly important for people living in political communities (*civitates*) because it educates them to respect the laws and the sovereign and to live in justice with their fellow-citizens.<sup>96</sup> While the subjects of a principality are moved and acted upon by the commands of the prince, the inhabitants of a *civitas* act out of their will. In the former case what counts is the uprightness of the ruler. In the latter it is important that the citizens possess a rectitude of their own. As Cicero wrote in the *De Officiis*, explains Henry, in the republics there are magistrates, private citizens and aliens. Each group has to possess a particular prudence (“*propriam prudentiam*”) according to their duties. The magistrates must be aware that they represent in their public person the *civitas*. It is therefore their duty to preserve its honor and dignity, enforce the law, guarantee to all their rights. Private citizens have to live in fair and equal terms with their fellow-citizens without servility nor arrogance and work for the peace of the republic. The aliens should mind their own business and avoid meddling in political life.<sup>97</sup>

These duties ordained by political prudence (“*per prudentia ordinati*”) guarantee the peace and the concord of the republic. The masterpiece of political prudence is the right ordering of the duties of the different sort of citizens so that a sweet harmony may result out of diversity. The prudence of the political man is then similar to the art of a cithara player (“*politicus sicut citharedus*”). His concern must be to moderate the citizens through justice and mercy, so that everyone lives prudently according to his duties with great peace and tranquility of the city. Political prudence, concludes Henricus, is primarily the knowledge of the political man who orders the republic by defining the duties of the different components, and maintains good order by assuring, through justice and clemency, that the citizens accomplish their duty. But political prudence pertains also to the individual citizen who governs himself in an orderly way for the common good of the city.<sup>98</sup>

Working on the same Aristotelian and Thomist sources available to Giles of Rome, Henry of Rimini elaborated an account of political

<sup>95</sup> Henry of Rimini, *De quattuor virtutibus cardinalibus*, 1, 27.

<sup>96</sup> “Ex quo patet quod necessaria est omni homini civitatis habitatori predicta prudentia politica.” *De quattuor virtutibus cardinalibus*, 1, 31. <sup>97</sup> Cicero, *De Officiis*, 1, 124–128.

<sup>98</sup> *De quattuor virtutibus cardinalibus*, 1, 31.

prudence with a marked republican thrust, one in which Aristotelian themes were combined with the Ciceronian idea of the political man as moderator, and with the notion of political prudence as the virtue that ought to lead individual citizens to behave according to the common good. Henry of Rimini was an admirer of the Venetian Republic, where the citizens enjoy the greatest liberty, peace and security.<sup>99</sup> Giles was reading Aristotle from the angle of an advocate of monarchy and a devout Christian. For him political happiness, noble as it can be, is still a preparation for heavenly life. Although it is proper for the prince to pursue political happiness, he must ultimately place his happiness in God and identify happiness with the love of God, both because he is a man and because he is the ruler. As a man, that is, a creature endowed with intellect and reason, he must place his happiness in something that is universal and intelligible, as God alone is. As ruler, he is the minister of God, and he does imperfectly what God does perfectly. Like God, he must be capable of understanding the common good, which is the most perfect and divine good. If happiness ultimately resides in God, he must cultivate those virtues that are conducive to him. Not only prudence, the queen of political virtue, but also charity. If he wants to join God, he must then rule in justice and charity.

Giles attributes to his prince a semi-divine status. Men can live three sorts of lives: a life of passions, a civil life, and a life of contemplation. The first is the life of beasts, the second of man, the third of angels. The prince should devote himself to civil life and also to contemplation. By ruling his subjects in justice and doing great things, he attains political happiness. Through contemplation, internal devotion and the love of God he participates in the higher status of divinity.<sup>100</sup>

Like the republican political man, Giles' good prince receives from God the appropriate reward. By ruling in justice and prudence, he has made himself similar to God and God loves and rewards those who are similar to him. Since he is more exposed to temptations and has more chance to transgress, the prince who has ruled well deserves a greater reward than ordinary men. Since he risks more than ordinary men and must display greater virtue, God shall reward him accordingly.

<sup>99</sup> Henry of Rimini, *De quattuor virtutibus cardinalibus*, II, 16.

<sup>100</sup> *De regimine principum*, Bk. I, 1.4, pp. 10-13.

The Aristotelian and Christian prince maintains the divine status of the Ciceronian political man. Perennial happiness is his just reward, as it was for his pagan counterpart. However, the Ciceronian *rector* attained perennial happiness in virtue of the political virtues alone. The Scholastic prince must also be inwardly devoted and charitable.

Giles' most radical innovation of the preexisting language of politics concerns, however, the relationship between the *civitas* and republican self-government, which is indeed the central issue of the political ideology of the city-states. The unanimous view of the thirteenth-century writers on city-government was that republican self-government was the form of government most apt to preserve the 'city' (*civitas*). To ensure that justice and the common good – the two distinctive qualities of the Ciceronian *civitas* – are properly carried out, the citizenry should entrust the supreme political powers to an elective magistrate committed to rule according to the laws and the statutes of the city on a temporary basis.

While he endorses and enhances the notion of the *civitas* as the natural goal of men, Giles firmly rejects the thesis that republican self-government is the right means to preserve it. Adopting the Aristotelian vocabulary, Giles renamed the *civitas* "political life" ("*vivere politicum*") and republican government "political regime" ("*regimen politicum*"). In his own words, his main point can therefore be summarized by saying that to attain political life we do not need a political regime but an hereditary monarchy. By questioning the relationship between republican government and political life, and claiming that a monarchy is indeed more apt to guarantee the highest and most necessary goal of civil life, Giles changed the meaning of the concept of politics that the theorists of communal self-government had elaborated in the thirteenth century.

Giles constructs his argument upon an Aristotelian reelaboration of the notion of *civitas*. The political community or city ("*communitatem politicam sivi civitatem*"), writes Giles, is the natural destination of mankind. The mere fact that man is the only animal who can communicate through language proves that he is naturally predisposed to live in society. The political community is not only the necessary condition for living, but also for living well. It is not enough for men to have the necessary goods, if preservation is not joined with the good life, with a life of virtue. Law and justice, the two foundations of a true political life, were instituted to make men live

according to virtue. To live politically (“*vivere politicum*”) means to live according to praiseworthy laws and institutions. Without law and justice there is no political life, and therefore no room for a true human life.<sup>101</sup>

Translated into Aristotelian language as *vivere politicum*, the *civitas* assumes an even nobler rank. The Aristotelian version adds to the Ciceronian image a much stronger moral connotation. While the writers who followed Cicero stressed that the *civitas* was instituted in order to prevent harm and offences and to protect properties,<sup>102</sup> Giles places a much stronger emphasis on the city as the necessary condition for a virtuous life.

For Giles, however, such an elevated goal cannot be attained by means of a political regime, one where the citizens possess legislative power and elect the magistrates. Unlike a monarchical regime where the king rules without limitations, in the political regime the magistrates must obey a number of conventions and are elected by the citizens, as in the Italian city-states, where the citizenry elects the *Podestà*, approves the statutes and may even correct the *Podestà*, if he transgresses the laws of the city.<sup>103</sup> Yet, the history of city-republics shows that the political or popular regimes produce penury, unrest, discord and war, whilst the cities and provinces that are under the rule of a king enjoy abundance, concord and peace.<sup>104</sup> The rule of one is more natural and more apt than a political regime to guarantee unity and peace. Of the two types of monarchical rule, the elective and the hereditary, the latter is to be preferred because it is more conducive to peace and unity.

Giles’ argument reproduces a pattern that his master Aquinas had already forged: an Aristotelian celebration of political life joined with a defence of monarchy. In Bk. I of the *De regimine principum* – almost certainly written by Aquinas himself before Ptolemy of Lucca took up the burden of completing the work – we find praise of civil life as the

<sup>101</sup> “Ostendo ergo vivere politicum secundum aliquas leges et secundum aliquas laudabiles ordinationes,” *De regimine principum*, Bk. III, 1.2, p. 404.

<sup>102</sup> John of Viterbo quotes this passage from Cicero (*De Officiis*, II, 78) to explain the origin of the commonwealth: “Hanc ob causam enim maxime, ut sua tenerent, res publice civitatesque constitute sunt. Nam etsi duce natura congregabantur homines, tamen etiam spe custodie rerum suarum, urbium presidia querebant.” *Liber de regimine civitatum*, p. 219.

<sup>103</sup> *De regimine principum*, Bk. III, 2.2, p. 455.

<sup>104</sup> “Experti enim sumus civitates et provincias non existentes sub uno rege esse in penuria, non gaudere in pace, molestari dissensionibus et guerris: existentes vero sub uno rege, e contrario, guerras nesciunt, pacem sectantur, abundantia florent.” *De regimine principum*, Bk. III, 2.3., p. 458.



natural destination of humanity, followed by the explanation of the superiority of the rule of one over that of many. Since the political community must above all secure peace and unity, the best form of government is the one that is most apt to attain these goals. Nature itself provides us with the right answer: all natural regimes are of one. The heart rules over the whole body, just as reason does over the other components of the soul. The bees have but one king and God is alone in ruling the whole universe.<sup>105</sup> Even though a king may become a tyrant, history shows that the rule of many often degenerates into mob-rule. It is therefore more convenient to live under a king than in a republican regime.<sup>106</sup>

The Aristotelian celebration of political life coexisted with contrasting views on the best form of government. Ptolemy of Lucca, for instance, fully endorses Aquinas' and Giles' Aristotelian account of the political life as a necessary condition for men's material and moral life, but he maintains that the form of government most apt to preserve political life is a political regime, one where a *rector policus*, not a king, rules.<sup>107</sup> Aquinas and Giles separated political life from political regime and used Aristotle's text to mount an ideological attack against republican government. Ptolemy reconnects political life and political regime, defending republican government as the most apt to preserve the life of the *polis*.<sup>108</sup>

The concept of political regime ("*principatus politicus*") occupies most of Bk. iv of the *De regimine principum*, one of the sections of the book that Ptolemy of Lucca completed around 1300–1305 after Aquinas' death in 1274.<sup>109</sup> The political regime, explains Ptolemy, is one in which sovereign power belongs to many as opposed to a single man. It comes from *polis* or *civitas*. In the political regime the rulers are bound by the laws. In monarchies the kings are above the laws; their own will has the power of law.

The political regime, stresses Ptolemy, is the most consonant to political life and is particularly suited for city-republics, as the

<sup>105</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *De regimine principum ad regem Cypri*, J. Mathis, (ed.), Turin–Rome, 1948, Bk. 1. 2. <sup>106</sup> *De regimine principum ad regem Cypri*, Bk. 1. 5.

<sup>107</sup> *De regimine principum*, Bk. iv, 23, p. 90.

<sup>108</sup> On the different political perspectives of Aquinas and Ptolemy, see N. Rubinstein, "Marsilius of Padua and Italian political thought of his time," p. 52; on Ptolemy of Lucca's puzzling combination of theological monarchism and political republicanism see Charles T. Davis, *Dante's Italy and Other Essays*, Philadelphia, 1984, pp. 224–229.

<sup>109</sup> On the authorship of the *De regimine principum* see A. O'Rahilly, "Notes on St. Thomas, iv. 'De regimine principum', V. Tholomeo of Lucca, the Continuator of the 'De regimine principum'," *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, 31 (1928), pp. 396–410, 606–614.

example of Italy shows. There are, though, exceptions: Rome had a political regime and it was not a city-republic. A few Italian provinces too are ruled politically.<sup>110</sup> Actually, the political regime is the only possible regime for people who are confident of their own intelligence, possess virile minds and daring hearts.<sup>111</sup> Despotic regimes fit, on the other hand, people with servile habits. In a perfect political regime men can attain political happiness ("*politica felicitas*"). A political ruler ("*rector politicus*") governs in fact by means of virtue, and his own virtue leads all the other virtues that are in the citizenry. As Augustine wrote in the *De civitate Dei*, a *civitas* is a congregation of men tied by social bounds that true virtue makes happy. Ptolemy specifies that the happiness of a *civitas* is mainly the work of a political ruler, one who rules politically, and fosters by his own virtue the virtues of the city as a whole.<sup>112</sup>

To be perfect, the political community must be well-ordered. Order, as Augustine said, following Cicero, is the disposition of things in their proper place. If all the different components of the city have their own rightful place, the polity is stable and harmonious, a true political community where men can live a perfect and happy life.<sup>113</sup> In Ptolemy of Lucca's account, the political regime is not only compatible with the existence of the *civitas*, but has actually the potentiality to guarantee the most perfect political happiness, the one that comes from virtue.

In order not to incur the critique of being a cause of civic conflicts, the political regime needs virtuous rulers and the right ordering of the different components of the polity. After Aquinas' and Giles' critique on behalf of the Aristotelian *polis*, the task for the champions of republican self-government was to make convincing the idea that a regime of elective magistrates bound by the laws could be united and stable. Ptolemy tried to respond to the challenge, but the developments of Italian political life put him in a difficult position. By the

<sup>110</sup> *De regimine principum*, Bk. iv. 1 and 2, p. 66 and 67.

<sup>111</sup> "Qui autem virilis animi et in audacia cordis, et in confidentia sive intelligentiae sunt, tales regi non possunt nisi principatu politico, communi nomine extendendum ipsum ad aristocraticum," *De regimine principum*, Bk. iv. 8, p. 76. See also Bk. i.1, p. 66.

<sup>112</sup> *De regimine principum*, Bk. iv. 23, p. 90. In the *Determinatio compendiosa de iurisdictione imperii*, a treatise intended to sustain the pope's temporal claims, Ptolemy wrote that even if political virtues ("*virtutes politicas civiles*") assure man political happiness ("*felicitatem politicam*"), the faithful christian must cultivate those virtues to enter in the kingdom of heaven where he will find true beatitude. Cf. Ptolemy of Lucca, *Determinatio compendiosa de iurisdictione imperii*, M. Krammer (ed.), *Fontes Iuris Germanici Antiqui*, Hannover and Leipzig, 1900, pp. 57-58.

<sup>113</sup> "Ergo sic politice vivere perfectam et felicem vitam facit." *De regimine principum*, Bk. iv. 23.

early fourteenth century most of the communes of Northern Italy had fallen under the domination of tyrants or single ruling families, as a consequence of factional conflicts and the pursuit of private interests over the common good.

As Remigio de Girolami passionately wrote in 1304 at the beginnings of his *De bono communi*, modern men restlessly destroy with diabolic spirit cities and provinces out of their disordered love for the private good.<sup>114</sup> Against the corruption of his day, Remigio wrote a fervent celebration of the excellence of the common good, citing both Aristotle and Cicero, along with many biblical and classical sources. From Aristotle Remigio quotes the famous passage from Bk. 1 of the *Nicomachean Ethics* on the excellence of the common over the particular good, commenting that, as the good of the community is superior to the individual's, we must accordingly love the common good more than the private. It also follows that the virtue and the art that seeks the common good is the most excellent and architectural, as Aristotle correctly said.<sup>115</sup> Cicero provides Remigio with an even more abundant literature on the priority of the common good, beginning of course with the passage from *De Officiis* (Bk. 1, 25) where Cicero admonishes that those who aim to rule the republic must disregard their own interest and care for the good of the whole community, and concluding with the no less famous line from the first speech against Catiline: "our country, which is much dearer to me than my life."<sup>116</sup>

From the common good comes all the honor of the citizens, glory and the civil good ("*bonum civile*"). The love for the common good is therefore virtuous and rational and we should be devoted to it, as the political virtue of the pagans urges us to do.<sup>117</sup> Interestingly, he speaks of political virtue ("*Politicam virtutem*"), not of political virtues, in the plural, as in the conventional reading of the Macrobian and Ciceronian tradition. Remigio condenses the four political virtues into a single one, the love for the common good, and devotes most of his tract to elucidating its foundations and implications. The basic

<sup>114</sup> Remigio De Girolami, *Tractatus de bono communi*, in Maria C. De Matteis, *La teologia politica comunale di Remigio de' Girolami*, Bologna, 1977, p. 3. <sup>115</sup> *De bono communi*, pp. 4-5.

<sup>116</sup> "patria, mihi vita mea multo carior est," *In Catilinam*, 1, 11. Cicero, *The speeches*, L. E. Lord trans., London-Cambridge, Mass., 1937, pp. 40-41.

<sup>117</sup> *De bono communi*, p. 8. In the *De peccato usure*, composed between 1269 and 1272, Remigio uses the word "*politicus*" in a Thomistic sense when he stresses that usury violates the law of the "*principatus politici*," that is the law of any secular or ecclesiastical authority instituted for the interests of the subjects. O. Capitani, "Il *De peccato usure* di Remigio de' Girolami," *Studi Medievali*, 6 (1965), p. 655.

assumption of his reasoning is that the love for the common good is a *rational* love. If the community is corrupted, the individual's life also is impoverished. Once the city is destroyed, the citizens can no longer cultivate the virtues that make them truly citizens. There remains only the external appearance, a statue or a painting, no longer the true and living citizen.<sup>118</sup> But whoever loses the quality of citizen, loses that of man too, as one cannot live proper human life without being a citizen.<sup>119</sup>

A citizen cannot possibly take pleasure from the corruption of his city, which moreover can never be in his interest. On the contrary, as similar naturally loves similar, the citizens should love one another. If they loved their fellow citizens and the common good, the city would be safe and tranquil. In fact love produces unity, generosity, ecstasy, zeal, all qualities that make the republic peaceful and strong.

Remigio's reinterpretation of the notion of political virtue in terms of love of the republic made an important contribution to the republican language of politics. In his account political virtue is a quality that the citizens must possess – not only, or not primarily, the ruler, as in the original Ciceronian and Macrobian version. While the theorists of city-rule of the thirteenth century had focused on the virtues of the ruler, Remigio points to the collective political virtue of the citizenry as the necessary prerequisite for the peace and the prosperity of the *civitas*. The experience of the decline of the communes posed to republican theorists the question of how to nurse the political virtue of a community. They realized that the virtues of the political ruler are to be surrounded by the virtue of the citizenry, if discord and tyranny are to be successfully repelled and the *civitas'* liberty and peace preserved.

Peace, echoed Dante in the *Monarchia*, composed between 1309–1313, is the highest good for man, the necessary condition for his happiness on earth.<sup>120</sup> Men can attain peace only through the institution of good political orderings, which is the task of politics, the source and the foundation of the just political constitutions (*"politica sit ymo fons atque principium rectarum politiarum"*).<sup>121</sup>

In full agreement with his Scholastic sources, Dante also stresses the

<sup>118</sup> "unde destructa civitate remanet civis lapideus aut depictus, quia scilicet caret virtute et operationem quam prius habebat," *De bono communi*, p. 18.

<sup>119</sup> "Et si non est civis non est homo, quia 'homo est naturaliter animal civile,' secundum philosophum in viii *Ethic.* et in i *Polit.*," *De bono communi*, p. 18.

<sup>120</sup> Dante Alighieri, *Monarchia*, G. Vinay (ed.), Florence, 1950, I.4.

<sup>121</sup> Dante Alighieri, *Monarchia*, I.2.

notion of political life as the foundation of liberty in the sense of judging and living according to reason. Commenting upon the passage of the *Politics* where Aristotle wrote that to live according to a good political constitution is safety and not slavery, Aquinas had remarked that to live according to a political constitution (“*secundum rempublicam*”) means indeed to live in liberty and safety (“*libertatem et salutem*”). The addition of liberty to safety respects Aristotle’s thought as he himself said that to be free means to be “*causa sui*.” Man is “*causa sui*” when he acts according to reason for the good. Since to live politically means to live according to rational laws designed to attain the common good, political life is the life according to reason, the sort of life that men live when they are not slaves of their own will or other men’s passions.

Man is free, writes Dante in turn, when he governs himself according to reason. He is a slave when he is ruled by his own passions or by other men’s will. Whereas corrupt regimes reduce men in servitude, the just ones make them free and encourage them to be at the same time good men and virtuous citizens. The goal of the Universal Monarchy is precisely to permit men to live politically in order to be free. Since it is the source and the principle of just governments, politics for Dante is then the foundation of liberty.

The role of the Monarch is in fact to be vigilant in ensuring that all the communities that are under his jurisdiction are ruled *politically*. The Universal Monarch is not supposed to prescribe *his* norms but the norms of reason, thereby preserving political life. To be submitted to a Monarch who sustains the political life in all communities amounts then to be submitted to the empire of reason, and hence to be free.<sup>122</sup>

The *Monarchia* was an important work for the formation of the idea of politics as the art of the good political constitution and, as such, the art of liberty. The notion of politics as the art of liberty was surely embedded in the Scholastic literature and in the works on communal self-government. It is only in the *Monarchia*, however, that we find this theme explicitly spelled out.<sup>123</sup>

<sup>122</sup> “Genus humanum solum imperante Monarcha sui et non alterius gratia est: tunc enim solum polities diriguntur oblique, democratice scilicet oligarchie atque tyrannides, que in servitutem cogunt genus humanum [. . .]; et politizant reges, aristocratici quos optimates vocant, et populi libertates zelatores, quia, cum Monarcha maxime diligit homines, ut iam tactum est, vult omnes homines bonos fieri: quod esse non potest apud oblique politizantes.” *Monarchia*, I. 12.

<sup>123</sup> On the overarching importance of the value of the *civitas* in Dante’s political thought see A. Passerin d’Entrèves, *Dante as a Political Thinker*, Oxford 1952, pp. 1–25; on the meaning of

An even more powerful channel for the diffusion of the language of politics as art of the city was the *Divina Commedia*. The fourteenth-century commentaries are, in this respect, an illuminating source. When Beatrice, in *Paradise* xvii, predicts Dante's exile and the loss of everything he loves most dearly, the commentator takes it to mean virtuous life, political regime, the common good, wife and children, relatives, friends and properties.<sup>124</sup>

Another passage from *Paradise* gives the commentator the chance to produce an Aristotelian celebration of political life as the necessary condition for the enhancement of moral virtues. When Charles Martell asks Dante whether men's life would be worse if they were not citizens, the response is straightforward: "Yes," replies Dante, "and here I ask for no proof." Man, remarks the commentator, is a civil and political animal who aims by his nature at the perfection of the mind which is the source of happiness. But the perfection of the mind can only be obtained through the cultivation of moral virtues, which can only be done in political life.<sup>125</sup> Thus, Dante was perfectly justified in attacking vehemently the bad rulers of his own times who ruined, rather than preserved, political life. Those who have been entrusted with the rulership of men should provide an example of justice and honesty and lead their subjects along the pathway of civil and political life ("*sicuri andassero per lo vivere civile e politico*"). Instead, because of their vices, they harm the bodies, the souls and the properties of their subjects.<sup>126</sup>

Other Trecento commentators believed they could recognize in Dante's text implicit references to the Ciceronian idea of political science as the discipline which created political communities along with ethics and philosophy. When Dante invokes Pegasus in *Paradise* xviii, remarks Pietro Di Dante, he refers to moral and political science and to philosophy, which gave men of genius perennial glory, and founded cities through laws and justice, as Cicero said in the *Tusculanae Disputationes* when he called philosophy the guide of life.<sup>127</sup>

the term "*civitas*" in the *Monarchia* see L. Minio-Paluello, "Tre note alla *Monarchia*," in *Medioevo e Rinascimento. Studi in onore di Bruno Nardi*, 2 vols., Florence, 1955, II, pp. 511-522.

<sup>124</sup> "Qui tocca in singularitate, che per tale cacciata l'Autore abbandonarà ogni cosa, ch'elli arà amata, cioè il virtuoso operare, e 'l politico reggere, e 'l bene comune, la moglie, e' figliuoli, li parenti e gli amici, e tuote le facultadi, le quali nulo è sì disumano, che almeno per lo necessario uso non l'ami, e per l'afezione carnale e naturale," *L' Ottimo commento della Divina Commedia* A. Torri (ed.), Pisa, 1827-9, *Paradise*, xvii, 55-57.

<sup>125</sup> *L'Ottimo commento, Paradise*, vii, 115-117. <sup>126</sup> *L'Ottimo commento, Paradise*, xx, note.

<sup>127</sup> "Et praediti narrandum invocat illam vivam fontanam Pegaseam, quam pro morali et politica scientia et philosophia figurat, quae ingendi facit in fama longaeva et movet, idest

The Aristotelian opposition between political rule and tyrannical domination is the interpretive framework most used in the *Lana* and *Ottimo* commentaries. Commenting upon *Paradise* xi, where Dante ridicules the vain pursuit of mundane goods and mentions those who pursued power by force or craft (“*per forza o per sofismi*”), the *Ottimo* remarks that ruling by force or deceit contradicts political rule.<sup>128</sup>

Aristotelian language is also evident in the commentaries on *Inferno* xii, the famous chant of the tyrants. After having explained that tyrants are plunged in blood because they took blood and plundered other men, and that the Centaurs who pierce them with their arrows symbolize the bestial passions to which the tyrants enslaved themselves, Jacopo della Lana remarks that the best way of understanding a concept is to investigate its opposite, as Aristotle taught.<sup>129</sup> Hence, to understand tyranny the best way is to illuminate the nature of *political* constitutions, which are the antithesis of tyranny. The *Ottimo* takes up the same approach, stressing that to understand tyranny it is useful for the reader’s benefit to expand a little more on political life, and describe the way kingdoms, cities and corporations should be ruled.<sup>130</sup>

The value of political life, and the necessity of fighting the pestilence of discord and civil strife, is also the central theme of Marsilius of Padua’s *Defensor pacis*, completed in 1324. Focusing on peace as the fundamental goal of political life, Marsilius contributed to the elaboration of the idea of politics as the art of the *civitas* in two ways: by stressing that the rule of law is the foundation of a good political constitution and that politics is primarily the art of making laws and statutes that are conducive to the common good of the city. As with Dante, for Marsilius too the verb *politizare* means to carry on political life, through the laws passed by a legislative body composed of the whole citizenry (or a selected part of it) and implemented by elective magistrates. Hence, the *Defensor pacis* reconnects political life and political regime.<sup>131</sup>

disponit secum civitates et regna legibus et justitia; de qua ait Tullius in V de Tusculanis quaestionibus,” Pietro di Dante, *Super Dantis ipsius genitoris Comoediam commentarium*, Vincenzo Nannucci (ed.), Florence, 1845 *Paradise*, xviii, 82–84. The passage by Cicero on philosophy is in *Tusculanae Disputationes*, v, 2.5.

<sup>128</sup> “E chi regnar per forze . . . ch’è contra il regno politico,” *L’Ottimo Commento*, *Paradise*, xi, 6.

<sup>129</sup> Jacopo della Lana, *Comedia di Dante degli Allagerii col commento di Jacopo della Lana bolognese*, Luciano Scarabelli (ed.), Bologna, 1866, *Inferno*, xii, note.

<sup>130</sup> “Ora, perchè questa materia è intorno alla gente tiranica, la quale guasta il reggimento politico, un poco ad utilitate della gente si tratterà della vita politica, per la quale si debbono reggere i regni, e le cittadi, e l’universitadi”, *L’Ottimo commento*, *Inferno*, xii.

<sup>131</sup> Marsilius of Padua, *Defensor pacis*, R. Scholz, (ed.) (Fontes Iuris Germanici Antiqui), Hannover, 1932, I, 12.2, pp. 62–63.

Marsilius developed both the theme of the rule of law as the foundation of a good polity, and the notion of politics as the art of legislation, through a close reading of Aristotle. Like most of his Scholastic counterparts, he grounds his argument on the Aristotelian notion of *polis*, as a community instituted for the sake of living and living well. He then proceeds to discuss the forms of government and compare the merits of elective versus non-elective monarchies. Although both non-elective and elective monarchs rule over voluntary subjects, the non-elective kings rule over subjects who are less inclined to obey, and through laws that are less political and less oriented to the common good than elective monarchs do.<sup>132</sup> Elected kings rule more politically, and their laws are designed more for the common good.<sup>133</sup> Elective regimes, concludes Marsilius, are then the most consonant with political life.

Having firmly advocated the excellence of the political regime, one in which the rulers are elective and bound by laws, Marsilius moves to consider the criterion that the ruler must use in order to regulate civil life. The criterion of the ruler must be the law, understood as a command with coercive force; a statement, specifies Marsilius following the *Nicomachean Ethics*, that must be the product of political prudence and understanding.<sup>134</sup> Only if the laws are the outcome of political prudence, is the rule of law better than the rule of men, and it may be said that, through the laws, reason itself rules. On the other hand, where passions pervert judgment and laws, the political constitution ceases to be temperate, and political life disintegrates. The crucial issue for the preservation of the political community is therefore that the laws are just, and designed to promote the common good.

To achieve this, legislative power must be entrusted to those who are more likely to make good laws. Marsilius' position on this issue gives the notion of political regime a decided republican sense. Earlier Scholastic thinkers like Ptolemy had pointed to the rule of law and the elective magistrates as the distinctive features of the political regime; Marsilius put a stronger emphasis on the principle that the legislative power must appertain to the citizenry. The whole body of citizens, or the weightier part thereof, has a better perception of the common

<sup>132</sup> Et ipsos disponunt legibus minus politicis ad commune conferens, quales pridem barbaricas dicimus," *Defensor pacis*, I, 9.6, p. 45.

<sup>133</sup> "Electi vero magis voluntariis presunt, eosque disponunt legibus politicis magis, quas diximus latas ad commune conferens," *Defensor pacis*, I, 9.6, p. 45.

<sup>134</sup> "Politico scilicet, id est ordinatio de iustis et conferentibus et ipsorum oppositis per prudenceam politicam," *Defensor pacis*, I, 10.4b, p. 50.



interest and can therefore pass laws that are conducive to it. Moreover, since nobody deliberately harms himself, it is unlikely that the citizen body will pass unjust laws. Finally, laws must be made by those who offer the best guarantee for obedience to them. If laws are made by the whole citizenry instead of a few, the citizens will be less reluctant to obey. To commit legislative power to a few citizens would be inconsistent with the principle that a *politia*, as Aristotle taught, is a community of free men and no citizen can be made slave of another: if only a few make the laws, they will impose their own interests, enslaving the other citizens to their will and thereby violating the basic principle of the *civitas*.<sup>135</sup>

In the *Defensor pacis*, politics regains the status of an architectural science that Aristotle had attributed to it. In Marsilius' account, political prudence is above all the art of making good laws and defining the appropriate distribution of honors and offices. Political prudence is ultimately responsible for peace, the highest goal of the *civitas*. If the laws are just, and the rulers are subject to them as well, the city will not suffer rebellion and sedition that originate from injustice. Similarly, if the ruler distributes honors and offices properly, and the legislator defines wisely which arts and disciplines are to be cultivated by the different classes of citizens, every component of the city will be in its proper place. As a result the community will be healthy and tranquil.<sup>136</sup>

In his inquiry into the best ways of attaining peace, Marsilius amplified the notion of politics as the art of legislation, which was embedded in Roman civil wisdom. At the same time he stressed that, in addition to rulers and legislators, the citizenry as a whole must possess political prudence. In a good polity that aims at peace, the citizenry has the final say in the approval of the laws and elects the ruler – two tasks that require political prudence and are of decisive importance for the good order of the city.

Through a close reading of Aristotle, Marsilius made available the image of politics as the art of instituting and preserving a community of free and equal people under the rule of law. Presenting politics as the art of legislation, he reinforced the identification of politics with the *civitas*, and prepared the ground for the celebration of the excellence of politics over all human arts. Indeed a well deserved

<sup>135</sup> "*Civitas est communitas liberorum, ut scribitur 3 Politice, capitulo 4, quilibet civis liber esse debet nec alterius ferre despociam, id est servile dominium,*" *Defensor pacis*, I, 12.6, p. 67.

<sup>136</sup> For Marsilius' definition of tranquillity, see *Defensor pacis*, I, 2, pp. 10–12.

rank, as political prudence is the sole art that can assure liberty and the enjoyment of a truly human life.

By the fourteenth century the *Politics* and the *Nicomachean Ethics* became the sources for a new set of conventional images of politics and the political man that integrated the Ciceronian vocabulary. After the Aristotelian renaissance, politics meant the art of founding and preserving just constitutions, to paraphrase Dante's words in the *Monarchy*, besides meaning the art of ruling in justice and according to reason, as Latini said in his *Tresor*.

Although it was neither systematic nor undifferentiated, the language that emerged from Aristotelianism possessed its own consistency and range of application. The adjective "politicus" was used to denote the rule of a moderate and just prince and republican regime; never to denote tyranny or despotism, nor to describe a prince that does not obey rules and laws and regards the commonwealth as his own private possession. In spite of the different views on the merits of monarchical over republican regime, the spread of Aristotelianism strengthened the notion of politics as the art of instituting and preserving a community of individuals living under the rule of law. Politics became even more decidedly a *civil* philosophy.

#### CIVIL LAW AND POLITICS

Before Latini the theorists of communal self-government did not speak of a science or art of politics. To designate the art of ruling the republic they used the Roman idiom *civilis sapientia*, namely the wisdom in legislating and administering justice. As we have seen the term appears in the *Oculus Pastoralis* and Orfino da Lodi in his *De regimine et sapientia potestatis* mentions civil wisdom (*civilis sapientia*) along with theology and rhetoric as one of the disciplines necessary for the establishment of the laws.<sup>137</sup> The source of the idiom "*civilis sapientia*" was probably Ulpian: "the knowledge of civil law (*civilis sapientia*)," he wrote in Bk. 50 of *The Digest*, is indeed a most hallowed thing (*res sanctissima*)."<sup>138</sup> A collection of similar expressions like civil science ("*civilis scientia*"), civil philosophy ("*civilis philosophia*"), civil

<sup>137</sup> "De tribus virginibus quae fecerunt leges, scilicet theologia, civilis sapientia et rhetorica," Orfino da Lodi, "De regimine et sapientia potestatis," *Miscellanea di storia italiane*, 7 (1869), p. 50.

<sup>138</sup> *The Digest of Justinian*, 50, 13, 1.5; I am quoting from *The Digest of Justinian*, Th. Mommsen, P. Krüger, A. Watson (eds.), Philadelphia, 1985, IV, p. 929.

reason (“*civilis ratio*”), may be found in Cicero. Unlike Ulpianus’ “*civilis sapientia*,” Cicero’s civil science, or reason, or philosophy, does not mean just the knowledge or the competence in civil law, but the more general art of ruling the republic, that is to say, politics, as Cicero himself says in the *De Finibus*. Referring to the Peripatetics’ partition of Philosophy he remarks that “the topic of what I think may fitly be entitled Civil Science (*quem civilem recte appellaturi*) was called in Greek *politikos*.”<sup>139</sup> Civil reason (“*civilis quaedam ratio*”), wrote Cicero in the *De Inventione* 1, 6, includes many important disciplines, one of which is eloquence. And those who maintain that civil science (“*civilem scientiam*”) has no need of eloquence, he stresses, are plainly wrong.<sup>140</sup> In the *De Oratore* Bk. 1, 193, “civil science” (“*civilis scientia*”) explicitly refers to the knowledge of the interests and the organisation of the republic; in Bk. 1, 60, he recommends for the good orator and political man the theoretical and practical knowledge on civil matters (“*rerum civilium cognitione et prudentia*”).<sup>141</sup>

In a somehow oblique way Cicero too uses the term *civilis sapientia* in the *De Republica*, Bk. 3, 5–7, where he qualifies the civil reason and discipline (“*ratio civilis et disciplina*”) as a sort of wisdom (“*sapientiam*”).<sup>142</sup> More explicitly Quintilian in the *Institutio Oratoria* Bk. 2, 15, 33–4, equates the Ciceronian civil science with wisdom, or philosophy (“*civilis autem scientia idem quod sapientia est*”).<sup>143</sup>

Although both the juristic notion of civil wisdom as the knowledge of civil law, and the more comprehensive concept of civil wisdom as the art of ruling a republic, were incorporated in the thirteenth-century language of city government, students of politics began to consider civil law an insufficient basis for theorizing on political matters. The author of an anonymous manuscript of the 1240s complained that at the time there was no science of the political good (“*De bono yconomico et politico non habemus aliquam scientiam*”), and that

<sup>139</sup> Cicero, *De Finibus Bonorum et Malorum*, H. Rackham (ed.), London–New York, 1914, pp. 304–305; Seneca also, referring again to the Peripatetic school, mentions “civil philosophy” (“*civilis philosophia*”) as a particular type of activity along with natural, moral and rational philosophy. I am quoting from Seneca, *Seneca ad Lucilium Epistulae Morales*, 2 vols. R. M. Gummere (ed.), Cambridge, Mass.–London, 1958, pp. 384–385.

<sup>140</sup> Cicero, *De Inventione*, H. M. Hubbell (ed.), London–Cambridge, 1949, pp. 12–15.

<sup>141</sup> Cicero, *De Oratore*, E. W. Sutton, H. Rackham (eds.), London–Cambridge Mass., 1942, pp. 44–45 and 134–135.

<sup>142</sup> Cicero, *De Re Publica*, C. W. Keyes (ed.), London–New York, 1928, pp. 184–187.

<sup>143</sup> Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, H. E. Butler (ed.), London–New York, 1921, 4 vols., pp. 314–315; The locution “civil wisdom” appears also in the writings of the Fathers of the Church: see for instance Lactantius, *Divinae Institutiones*, v, 16, 12.

students of politics had to use civil and canon law books.<sup>144</sup> After the Aristotelian renaissance of the late thirteenth-century, the monopoly of the jurists over politics was regarded with increasing hostility, and condemned as an illegal occupation. The jurists, wrote Giles of Rome, discuss political matters in a merely narrative way with no rational perspective: they should be called political idiots (*"idiotae politici"*).<sup>145</sup>

To the charges of the Aristotelians, the fourteenth-century jurists, particularly Baldus de Ubaldis, responded by giving the concept of politics a strong juridical connotation, thereby reinforcing the intellectual continuity between politics and the Roman *civilis sapientia*. However, in interpreting politics, the civilians did not always speak with one voice. While Baldus strengthened the identification of politics with republican self-government by attributing the qualification "political" to the ruler and the citizens of independent city-republics, his contemporary, Lucas de Penna, used the term "political" to describe the relationship between the prince and the body of the state.<sup>146</sup>

The intellectual process of rediscovery and reconstruction of the language of politics by the civilians looked like a random search that from time to time brings to light archeological fragments hidden in the mines of the Roman Law. The very texts of the *Digest of Justinian* from which the Commentators derived the notion of politics had been totally opaque, in this respect, to the Glossators of the early thirteenth century. In addition to the Roman Law the jurists elaborated the concept of politics having also in view the political experience of Italian city-republics.

As is well known, the major achievement of the Bartolist school was the legal justification of the political autonomy of the city-states and the theory of citizenship. Less analyzed, but equally important for the story that I am trying to reconstruct, is the elaboration of the notion of politics as civil wisdom and the use of the qualification "political" to indicate the position of preeminence of the ruler in his public person.

The Aristotelian notion of man as a political animal which is naturally destined to live under the laws was embedded in the *Digest*. The *Digest* I, 3.2 reports the following passage from Chrysippus, a

<sup>144</sup> See P. Michaud-Quantin, *Universitas*, Paris, 1970, p. 5, no.4.

<sup>145</sup> Giles of Rome, *De regimine principum*, part II, Bk. 2, ch. 8.

<sup>146</sup> J. P. Canning, "A fourteenth-century contribution to the theory of citizenship: political man and the problem of created citizenship in the thought of Baldus de Ubaldis," in B. Tierney and P. A. Linehan (eds.), *Authority and Power: Studies on Medieval Law and Government Presented to Walter Ullmann on his Seventieth Birthday*, Cambridge, 1980, pp. 197-212.

Stoic philosopher: "Law should be the rule of the just and the unjust and of those by nature political animals." The Aristotelian sense of the expression "those by nature political animals" was lost in the translation of the Glossators of the Bolognese School, which rendered the passage as: "Law is the rule of the just and the unjust and of those things which are by nature civil."<sup>147</sup>

Accursius' gloss obscures even more the meaning of the passage. He wrote: "are by nature civil, that is by the genius of natural man." The first to recover the original Aristotelian meaning of the passage was Baldus de Ubaldis, who restored the full sense of the notion of man as by nature a political animal, and the concept of the law as the appropriate structure for the well-ordered political man: "Note at those words, 'things natural and civil,' that man is naturally a civil animal: and law should be similar to a well-composed and civil man."<sup>148</sup>

The fourteenth-century Commentators introduced a no less important innovation in the definition of the subject matter of jurisprudence. An innovation, as we shall see, of particular relevance for the vocabulary of politics. On the question of the subject matter of *scientia civilis*, the conventional definition was that of Azo: "[Civil law] belongs to ethics, because it deals with morals, just like all the books of legal science also do."<sup>149</sup> Writing on the same subject, Petrus Bellapertica (d. 1308), one of the luminaries of the school of the early Commentators at Orléans, introduced an important conceptual shift. He accepted that legal science is a province of ethics since its subject matter is man. But he also stressed that man had to be understood as a

<sup>147</sup> The text of the *Digest of Justinian*, composed by Marcian, stresses the notion of the law as the foundation of the life of the *polis* and the standard of justice and injustice for *political beings*: "For Demosthenes the orator also defines it thus: Law is that which all men ought to obey for many reasons, and chiefly because all law is a discovery and gift of God, and yet at the same time is a resolution of wise men, a correction of misdeeds both voluntary and involuntary, and the common agreement of the *polis* according to whose terms all who live in the *polis* ought to live." Chrysippus too, a philosopher of supreme Stoic wisdom, begins his book *On Law* in the following terms: "law is sovereign over all divine and human affairs. It ought to be the controller, ruler, and guide of good and bad men alike, and in this way to be a standard of justice and injustice and, for beings political, by nature a prescription of what ought to be done and a prescription of what ought not to be done": *The Digest of Justinian*, Th. Mommsen, P. Krueger, A. Watson (eds.), Philadelphia, 1985, I, p. 11. See also J.P. Canning, *The Political Thought of Baldus de Ubaldis*, Cambridge, 1987, pp. 164–165, a work to which I am greatly indebted.

<sup>148</sup> See J. P. Canning, *The Political Thought of Baldus de Ubaldis*, p. 165.

<sup>149</sup> Azo, *Summa Codicis*, Lyon, 1557, ad. v. "Incipit materia ad Codicem: Supponitur ethice, quia tractat de moribus, sicut et omnes libri legalis scientie."

part of the city (*"pars civitatis"*).<sup>150</sup> The identification of the political man, as the subject matter of legal science, adumbrated in Petrus Bellapertica, is completed by Guilelmus de Cuneo (d.1335), the master of the Toulouse school. The relevant passage appears in the Proem to the *Digestum vetus*:

The question is, what is the subject-matter of this science? . . . It says elsewhere that the subject-matter of civil justice is political man [*"iusticia civilis est subiectum homo politicus"*], insofar as he is fitted to the government of the *respublica* . . . Is political man, therefore, the subject-matter? I say here that he is, because he is principally treated in the law as a man, since all laws were made for the sake of men . . . I say however concerning this that the subject-matter should be ruled well, because man living in a civil community can be said to be the subject-matter . . . Again, if the civil actions of man are considered, they can be called the subject-matter; as a result, it does not seem to matter at all whether we are to say that political man, that is one living in a civil community [*"hominem politicum idest vivens civiliter"*], or human actions are called the subject-matter . . .<sup>151</sup>

Also commenting on the *Digestum vetus*, Cynus de Pistoia (1270–1336/7), poet–jurist and champion of the application of scholastic techniques to legal science, remarks that there is in fact no difference in positing political man or human civil actions as the subject-matter of legal science. Furthermore, he refers explicitly to Aristotle as the source of the concept that the political man belongs to civil justice [*"in civili iusticia est homo politicus"*].<sup>152</sup>

Albericus de Rosciate (1290–1360), commenting on the same passage of the *Digestum vetus*, recapitulates the various interpretations offered on the issue and agrees, referring to *Politics* Bk. 3, that the subject of law is the political man fit to govern the republic. He also adds that the law considers the political man as having in view the good. Laws are in fact enacted in order to make men live a life of virtue, that is in a civil way.<sup>153</sup>

<sup>150</sup> Petrus de Bellapertica, *Lectura Institutionum*, Lyon, 1586 (anastatic reproduction: Bologna, 1972), Rubr., "In nomine domini Jesu Christi," n. 27–28 (pp. 22–23).

<sup>151</sup> Guilelmus de Cuneo, "Lectura super Digesto veteri," Proem, in Brandi, B. (ed.), *Notizie intorno a Guilelmus de Cuneo*, Rome, 1982. I am quoting from J. Canning's translation in *The Political Thought of Baldus de Ubaldis*, pp. 161–162.

<sup>152</sup> Cynus de Pistoia, *Lectura super Digesto veteri*, ms, Bibl. Savigny 22, Preussische Staatsbibliothek, Berlin, fol. 114.

<sup>153</sup> "Sed si queratur quod sit subiectum in ista scientia, de quo principaliter tractatur, dixerunt quidam quod bonum et equum . . . Alii dixerunt quod operationes humane, quia de illis in iure principaliter agitur, ut in Auth. 'Haec constitutio innovat' [. . .] in prin. Philosophus, 3 Politicorum, dicit, quod iustitie civilis est subiectum homo politicus prout aptatur ad

Bartolus of Saxoferrato did not himself contribute a great deal to the reconstruction of the notion of politics as civil discipline. As Canning has pointed out, the term "political" appears a few times in his work and never in a particularly significant way.<sup>154</sup> However, by stressing that justice is the fundamental requirement of good government,<sup>155</sup> and by qualifying rule contrary to law and justice as the distinctive feature of tyranny,<sup>156</sup> he strengthened the view that civil wisdom is the basis of the art of ruling a city.

His understanding of *civilis sapientia* has a clear political thrust. Jurists are frequently called to assume important public offices as advisors, or even to be entrusted with the rule of the republic.<sup>157</sup> For this reason he explicitly urged his fellow-jurists to study the literature on the best form of government to be fit to discharge public duties.<sup>158</sup>

Amongst the Commentators of the fourteenth century, the most significant and articulate contribution to refining the concept of politics came, as I have said, from Baldus de Ubaldis (1327–1400). As we have seen, the earlier Commentators had already taken the important step of pointing to political man as the subject-matter of legal science, meaning that the aim of civil justice is to make man political because they make him live in justice, that is, to live the sort

regimen reipublice . . . Concedo quod homo politicus sit subiectum quia de eo principaliter tractatur in iure, ut bene regatur, cum gratia hominum omnia iura facta sunt . . . Item operationes humane possunt dici subiectum inspecto homine prout operatur civiliter; unde nihil videtur interesse utrum dicamus hominem politicum, id est viventem civiliter, esse subiectum, an operationes humanas." Albericus de Rosciate, *Commentariorum pars prima super Digesto veteri*, Lyon, 1545, n. 11–12 (fol. 2v).

<sup>154</sup> He speaks of "nobilitas politica" in c 12. 1.1, n. 24, (p. 118 of the Bard edition, Basle, 1589).

<sup>155</sup> See *Tractatus de regimine civitatis*, in Quagliani (ed.), p. 155. Bartolus stresses the priority of justice also in another passage where he refers to the *regimen per populum*, the contemporary equivalent of Aristotle's *politia*. To preserve a popular government, he writes, honors and favors must be distributed justly, taking into account the *gradus*. If, on the contrary, they are unjustly distributed ["quia aliqui gravantur, aliqui alleviantur"], the republic is destroyed ["*res publica destruitur*"]. Bartolus de Saxoferrato, "Tractatus de regimine civitatis," 30–35, in Diego Quagliani, *Politica e diritto nel Trecento italiano. Il "De Tyranno" di Bartolo da Sassoferrato (1314–1357)*, Florence, 1983, p. 150.

<sup>156</sup> With reference to the tyrant *ex defectu tituli* as well as *ex parte exercitii*, Bartolus uses the expression "non iure principari." Cf. *Tractatus de tyranno*, 206–207 and 449, in Quagliani, *Politica e diritto*, pp. 184 and 196.

<sup>157</sup> In this *civilis sapientia* there are, writes Bartolus, several mansions: "Quidamenim ad legendum in civitatis ad regis assumuntur, quidam ad assiedendum in locis insignibus praeponuntur, quidam ad advocandum in curiis principum et regis attrahuntur, alii ad consulendum in cameris assidue requiruntur, alii ad consilium principum assumuntur. Hi enim sunt quibus respublica regenda committitur." "Sermo in doct. do. Johannis de Saxoferrato," in Sidney Woolf, *Bartolus of Sassoferrato. His Position in the History of Medieval Political Thought*, Cambridge, 1919, p. 19.

<sup>158</sup> See "Tractatus de regimine civitatis," 80–90, in Quagliani (ed.), *Politica e diritto*, p. 153.

of life and be the sort of person who is appropriate to the *polis*. Civil law forges the citizens who keep the *civitas* alive.

For Baldus the jurists must elicit the principles of law from nature. Man's nature, his perfect natural *telos*, is to live in a political community. Therefore, if legal science wants to derive its principles from nature, its goal has to be the preservation of the political community. Through the use of Aristotelian language, Baldus corroborates the view of jurisprudence as the science that aims at the preservation of the political community, which means that legal science is, in the most genuine sense, political.

Baldus completed the work of the earlier Commentators by spelling out the idea that politics is the art of ruling the republic justly. As we have seen, this concept was already circulating in the literature on republican self-government, but had not been hitherto developed in the legal literature. Elaborating on a theme in the Commentators' works, he described justice as the virtue most necessary to rule a *civitas*, and therefore as the queen of the political virtues. At the same time, he stressed that since the laws and justice are the bond of civil life, civil science has a role of outstanding importance and nobility, a nobility which affects also politics, because of the strict connection between jurisprudence and politics.

In his refinement of the language of politics, Baldus draws from the Aristotelian as well as the Ciceronian vocabulary. In an important comment on the *Codex Iustinianus*, for instance, he clearly uses the Aristotelian notion of the *politia* when he stresses that man can be considered either in his position of preeminence or "in congregation." If considered in congregation ("*in congregatione*"), "natural man would be made political, and a people is created out of many men come together [. . .]. The people is sometimes girt by walls and inhabits a city, and as such is properly called political from *polis* which is a city."<sup>159</sup>

Commenting upon the definition of "*populus*," in the *Codex Iustinianus*, he explains that a man can be discussed in three ways: as an individual naturally composed of soul and body; as an economic body, that is, as head of the family, like a *paterfamilias* or the abbot of a monastery; as "a civil or political body like the bishop of a city and the

<sup>159</sup> "Sed si consideratur in congregatione tunc homo naturalis efficeretur politicus, et ex multis aggregatis fit populus [. . .]. Iste populus quandoque muris cingitur, et incolit civitatem; et idem proprie dicitur politicus a polis quod est civitas." Baldus de Ubaldis, *Lectura in VI-IX libros Codicis*, Lyon 1498, (c. 7. 53. 5).



*Podestà*.”<sup>160</sup> In this case, continues Baldus, he is regarded as being in a position of preeminence. Referring to a bishop or a *Podestà*, the adjective “political” denotes the public or collective personality that pertains to them.<sup>161</sup> They embody the community of the *fideliū* in the case of the bishop, or the community of citizens in the case of the *Podestà*. They can speak and act *as* the city.<sup>162</sup> Also, the division of moral science into ethics, economics and politics, that Baldus employs to point out that legal science deals with all three, is an elaboration of Aristotelian themes:

The final cause [of our subject] is threefold, namely within man, in relation to man, and in relation to the *respublica*. Within man, so that he may do good; and this belongs to ethics. In relation to man, so that someone may rule his family well; and this belongs to economics. In relation to the *respublica*, so that it may be ruled healthily; and this belongs to politics.<sup>163</sup>

To live a moral and political life men must be capable of distinguishing good from evil, just from the unjust, and act accordingly. Since legal science and moral philosophy enable them to do so, they are the tools necessary for moral and political life.<sup>164</sup> Furthermore, the goal of moral and political thinking is the common good, a good more divine because it is common.<sup>165</sup> The excellence and perfection of a science’s goal reflects upon the science that pursues it: as long as it remains the science of ruling a city and seeks the common good, politics deservedly enjoys the most noble rank among human disciplines.

Elsewhere, Baldus adopts Ciceronian rather than Aristotelian language. In his Proem to the *Commentaria ad Institutionem*, for instance, he discusses the notion of politics as the art of ruling a *civitas*

<sup>160</sup> “prout est quoddam corpus civile seu politicum”; Ad c.7.53.5 (fol. 236r).

<sup>161</sup> See on this point J.P. Canning, “Ideas of the state in thirteenth and fourteenth-century commentators on the Roman Law,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th Series, 33 (1983), pp. 1–27.

<sup>162</sup> Similar in sense is a passage of the *Consiliorum*, where Baldus discusses Giangaleazzo Visconti’s grant of the city of Asti with all its possessions: “Modo sequitur in littera contractus tertia particula ‘que tenet et possidet’ . . . prout autem respicit politicum regimen intelligitur ‘que tenet et possidet,’ id est que regit et gubernat seu nomine suo gubernentur.” Ad d.l.i. Rubr. folio 4r.

<sup>163</sup> “Causa finalis [artis nostre] est triplex, scilicet in homine, ad hominem, et ad rempublicam. In homine, ut bonus sit; et hoc pertinet ad ethicam. Ad hominem, ut quis bene regat familiam; et hoc pertinet ad economicam. Ad rempublicam, ut respublica salubriter regatur; et hoc pertinet ad politicam [. . .].” D. Constant, “Omnem,” II.

<sup>164</sup> “Subiectum est homo, qui per scientiam acquirit politicam id est moralem qualitatem seu philosophiam per quam perfecte cognoscit, separat iustum a contrario, quia indicat quod iustum est.” D. l.i.i. Additio Baldi, n. 7.

<sup>165</sup> “Quanto bonum est communius tanto divinius. Commune bonum dicitur quod debet esse subiectum in qualibet consideratione politica et morali, ut no.” D.I.3.2.

using the language of political virtues. The starting point of his reasoning is again justice, defined as "political virtue." When we define justice as political virtue, stresses Baldus, we want to say that it is impossible to rule a city without justice, just as it is impossible to move a mountain from one place to another. It is correct, then, to list justice among political virtues along with prudence, temperance and fortitude.<sup>166</sup>

The reference to Cicero is also clear in the Proem to the *Institutiones*, where Baldus describes the law as the bond of civil society. Without civil law, he says, we can no longer speak of *civitas*.<sup>167</sup> As an intricate passage of his commentary *In usus feudorum* seems to mean, civil law is the political rule that makes possible a civil order.<sup>168</sup> Since civil order is the precondition of a virtuous and consequently happy life, splendor and nobility reflect upon the two disciplines that are responsible for its preservation and flourishing, the sciences of law and politics.<sup>169</sup>

Through Baldus' work, the notion of politics is firmly anchored within the boundaries of the *respublica* and identified with the pursuit of the common good. Even if he refers on one occasion to politics as the active participation of the citizens in the government of the republic,<sup>170</sup> he does not consider the attribute "political" applicable

<sup>166</sup> "Hic diffinitur iustitia prout est virtus politica, dicta a polis, quod est civitas, et icos, quod est scientia, quasi scientia de regimine civitatis. Et ponitur in diffinitione constans et perpetua ad denotandum, quod ita est impossibile civitates sine iustitia regi, que est virtus politica, sicut est impossibile montes de uno loco ad alium transferri. Et quod iste intellectus est verus, probatur, quia virtutes politice sunt quattuor: iustitia, temperantia, fortitudo et prudentia," ad *Institut.* I.I.I, nn. 2-4.

<sup>167</sup> "Scientia civilis . . . que tante mirabilitatis existit quod ea pretermissa humane societatis nullum est vinculum, sic nec civitatis consistit vocabulum." Proem ad *Institut.*, ad v. "Quoniam" fol. 2r.

<sup>168</sup> "Ubi vero est tribunal, ibi aliquam politicam et regulam necesse est esse que dici potest ius civile, id est ius vivendi sub quadam specie civilitatis," ad *Feud.*, 1.8 (Additio).

<sup>169</sup> See also Cynus de Pistoia: "ubi est iustitia, est felicitas." By justice he means a virtue, a habit of mind: "Verum est, quod particulariter in qualibet mente, in qua est diffusa, corrumpitur: et sic definite esse virtus quando corrumpitur, et sic non est iustitia. & talis iustitia, prout est virtus, semper est apta tribuere ius suum." He then specifies that "habitus mentis bonus, unicuique tribuens secundum suam dignitatem: maioribus reverentiam, minoribus disciplinam, Deo religionem, parentibus obedientiam, paribus concordiam, sibi ipsi castimoniam, miseris, seu pauperibus, compassionem."

Justice is virtue and law is the implementation of justice: "Iustitia est virtus. Ius est executio eius." Cynus de Pistoia, "Iurisconsulti praestantissimi," *In Codicem, et aliquot titulos primi pandectarum tomi commentaria*, Frankfurt, 1578.

<sup>170</sup> "Quedam sunt universitates, que habent regimen active, id est que habent regere; quedam passive tantum, id est que habent regi et non regere, ut rustici qui non participant politica, nam agricole non participant politicam secundum Aristotelem," "Decretales Gregorii P.IX. seu Liber Extra" 1.31.3. n. 5, in J. Canning, "A fourteenth-century contribution to the theory of citizenship," p. 207.

solely to republican government. The emperor or a king may well rule politically, as long as they pursue justice and the common good. But if they pursue the private interest, their rule is no longer political. It is, as Baldus' teacher Bartolus had made clear, a tyranny *ex parte exercitii*. The emperor who seeks his own interest is almost a tyrant ("quasi tyrannus est") and, adds Baldus, he does not act as the personification of the republic.<sup>171</sup> In his writings politics is presented as the art of preserving the *respublica* and preventing tyranny from occurring. Politics alone permits men to enjoy the precious good of the city.<sup>172</sup>

By the middle of the fourteenth century, roughly at the time when Baldus was discussing the notion of politics as the art of ruling a city in justice, the Neapolitan jurist Lucas de Penna elaborated a quite different meaning for the notion of politics, referring now to princely rule. At the core of his analysis lies his account of the relationship between the prince and the state as a "*matrimonium morale et politicum*."<sup>173</sup> Lucas de Penna formulates the concept of the political and moral marriage between the prince and the republic, commenting on a law concerning the occupation of Desert Land. Relying on classical, as well as biblical, sources, he describes the prince as the husband of the republic, whose wedlock with the commonwealth can be designated as a moral and political marriage:

There is contracted a moral and political marriage [*matrimonium morale contrahitur et politicum*] between the Prince and the *respublica*. Also, just as there is contracted a spiritual and divine marriage between a church and its prelate, so is there contracted a temporal and terrestrial marriage between the Prince and the state. And just as the church is in the prelate, and the prelate in the church [. . .] so is the Prince in the state, and the state in the Prince".<sup>174</sup>

Through the metaphor of marriage, Lucas de Penna meant to explain that the Prince – in his public person – embodies the whole republic and acts as the head of it. At the same time, the republic is completed in the prince. As Seneca wrote in the *De Clementia*,

<sup>171</sup> "non tamquam respublica gereret se," *Feud.* I, 14.1.

<sup>172</sup> "Homines tria dicuntur possidere: vitam, libertatem et civitatem," *Dig.* L.1 4 "De statu hominum et lex naturae."

<sup>173</sup> Lucas de Penna, *Commentaria in tres posteriores libros Codicis*, Lyon, 1597, c.11, 58.7.n.8; on Lucas' legal and political thought see W. Ullmann, *The Medieval Idea of Law as Represented by Lucas de Penna*, London, 1946.

<sup>174</sup> I am using Ernst Kantorowicz's translation in *The King's Two Bodies. A Study in Medieval Political Theology*, Princeton, 1957, p. 214.

addressing the Emperor Nero, "You are the soul of the *respublica*, and the *respublica* is your body."<sup>175</sup> However, adapting a verse from Ephesians 5, Lucas de Penna formulates the relation prince-republic in terms of husband-wife and head-body rather than soul-body as Seneca does in the *De Clementia*: "The man is the head of the wife, and the wife the body of the man . . . After the same fashion, the Prince is the head of the realm, and the realm the body of the Prince."<sup>176</sup>

As Ernst Kantorowicz has explained, Lucas de Penna was borrowing an idiom that was already circulating in Canon law. Just as Christ is the head and the husband of the supra-individual body of the Church, the prince is the head and the husband of the republic. The relation of Christ to the Church and that of the prince to the republic are both relations of command. Christ is the head of the Church, which is his body, just as the prince is the head of the republic. The Church cannot exist as a collective and living body without Christ and the bishops; the republic cannot exist without the prince. Through the mediation of Christ and the prince, the faithful and the subjects form the fictional body of the Church and the state respectively.

And just as men are joined together spiritually in the spiritual body, the head of which is Christ . . . , so are men joined together morally and politically in the *respublica*, which is a body the head of which is the Prince.<sup>177</sup>

In addition to command and personification, the image of marriage also conveys the idea that the republic has an independent existence and endowments. Describing the relation of the prince to the republic in terms of husband and wife, Lucas de Penna intends to stress the principle of the inalienability of the fisc. The fisc is the dowry of the *respublica*. In marrying the republic, the prince acquires the right to use the endowment, not to alienate it. At the moment of his consecration he solemnly vows to protect the republic and to refrain from alienating property belonging to the fisc, the same vow that the bishop must take with regard to the Church's possessions.

The importance of Lucas' juristic analogies and equivalences no

<sup>175</sup> "Nam si, quod adhuc colligit, tu animus reipublicae tuae es, illa corpus tuum . . ." Seneca, *De clementia*, 1, 5.1; Seneca, *Moral Essays*, J. W. Basore (ed.), London-Cambridge Mass., 1958, p. 370-371.

<sup>176</sup> "... item, sicut vir est caput uxoris, uxor vero corpus viri [Eph. 5. 23] . . . ita princeps caput reipublicae, et res publica eius corpus," Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, p. 216. See also W. Ullmann, *The Medieval Idea of Law as Represented by Lucas de Penna*, London, 1946.

<sup>177</sup> Lucas de Penna, *Commentaria in tres posteriores libros Codicis*, c.11, 58.7.n.8.

doubt relies on the adaptation of the model of the mystical body to the prince and his state. Yet, Lucas' notion of the moral and political marriage between the prince and the republic embodies other important implications for the language of politics. In order to explore them, it is useful to focus on the element of consent that the metaphor of the political marriage contains. The text of the *Digest* itself explicitly states that consent, not copulation (*concubitus*) makes the marriage.<sup>178</sup> Long before Lucas' works, the canonists had already pointed to consent as the crucial requirement of marriage. Huguccio of Pisa (d. 1210), for instance, in his gloss on the *Codex* compares the bishop's election to matrimonial consent.<sup>179</sup> At the outset of the fourteenth century, Cynus de Pistoia had applied the image of the marriage to the election of the prince on the part of the republic. Again, the elements that make the metaphor appropriate are the mutual consent and the commitment to protection. Just as the marriage requires mutual consent, so does the election of the emperor: he must be willing to take the republic as his spouse, and the republic must be willing to accept him as her husband and defender.<sup>180</sup> The same argument is repeated by Albericus de Rosciate in his commentaries on the *Code* composed between 1312 and 1314.<sup>181</sup>

Both Cynus and Albericus de Rosciate, however, speak of *intellectual* matrimony (*matrimonii intellectuale*); Lucas de Penna of *moral* and *political* matrimony. The addition of the two adjectives "moral" and "political" gives the metaphor further significance. For Cynus and Albericus the metaphor of marriage was perfectly apt to denote the fictional conjunction between the prince and the republic, and the responsibility of the former to lead and protect the republic. Lucas' addition of the attributions "moral" and "political" means that the rule of the prince over the republic is restricted by the principles of justice and must always aim at the common good. It is precisely the

<sup>178</sup> "Nuptias, non concubitus, sed consensus facit," *Digest*, 50.17.30.

<sup>179</sup> "ex mutuo consensu, scilicet eligentium et electi"; see Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, p. 212.

<sup>180</sup> "quia ex electione Imperatoris et acceptione electionis Reipublicae iam praepositus negari non potest et eum ius consecutum esse, sicut consensu mutuo fit matrimonium . . . Et bona est comparatio illius corporalis matrimonii ad istud intellectuale: quia sicut maritus defensor uxoris dicitur . . . ita et Imperator Reipublicae," Cynus de Pistoia, *In Codicem et aliquot titulos primi Pandectarum tomi commentaria*, Frankfurt, 1587, c.7.37., n. 5, f.446rb.

<sup>181</sup> "quia sicut matrimonium consensu perficitur . . . sic ex mutuo consensu eligentium et electi ius plenum consequitur Imperator . . . Nota ergo quod ex quo res administrat, et est bona argumentatio matrimonii carnalis ad istud intellectuale, quia sicut maritus est defensor uxoris . . . ita Imperator Reipublicae," c.7.37.3, n. 12.

respect for justice and the pursuit of the common good that make the conjunction and the rule of the prince over the republic a moral and political marriage, not just a marriage: moral because justice makes men good; political because the common good is, in Aristotelian terms, the basic feature of the political community. By joining the adjectives "moral" and "political" to the metaphor of the marriage, Lucas is conveying two connected points: the preeminence of the prince and his duty to rule in justice having in view the common good.<sup>182</sup>

Both points seem to be the result of a reworking of Aristotle via Aquinas. Commenting on Bk. 12 of the *Codex*, Lucas refers to Bk. 4 of the *Politics* in a passage where Aristotle compares the kings and the legislators to the physician. While the physician takes care of the health of the body, kings and legislators watch over the health of the soul of the subjects, if they are committed to justice. Interestingly, however, the text of the *Politics* does not read "kings and legislators" ["*reges et legum latores*"], as Lucas writes, but "*bonum legislatorem*" and "*vere politicus*." A much closer formula to the one used by Lucas is in Aquinas' commentary. Aquinas speaks in fact of "*politicus et legislator*." Another element that suggests that Lucas was using Aquinas' commentary is the fact that in the original text Aristotle mentions medicine briefly, together with the arts of ship-building and the making of clothes, in the context of a discussion about the necessity that every practical art and science must consider also what is appropriate under specific circumstances, not just what is best in general. Aquinas, instead, explicitly associates the physician with the political man, and equates the knowledge that the good physician must possess in order to preserve the health of a particular body with the skill that the politician must have in order to rule his republic well.

Apart from the question of sources, the important issue is the shift from Aquinas' and Aristotle's "*politicus et legislator*" to Lucas' "*reges et legumlatores*." By substituting "king" for political or civil man, Lucas avoids the Aristotelian connotation of "political," that is, the reference to a self-governing community, and makes it clear that only

<sup>182</sup> The concept of the prince as the head of the mystical body of the republic ("*caput mystici reipublice corporis*") appears also in Aenes Sylvio Piccolomini's *Epistola de ortu et auctoritate imperii Romani* to mean that the prince, because of his leading position, must be prepared to sacrifice himself for the good of the republic, just as Christ – who is the head, the rector and the prince of the church ("*caput ecclesie, princeps et rector*") – See Gerhard Kallen, *Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini als Publizist in der Epistola de ortu et auctoritate imperii romani*, Cologne, 1939, pp. 82–84.

a king can guarantee the health and the life of the political body. It was a substantial transformation of Aristotle's notion of politics.

The order and the security of the commonwealth require a prince who possesses legislative power, as well as the power of waging a war, commanding the army, coining the money, levying taxes, granting immunities, remitting penalties, dissolving bans, confirming or withdrawing privileges, exercising jurisdiction, revoking the laws made by his predecessors and the like.<sup>183</sup> Without a prince, no city can exist. He is the foundation of the good order that alone makes possible living in a city.<sup>184</sup> The conflicting needs and desires of the citizens require a superior authority that harmonizes and moderates them. For this task a single ruler is much better than the many.<sup>185</sup>

While he expunges from the adjective "political" its original republican connotation, Lucas elaborates a new meaning of the term reworking, once again, Aristotle's and Aquinas' texts. In the *Politics*, Aristotle divides the science of household management into despotic (the rule over the slaves), paternal (the rule over the children) and conjugal (the rule over the wife). He then describes the paternal rule as royal and the conjugal as "political." The preeminence of a man over his wife, clarifies Aquinas, is political just like the preeminence of the rector of a republic. A man does not possess an absolute authority over his wife and he is bound by the laws of marriage. He is like the rector of the republic, who exercises his authority over the citizens according to the laws of the city.<sup>186</sup>

The rule of the husband over wife differs from the political rule in the important respect that, unlike the latter, no alternation in command is contemplated. The wife remains under the rule of the man because of her natural inferiority, unless the marriage has been formed contrary to nature and the man is actually effeminate. Apart from this difference, the preeminence of the man over the wife can be described as "political" in the sense of moderated, or restricted by laws, as opposed to despotic rule.

<sup>183</sup> c.12.35 14. nos 1 seq.

<sup>184</sup> "Nihil est tam necessarium civitatibus quam principatus, sine quibus impossibile est esse civitatem. Et sine his (quae ad bonum ordinem et ornatum) impossibile est habitare," c.12.59.8., n. 3.

<sup>185</sup> "Princeps solus melius exercet imperium quam plures," c.12.59.8., n. 3.

<sup>186</sup> "vir principatur mulieri politico principatu, id est sicut aliquis qui eligitur in rectorem civitati praestet . . . set vir non habet plenariam potestatem super uxorem quantum ad omnia, set secundum quod exigit lex matrimonii; sicut et rector civitatis habet potestatem super cives secundum statuta," Aquinas, *Sententia libri politicorum*, p. A 113.

Every act of the king, writes Lucas de Penna, must be grounded upon equity.<sup>187</sup> He has the tutorship and the administration of the republic. As the soul gives life and health to the body, the prince and the king give life and preserve the health of the political body, if they rule with rectitude and restrain from harshness and brutal oppression. The properties of the subjects and of the republic do not belong to him. Like a trustee he is required to protect, but can not dispossess. The same holds true for the persons of the subjects, as the prince has the right of the sword to punish the wicked, but is not entitled to punish the good and the wicked alike. God has, in fact, ordained princely power so that the wicked are restrained from doing evil and the good men may live in peace.<sup>188</sup> The republic is entrusted to him so that the people may live in justice, which is the primary goal for which men gathered in republics.<sup>189</sup> And with justice come the blessings of peace and friendship. Under the rule of a just prince, the subjects may enjoy the most precious good of liberty, in the sense of civil liberty, a good which is the light of men's life, whereas servitude is the image of death.<sup>190</sup>

Like health, civil liberty is priceless, and the prince is never entitled to restrict it without just cause.<sup>191</sup> If he does so, he acts as a tyrant who misuses the power entrusted to him. Since the tyrant treats the republic as his servant and property the political and moral marriage is dissolved.<sup>192</sup>

If justice and the common good are destroyed, the republic itself vanishes. The marriage is no longer moral and political, and the wife, the republic, loses her liberty and her dowry. The distinctive features of the tyrant are in fact unnecessary confiscations and the levying of unjust taxes to satisfy his selfishness. Where a tyrant dominates, writes Lucas, there is no society.<sup>193</sup> The restoration of the republic demands the removal of the tyrant. Since the tyrant is a public enemy, tyrannicide is not only justified but praiseworthy.

By forging the concept of the moral and political matrimony, Lucas

<sup>187</sup> "Omnis actus regius debet super aequitate fundari," c.11.70.5, n. 36.

<sup>188</sup> "Potestas quippe regia constituta est, ut mali coercentur a malo, et boni inter malos quiete vivant," c.11.71.1., n. 1.

<sup>189</sup> See c.10.1., n. 4, where Lucas provides an orthodox Ciceronian definition of "civitas."

<sup>190</sup> See c. 11.48.1, n. 10.

<sup>191</sup> "Homines . . . quorum gratia bona omnia sunt inducta . . . et qui sunt bonis omnibus digniores . . . eorum salus et libertas aestimari non potest," c.11.48.1., n. 10.

<sup>192</sup> "Tyrannus est qui violenta dominatione populum premit," c.10.31.42., n. 2.

<sup>193</sup> "Nulla est societas cum tyrannis et potius summa destructio est," c.12.63.1., n. 74.



de Penna was transferring to the prince and the republic the corporative and organic elements that the canonists had elaborated to define the relationship between Christ and his vicars, and the body of the Church. This was a step of remarkable ideological importance that gave unprecedented nobility to the concept of political community.

The notion of the moral and political marriage, however, seems to be the result of another borrowing, this time not from the intellectual armory of the Church, but from that of the republican tradition. This was mainly from Aristotle, via Aquinas' commentary, though with substantial reworkings. Conveniently readapted to suit Lucas' tenet of the superiority of monarchical rule, Aristotle's notion of the political rule of man over wife, and the parallel between the good political man and the physician, served nicely to enable Lucas to elaborate the image of a moderate princely rule.

No less significant, however, is Lucas' use of Roman sources. Indeed, the discussion that led him to the formulation of the concept of the moral and political marriage begins with a reference to Lucan's *Pharsalia*, where the poet qualifies Cato as father and husband to the City of Rome.<sup>194</sup> Once again a borrowing with important transformations: the Roman *princeps*, like Cato, who deserves the title of husband and father to the republic, is simply a citizen who has served in office with outstanding virtue and devotion to the public good. Lucas' prince, to whom he affixes the attributes of the Roman prince, is an absolute ruler or the Emperor himself. Though not as lofty as the association with the Church's mystical body, the Aristotelian attribute of "political," enriched with the qualities of the Roman prince, was far from ignoble.

Referred to kingly or princely rule, the adjective "political" loses its association with the self-governing community, but it retains the commitment to justice and the common good. Conversely, the adjective "political" indicates that the king possesses less power than a non-political king, and must accept checks and limitations. The label "political" clearly separates the prince from the tyrant, and makes him resemble a republican ruler. When advocates of monarchical government resorted to the word "*politicus*," they always intended to attach to the image of the monarch some of the

<sup>194</sup> "Item princeps si verum dicere vel agnoscere volumus . . . est maritus reipublicae iuxta illud Lucani . . ." It follows the quotation from *Pharsalia*, II, 388: "urbi pater urbique maritus."

connotations that belonged to the vocabulary of the *respublica*: the rule of law, the commitment to justice and the common good, moderation, electivity, or various combinations of those.<sup>195</sup>

The most famous, and perhaps influential, combination of "political" and "kingly" is, of course, Aquinas' definition of imperial dominion as "*dominium regale et politicum*." Imperial rule, he writes in the twelfth chapter of Bk. 4 of the *De regimine principum*, is a form of domination that holds the center between kingly and political domination ("*medium tenet inter politicum et regale*"). There are three qualities that make the imperial dominion comparable to the political rule, as he explains in ch. 20 of the same book. In imperial and political dominion alike, rulers succeed each other by election. Secondly, the imperial title was not transmitted to the heirs. Finally, emperors succeeded one another by pure usurpation, just as the consuls of the late republic did.

On the other hand, the empire is similar to the monarchical regime because the emperor possesses full jurisdiction, has the right to levy taxes and to legislate. Like a king, the emperor is ornamented with the crown, the symbol of regal power. Lastly, emperors have an arbitrary power over their subjects, and this makes them different from the consuls or political rulers.<sup>196</sup>

As we have seen, the "*regimen politicum*" is, according to Aquinas' own definition, a regime where the citizenry appoints the magistrates for a limited span of time in order to rule in justice under the laws of the city. Leaving aside the element of self-government (which of course is absent in every application of the attribute "political" to imperial or monarchical regimes) it still sounds forced to call a regime "political"; where the sovereign has arbitrary power over his subjects ("*arbitraria potestas*").

Even for an advocate of monarchy, to deserve the qualification "political," a regime must meet a number of basic requirements: the rule of law, consent, the implementation of the common good. As we have seen, combinations among elements, as well as specific interpretations of each element, changed in the hands of different writers. But,

<sup>195</sup> An interesting example is John of Salisbury, who in 1159 composed the *Policraticus*, a work that had a remarkable influence on the Italian jurists, particularly Lucas de Penna; see Walter Ullmann, "The influence of John of Salisbury on medieval Italian jurists," *English Historical Review*, 59, (1944), pp. 384-392.

<sup>196</sup> "a consulibus sive rectoribus politicis"; Aquinas, *De regimine principum*, Bk. III, ch. 20, J. Mathis (ed.), p. 62.

without a recognition of some sort of the rule of law, or the consent of the ruled, or the commitment to the common good, the regime would appear to be tyrannical, not political.

A political regime may be more than all of this. It may be a popular regime, as Bartolus translated Aristotle's *politia*,<sup>197</sup> that is, a regime where the sovereign power belongs to the citizenry. But it cannot be less. Although the range of application of the attribute "political" defined by the jurists was quite comprehensive, it did not include tyranny. What remained within the confines of political life was a precious good, to be preserved with the greatest care by means of the art of making and administering the laws.

By the end of the Trecento, the civilians had defined the boundaries of *civil discipline* and enhanced its status. By describing the art of law as the political discipline *par excellence*, they transferred to politics the eminence of the laws and of law-making. To a large extent, the fourteenth-century jurists continued the tradition of the political virtues and Aristotelianism, and enriched the legacy of Roman civil wisdom, thereby preparing the intellectual background for the Humanists' celebration of politics.

<sup>197</sup> See Bartolus of Sassoferrato, "*De regimine civitatis*," in D. Quaglioni, *Politica e diritto nel Trecento italiano*, p. 150.

## CHAPTER 2

### *The philosophy of the city and the political man*

The history of the acquisition of the idea of politics reached its turning point in the works of the Civic Humanists. Drawing on the traditions that conjoined in the reconstruction of the language of politics (the doctrine of political virtues, civil law and Aristotelianism), the civic Humanists of the Quattrocento completed the elaboration of the idea of politics as civil philosophy.<sup>1</sup> It was politics' highest moment of glory: not only did it possess its own coherent language, it was also recognized as the most excellent human endeavor.

The celebration of politics as the art of the republic went hand in hand with the rejection of the art of the state, a base art of attaining power and using public institutions for private purposes. Politics and the art of the state were regarded by the Quattrocento humanists as terms of antithesis, just as the "man of state" was the corrupted and degenerated counterpart of the good citizen.<sup>2</sup> Whereas the "civil man" devoted to the common good was pointed to as the highest ideal, the statesman who is prepared to commit any sort of wicked action to attain power, and is glad to serve the powerful in order to dominate his fellow-citizens, was scorned as the most depraved of men.

One of the earliest portraits of the Humanist political man may be found in Petrarch himself, in the second half of the Trecento. In his account of the ideal *rector reipublicae* the spiritual father of Italian Humanism resorted to the language of political virtues, Aristotelism and civil law. In a long letter of November 1373 to Francesco da Carrara, the *Signore* of Padua, Petrarch commits himself to the task of

<sup>1</sup> The intellectual debt of the Humanists to the late medieval rhetoricians and Scholastic philosophers has been emphasised, from a different perspective, by P. O. Kristeller. See for instance P. O. Kristeller, "Humanism and Scholasticism in the Italian Renaissance", in *Renaissance Thought and its Sources*, M. Mooney (ed.), New York, 1979, passim.

<sup>2</sup> On the contrast between the statesman and the political man in later European political language see P. L. Weinacht, "Der Politiker als 'Staatsmann'," *Civitas*, 9 (1970), pp. 75-77.

providing his patron with an ideal portrait in which he can mirror himself. Petrarch's main source is Cicero, and his model ruler ("*rei publice gubernator*") is a variation on the theme of the *Dream of Scipio* that he quotes at the outset of the text.<sup>3</sup> Although Cicero was a pagan, assures Petrarch, his precepts on the rulership of the republic are totally acceptable also for a Christian. Particularly, a ruler should keep in mind Cicero's advice that the most secure foundation of the sovereign's power is the love of the subjects. A prince should therefore strive to gain his subjects' love while making himself feared only by the wicked. To attain these goals he must simply be just, merciful and generous to all his subjects. As Cicero has explained, expediency can never be divorced from honesty, and what is just must have priority over what is expedient. The pursuit of virtue has then to be his constant concern, always remembering that virtue is the ladder which leads to perennial glory.<sup>4</sup>

From Aristotle the ruler must learn that he should be like a good administrator, not like a tyrant ("*ut administrator not ut dominus*"). He should then avoid all the expenses that are not required by the interest and the splendor of the city.<sup>5</sup> This is not only the most just, but also the safest policy to maintain the city.

As the Roman Law states, to be just means to give to each his due, not to harm anyone except for the gravest reason and, even in this case, to incline to mercy. You shall never forget, exhorts Petrarch using Lucas de Penna's words, that "the republic is a body of which you are the head" ("*unum enim corpus est res publica cuius tu capus es*").<sup>6</sup> You should then love your subjects like your body. To discharge your onerous duties, concludes Petrarch, you should seek the help of men who are expert in civil wisdom and love justice. Their expertise and their commitment to justice will assist you in ruling as the most just *rector rei publice* paralleling the greatest rulers of all times.

While Petrarch could only try to teach a *Signore* how to become a good ruler, Coluccio Salutati had also the chance to put into practice the ideal of the Humanist political man during his tenure as Chancellor of the Florentine republic from 1375 to his death in 1406. The Florentine Chancellor was a bureaucrat or administrator whose

<sup>3</sup> Francesco Petrarca, *Ad Magnificum Franciscum de Carraria Padue dominum, qualis esse debeat qui rem publicam regit*, in U. Dotti (ed.), *Epistole*, Turin, 1978, p. 771; English trans. in B. G. Kohl, R.G. Witt, *The Earthly Republic*, Philadelphia, 1978, pp. 35-78. <sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 807.

<sup>5</sup> *Politics*, 1314b, 40 (Moerbeke transl.), Susemihl (ed.), p. 583.

<sup>6</sup> Francesco Petrarca, *Epistole*, p. 778.

main duty was to write the official letters of the republic. Salutati discharged his duty with strenuous devotion and brought to his work all the weight of his Humanistic culture.<sup>7</sup> During his chancery, the republic had to face serious internal and external threats: the Ciompi's upheavals, the war against Pope Gregory XI and, above all, the mortal duel against Gian Galeazzo Visconti, the Duke of Milan. Called to assume the chancery in the most difficult times of the republic, Salutati became the symbol of the defense of liberty against tyranny.<sup>8</sup> For him, politics was a commitment to liberty; the sole value that makes life worth living. A task to be accomplished with prudence and devotion, sustained by a deep knowledge of the human world and the mastery of the art of persuasion.

His letters and speeches illuminate the conception of politics as civil philosophy. Politics, remarks Salutati in a letter from December, 1374 is a hard and arduous task that does not give happiness or material rewards, as many people seem to believe. That is unless, of course, one abuses power and uses public institutions for private purposes.<sup>9</sup> A true civil man must keep in mind the words of Emperor Adrianus when he said that he intended to rule in the full awareness that the republic belongs to the people, not to him ("*se rempublicam gesturum, ut sciret rem populi esse, non propriam*").<sup>10</sup> The good ruler must be prepared to serve out of a sense of duty toward his own city. As he responded to a friend who advised him to flee Florence infested by plague, it is a duty of the citizens to remain in the city in moments of danger. To abandon the city and one's own fellow-citizens would contradict all moral principles.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>7</sup> For excellent reviews of the literature on the ideas and the political role of Florentine Chancellors see R. Black, "The political thought of the Florentine Chancellors," *Historical Journal*, 29 (1986), pp. 991-1003, and, *Benedetto Accolti and the Florentine Renaissance*, Cambridge, 1985, pp. 115-138.

<sup>8</sup> See E. Garin, "I cancellieri umanisti della Repubblica fiorentina da Coluccio Salutati a Bartolomeo Scala," in E. Garin, *La cultura filosofica del Rinascimento italiano*, Florence, 1961, pp. 3-18.

<sup>9</sup> "Sic de primoribus urbium contingit, quos inter populorum diversa indiscretaque studia oportet multis anxiiisque laboribus ac damnis patrie naviculam regere, qui tamen quadam auctoritatis umbra vulgo quieti putantur felices et leti fructum de republica reportare," *Epistolario di Coluccio Salutati*, F. Novati (ed.), Rome, 1891, I, p. 193.

<sup>10</sup> *Epistolario di Coluccio Salutati*, F. Novati (ed.), Rome, 1893, II, p. 40 (letter to Charles of Durazzo, 1381).

<sup>11</sup> "Inhonesta est igitur ista fuga quam facitis, que contraria quidem est cunctis virtutibus, que verum sunt honeste pulcritudinis fundamentum," *Epistolario di Coluccio Salutati*, II, p. 88 (Letter to Antonio di Ser Chello from August 1383). In a letter from 1384 (?) to Landolfo Caiazza, Salutati reiterates his ideal of political activity as unlimited commitment to the good of the country; *Epistolario di Coluccio Salutati*, II, p. 133.

While politics is exclusively the art of the city, tyranny can be assimilated to the despotic rule of the household, as Salutati wrote in the *De Tyranno*, composed in 1400. What the Greeks called despotic rule is the rule over slaves and beasts to preserve the welfare of the owner. The tyrant resembles the despot insofar as their goal is to pursue what is profitable to them and increases their wealth. Tyrannic rule comes closer to economics than all other forms of government (“*Tyrannus . . . magis cum iconomico convenit*”). Furthermore, since tyranny – both in the sense of usurpation and unjust rule – is rule against the laws, it is also the opposite of political rule (“*principatus politicus*”) that Salutati, following Ptolemy of Lucca, defines as authority limited by the laws (“*autoritate restricta legibus*”).<sup>12</sup>

The monarchical rule of one man may still be called “political,” if the king is a good and wise man.<sup>13</sup> Between a tyrant and a king there is no affinity whatsoever: the former is wicked, the latter is good. The good king is bound by the laws and the laws that he promulgates are in turn laws of justice, truth and equity (“*lex iusticie, lex veritatis, et equitatis*”).<sup>14</sup> As the orb and the scepter, the symbols of regal authority, indicate, the king must embody the perfection of the virtues and be the guardian of law. The orb indicates perfection and the scepter conveys the idea of right and rectitude. Both the orb and the scepter are made of gold and, just as gold reverts to its original beauty after having been melted, so the good king must remain untouched by vices and corruption, preserving his splendor and majesty intact.<sup>15</sup> To be devoted to the republic, however, does not imply neglecting one’s own wife and children. The virtue of Count Napoleone Orsini, wrote Salutati to his son Nicola, exceeds that of the legendary Cato, because he was an excellent ruler and yet did not disregard his family as Cato did on account of his marble severity (“*marmorea quasi severitas*”).<sup>16</sup>

When just magistrates or a good prince rule, cities flourish and the citizens enjoy the most sweet liberty (“*dulcissima libertate*”), a celestial

<sup>12</sup> Coluccio Salutati, *De Tyranno*, I, 6, F. Ercole (ed.), Berlin and Leipzig, 1914, p. xiii; Eng. transl. in E. Emerton, *Humanism and Tyranny*, Cambridge, 1925, p. 77.

<sup>13</sup> “Nonne politicum est, et omnium sapientum sententiis diffinitum, monarchiam omnibus rerum publicarum conditionibus preferendam, si tamen contingat virum bonum et studiosum sapientie presidere?” *De Tyranno*, IV, 14, p. 1; *Humanism and Tyranny*, p. 108. In qualifying monarchical rule as “political,” Salutati contravenes the notion of political regime that he had approvingly discussed at the outset of the *De Tyranno* following the conventional Scholastic scheme; see *De Tyranno*, I, 6, p. xii, *Humanism and Tyranny*, pp. 76–77.

<sup>14</sup> *Epistolario di Coluccio Salutati*, II, p. 36.

<sup>15</sup> *Epistolario di Coluccio Salutati*, II, pp. 42–46.

<sup>16</sup> *Epistolario di Coluccio Salutati*, I, pp. 107–108.

good that surpasses all others riches of the world.<sup>17</sup> Writing in 1369 to a friend who had played a major role in restoring liberty in Lucca, Salutati stresses that nothing is nobler, greater and more valuable than liberty (*"quid supra libertatem dabis altius, maius, vel carius?"*).<sup>18</sup> As a people who succeed in ending their servitude know well, no joy in life can parallel the recovery of liberty. Liberty is a sweet restraint (*"dulce libertatis frenum"*) which consists in living under laws that rule over all the citizens according to the most just standard of equality. The citizens who live in liberty under just laws can enjoy the most pleasant goods of life. For the subjects of a tyranny, on the contrary, all their most precious goods are at the mercy of the tyrant, and civil life is only a source of sorrow and fear.

As Hans Baron has remarked, Salutati's civic humanism suffered important limitations, particularly because of his attachment to the Trecento's ideal of the *Imperium Romanum*, and his uncertainties concerning the excellence of the active, over the contemplative, life.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, Salutati made a major contribution to the diffusion of the notion of politics as the noble art of the republic. His *De Nobilitate legum et medicinae*, composed in 1399, may be regarded as the manifesto of the humanist celebration of politics.<sup>20</sup>

The controversy over the comparative merit of medicine and laws had been inaugurated by Petrarch himself in 1351-2 and went on, as we shall see, throughout the fifteenth century.<sup>21</sup> The *"disputa delle arti,"* as it was called, was actually one of the most intense confrontations between Humanists and Scholastics. The former supported the excellence of practical disciplines and the human world, the latter championed the nobility of scientific knowledge and nature. Salutati's pamphlet, composed in response to the argument of a physician called Bernardo of Florence, set the tone and provided the line of argument that later humanists used in the pursuit of the *querelle*. Salutati begins his challenge to the idea of the superiority of medicine and knowledge of nature over the laws and human world by

<sup>17</sup> *Invectiva in Antonium Luschum vicentinum*, in E. Garin (ed.), *Prosatori latini del Quattrocento*, Milan-Naples (s.d.), p. 15.

<sup>18</sup> *Epistolario di Coluccio Salutati*, I, p. 90 (Letter to Niccolosio Bartolomei from April, 1369).

<sup>19</sup> See Hans Baron, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance*, I, pp. 79-96; see also *In Search of Florentine Civic Humanism*, Princeton, 1988, I, p. 135, where Baron qualifies Salutati as "a transitional figure."

<sup>20</sup> Baron regards the *De Nobilitate*, as well as other works, as "by-paths or digressions"; *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance*, I, p. 92. I think that the *De Nobilitate* is, on the contrary, an important text, at least for the study of the acquisition of the idea of politics.

<sup>21</sup> See E. Garin, "Introduzione" to C. Salutati, *De nobilitate legum et medicinae*, Florence, 1947, p. 45.



defining what the law actually is. He then proceeds to define what medicine is and to compare the two disciplines. The treatise ends with a confutation of Bernardo's views, allowing Medicine itself to speak on its own behalf. Salutati begins his remarks by opposing Bernardo's argument that politics, not the law, may be called, with Aristotle, "architectural art." Politics and the laws, stresses Salutati, are actually the same thing ("*idem esse politicam atque leges*").<sup>22</sup> Identifying politics with the laws, Salutati was restating a position that the jurists of the fourteenth century had amply discussed, and that was ultimately derived from the Roman notion of *civilis sapientia* or *civilis ratio*.<sup>23</sup> The concept of "political reason" ("*politica ratio*") that he introduces in ch. 20 of the *De nobilitate* is a synonym of the Ciceronian "civil reason" ("*ratio civilis*").<sup>24</sup> Like the Trecento civilians, Salutati's notion of political reason refers to the rational activity of constructing a humane society grounded upon the law, not only the activity of ruling according to the norms of reason and justice. The emphasis is on the legal structure of society. For Salutati the assimilation of politics to legislation was not meant to be a reduction of the nobility of politics. Instead, understood as political reason, politics may legitimately claim the title of an "architectural art" that had been judiciously granted to it by Aristotle.

As Cicero has taught us, writes Salutati, the law is the rational norm of human life. Though we say that the law is a human creation, in fact true law comes from nature and as such its origin is ultimately divine. No human law can be called a true law if it violates the highest norm of equity, which is the precept of eternal reason.<sup>25</sup> The principle of Roman Law that says that the will of the prince has the force of law is correct, but it means that the true prince rules because of his wisdom and virtue, not his power. The ruler who violates the eternal principle of law is a tyrant. To have the force of law, and to be a law, are different things. An unjust command may have the force of law because of the power of him who issued it, or the cowardice of his subjects, or simply by mistake. All that, however, does not make an unjust command a law.<sup>26</sup>

To refute Bernardo's argument that laws lack universal value because they change according to times and circumstances and are

<sup>22</sup> *De nobilitate legum et medicinae*, p. 168.

<sup>23</sup> On the juridical background of Salutati see F. Novati, *La giovinezza di Coluccio Salutati (1331-1353)*, Turin, 1888.

<sup>24</sup> *De nobilitate legum et medicinae*, p. 170.

<sup>25</sup> *De nobilitate legum et medicinae*, p. 18.

<sup>26</sup> *De nobilitate legum et medicinae*, p. 243.

fruits of particular decisions referring to particular situations, Salutati relied upon Cicero's concept of law. In this context he does not resort to the Aristotelian ideal of the republic as a "partnership of all men aimed at the realization of all values," as it has been said.<sup>27</sup> "My Cicero" ("*Cicero meus*") – wrote Salutati – has clearly explained to us the nature and the task of the laws: although they are the outcome of human decisions, they embody the universal principle of the divine law of equity, and aim at the preservation of the city and the whole of humanity. True laws are universal precepts seeking the common good.<sup>28</sup> The task of political reason is that of introducing measure, proportion and justice into the human world – a task accomplished through the laws, which are the arrangement and the rule of political reason ("*politicae rationis institutio atque preceptio*").<sup>29</sup>

Both politics and laws aim at the preservation of human society. Politics' goal is the good citizen; so is the legislator's.<sup>30</sup> Their concern is the good and the order of the city and the whole of humanity. As Aristotle aptly said, the political good ("*bonum politicum*") is greater and nobler than the individual one. Politics bears the responsibility for the health of the soul, and men's happiness. True happiness is, in fact, political happiness ("*politica felicitas*"), the life of virtue in the humane city. Only politics, through laws, makes it available to men by creating the condition for a virtuous life. Since politics is responsible for the most precious goods, it clearly deserves the noblest rank among sciences.

Similar arguments were reiterated a few years later, by Leonardo Bruni, Salutati's pupil and successor as Chancellor of the republic, particularly in his translations of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, the *Politics* and the pseudo-*Economics*, where he presented Aristotle's political and moral thought as a philosophy of civil life, in the sense of active life informed by the sense of the right measure. Just as the *respublica* is

<sup>27</sup> See J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment. Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition*, Princeton, 1975, p. 66. Pocock also maintains that "the theory of the polis – which is, in a certain sense, political theory in its purest original form – was cardinal to the constitutional theory of Italian cities and Italian humanists" (p. 74). While it is certainly plausible to regard the theory of the polis as political theory in its purest form, it seems to me less plausible to describe it as the cardinal component of the Italian cities and the Italian humanists. The theory of the *respublica*, particularly in its Ciceronian version, was at least as "cardinal."

<sup>28</sup> *De nobilitate legum et medicinae*, p. 132; see also pp. 16–19.

<sup>29</sup> *De nobilitate legum et medicinae*, p. 198.

<sup>30</sup> "Intendit politica conservationem humane societatis; hoc idem intendit et lex. Vult politica civem bonum; et quid aliud latores legum suis institutionibus moliuntur?" *De nobilitate legum et medicinae*, p. 170.

governed by measure and proportion, so must be the lives of the citizens. Neither a life of ascetic renunciation of worldly goods, nor a life of restless pursuit of glory, riches or power will do. Instead, there must be a well-balanced willingness to cherish the joys that life can offer us, and to accept the limits and the evils that accompany the human condition.

Human intercourse, not buildings or walls, makes a city. And the city will survive as long as men learn how to converse and to face their common problems through language and persuasion. Wealth, commerce and crafts also are an important component of a harmonious and well-balanced civil life. For Bruni, Aristotle was the teacher of an ethics of measure, and the master of rhetoric and economics. He was a true philosopher of the city and as such a master of politics.<sup>31</sup>

For Bruni, the part of morals that the Greeks called "Politica" must be translated as rendered by "*precepta circa rempublicam*." The time has come, he stresses in the "Prologue" to his translation of Aristotle's *Pseudo-Economics*, to use our own vocabulary instead of the alien Greek words. What pertained to "*politici intellectus et theoria*," in Moerbeke's words, becomes, in Bruni's vocabulary, a matter of "*civilis intelligentia et speculationis*."<sup>32</sup> While Moerbeke kept the Greek word *politia* to denote the constitution of the city, Bruni refers to it with the Latin word *respublica*.<sup>33</sup> In the shift from *politia*-rooted words to *civitas*-rooted words, the image of the city is expressed in a vocabulary that would become predominant in Humanist and Renaissance political literature. Beyond common protection and the satisfaction of material needs, the *civitas* is the human community where the citizens have in common the laws, the magistracies, and religious and public ceremonies. In a true city the relationships between citizens are relationships of friendship and solidarity. When envy and animosity take the place of friendship, the city is dissolved into a multitude of strangers or enemies.<sup>34</sup>

A well-ordered city is a self-governing community where the citizens alternate in public offices. Only in such a city can men enjoy happiness and a truly human life. If the citizenry has no place in the

<sup>31</sup> See E. Garin, "La fortuna dell'etica aristotelica nel Quattrocento," in *La cultura filosofica del Rinascimento italiano*, Florence, 1961, pp. 60-71.

<sup>32</sup> *Aristotelis politicorum libri octo*, Paris, 1506, Bk. vii, 2.

<sup>33</sup> *Aristotelis politicorum libri octo*, Bk. iv, 1. <sup>34</sup> *Aristotelis, politicorum libri octo*, Bk. iii, 6.

institutions of the city, the city cannot be regarded as well-ordered.<sup>35</sup> The common good, he stresses in the preface to his translation of the *Politics*, is nobler and higher than the particular good: the more common the good, the more it is divine. A civil society, where men can attain self-sufficiency and the perfection of their moral life, is the most precious common good. The art that teaches what a *civitas* is, and how it is to be preserved, deserves the highest rank among human disciplines.<sup>36</sup> Those who neglect the disciplines of the human world in order to devote themselves to the knowledge of nature, Bruni had stressed in his *Isagogicon moralis disciplinae* (1421-4), seem to neglect what is truly our concern ("*re nostra*") and attend to something that is alien to us.<sup>37</sup> Without providing a single word in substitution for the Greek *Politia*, Bruni defines politics as the art of the cities and of the rule and the preservation of the cities.<sup>38</sup>

The works of Aristotle also provided important elements for the redefinition and the acquisition of the classical concept of political man. The true political man, like the good legislator, must know the best constitution to be introduced in a city, given the specific features of the people and the place. The creation of a political constitution is the masterpiece of the political man. However, it is a no less praiseworthy and difficult task to restore an already existing city, than it is to found a new one. Both tasks can be managed only by the true political man, the "*vere politicum*" in Moerbeke's translation,<sup>39</sup> the "*vere civilem hominem*" in Bruni's version.<sup>40</sup>

The political man cannot rule unjustly or despotically. To wonder whether it is permissible for a political man to be unjust is plainly absurd.<sup>41</sup> The virtues that the political man must possess are the same that ordinary citizens must also have. Nevertheless, the political man

<sup>35</sup> *Aristotelis, politicorum libri octo*, Bk. II, 8.

<sup>36</sup> "Nulla profecto convenientior discipline homini esse potest quae quid sit civitas et quod respublica intelligere et per que conservatur intereatque civilis societas non ignorare," Leonardo Bruni, *In libros politicorum Aristotelis de greco in latini traducto prologus*, in H. Baron (ed.), Leonardo Bruni Aretino, *Humanistisch-Philosophische Schriften*, Leipzig and Berlin, 1928, p. 73.

<sup>37</sup> L. Bruni, "Isagogicon moralis disciplinae ad Galeottum Ricasolanum," in E. Garin, *Filosofi italiani del Quattrocento*, Florence, 1942, p. 106-107. English translation in G. Groffith, J. Hankins, D. Thompson, *The Humanism of Leonardo Bruni*, Binghamton, New York, 1987.

<sup>38</sup> "de civitatibus eorumque gubernatione conservationemque traduntur," *Aristotelis politicorum libri octo*, Prologus. <sup>39</sup> *Aristotelis politicorum libri octo*, (Moerbeke trans.), VI, 1.

<sup>40</sup> *Aristotelis politicorum libri octo*, (Bruni's trans.), Bk. IV, 1.

<sup>41</sup> "existimare civile disciplinam esse dominari . . . hoc autem absurdum," *Aristotelis politicorum libri octo*, (Bruni's trans.), Bk. VII, 2.

must possess an outstanding degree of prudence and be capable of foreseeing dangers in advance.<sup>42</sup> The possibility of the humane city, then, is contingent upon the ruler's and the citizens' political prudence.

As with his mentor Salutati, Bruni's celebration of politics was the follow-up of the commitment to the ideal of the *civitas*. While Salutati's *De Nobilitate* may be considered the manifesto of the Humanist ideal of politics, Bruni's *Laudatio florentinae urbis*, composed in 1403-4, may be regarded as the blueprint of the Humanist celebration of the city. As Nicolai Rubinstein has written, Bruni's account of the Florentine Constitution in the *Laudatio* depicted the ideal rather than the actual city.<sup>43</sup> In his ideal city liberty and civic equality rest upon the most admirable order and balance of its institutions. Like different tunes that compose a harmony, every component of the city is appropriately ordered for the good of the whole. The offices are properly differentiated and disposed. Florence's constitution is therefore the example of the Ciceronian idea of order as allocation of everything in its right place, and a masterpiece of political prudence.<sup>44</sup> All the offices and the magistracies are ordered according to the city's most sacred values: law and liberty. Without law there can be no city; without liberty life is not worth living.<sup>45</sup> The Florentines' greatest preoccupation has always been, remarks Bruni, that of preventing the rise of tyranny. To secure the rule of law and liberty, they have devoted the utmost care to be sure that no magistrate, no matter how powerful, would ever be able to rule in contempt of the laws and act as a tyrant. To this purpose, all tenures are short term, and even the most sensitive magistracies are collegiate. Finally, and most importantly, the council of the citizens has the final say in the passing of the laws. The republic must be concerned with the preservation of civic equality and prevent the nobles and the wealthy from becoming too powerful. In this respect political prudence suggests the need to be benevolent to the neediest

<sup>42</sup> "in principio fit malum cognoscere sit non cuiuscuque, sed politici vir," *Aristoteles politicorum libri octo* (Moerbeke trans.), Bk. viii, 8; "tamquam malum ab initio exoriri cognoscere non cuius sit sed civilis viri," *Aristotelis politicorum libri octo*, (Bruni trans.), Bk. viii, 8.

<sup>43</sup> Nicolai Rubinstein, "Florentine constitutionalism and Medici ascendancy in the fifteenth century," in *Florentine Studies* (ed.) N. Rubinstein, London 1968, pp. 442-462, particularly p. 455.

<sup>44</sup> Leonardo Bruni, "Laudatio Florentinae Urbis," in H. Baron (ed.), *From Petrarch to Leonardo Bruni*, Chicago, 1968, pp. 258-259. <sup>45</sup> *Laudatio Florentinae Urbis*, p. 259.

and the weakest, and to be more severe against the powerful.<sup>46</sup> When the city is free, it truly belongs to the citizens. They share the institutions, the laws, the magistracies. They have the same hopes and the same fears, the same friends and enemies. Thus, to be a citizen of a free city is a great thing.<sup>47</sup>

Almost twenty-five years after the composition of the *Laudatio*, in 1427–8, Bruni again took up the ideal of the city in his *Oration for the Funeral of Nanni Strozzi*, a Florentine citizen who died in May, 1427 in battle against the forces of the Visconti Duke of Milan. On this occasion, Bruni placed a much stronger emphasis upon the conquests and the military achievements that allowed Florence to build a wide dominion, and to become the chief city of Tuscany. The celebration of the “popular” constitution, which protects the liberty and the equality of all the citizens, is mixed with praise for the conquest of Pisa and other large cities, recalling the forebears who conquered “all their neighbors” with their warlike virtue. What seems to count more in Bruni’s *Oratio* is being a citizen of a free city which dominates other cities and a large territory, rather than being simply a citizen of a free city that has succeeded in defending its liberty. In saying that military deeds incontrovertibly rank higher than the arts of peace, Bruni was rebuking Cicero’s teaching in the *De Officiis*.<sup>48</sup>

Elsewhere, however, Bruni drew on Cicero to shape his ideal of the political man. In *Cicero Novus*, composed in 1415, he pointed to Cicero as the ideal scholar and political man whose service as a consul benefited his country and as an orator served countless private persons, not to mention men of learning who have been helped by his scholarly works.<sup>49</sup> Cicero fulfilled two equally difficult and important

<sup>46</sup> *Laudatio Florentinae Urbis*, p. 262.

<sup>47</sup> An illuminating example of the humanist eulogy of the free city is provided by Lapo of Castiglionchio, a contemporary of Bruni: “Sanctissimum primo ac dulcissimum patriae nomen habet enim haec ad eam rem non parvas necessitudines, magnum est enim ex eadem esse civitate, praesertim ubi libere vivitur. multa sunt civibus inter se communia, iura leges, forum, senatus, honores magistratusque omnes, communis etiam hostis, communis spes commune periculum,” Lapo de Castiglionchio, in *Reden und Briefe Italienischer Humanisten*, Munich, 1970, p. 250. The passages are clearly borrowed from Cicero: “Civibus multa inter se sunt communia, forum, fana, porticus, viae, leges, iura, judicia, suffragia, consuetudines: praeterea et familiaritates multaeque cum multis res rationesque contractae.” *De Divinatione*, 2, 1.

<sup>48</sup> This point has been made by H. Baron, *In Search of Florentine Civic Humanism*, 1, p. 146 (the chapter is a revision of an earlier essay published in 1935).

<sup>49</sup> Leonardo Bruni, “Cicero Novus seu Ciceronis vitae,” in Leonardo Bruni, *Humanistische-Philosophische Schriften*, p. 114. English transl. in *The Humanism of Leonardo Bruni*, p. 187.

achievements: "when he was active in the republic that was mistress of the world, he wrote more than the philosophers living and studying at leisure; on the other hand, when he was mostly occupied in study and in writing books, he got more public business done than those who are involved in no literary endeavor."<sup>50</sup> Philosophical inquiry and political commitment were inseparable components of his *humanitas*. He derived from moral philosophy the wisdom he applied in the rule of the republic.

A few years later, in the *Isagogicon moralis disciplinae*, he stressed once again the importance of moral philosophy as the indispensable guide to life. This time, however, the sort of moral philosophy he recommends is explicitly Aristotelian. In his account of the moral virtues that ought to be cultivated, Bruni places a particular emphasis upon fortitude, which he calls "the fairest" and the most celebrated of all virtues.<sup>51</sup> It is indeed quite common, remarks Bruni, for fortitude to appropriate the term "virtue" for its own.<sup>52</sup> Yet, the virtue most necessary for the political man is prudence, that teaches how to evaluate the means that are conducive to the common good.<sup>53</sup> The most orthodox Ciceronian portrait of the civil man can be found in Matteo Palmieri's *Vita Civile*, composed between 1435 and 1440, a work that Hans Baron has described as designed "to recreate the civic attitude of the *De Officiis* in its entirety."<sup>54</sup> In the dialogue, Agnolo Pandolfino instructs Franco Sacchetto and Luigi Guicciardino, two younger Humanists of the generation of Palmieri actively involved in Florence's political life. As Palmieri explains in the Proem, the *Vita Civile* is the result of his investigations about the most perfect life that men can achieve given the inescapable imperfection of the human condition. After careful study of classics, he came to the conclusion that the best that we can do in our mortal life is to live virtuously in an *optima respublica*, enjoying a good reputation and attending to our own business without harming others.<sup>55</sup> The best life that we can possibly live on earth is the civil life, as the Latin and Greek authorities have

<sup>50</sup> *The Humanism of Leonardo Bruni*, pp. 187–188; *Humanistisch-Philosophische Schriften*, p. 115.

<sup>51</sup> *The Humanism of Leonardo Bruni*, p. 275; *Humanistisch-Philosophische Schriften*, p. 30.

<sup>52</sup> *Humanistisch-Philosophische Schriften*, p. 30; *The Humanism of Leonardo Bruni*, p. 275.

<sup>53</sup> *Humanistisch-Philosophische Schriften*, pp. 39–40; *The Humanism of Leonardo Bruni*, p. 282.

<sup>54</sup> "The memory of Cicero's civic spirit in the medieval centuries and the Florentine Renaissance," (1938), now reissued in *In Search of Florentine Civic Humanism*, 1, p. 125.

<sup>55</sup> Matteo Palmieri, *Vita Civile*, G. Belloni (ed), Florence 1982, p. 4. Palmieri was simply paraphrasing Cicero's opening of the *De Oratore*.

taught. The *Vita Civile* intended, in fact, to popularize the wisdom of the ancients, unfortunately still available only to a few.

The work is divided into four books. The first deals with the education of the children. The second illustrates the virtues of prudence, fortitude and temperance. The third is entirely dedicated to justice, the most excellent of all virtues and the most necessary to preserve a well-ordered republic. The fourth discusses the wealth that is necessary for the prosperity and the ornament of the city. Imitating Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis*, the *Vita Civile* ends with an imaginary narrative about the felicity that awaits those men who devoted their lives to the services of the republic and followed the principles of civil life.

Although the precepts of civil life concern all the citizens, Palmieri's civil man is above all the model for magistrates and rulers of republics. To the magistrates, Palmieri calls the famous Ciceronian principle that they must no longer act as private, but only as public, persons, as if they embodied the whole city. Their sole concern must therefore be to support and defend the dignity and the honor of the republic and preserve its laws. They must at all times have in view the good of the whole city and never forget that the citizens have entrusted them with the most precious goods of the city.<sup>56</sup> When a good citizen is called to serve in office – stresses Palmieri – he must keep in mind that he is the representative of the universal person of the city and no longer a private individual. When he is in office, he is like the living republic.<sup>57</sup> To him have been entrusted the dignity and the common good of the republic, and, to discharge his duty well, he must never forget the two principles that Cicero derived from Plato: to leave his private concerns aside and to take care of the whole body of the republic without favoring some at the expense of others. Like a tutor, the governors of a republic must aim at the good of the ruled, not of the ruler. Yet good rulers are rare. It is, in fact, very difficult for men to set aside private interests and to be exclusively devoted to the common good and the interests of others.

Furthermore, rulers must be capable of making the right choices

<sup>56</sup> Matteo Palmieri, *Vita Civile*, pp. 99–100.

<sup>57</sup> “Ogni buono cittadino che è posto in magistrato dove rapresenti alcuno principale membro civile, inanzi a ogni altra cosa intenda non essere privata persona, ma rapresentare l'universale persona di tutta la città, et essere facta animata republica. Conosca essere commessa in lui la publica degnità et il bene commune essere lasciato nella sua fede.” *Vita Civile*, pp. 131–132.



and identifying the good of the republic correctly; only prudent men are then suited to rule a republic. Besides prudence, the civil man must possess fortitude, greatness and the constancy of mind that enables him to stand firmly against adverse fortune and defend the right claims of everybody. He must also display modesty, or moderation, the virtue that instructs us to maintain the right order in speaking and acting, restraining our passions.

Above all else, the civil man must be just. Justice, writes Palmieri, following Cicero again, is the queen of virtues. It embodies all the others and can be correctly regarded as the empress of virtues. On justice depends the conservation of civil society and friendship among men. Without justice no city or state or public government can last. Justice gives to each his due, takes care of the whole body of the republic, as well as each individual member, preserves peace, unity and concord. Unjust rulers, on the contrary, have always caused the dissolution of republics and the loss of liberty.<sup>58</sup> If justice is properly enacted, both in domestic and foreign politics, the city will remain healthy and powerful, capable of facing any internal or external threat.

Justice, explains Palmieri at the outset of Book III, is the highest civil good ("*sommo bene civile*") and the foundation of the good order of the republic. Every citizen should be totally committed to justice: nothing is in fact more precious than the safety of our country. When we die, our last thoughts always go to our sons and our country. We would like to be sure that they will survive and flourish after our death; as long as our country and our descendants live, we are not completely dead.<sup>59</sup> Because the virtue of the civil man preserves a good which is eternal, its reward is accordingly perennial glory and eternal beatitude. As Plato and Cicero correctly explained, the souls of all the good rulers and the excellent civil men ("*optimi civili*") return after their death immediately to heaven, and the reward is indeed proportioned to the good that they did in their life.

Palmieri concludes the *Vita civile* with his own reelaboration of the *Somnium Scipionis*. Instead of Scipio the younger, the hero of his

<sup>58</sup> "Le divisioni civili sono quelle che sempre hanno disfatto et per l'avenire disfaranno ogni repubblica. Niuna cosa è tanto cagione delle discordie et sedizioni civili quanto gl'ingiusti governi. Piglion exemplo coloro che posseggono la dolce libertà [. . .], ministrino debitamente il dovere a ciascuno privato et in publico accio ne segua l'unito amore della cittadinesca concordia, le quali cose, secondo gli approvatissimi philosophi sono la vera forteza et principali stabilimenti del politico vivere," Matteo Palmieri, *Vita Civile*, pp. 136-137. <sup>59</sup> *Vita Civile*, pp. 103-105.

narrative is Dante, and the role of Scipio the elder is played by Charlemagne. A friend of Dante who died fighting for his country in the battle of Campaldino (1289) reports to him that after death he found himself in the middle of the universe on the border between the mutable sublunar world and the world of immutable celestial bodies. A venerable old man, revealed later on to be the great emperor Charlemagne, welcomes him and explains that he is between life and death, between eternal happiness and perennial pain, between light and darkness. "Because of your virtue and your devotion to your country you may go upward toward eternal life, happiness, and light. God gladly opens the doors of eternity to the rulers of the republics who preserved civil life." As soon as the emperor concludes his speech, Dante's friend realizes that he is in the first of the nine circles of eternal light and he could clearly see the souls of the great citizens who ruled their republics in justice: Fabricius, Curius, Fabius, Scipio, Metellus and many others. "As you may see," says Charlemagne, "the soul of civil men joins God and attains eternal life."<sup>60</sup>

When Matteo Palmieri died in 1475, Alamanno Rinuccini delivered the funeral oration praising the author of the *Vita Civile* as a model of harmonious balance between civic commitment and pursuit of the *studia humanitatis*. Praising Palmieri, Alamanno was setting out his own ideal of the civil man. As a member of one of the most illustrious Florentine families, Alamanno always played an important role in Florentine politics within the Medicean party. In 1475-6, however, his political fortunes declined after an unsuccessful diplomatic mission to Rome that cost him the enmity of the young Lorenzo de' Medici. Embittered and resentful of Lorenzo's regime, Alamanno composed the dialogue *Of Liberty* in 1479, a year after the Pazzi's conspiracy. In the 1480s, he returned to political life and held important offices including a post on the board of governors of the growing University of Florence. He held important positions under the republican regime of 1494, and remained politically active until his death in 1499.

In the dialogue *Of Liberty*, his spokesman is the "lover of liberty" (Eleutherius) forced to live in solitude because of the corruption of the times. The role of the civil man devoted to liberty is given to "the Truthful" (Alitheus). Asked to explain the idea of liberty, Alitheus provides an exemplary account of the conventional Humanist ideal.

<sup>60</sup> *Vita Civile*, pp. 200-208.

"Liberty," he remarks, after having entertained his friends with an elegant reading of Theocritus' *Bucolics* in Greek, "is a potentiality to live in freedom within the limits of the law and custom."<sup>61</sup> Only the wise man who is capable of moderating his passions realizes the potentiality for freedom, whereas the unwise man, who enslaves himself to passions, turns the potentiality for freedom into servitude which is the cause of restless dissatisfaction and unhappiness. The free man who has attained peace and tranquillity of the soul can direct his life to the ends that he elects, and is truly happy.

Along with wisdom, liberty also requires fortitude. As Cicero says, stresses Eleutherius, liberty is the property of a strong mind who refuses to obey another "unless his commands are just and legitimate and serve a useful purpose."<sup>62</sup> Only he who possesses fortitude can speak freely and put himself at risk for the good of the republic in spite of the dangers, as a true civil man has to do.

In saying that the boundaries of liberty are law and customs, Alitheus refers again to Cicero's paradox that, in order to be free, we must obey the law. The constraints that the law imposes prevent us from enslaving ourselves to immoderate passions and our fellow citizens or our own desires. The law that prevents one man from raping another man's wife out of lust, makes us free, not slaves. On the other hand, when a man, or a few men, succeed in placing himself, or themselves, above the laws, the whole city is enslaved to their whims. Servitude of the city is the consequence of the lack of fortitude and the base ambition of the citizens who do not dare to stand up to the tyrant and his partisans and prefer to submit their lives to an alien will.

After Alitheus' passionate eulogy of liberty, it is the turn of Eleutherius to justify his choice of abandoning civil life to retire in solitude. Eleutherius begins with the same idea of wisdom as the safest guarantee for happiness, the ultimate goal of human life. What we should all seek, remarks Alitheus, is inner peace and tranquillity. We can achieve this goal either by keeping away all desires, or learning to moderate them. The first target is the most perfect and makes man similar to God. The second, though less perfect, is more in our reach and assures us that tranquillity of soul which true happiness consists of.

Although serving in office is a duty of the civil man, he cannot be asked to accept posts when that amounts to becoming a liar, a thief, a

<sup>61</sup> An English translation of the dialogue may be found in Renée Neu Watkins, *Humanism and liberty*, Columbia, South Carolina, 1978, pp. 193-222.

<sup>62</sup> *Humanism and Liberty*, p. 202.

robber, an unjust man, or the accomplice or the tool of wicked men. Our guide should once again be Cicero, who said that he always wished first to deserve public honors, second to be thought to deserve them, and only third actually to obtain them. When the city is under the domination of a tyrant, tranquillity and freedom of spirit cannot coexist with office holding and can be attained only with the solitary life cultivating the *studia humanitatis*. I shall go back to public life, stresses Eleutherius, only when honors can be obtained through justice and virtue, not servile flattery. Solitude means conversation with ourselves and with the great masters of the past, not idleness. If I am unwilling to adore, to flatter and to bow before the tyrant, concludes Eleutherius, can I be blamed?<sup>63</sup>

Even if mitigated by the *studia humanitatis* and the pleasures of country life in the beautiful Tuscan scenery, the withdrawal from political life is a condition of incompleteness. We have to make the best of it, but separation from the life of the city still limits our human potentialities. For most of the Florentine humanists of the generation of Rinuccini, the ideal to be followed is the civil man who attains the right balance between political commitment, domestic life, and the cultivation of the *studia humanitatis*.

An appropriate example is Donato Acciaiuoli (1429–79), a “Florentine citizen who serving the Republic, cultivated philosophy, and philosophizing ruled the Republic,” as the inscription over his tomb reads. As he wrote in 1448 to Giovanni, the Duke of Calabria, his ideal in life is the civil man who excels in fortitude, justice, liberality, as well as in the devotion to scholarship.<sup>64</sup> In another letter from 1449 to the younger Gabriele de’ Guicciardini, he emphasizes again his commitment to the *studia humanitatis*, which permits us to listen to the voices of the ancient wise men as if they were still with us. Their voices encourage us to cultivate the political virtues: to be temperate in prosperity, strong in adversities, prudent in public and private business, to love our fellow citizens, to honor our parents and relatives. The works of the ancient classic philosophers restrain those who are too bold and encourage those who are too slow.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>63</sup> *Humanism and Liberty*, p. 221.

<sup>64</sup> See E. Garin, “Donato Acciaiuoli cittadino fiorentino,” in *Medioevo e Rinascimento*, p. 206.

<sup>65</sup> “Numne enim ad bene vivendum magnopere confert? Cum nos rationibus et exemplis a vitiis revocet; cum nobis virtutem familiarem faciat; cum in felicitate temperantiam, in adversitate fortitudinem, in negotiis prudentiam doceat esse servandam; cum moneat quam caritatem patrie cives, quam pietatem natis parentes, quemve honorem parentibus debeant nati; cum nos optimis moribus muniat, ut facile mentem nostram ab illicitis cupiditatibus tueamur,” The letter is published in A. Della Torre, *Storia dell’Accademia Platonica di Firenze*, Florence, 1902, pp. 339–341.

Donato's main concern is the practical life of the city. City means measure, balance between the extremes; a goal much easier to miss than to reach, just as in man's life it is easier to do evil than good. There is nothing so simple as to indulge our passions and appetites. But when passions are left unchecked a city no longer exists. The right balance is something to construct, like a work of art.<sup>66</sup>

As a product of human art, the city is exposed to decay and corruption. The greatest responsibility is upon the rulers. As Plato taught, justice is the soul of the city (*"l'anima della città è la iustitia"*).<sup>67</sup> The main concern of the ruler must then be to administer justice properly. If the ruler does not respect justice because of ambition or weakness, he ruins the beautiful work of the city. The citizens too, with their immoderate appetites, may become the worst enemies of the city, as dangerous as external foes.<sup>68</sup>

The source of Donato Acciaiuoli's ethics of measure is Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, which he translated and commented on following the lectures delivered by Giovanni Argiropulo, the Greek philosopher at the University of Florence.<sup>69</sup> After the *Ethics* he translated the *Politics*, a necessary step, he wrote in the "Proem" composed in 1472, to recover the best of Aristotle's thought.

Aristotle's intention in writing the *Politics*, remarks Donato in his commentary, was to show the superiority of the art of the city. Through politics men can in fact moderate and rule the republic so that they can live the most happy lives on earth.<sup>70</sup> Even if civil discipline relies upon probable arguments, rather than infallible

<sup>66</sup> E. Garin, "Donato Acciaiuoli cittadino fiorentino," in *Medioevo e Rinascimento*, p. 213.

<sup>67</sup> M. Lentzen, *Reden Cristoforo Landinos*, Munich, 1974, pp. 49–50. "Io non dubito punto – wrote Donato – che, se questa divina virtù che ha mandato Iddio in terra, nelle mani nostre e degli altri che reggono e governano, si potesse vedere con occhi corporali, el suo splendore ne parebbe tanto che occuperebbe tutti e' nostri sensi, e c'incenderebbe e' nostri animi di uno ardente amore e desiderio inverso la sua bellezza e dignità, perchè ella è quella che è chiamata stella Hespero, ella è chiamata Lucifer, ella è decta regina di tutte le virtù morali ... Ella è regola e misura d'ogni operazione. Ella è quella che ci fa essere felici e beati," p. 50, no. 10.

<sup>68</sup> "O miseram patriam, quae non modo externas nationes et peregrinos populos hostes habet, sed etiam amantissimos filios – non qui sint, sed qui esse deberent – sedulo sentit loco acerbissimorum inimicorum." From a letter to Agnolo Baldesi, July, 1448, in *Storia dell'Accademia Platonica di Firenze*, p. 336.

<sup>69</sup> See Donato Acciaiuoli, *Florentini Expositio super libros Ethicorum Aristotelis in novam traductionem Iohannis Argyropuli Bizantii*, Florence, 1478.

<sup>70</sup> "Intentio igitur A. est ut post moralem et domesticam disciplinam civitatem constituat, et Rempublicam moderetur, in qua hominis, seu cives, quoad possint felicissime vivant," Donato Acciaiuoli, *In Aristotelis libros octo politicorum commentarii nunc primum in lucem editi* . . ., Venice, 1566, p. 9.

demonstrations, it is nonetheless the most excellent of practical sciences (“*excellentissima partium activarum scientia*”).

The text of the *Politics* gives Donato the chance to celebrate the greatness of those law-givers and rulers who did their best to ensure the happiness of their cities. The civil ruler, unlike the monarch, is subject to laws instituted in accordance with political prudence, and to the principle of alternation in office.<sup>71</sup> Aristotle correctly teaches us that ruling is different from dominating. Domination is over the slaves; over free men only civil rule is appropriate. In a household there is but one master and the others are servants, whereas a republic is a community of free and equal citizens and civil government is the rule of the whole citizenry through elective magistrates (“*plures per magistratus regunt*”). Moreover, he teaches that politics is the art of instituting a republic in reality, not of speculating upon the perfect republic. For such a task the political man needs an outstanding degree of prudence. His art resembles that of the architect and has nothing in common with the base art of ruling slaves or manual laborers.<sup>72</sup>

One year later, Donato completed the Italian translation of Leonardo Bruni’s, *History of Florence*. Like those of the *Ethics* and the *Politics*, he regarded the translation of Bruni’s *Historiae* as his own contribution to the philosophy of the city. The common good, writes Donato paraphrasing Aristotle, is the highest good because it concerns the many rather than the one. For rulers who are entrusted with the common good, knowledge of history is of crucial importance. The knowledge of the past places them in the best position to judge the present and the future properly and to make the right choices. The history of Florence, just like the heroic deeds of Plutarch’s *Parallel Lives*, can teach us styles of life and help us to construct our own city. The human city that embodies measure and balance was Donato’s main concern until his death in 1479, one year after the Pazzi’s conspiracy. With Donato’s death, stressed Cristoforo Landino in his funeral speech, the *patria* has lost an excellent citizen, a wise counselor, an eloquent orator.<sup>73</sup> Let us hope, he said at the end of his

<sup>71</sup> “In re. pu. sunt plures liberi atque equales: et horum alii president, alii parent: et ij rursus parent, et illi praesident,” In *Aristotelis libros octo politicorum commentarii*, p. 27.

<sup>72</sup> In *Aristotelis libros octo politicorum commentarii*, pp. 86b–88a.

<sup>73</sup> Rhetoric as an indispensable foundation of a good political community was a topical theme in humanistic literature. Language – wrote, for instance, Poliziano – “una res et dispersos primum homines in una moenia congregavit et dissidentes inter se conciliavit et legibus moribusque, omnique denique humano cultu civileque coniunxit. Quapropter etiam

speech, that the young will follow such an example of a true civil man.<sup>74</sup>

In the language of the Humanists of the fifteenth century, the free city where the law rules is referred to as “political” or “civil” life (“*vivere politico*”, “*vivere civile*”). In most cases it was a synonym for a republican or popular regime, one in which the citizenry possess the power of electing the magistrates and passing the laws.<sup>75</sup> “Political” became also a synonym for a good constitution, as the Venetian historian Lorenzo de’ Monaci wrote: “indeed, where the laws rule, there is a good polity, and the *politicum* is nothing but what is good.”<sup>76</sup> For Lorenzo de’ Monaci the perfect *political* regime is the mixed government, one that combines the virtues of monarchy, aristocracy and popular government.<sup>77</sup> Since the *political* regime guarantees the rule of law and the common good, it deserves the qualification of good government *par excellence*. The greatness of the constitution of Venice, stresses Lorenzo de’ Monaci following Enrico da Rimini, consists above all else in the fact that it insures the triumph of civil reason (“*civili ratione vivendi*”).<sup>78</sup>

In the political treatises of the early Quattrocento, however, “political life” did not mean only rule of law and common good, but also equality, justice and concord. A “political life” cannot allow a single citizen, or a few, to assume extraordinary power and control the institutions of the republic, because the excessive power of private citizens undermines the rule of law. A citizen of great wealth could easily influence, directly or indirectly, public deliberation and the

deinceps in omnibus bene constitutis beneque moratis civitatibus una omnium semper eloquentia effloruit summumque est fastigium consecuta,” in E. Garin (ed.), *Filosophi italiani del Quattrocento*, Florence, Le Monnier, 1942, p. 412; Poliziano’s passage is in fact a paraphrase of Cicero’s *De Inventione*: 1.2–3; on the importance of Cicero’s texts on rhetoric see J. Seigel, *Rhetoric and Philosophy in Renaissance Humanism*, Princeton, 1968.

<sup>74</sup> *Oratione di Cristoforo Landino nella morte di Donato Acciaiuoli*, in M. Letzen, *Reden Cristoforo Landinos*, pp. 81–89.

<sup>75</sup> See on this point N. Rubinstein, “The history of the word *politicus* in early-modern Europe,” in A. Pagden (ed.), *The Languages of Political Theory in Early-Modern Europe*, Cambridge, 1987, p. 45.

<sup>76</sup> “Ubi vero leges principantur, est vera politia, et politicum est nisi quod bonum est”; Lorenzo de’ Monaci, *Chronicon de rebus Venetis*, in L. Muratori, *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*, viii, Appendix (Venice, 1758, pp. 276–277. I am following N. Rubinstein’s translation in “The history of the word *politicus* in early-modern Europe,” pp. 45–46.

<sup>77</sup> “Principatus Venetus ex his tribus permixtus, super solidiori petra firmatus est. Habet ducem in similitudinem regis: habet Consilium sanissimum Rogatorium in similitudinem paucorum optimorum: habet majus Consilium in similitudinem populi; quaelibet autem harum specierum subjecta est suis institutis, et legibus”; *Chronicon*, p. 277.

<sup>78</sup> Lorenzo de’ Monaci, *Chronicon*, p. 32.

election of the magistrates. If he can control the magistrates he can control the laws, which means that a man, not the laws, rule.

The other foundation of political life is justice. The rulers of the city must give to each citizen his due and never favor some at the expense of others. These Ciceronian themes were reiterated by Alamanno Rinuccini in a public *oratio* delivered in 1493. As long as cities and empires were justly ruled, they increased in glory and reputation. People are content with justice and if justice is provided to all, the city enjoys concord and peace. Cicero, remarked Rinuccini, was perfectly right in ranking justice as the queen of virtues. Both ancient history and modern experience prove that justice and good laws are the necessary foundations for the liberty of the city and for the preservation of the political and civil life ("*humano vivere et maxime politico et civile*").<sup>79</sup>

In using the notion of "political and civil life" to denote both the *civitas* in general and the republican government in particular, the republican humanists were, in fact, making an ideological point, namely that the republic is the form of government most appropriate to the *civitas*. The political message that they were then conveying was that, if we want to live in liberty in a city where the law rules over men, we must institute and preserve a republican government.

The Quattrocento Humanists, however, not only sang the praise of political life and political man. They were also the witnesses to the degeneration of politics and the rise of the art of the state. Indeed, the art of attaining power within republican institutions had deep roots in Florentine history. In the Trecento it was a common practice for the most prominent guildsmen, such as the Acciaiuoli, Bardi, Del Bene, Peruzzi, Strozzi, to use the government "as if it were their own private business."<sup>80</sup> In addition to financial success the most common way of attaining an exalted status was through marriages and family connections. Memoirs and books on behavior provided detailed advice on how to attain "state": "Always seek the friendship and support of those who have more 'state' [money, power, status] then you: order your wives and your daughters to be friendly with the kin of the powerful; remember that when you seek a husband for your

<sup>79</sup> Alamanno Rinuccini, *Lettere ed orazioni*, V. Giustiniani (ed.), Florence, 1953, p. 202. See also p. 191: "Tacerommi di dire lessersi per quello medesimo giorno corroborate et vivificate le vostre sacrosante et inviolabili leggi, nella cui observantia consiste 1 fondamento d' ogni buono et polytico viver."

<sup>80</sup> M. B. Becker, *Florence in Transition: 1, The Decline of the Commune*, Baltimore, 1967, p. 25.



daughter or wife for your son, look for the offspring of a merchant, both rich and well established in Florence. Make certain that your prospective in-laws are venerable Guelphs and that they play a prominent role in public life."<sup>81</sup>

Given the weakness of public institutions, it was almost a necessity for Florentine citizens to have powerful patrons and be well entrenched within a network of friends. In Trecento Florence to try to remain independent from factions and seek only the common good of the republic was tantamount to political and social suicide. The best that one could do was to support the most decent faction, a difficult choice indeed, since, in most cases, none of the factions had the slightest concern with justice and reason.

Since their origin, the communes of Northern Italy were the result of the combination of semi-autonomous groups: families, clans (*consorterie*), corporations, religious fraternities, the Guelph and/or Ghibelline party. All these groups were not usually willing to surrender their legal and social prerogatives to the commune or the republic. The patrician families strived throughout the era of the communes to maintain the right of vendetta, and the corporations only very reluctantly gave up their jurisdiction and police powers. Republican regimes had to fight hard against those private institutions in order to try to impose some sort of rule of law. Political institutions were constantly in danger of becoming mere instruments of private groups. From the thirteenth to the sixteenth century, it has been aptly remarked, one of the most current complaints voiced by political writers and historians was that men sought office to favor their family and their friends and regarded the state as the public "manger" (*mangiatoia*). In most of the Italian city-states republican regimes failed to curb corporate and family interests. The rise of the *signorie* was in many cases the result of the victory of corporate interests and party loyalties. No matter how different the process in the various cities was, all the Italian despots or *signori* seized power at first as leaders of a faction or party.<sup>82</sup>

Although corruption and patronage were well-established practices in the Italian communes, the Quattrocento historians regarded the regime established by Cosimo in 1434 as a phenomenon of

<sup>81</sup> See Giovanni Morelli di Pagolo, *Ricordi*, V. Branca (ed.), Florence, 1956, pp. 208–209; quoted in M.B. Becker, *Florence in Transition*, I, p. 26.

<sup>82</sup> P.J. Jones, "Communes and despots: the city state in late medieval Italy," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th Series, 15 (1965), pp. 82–85.

unprecedented magnitude. Through his mastery of the art of the state, Cosimo succeeded in attaining a control over public life much stronger than any other citizen or family ever did in the past. Without being the formal prince, Cosimo was for thirty years the *de facto signore* of Florence. His power rested upon his capacity of placing his own partisans and friends in the important offices of the republic. This allowed Cosimo to bar any laws that would hurt his own or his party's interest. Quietly, without clamor, acting always from behind the scene, Cosimo succeeded in securing a regime that lasted until his death.<sup>83</sup>

Cosimo's art of the state was a subtle form of corruption that permitted him and his party to gain a decisive influence over public institutions, thereby almost transforming the republic into their private possession. It was not outright bribery, and even less sheer violence, apart from exceptional circumstances such as the foundation of the regime in 1434 when Cosimo imprisoned his enemies, or sentenced them to death, or exile.<sup>84</sup> Although the goal was similar, the art of the state that Cosimo brought to a degree of perfection was substantially different from the methods and the style of traditional tyrants and usurpers. The foundations of his state were wealth and personal connections, not military force. His wealth allowed him to loan money to the friends who were in arrears with their taxes – and therefore make them eligible for office – or make gifts to their protégés so that they might conveniently marry their daughters. The splendor of Cosimo's palace attracted foreign princes and dignitaries, like the Milanese ambassador who lived in the Medici's palace. Not surprisingly, foreign dignitaires regarded Cosimo and his palace as the center of power in Florence. Finally, because of his personal connections with popes, princes and emperors, Cosimo was the actual pivot of Florence foreign politics.<sup>85</sup> Wealth, connections, as well as tact, eloquence, affability and an outstanding degree of prudence,

<sup>83</sup> See Vespasiano da Bisticci, *Le Vite*, A. Greco (ed.), Florence, 1976, II, p. 192.

<sup>84</sup> See Vespasiano da Bisticci, *Le Vite*, II, p. 175, where he describes what Cosimo and his friend did in order to secure their state ("per fermare lo stato loro").

<sup>85</sup> In his fundamental study on *The Government of Florence under the Medici*, Oxford 1966, N. Rubinstein remarks that Cosimo's influence was perhaps most effective in the field of foreign policy, than in domestic affairs. According to Rubinstein, Vespasiano da Bisticci and foreign visitors in Florence tended to exaggerate Cosimo's power that even in its climax after 1458 was of an entirely different kind from that of a despot (pp. 128–135). For the foundation of the Medici's regime see D. Kent, *The Rise of the Medici: faction in Florence 1426–1434*, Oxford, 1978.

were the basic means and components of Cosimo's art of the state, which permitted him to be almost the *signore* of Florence and to have engraved in his tomb in S. Lorenzo the inscription, voted by public decree, "Pater Patriae."

In spite of Cosimo's achievements, the Quattrocento Humanists sharply distinguished between the good citizen who holds office to serve the republic and the corrupt man who sits in office to favor his own or his party's interests and pointed to the former as the example to be followed. In his *Lives of Illustrious Men of the Fifteenth Century*, Vespasiano da Bisticci dedicates his warmest praise to citizens like Lorenzo Ridolfi, who, though he had great influence in state affairs ["*bene che nella repubblica fusse di grandissima autorità*"] and might have done whatever he willed, was like an ancient Roman in his integrity – a poor man who lived on his own income.<sup>86</sup> When he served in office, he always followed reason and never departed from the pathway of justice and honesty. Lorenzo did not long for power in order to oppress his fellow citizens or cause disorders in the city. Instead, he used his power and authority properly and was everybody's friend. He had such a reputation for uprightness that no one even dared to ask him for something that was not just and honest.<sup>87</sup>

Vespasiano's words echo the definition of politics that Latini had forged almost two centuries before: his model magistrates distinguished themselves because they discharged their duties according to justice. Another example of the persistence of the humanist ideal of the political man was Vespasiano's portrait of Ser Filippo di Ser Ugolino Pieruzzi, a Notary of the Riformagioni in fifteenth-century Florence. In 1429 he was granted an important post in the republic, one on which rested the good or bad fortune of the city. Ser Filippo, stresses Vespasiano da Bisticci, discharged his office with the utmost dignity and authority: in his capacity as a notary he boycotted all that did not lead to the common good of the city ("*il bene universale della città*"). If a member of the regime went to him to propose an unjust law, he always found some way to make the law ineffective, if he could not prevent its enactment. He always turned down gifts, and in matters of justice and honesty he had the courage to confront even the most powerful men of the city in person.<sup>88</sup> Ser Filippo lost his post because of the nefarious manipulations of the friends of Cosimo, and

<sup>86</sup> Vespasiano da Bisticci, *Le Vite*, II p. 131.      <sup>87</sup> Vespasiano da Bisticci, *Le Vite*, II, p. 137.

<sup>88</sup> Vespasiano da Bisticci, *Le Vite*, II, pp. 244–246.

spent the rest of his life in exile and solitude. In his final years, Vespasiano tells us, he was approached by a friend who wanted to share with him his immense joy for having been elected to an important post, which he welcomed as a convenient means to mitigate his financial hardships and improve his social status. "Does it not seem to you an infamy and a shame that you use this office as your own shop?" ("*ne facci botega*"). These offices – continues Ser Filippo – were not devised to furnish plunder for you and your fellows; you are only concerned with your interest ("*attendete alla propria utilità*") and oppress Florence more than an occupying army.<sup>89</sup>

Men such as Lorenzo Ridolfi or Ser Filippo di Ser Ugolino were servants of the republic, not founders of states or conquerors, yet they were extolled as exemplary citizens deserving to be recorded as true civil men who sustained the liberty of the republic. The practice of the art of the state was on the contrary regarded as the most detrimental for the life of the republic, as we can see from the works of Giovanni Cavalcanti, the author, in the 1430s, of the *Istorie Fiorentine* and, in the 1440s, of a *Political and moral treatise* (*Trattato politico-morale*). Cavalcanti remained throughout his life an outsider in Florentine politics. The descendant of an old magnate family that had been banned from public offices, Cavalcanti had never had access to magistracies. Moreover, he always had financial hardships that eventually led to two stays in the *Stinche*, the prison of Florence, where he completed his *Istorie Fiorentine*. Cavalcanti was a bitter and resentful observer of Florence's political life, particularly after Cosimo's return to power in 1434. He was a moralist, though, more a critic of his own times than an enthusiastic advocate of civil philosophy. He saw in Florence corruption and decay, rather than the flourishing of civil life. For him "state" and politics were antithetical notions. He regarded the pursuit of the state – in the sense of control over public institutions – as the most serious threat to political life. The citizens who supported Cosimo to become the *signore* of the city, he wrote, were the decided enemies of political life ("*vivere politico*").<sup>90</sup> Equally repugnant to political life and favorable instead to tyranny ("*tirannesco e non politico vivere*") was the practice of taking public decisions at private dinners and in the palaces of the powerful citizens.<sup>91</sup>

<sup>89</sup> Vespasiano da Bisticci, *Le Vite*, II, p. 258.

<sup>90</sup> G. Cavalcanti, *Istorie Fiorentine* G. di Pino (ed.), v. 5, Milan, 1945, p. 145.

<sup>91</sup> G. Cavalcanti, *Istorie Fiorentine*, II.1; see also C. Varese, *Storia e politica nella prosa del Quattrocento*, Turin, 1961, pp. 93–129.

Cavalcanti's heroes all belong to the past generations.<sup>92</sup> Indeed, the image of the political man that he portrays in the *Trattato* exhibits a number of features that one cannot find in any contemporary works of the same genre. Drawing on conventional sources, with perhaps a more decided sympathy for Seneca, Cavalcanti actually alters the orthodox account of the political virtues. Quoting Seneca's advice that, in order to be good, we must choose as our model the best man, Cavalcanti remarks that such a model must be a man whose judgment and behavior are examples of beautiful political life (*"bel vivere pulithico"*).<sup>93</sup> However, while discussing the virtues of the political man, he introduces the notion of "political shrewdness" (*"politica sagacità"*) as a component of prudence in general.<sup>94</sup> By political shrewdness, he means the capacity to resort to simulation and lying when the circumstances require one to do so, as Hannibal did when he deceived the Senate of Carthagenes.<sup>95</sup>

With regard to justice too, Cavalcanti introduces an important amendment to the conventional ideas of his time. He opens his discussion with the usual Ciceronian claim that justice is a virtue that God himself has instilled in men's souls by means of prudence. It is a virtue that commands us to give to each his due and to distribute honors and dignities to the most virtuous citizens. Both principles, stresses Cavalcanti, which are fundamental requirements for the preservation of the beautiful political life, are totally disregarded in Florence, where honors and offices are distributed with a view to the nobility of the family and lineage.<sup>96</sup> Furthermore, we command our magistrates to obey the laws and the statutes of the city, whereas the ancient Romans trusted the judgment of their most excellent men, and did not bind them with laws and orders. Hence, Cavalcanti clearly maintains against the conventional wisdom that the rule of virtuous men unbound by laws is more appropriate to political life than the rule of law.

Another "heir and critic" of Civic Humanism, Leon Battista Alberti,<sup>97</sup> illuminated in the most eloquent way the radical antagon-

<sup>92</sup> See M. T. Grendler *The "Trattato Politico-Morale" of Giovanni Cavalcanti (1381-1451)*, Geneva, 1973, pp. 13-30. <sup>93</sup> *Trattato Politico-Morale*, p. 120.

<sup>94</sup> *Trattato Politico-Morale*, p. 126. <sup>95</sup> *Trattato Politico-Morale*, p. 126.

<sup>96</sup> *Trattato Politico-Morale*, p. 133.

<sup>97</sup> I am borrowing the description of Leon Battista Alberti as "critic and heir" of Florentine Civic Humanism from Hans Baron, *In Search of Florentine Civic Humanism*, Princeton, 1988, I, pp. 258-288. Baron maintains that the views voiced by Giannozzo, one of the characters of the dialogue *Of the Family*, reflect "unpolitical sentiments" (p. 267) and advocate "a nearly

ism between the political man and the “man of state”<sup>98</sup> in support of the ideal of the good citizen. The crucial passages are to be found in the third book of *The Family*, composed between 1432 and 1434, and may indeed be regarded as the best example of the Humanist view of the art of the state as the opposite of politics.

To hold office and to be in the state (“*trovarsi negli uffici et nello stato*”), stresses Giannozzo, is not at all an honor. The life of the “men of state” is a life of worries, anxieties and burdens; it is a life of servitude covered by external marks of honor. The only advantage that the “men of state” can obtain from their positions is the opportunity to steal and perpetrate injustice, and yet this licence is acquired at the cost of infinite anxieties and humiliations.<sup>99</sup> The citizens who long for power (“*desiderano lo stato*”) are possessed by an immoderate pride and desire for superiority, cannot bear civic equality and cannot live without abusing the ordinary citizens. Out of their thirst for power and superiority they expose themselves to all sorts of dangers, dislike the company of the honest citizens and seek the friendship of the wicked and the mean.<sup>100</sup>

A man who is not content with his own, and wants the possessions of the others, deserves blame; but even more blameworthy are those who usurp and use public institutions as if they were their own property, their own shop (“*ascrivermi lo stato quasi per mia ricchezza, riputarlo mia bottega*”).<sup>101</sup> Against the disreputable “men of state,” Alberti, through the words of Lionardo, extols the conventional image of the civil man. Whereas the “men of state” use public institutions as their private possessions, the good citizen cares more for

total alienation from the political ideals of the city-state” (p. 264). As I hope to clarify in the following pages, Giannozzo’s famous speeches in Book III should be read as an attack against the “men of state” – the men who seek offices and power for the sake of ambition and use public institutions as their own private possession – not against the ideal of the good citizens who serve the republic and accept offices for the good of the republic and the citizens. What Giannozzo seems to be advocating is an appropriate measure between private (economic) and public life, a position that was indeed typical of the Civic Humanism.

<sup>98</sup> I translate as “men of state” the pejorative expressions like “*staterreci*” or “*statuali*,” which literally mean “men who hold state or are in the state,” the men who seek office out of desire for superiority and strive to climb within the system of power. I prefer to render “*statuali*” and “*staterreci*” as “men of state” instead of “public men,” as Hans Baron does (*In Search of Florentine Civic Humanism*, Princeton, 1988, I, p. 264), because it seems to me to convey better the idea that the men in question have, or belong to, the state. “Public men” may be slightly misleading since the “*statuali*” were in fact using the public institutions for private purposes.

<sup>99</sup> Leon Battista Alberti, *I primi tre libri della famiglia*, F. C. Pellegrini and R. Spongano (eds.), Florence, 1946, pp. 273–275.

<sup>100</sup> Leon Battista Alberti, *I primi tre libri della famiglia*, p. 276.

<sup>101</sup> Leon Battista Alberti, *I primi tre libri della famiglia*, p. 278.

the common good than for his own private or factional interest. He is concerned with the concord, peace and tranquillity of his own family, but he is even more concerned with the concord and peace of the republic. The good citizen knows that the good order of the republic cannot be preserved if the richest citizens are also politically more powerful than the ordinary ones. He is also well aware that the republic will not survive for long if the good citizens are concerned only with their own domestic affairs.<sup>102</sup> Therefore, he takes fully to heart the old advice that urges to devote ourselves to the service of the republic in order to prevent its falling into the hands of the ambitious citizens who would use power to corrupt both public and private life. In serving our own republic, concludes Lionardo, we discharge our duty as citizens; it is not servitude and deserves to be praised as the most noble activity.<sup>103</sup> The last word in the discussion is for Giannozzo, who stresses that a good citizen should indeed serve the republic, without however neglecting his private life and business. Political life cannot be a substitute for domestic and private business; it is rather an additional burden to be shouldered in order to enjoy private liberty.<sup>104</sup>

The condemnation of the "men of state" and their base art of seeking power was echoed in other popularized versions of the book *Della Famiglia*, the so-called *Rifacimenti*.<sup>105</sup> In his *Treatise of the Government of the Family*, for instance, Agnolo Pandolfini (1363–1446) repeats Alberti's words, as does Giovanni Rucellai in his *Žibaldone quaresimale*. Both works stress the opposition between state and republic. The state and the republic are two incompatible pursuits: to pursue or to establish a state means to spoil and to disfigure the republic; conversely, the best way of serving and defending the republic is to oppose the state, namely the control of private individuals over the institutions.<sup>106</sup> Whereas the foundations of the

<sup>102</sup> "Ma né anche quelle medesime si potranno bene conservare, ove tutti e buoni siano solo del suo otio privato contenti" *I primi tre libri della famiglia*, p. 281.

<sup>103</sup> "Né chiamerei servire quello che a me fosse debito fare, quanto senza dubio a' giovani sempre fu debito riverire i maggiori et apresso di loro molto cercare quella fama et dignità, in quale i maggiori si truovano amati et riveriti," *I primi tre libri della famiglia*, p. 282.

<sup>104</sup> Leon Battista Alberti, *I primi tre libri della famiglia*, p. 284.

<sup>105</sup> See J. Ravenscroft, "The third book of Alberti's *Della Famiglia* and its two *Rifacimenti*," *Italian Studies*, 29 (1974), pp. 45–53.

<sup>106</sup> "E come si può arricchire dello stato, se non col rubare il comune e le singolari persone e' sudditi [...]?" Agnolo Pandolfini, *Trattato del governo della famiglia*, Milan, 1802, p. 83. The same words are repeated by Giovanni Rucellai in his *Žibaldone quaresimale*; see Giovanni Rucellai ed il suo *Žibaldone*, A. Perosa (ed.), London 1960, I, pp. 39–40.

republic are justice and the rule of law, the “men of the state” strive to be above the laws and to impose on the other citizens the burdens of social life while reserving all privileges and benefits for themselves.<sup>107</sup> The republic can last as long as civic equality is properly preserved; the state is inherently a position of superiority.<sup>108</sup>

The rejection of the art of the state and the praise of the civil man reappears again in two later works by Alberti, the *Momo sive de Principe* (1447) and the *De Iciarchia*, composed in the 1460s. *Momo* is a text of great complexity, full of metaphors derived from classic sources and filled with oblique allusions to people of the Roman Court, where Alberti served under the nefarious papacy of Eugenio IV. The theme of the book is the prince, who rules over the republic like the soul over the body.<sup>109</sup> In the *Momo*, the reader should then find a number of ideas concerning the education of the *optimus princeps*, and also instructive observations concerning the prince’s entourage.

Momo is the irreverent god whose habit is to upset and irritate everybody, including his own relatives. None who has any dealings with him can remain free from anger and indignation. Expelled from Olympus, Momo seeks refuge on earth, where he is involved in vicissitudes of every sort. Readmitted among the Gods, Momo decides to change his behavior to gain reputation and prestige within the gods’ community. He is now good, friendly, kind to everybody. As Momo himself says in a monologue, I do not intend to change my malicious nature; I will only simulate and adapt my conduct to the circumstances.

Every man involved in worldly affairs should adopt Momo’s new style and alter his conduct according to the circumstances, simulating and dissimulating without a moment of distraction, ready to capture the others’ feelings, ambitions, thoughts, intentions, plans.<sup>110</sup> He must know with whom everyone is connected; what are his needs, his

<sup>107</sup> “Eccoti sedere in istato; che n’hai d’utile? Dirai; potere soperchiare sforzare rubare con qualche onesta licenzia, alleggerarti delle gravezze”; Agnolo Pandolfini, *Trattato del governo della famiglia*, p. 83; Giovanni Rucellai ed il suo *Zibaldone*, p. 40.

<sup>108</sup> “Oh matti fumosi altieri avari proprio tiranneschi! Non possono sofferire gli altri pari con loro; non vogliono vivere senza sforzare e soprastare i più deboli e’ più degni e più antichi di loro: e però vogliono lo stato”; Agnolo Pandolfini, *Trattato del governo della famiglia*, p. 84; Giovanni Rucellai ed il suo *Zibaldone*, p. 40.

<sup>109</sup> Alberti, Leon Battista *Momo, o del principe*, Rino Consolo (ed.), Genoa 1986, p. 26.

<sup>110</sup> See also the discussion between Caronte and the philosopher Gelasto, where the philosopher compares the republic to a ship, and the ruler to the sailor, stressing that the leader must be capable to adapt to all circumstances; “omnibus temporibus accomodant atque obsecundantur,” *Momo, o del principe* p. 266.



opinions, his preferences, what are his chances to succeed and what is his strategy. At the same time, he must always disguise his ambitions and desires through the subtle art of simulation, vigilant and ready to seize the occasion when it comes. He must always be in full control of himself and have no mercy for adversaries. Using deeds, rather than words, he must assault the enemy, always keeping in mind that others' speeches may well all be full of snares.<sup>111</sup> He should trust none and let others believe that he trusts everyone. He who follows this conduct will gain reputation and the esteem of both ordinary and the learned people. They will all be respectful, especially when they realize that he knows everything about them. Finally, the most important thing is to mask his actions with the fictitious colors of honesty and goodness.<sup>112</sup> What a marvelous thing, concludes Momo, to be able to disguise our feelings in the fog with the practice of the art of simulation!

During a solemn banquet, Momo provides further details concerning the best way to gain power through good reputation. The best strategy is to be capable of appearing as a person who deserves respect and devotion in moments of danger. Even if they seem reluctant to obey, men are, in fact, mostly docile; hence, it is possible to rule through rational means (*"arte et ratione"*). Men easily obey those who rule in justice and rectitude; however, remarks Momo, the art of ruling demands great effort to look after the subjects' interests, and, in the last analysis, it is a sort of servitude which in addition entails dangers and risks.

Momo learns at his own expense that princes are not in the least concerned with reforming the world in a way that better fits men's interests and aspirations. Although he was only simulating, Momo spoke in favor of the reform and even wrote a treatise concerning the duties of rulers. For his imprudent commitment to reform, Jove punishes him with castration.

He also learns that the love of justice and truth are totally inappropriate to achieving political success. I was, he comments disconsolately, used always to connecting my ideas to truth, my desires to duty, my face to the principles of justice as I felt in my heart. I was sent into exile because of my truthful attitude. I was readmitted to Olympus after having committed many kinds of crimes, including

<sup>111</sup> *Momo o del principe*, p. 101.

<sup>112</sup> "ut illis esse persimiles videamur qui boni ac mites putentur," *Momo, o del principe*, p. 100.

the rape of a virgin goddess. Once readmitted among the gods, I learned how to adapt my ideas and words to prejudices, intrigues and machinations. As long as I applied the most perverse arts, I obtained the favor of the prince and the highest reputation. My disgrace began when I decided to leave aside servile manners and resume my old independence. I also composed a treatise concerning the duties of gods and rulers that Jove did not even look at.

Is the crude alternative to rule with injustice or to neglect the public affairs?<sup>113</sup> Everyone understands how detrimental it is for the commonwealth to punish those who give good advice, and to reward the wicked. But princes do not like to follow advice. They rather indulge themselves in pleasures and abuse of power. They are satisfied with appearances. Surrounded by flatterers, they soon forget that they may err, and make decisions by following their passions and caprice.

Kings do not deserve the preeminence that they claim. If they rule under the laws, they simply fulfill their duty, just like anybody else. If they accumulate wealth through the exercise of power, they rule like tyrants and do not deserve any appreciation for that. But even if they enrich the state, this is owing more to the industriousness or the courage of the citizens, than to the king's own virtues. The contribution of kings to the welfare and the peace of the city is negligible compared to that of their functionaries and magistrates. The burden of the peace and tranquillity of the kingdom is actually upon the subjects' shoulders, whereas the king's behavior excites rivalries and envy. Neither is the king's life preferable to that of ordinary people. His desires always exceed their possibilities; hence, he never finds repose and is restlessly seeking new things.

For Alberti, a prince who wants to attain glory and succeed must follow a simple set of rules: to avoid doing nothing as well as doing everything; neither should he act by himself, nor should he seek the participation of all. He must benefit the good and hurt the wicked only if compelled. He should evaluate people according to their true qualities, not their apparent ones. As a general rule he must avoid innovations unless it is necessary and he is absolutely sure that the innovation will increase his reputation. In public he must look magnificent; in private thrifty. He must fight with equal determination

<sup>113</sup> "Vos hic quid magis vituperabitis, an desidiam in negligenda republica an iniustitiam in administranda?" *Momo, o del principe*, 278.

both pleasures and enemies, pursue glory and fame through peace rather than war, put up with the supplications and the pleas of the humble as well as treating others with aristocratic aloofness.

The whole point of Momo's testament is to instruct the ruler how to minimize the ill effects of power. If he cannot avoid involvement in public life, which would be the wisest solution, he should at least learn how to make it bearable. Some twenty years later, in the *De Iciarchia*, one of his last works, Alberti goes back to the theme of the ideal prince. Whereas the *Momo* is a crude portrait of the reality of princely rule and an exhortation not to get involved in politics, the *De Iciarchia* is a eulogy of the civil man and an appeal to the younger generation to pursue that noble ideal. Probably composed around 1468, when the Medici's domination over Florence was firmly established, the *De Iciarchia* is Alberti's political testament, a political act against the overwhelming corruption of the city fostered by the Medicean regime.<sup>114</sup> Against the practice of ruling the city as if it were a private shop ("*quasi come da una sua bottega*"),<sup>115</sup> Alberti revives the Humanist ideal of the prince who rules through virtue for the common good.

He begins his argument by challenging what appears to have been the predominant attitude of the time, namely that riches give power ("*stato*"). Against this view, Alberti's spokesman remarks that virtue, not riches, gives the right sort of preeminence and status ("*stato*").<sup>116</sup> Commenting on the ambition of the Florentine noblemen, Battista stresses that he would be glad if their aim was to become true princes, devoting themselves to the cultivation of virtue without being seduced by the mere external symbols of power.<sup>117</sup>

The true prince must excel in virtue. Virtue alone qualifies him to rule. Those that the populace call princes are instead individuals who enslave the republic.<sup>118</sup> The true prince cannot impose his arbitrary will upon others. On the contrary, the principality imposes on the ruler the civil necessity ("*necessità civile*") of maintaining the liberty and dignity of the city and the security of private citizens.<sup>119</sup> The true prince is the highest public magistrate ("*pubblico e primo magistrato*")

<sup>114</sup> See G. Mancini, *Vita di Leon Battista Alberti*, Rome, 1971, pp. 448–457.

<sup>115</sup> Alberti uses here the same words that he had employed some twenty years before to portray the conduct of the "men of state."

<sup>116</sup> Leon Battista Alberti, *De Iciarchia*, in *Opere Volgari*, A. Bonucci (ed.), Florence, 1845, III, p. 13.

<sup>117</sup> *De Iciarchia*, p. 15.

<sup>118</sup> "Sono ministri aggiudicati a susservire la Repubblica," *De Iciarchia*, p. 16.

<sup>119</sup> *De Iciarchia*, p. 18.

whose main duty is to temper the citizens' conduct. He must be like a friend to them without seeking to reduce the city to servitude. He must be obedient to the laws and administer them severely ("*ministro della severità*"), be a model of virtue, and be able to show to the citizens what it is to be just, temperate, strong and honest. Like every man, the true prince is the servant of the laws, with the additional unpleasant burden of punishing criminals.<sup>120</sup> He is the servant of the republic, endowed with the authority necessary to guide the citizens toward a peaceful and honest life.

In order to succeed in his task, the prince must learn first to be his own master. The civil man, who aims to control others, must practice virtue, be capable of distinguishing truth from error and be well informed about the customs, the manners and the history of his own republic.

The moral foundation of the prince's rule is true and sincere goodness ("*la vera e sincera bontà*") which assures man tranquillity and liberty.<sup>121</sup> True and sincere goodness is also the best way to achieve public honors, since citizens love good men and gladly elect them to the highest magistracies; hence, true virtue opens the ways to honors. A generous soul should be longing for the true honor that is the reward for virtue, not superiority as such.<sup>122</sup>

After moral qualities, Alberti proceeds to illustrate the habits, gestures and language of the civil man. The civil man devotes himself solely to rare and precious things; he is never agitated like those who are involved in too many things. His sole concern is to attain beatitude through virtue and to become famous and immortal. He is never ostentatious at the table; he does not bend his face over the plate, nor does he seek to grasp as much food as he can. Along with table manners, he distinguishes himself in the way he dresses: simple, clean and proper. Through his clothes, he conveys the image of himself as a decent and moderate person. His language must imitate the order of nature. Language is the bond of human society, and through language men express what they need in order to live well. Our language must therefore be regulated according to prudence and charity. The civil man does not utter anything that comes to mind without pondering the consequences of his words. Few words are generally better than many and a meditated answer entails less risk of

<sup>120</sup> *De Iciarchia*, pp. 19–20.

<sup>121</sup> *De Iciarchia*, p. 59.

<sup>122</sup> *De Iciarchia*, p. 71.

making a mistake. Loquacity is, on the other hand, a sign of ignorance, temerity, insolence and impudence.<sup>123</sup>

Language reflects the mind. If the latter is upright and well-tempered, a person's words will be pleasant and appropriate accordingly. In public discussions, the civil man disputes in order to find the truth, not to defend his own opinion. His voice and his gestures show that he loves the person with whom he is having a discussion. Whereas the well-balanced language of the civil man sustains the good order of human society, the words of the wicked destroy families and republics. Civil eloquence rules the republic and it is as powerful as steel is in war. The eloquence that aims at the search for truth needs wisdom and prudence ("*sapienza e prudentia*"); the eloquence of rulers of the republic circumspection, firmness, magnanimity; the eloquence of ordinary citizens' good customs. All types of eloquence must be directed to goodness and truth.

In the last book of the dialogue, where the discussion shifts to the goals of the principality, Alberti completes his portrait of the civil prince. The aim of the principality, says his spokesman, is the moderation of men. The city is a larger family and the family can be equated to a smaller city.<sup>124</sup> However, whereas the bond of the family is love, men founded cities primarily to benefit themselves. To our family as well as our country, we have the obligation to devote our best energies to sustain its prosperity. If everyone played his own part, the whole community would flourish, but since not everyone performs his duty, the city needs a moderator, a ruler.

The lesson of *The family* and *Momo* is still present in Alberti's reasoning. In the *De Iciarchia* too, he stresses that principalities and *signorie* are often attained through fraud and violence and maintained through force, rapine, dissimulation and cruelty. But this time he draws a different conclusion, that is, an exhortation to institute a principality through goodness, benevolence, civility, and maintain it through love, charity and gratitude.

It is in our interest that our family and our city should flourish; hence we should not hesitate to devote our best energies to the task of founding a good principality. This is a task that is far from being impossible. Men gladly submit themselves to rulers who allow them to prosper in peace and tranquillity ("*fruttare le cose sue con libertà*

<sup>123</sup> *De Iciarchia*, p. 77.

<sup>124</sup> *De Iciarchia*, p. 123.

*quieta*”).<sup>125</sup> They also willingly obey those commands that they understand to be conducive to their happiness and interest. The good man, the civil prince, is always ready to help others to find the pathway to virtue. He is not content with his own virtue and happiness but willingly advises others how to attain the same goals. With diligence and circumspection, he then provides every person with what is useful and appropriate for him. A man like this would be the perfect civil man and prince, and if a city had only a few of them, it would be the happiest on earth.<sup>126</sup>

During the Quattrocento, the celebration of political life was never free from severe criticisms. As early as 1415, Giovanni Baldi of Faenza challenged Salutati's claim of the superiority of politics over natural sciences arguing that the higher rank must be attributed to theology, the second to medicine and only the third to politics (*“legibus politicis”*). Theology helps men to win their struggle against sensuality; medicine combats malignant humors; laws sustain men in their fight against their evil inclinations.<sup>127</sup>

The main target for the critique of politics' excellence was the Ciceronian principle that we may find true happiness in the pursuit of political virtues. In one of the dialogues of *Il paradiso degli Alberti*, composed by Giovanni Gherardi da Prato in 1425, the philosopher Biagio Pelacani of Parma is requested to clarify man's happiness. To answer the question posed by the illustrious guests gathered in Alberti's magnificent house, Biagio reviews Aristotle's classical distinction among three types of lives: sensual, political and contemplative. When he follows natural desires and impulses, man lives like a beast and cannot be regarded as being happy. The alternative is between political life – the life according to the political virtues (*“virtudi politice”*) – and the life of contemplation devoted to the pursuit of knowledge. Living politically, man lives as a man. Living a life of contemplation, man reaches a superior status and participates in divinity. Of the two ways of life, the latter is unquestionably the most consonant to human nature, as Ovid teaches us: “[gods] gave to

<sup>125</sup> *De Iciarchia*, p. 130.

<sup>126</sup> “Quello sarà ottimo principato quale contenti e suoi sudditi, tale che non lo chiamerebbero migliore . . . Oh beata quella città dove in qualunque famiglia fusse un uomo tale . . . E quanto beata! E se questa nostra repubblica un tanto numero avesse, uomini simili, pur dieci, pur sei. Non dico di più,” *De Iciarchia*, p. 132.

<sup>127</sup> Johannis Baldi, “Disputatio an medecina sit legibus politicis praeferenda,” in *La disputa delle arti nel Quattrocento*, E. Garin (ed.), Florence, 1947, pp. 3–4.

man an uplifted face and bade him stand erect and turn his eyes to heaven".<sup>128</sup>

Politics gradually lost its position of preeminence in favor of contemplation and philosophical inquiry. With the decline of republics, the civil art weakened too. The intellectual transition was gradual. We may find authors who defended Salutati's position and later moved toward a more disenchanted view of politics and law. Poggio Bracciolini composed, in 1436 or 1440, an *Oratio in laudem legum* where he repeats Salutati's views almost word for word. Laws, he writes, educate men to live virtuously, help them to impose the rule of reason over passions and guarantee peace and concord. Without law and reason no civil life, no liberty, no security would exist.<sup>129</sup> A true *politia* must be grounded upon the rule of law, as Aristotle wrote in the *Politics* and in the *Rhetorics*. As Cicero said in the *De Cluentio*, the rule of law over men is the foundation of our liberty and the source of equity. On laws rely the reason, the mind and the judgment of the city. Without the laws the whole body of the republic would collapse. We must then all be the servants of the laws in order to be free.<sup>130</sup>

About ten years later, in 1450, Poggio composed a dialogue on the comparative merits of medicine and civil law, where the Ciceronian celebration of the law leaves room to a skeptic view of political life and history. The conventional humanist view of the law as the foundation of civil life and guide to virtue is defended by Benedictus who impersonates in the dialogue the famous jurist Benedetto Accolti.<sup>131</sup> The message of the dialogue emerges, however, through the words of Nicolaus, who impersonates the Areatine physician Niccolò Tignosi.<sup>132</sup> The law, stresses Nicolaus, is just the will of the strongest. As

<sup>128</sup> "Animalia cetera terra, os homini sublime dedit celumque," *Metamorphoses*, 1, 84–85; Giovanni Gherardi da Prato, *Il Paradiso degli Alberti*, A. Lanza (ed.), Rome, 1975, pp. 217–219.

<sup>129</sup> "Sapientissimi ergo illi viri extiterunt, qui nullam civilem vivendi normam, nullam libertatem, nullum fructum laborum suorum in ea urbe esse putabant, quae non et optimis legibus fulciretur." "Oratio in laudem legum," in E. Garin (ed.), *La disputa delle arti nel Quattrocento*, p. 12.

<sup>130</sup> Poggio Bracciolini, *Oratio in laudem legum*, in E. Garin (ed.), *La disputa delle arti nel Quattrocento*, pp. 12–13.

<sup>131</sup> "In legibus quoque versatur maximum vitae praesidium civilis, sine quibus neque coetus hominum institui, neque civitates conservari queunt. Quid esset enim vita hominum sine legibus, quibus boni hortarentur ad virtutem, mali a vitiis compescerentur?" Poggio Bracciolini, "Secunda convivalis disceptatio, ultra artium, medicinae an iuris civilis, praestet," in E. Garin (ed.), *La disputa delle arti nel Quattrocento*, p. 16.

<sup>132</sup> See F. Krantz, "Between Bruni and Machiavelli: history, law and historicism in Poggio Bracciolini," in P. Mack and M. C. Jacob (eds.), *Politics and Culture in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge, 1987, p. 144.

Anacharsis rightly said to Solon, the laws are like spider's nets: they are effective against ordinary people, but the powerful easily break them. Republics attained greatness through violence, not through justice, equity and law. This holds true also for the Roman Republic, the alleged champion of justice and law.<sup>133</sup> Men who have, or who aim at, power rely on force and they use the laws to sustain their domination.<sup>134</sup> After having dismissed the value of civil wisdom, Nicolaus concludes the dialogue with a eulogy of philosophy and theology, the most divine arts which have the highest rank among all disciplines.

Poggio's main reason for writing the dialogue may well have been the desire to prove his rhetoric skills.<sup>135</sup> Whatever his motivation, it remains true that Tignosi's words reflected current ideas on the art of the state in mid-fifteenth-century Florence and were a direct attack against the main tenets of civil philosophy. Tignosi's point was that justice and law have no place in real political life. Since political life is the realm of sheer violence and intrigue, it is perfectly plausible to abandon civil philosophy and devote oneself to contemplative philosophy and theology. When politics becomes pursuit of power the wise man flees it: his place is not the prince's court, but a quiet villa in the countryside.

Some ten years before, Poggio had discarded the Ciceronian idea that political life opens the pathway to happiness and glory in the *Dialogum de infelicitate principum*, composed in 1441. The thesis proposed for discussion is whether it is true that those who are in the most elevated positions are happy, and conversely, whether those who do not pursue public honors, and cultivate moral virtue and philosophy, are fools or inept.<sup>136</sup> In opposition to common opinion, writes Poggio in the proem of the dialogue, we should endorse the doctrine of the wise philosophers who identified happiness with the inner good of the soul.<sup>137</sup>

The dispute is opened by Cosimo de' Medici, who makes the point

<sup>133</sup> "Quippe qui videamus res publicas per vim ad summum imperium pervenisse, et regna, non legibus, sed viribus et manu, quae sunt inimica legibus, comparata"; *Secunda convivalis disceptatio*, in *La disputa delle arti nel Quattrocento*, p. 29.

<sup>134</sup> *Secunda convivalis disceptatio*, in *La disputa delle arti nel Quattrocento*, p. 30.

<sup>135</sup> See R. Black, *Benedetto Accolti and the Florentine Renaissance*, Cambridge 1985, pp. 79–84; see also A. Field, *The Origins of the Platonic Academy of Florence*, Princeton, 1988, p. 146, where the author claims that Poggio intended to defend the illegitimate Medicean regime and justify Florentine expansionism.

<sup>136</sup> Poggio Bracciolini, "De infelicitate principum," in R. Fubini (ed.) *Opera Omnia*, Turin, 1964, reprint of the Basle edition of 1538, I, p. 390.

<sup>137</sup> *De infelicitate principum*, p. 391.



that it is ludicrous to consider as unhappy those who are in position of command. Against him, Nicolaus asserts that princes and happiness have nothing in common because to be happy, we must be good, a task which is very difficult for ordinary man and impossible for princes.<sup>138</sup> We are by nature weak and prone to vice, and a principality is in itself a cause of vice. It corrupts princes in such a way that they do not even try to pursue and enjoy happiness. If by chance they are upright, chaste, humane, they will soon become wicked, inhuman, cruel and false.<sup>139</sup>

Carolus replies that these arguments are true for the tyrant who is overwhelmed by vices to the point that he cannot be happy, but they do not apply to the true prince.<sup>140</sup> As Cicero said, men are naturally inclined to seek the glory and fame that derive from power. The pursuit of principality is then a commendable endeavor. The institution of principality is not in itself morally wrong, nor is it in itself a cause of unhappiness. The institution, excellent in itself (*"rem optimam"*), is corrupted by the abuses of men. The good prince can do great deeds: help the needy and the weak, reward virtue and support the friends.<sup>141</sup> The just and excellent princes, like Augustus, Vespasian, Titus, Antonnius Pius, Aurelianus, Alexander Severus, Traian, concludes Cosimo, enjoyed a happy life.

To refute Carolus and Cosimo's arguments, Nicolaus invokes Aristotle, who explained that happiness consists in living according to virtue (*"felicitem esse vita operationem secundum virtutem"*), and "our Cicero," who said that happiness consists in wise decisions (*"bona consilia"*). Hence, if happiness consists in virtue and good decisions, how can princes possibly be happy, since they lack both virtue and good judgment? They cannot be said to possess fortitude, which consists of the capacity to undergo dangers for the sake of the common good. Princes are ready to take up arms only to enlarge the boundaries of their empire (*"pro privato commodo"*). If someone said that princes are temperate, he should be ridiculed. Moreover, princes are not just, neither in punishment nor in rewarding. Rather than prudent, they should be called astute, since they are very skilled at engaging in intrigue against their subjects.<sup>142</sup> Finally, their apparent liberality should rather be called prodigality.

<sup>138</sup> "Nullam felicitati cum principibus esse societatem," *De infelicitate principum*, p. 395.

<sup>139</sup> *De infelicitate principum*, p. 398.

<sup>140</sup> "tyrannos seemper vitijs abundare, idéoque esse infelices necesse est," *De infelicitate principum*, p. 399.

<sup>141</sup> *De infelicitate principum*, p. 400.

<sup>142</sup> *De infelicitate principum*, p. 404.

Banished from the princes' soul, the virtues find their refuge among the humble ("*ad humiliores homines contulerunt*"). Private citizens are actually much more inclined to live virtuously than princes, because they do not live in idleness and luxury and have to earn their living through their labor. Moreover, they are restrained by laws. Common people, then, are likely to enjoy the true happiness that comes from virtue.

Toward the end of the dialogue, Cosimo makes an important switch in the discussion. Instead of mentioning the example of kings and emperors, he evokes the republican leaders, such as Alcibiades, Themistocles, Pericles, Aristides, Hannibal, Camillus, Quintus Metellus, and remarks that princes of this sort were happy. The reference to the republican heroes does not persuade Nicolaus who insists that happiness is not to be found in grand things – not in power, or in honors – but in the cultivation of philosophy, the mother of virtue ("*matrem virtutum philosophia*"); in the investigation of occult matters; in the liberal arts and in the *studia humanitatis*; in sum, in the retirement to a peaceful harbor where we can live secure from the buffets of fortune. Princes who disdain all these things are to be despised, and their glory is ephemeral. Only the deeds and the works of those who devote themselves to the cultivation of virtue survive the oblivion of time. He who pursues virtue does not need anything outside himself. Seneca, not Cicero, is the master to follow: happiness is to be found in the life of solitude, not in politics.<sup>143</sup>

The growing influence of Platonism through the teaching of Marsilio Ficino provided new conceptual tools to be used in the revision of the Ciceronian image of politics. Cristoforo Landino (1424–98), follower of Marsilio Ficino, poet and commentator on Dante and Virgil, offers an illuminating example of the new intellectual trend in his *Questiones Camaldulenses*, composed in 1475. Discussing the usual theme of the rival merits of active versus contemplative life, Landino openly criticizes the Ciceronian celebration of politics. Cicero's civil achievements in defense of the republic, argues Landino, were not inferior to any military deed. His political and philosophical works, however, deserve greater glory than his political accomplishments. The good that any political man can achieve lasts only for a short while ("*ad praesens aut ad breve tempus*"), but the good that the philosophers who illuminate the nature of

<sup>143</sup> *De infelicitate principum*, p. 419.

things accomplish for humanity lasts forever. Thus, not politics, as Cicero maintained, but speculation provides immortality.<sup>144</sup>

Although a number of defenders of the excellence of a life of political commitment can still be found in the 1470s,<sup>145</sup> the attacks against the status of politics became more and more intense as the century moved towards its close. In the early 1480s, a critique of the excellence of politics was mounted by Niccoletto Vernia, a teacher at the Gymnasium of Padua. Proceeding in the most orthodox scholastic style, Niccoletto dismantles Salutati's argument by attacking the main tenet of the tradition of political virtue, namely that politics may ensure the attainment of true happiness. True happiness, contends Niccoletto, does not reside in civil life, but in speculation and the pursuit of truth. Man undertakes speculation by himself without the cooperation of others. Political happiness, on the other hand, may be attained only with others. The happiness that comes from speculation and the knowledge of nature is therefore self-sufficient, and much more perfect than political happiness.<sup>146</sup> Politics seeks the common good and the peace of the city. Important as they are, however, these goals are inferior to the good of the soul that contemplation assures. Furthermore, laws are imperfect and relative; a human, not a divine, creation, as Cicero claimed. The great philosophers of antiquity are to be honored as philosophers, not as political men.<sup>147</sup>

Ten years later, Antonio De Ferrariis, Il Galateo, addressed similar arguments explicitly against Salutati, an ignorant man – he wrote – who pretended to know everything, and Cicero, who praised politics only out of his ambition for honors and offices. Even if he did not

<sup>144</sup> "Actiones enim una cum hominibus suum finem sortiuntur; speculationes autem cuncta saecula vincendo immortales perdurant et aeternitati aequantur," Cristoforo Landino, "Quaestiones Camaldulenses ad Federicum Urbinatum Principem," in E. Garin (ed.), *Filosofi italiani del Quattrocento*, p. 386.

<sup>145</sup> A pertinent example is Bartolomeo Sacchi (Il Platina), the author of the *De optimo cive* and *De vero et falso bono*, composed in 1470 and 1469 respectively. As Cicero correctly said, he wrote in the *De optimo cive*, we are not only born for ourselves, but also for our friends and our country. Those who elect a life of solitude forget this principle and are useful only to themselves. The speculation on the mysteries of the universe that flourished remarkably among the Egyptians and the Greeks is in fact of scarce utility for humanity. The Romans are much more praiseworthy, as they neglected private goods and applied themselves to the study of laws and moral disciplines, having always in view the common utility ("*communi hominum utilitati semper consulere*"), in E. Garin, *Filosofi italiani del Quattrocento*, pp. 266–269.

<sup>146</sup> "Ergo felicitas inventa in naturali philosophia, quae est speculatio veritatis, est vera felicitas respectu felicitatis politicae," Niccoletto Vernia, "Quaestio est, an medicina nobilior atque praestantior sit iure civili," in *La disputa delle arti nel Quattrocento*, p. 114.

<sup>147</sup> *Quaestio est, an medicina nobilior atque praestantior sit iure civili*, pp. 120–121.

know Aristotle, Cicero should have learned from his teacher Plato that contemplative life is the most perfect, whilst Lactantius, who agreed with Cicero that the political man is superior to the philosopher, should be whipped. Our teacher, stressed Galateo, should be Aristotle. Not, of course, the Aristotle of Book I of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, where he qualifies politics as the most perfect science, but that of Book X, where he defines the contemplative life as the most noble, the only one that makes men similar to gods.<sup>148</sup> Contemplation, not virtue, is proper to men. The animals also show prudence, fortitude, temperance and justice.<sup>149</sup>

Galateo's polemic was completing the dismantling of the language of political virtue that had already begun in the Quattrocento with the denial of the view that the political virtues provide happiness. In addition to the fact that they do not provide happiness, they do not at all make man closer to the divinity, as Cicero pretended in the *Somnium Scipionis* and in his doctrine of the divine origin of the law.

While the advocates of the superiority of contemplative over political life aimed at diminishing the value of the Ciceronian doctrine of the political virtues, other political writers applied the vocabulary of political virtues to the good prince or king dismissing at the same time the ideal of the republican citizen. Applied to a prince instead of the rulers or the magistrates of republics, the vocabulary of virtues assumed new meanings. An appropriate example is Giovanni Pontano's *De Principe*, composed in 1468 and dedicated to Duke Alfonso of Calabria. As Pontano remarks at the outset of the book, the aim of his work is to teach the young Duke how to captivate the minds of his subjects and gain their benevolence. To achieve these goals, the prince must attain the reputation (*opinio*) of being just, pitying and religious. Whereas the civil man must actually possess the virtues, the prince needs only the reputation of being virtuous to make his rule acceptable. The civil man must possess the virtues to keep the republic free and peaceful; the prince to preserve, above all, his power. The prince must pursue liberality because it helps to turn enemies into friends, neutrals into supporters, the untrustworthy into loyal partisans.<sup>150</sup>

<sup>148</sup> Antonio De Ferrariis, (Il Galateo), "De dignitate disciplinarum ad Pancratium," in *La disputa delle arti nel Quattrocento*, p. 131.

<sup>149</sup> Antonio De' Ferrariis, (Il Galateo), *De dignitate disciplinarum ad Pancratium*, pp. 137-139.

<sup>150</sup> Giovanni Pontano, *Ad Alphonsum Calabriae Ducem De Principe Liber*, in E. Garin (ed.), *Prosatori Latini del Quattrocento*, Milan-Naples s.d., pp. 1025-1027.

Also the classical Ciceronian advice that the love of the citizens is the safest foundation of government assumes in Pontano's *De Principe* a different thrust. The love that the prince must primarily seek is that of his relatives and entourage, and those to whom he has entrusted the protection of his person and properties.<sup>151</sup> To gain the love of his relatives and courtiers, he should sincerely, not simply as a pose, congratulate them for their good fortune and commiserate with them for their misfortune. An appropriate blend of liberality and gratitude will bind them to him and turn them into loyal partisans, whilst an excess of liberality and gratitude would have pernicious effects. Moreover, he should not always adopt the same standards, nor treat everybody in the same way. If he does that, his relatives and courtiers would get used to benefits and expect to receive new ones every day. He must, therefore, be capable of refusing favors and not agree to all requests.

Having explained all this, Pontano adds that the Prince also has the duty to be humane and to seek the happiness of the whole population, not only of his relatives and partisans. However, his main concern must be with avoiding the reputation of being greedy and cruel rather than of being regarded as liberal and humane.<sup>152</sup> To be cruel and harsh is imprudent and unsafe: the cruel cardinal Ancelotti was slaughtered by the servant in charge of his room. Hence a prince who aims for a long life, should not, admonishes Pontano, imitate the example of tyrants.

No less important than liberality and clemency is justice. In the administration of justice, the prince must be impartial and become the personification of the laws themselves which are the same for everybody.<sup>153</sup> Ostensibly, Pontano is reiterating a conventional principle of Ciceronian political philosophy. Yet, in this case too, the adaptation of the Ciceronian vocabulary to apply to a prince needs adjustments. Although he must be impartial, the prince must also keep in mind that too rigorous an obedience to the law may well turn into injustice. It is hence advisable to be severe with some and mild with others according to the circumstances and the times. In some cases it is better to commute or to delay the punishment, than to apply the laws strictly, particularly with loyal subjects and those who have served the prince well.<sup>154</sup>

<sup>151</sup> *De Principe*, p. 1040.      <sup>152</sup> *De Principe*, p. 1040.

<sup>153</sup> "Ubi autem de iure agatur, nullum a te personarum discriminem habeatur, sed ipsarum legum personam induas, quae eadem semper sunt omnibus," *De Principe*, p. 1048.

<sup>154</sup> *De Principe*, p. 1051.

The civil man in office must be tutor and servant to the republic; the prince is master ("dominum") and protector ("patronum").<sup>155</sup> Accordingly, the prince must possess a majesty that has never been attributed to the civil man even when serving in the highest magistracies. As Pontano remarks, the classical sources, particularly Cicero, said very little in this respect. Cicero mentioned only the distinction ("decus") appropriate to private citizens and elective magistrates. A doctrine of princely majesty is still to be created, and such a theory must discuss at length the look, the behavior, the gesture, the language of the prince, as well as the appropriate ornaments of the royal palace.<sup>156</sup> Had I leisure enough, concludes Pontano, I would be happy to compose a detailed work on majesty.

Pontano's *De Principe* undertakes the task of forging the ideology of princely rule in part by readapting the conventions of civil philosophy, in part, by integrating it with new themes and new concepts. *De Principe* exemplifies the ideological trend connected with the establishment of princely rule over most of the Italian cities. The adoption of Platonism sustained the interpretation of the ideal of the civil man as a monarch or a prince. The Platonic monarch, however maintained some feature of the civil man. In his translation of Plato's *Statesman*, for instance, Marsilio Ficino rendered *Politikòs* as civil man (*civilis vir*) but also stressed that the rule of a single man is most conducive to peace and reproduces in the human city the rule of God over the universe.<sup>157</sup> The good king, however, like the good shepherd or the good captain, must take care of those who are under his rule and not seek his own interest. The true king is a citizen among citizens, whose excellence is grounded upon his justice and prudence.<sup>158</sup>

As Eugenio Garin has aptly shown, the Plato of the Florentine Humanists of the Quattrocento was no longer the theorist of the cosmic justice (*naturalis aequitas*) that had allured the medieval commentators.<sup>159</sup> The sympathy of the Humanists goes to Socrates,

<sup>155</sup> *De Principe*, p. 1051.      <sup>156</sup> *De Principe*, pp. 1061-1063.

<sup>157</sup> "In unum esse imperium omnium conferendum ut humana gubernatio divinae quam simillima sit, siquidem, et Deus unus mundi totius est rector"; Marsilio Ficino, "In librum Platonis de regno, vel civilem. Epitome," in Marsilii Ficini, *Opera*, Turin, 1959 (reprint of the Basle edition 1576), II, p. 129.

<sup>158</sup> "Eiusmodi vero gubernatorem atque curatorem saepius civilem vocat virum quam regem significans adeo humanum ac fieri possit, mitem esse debere, ut inter cives videatur esse concivis, prudentia, iustitia, cura potius quam alio quonvis excessu superior", Marsilio Ficino, "In librum Platonis de regno, vel civilem," in *Opera*, II, p. 1295.

<sup>159</sup> See E. Garin, "Donato Acciaiuoli cittadino fiorentino", in *Medioevo e Rinascimento*, Bari, 1973, pp. 234-237.

the philosopher concerned with justice in the humane city, rather than to the Pythagoric Timaeus, who seeks the norm that rules the order of the universe, as if the *Cosmos* were our true city.<sup>160</sup> For the Humanists, Plato is the source of Cicero, and they read him in the same way that they approached Cicero, namely to find suggestions for the philosophy of the city and civil justice. Since most of Cicero's *De Republica* was lost, it was reasonable to study the source from which he had drawn his political philosophy.<sup>161</sup> Plato may aptly complete Cicero. The former provided a theory of a rational organization of the republic; the latter investigated the historic origin of the states and explained how a republic, though not a perfect one, may be concretely instituted and preserved.<sup>162</sup> As Leonardo Bruni, who translated Plato's *Letters* into Latin, wrote to Cosimo de' Medici, Plato is an excellent teacher for the political man.<sup>163</sup> Although he was of course indulging in flattery, it was not implausible for Giorgio Trapezunzio to dedicate to the Senate of the Republic of Venice his translation of Plato's *Laws* stressing that the work is very instructive for a city committed to the preservation of liberty.<sup>164</sup>

The most important example of usage of the Platonic vocabulary may be found in Francesco Patrizi's works, which played a central role in the history of the acquisition and transformation of the concept of politics. His two major works, the *De Institutione Reipublicae*<sup>165</sup> and the *De Regno*,<sup>166</sup> although later almost completely forgotten, enjoyed in the sixteenth century a remarkable reputation in Italy as well as in

<sup>160</sup> "In mundi huius sensilis veluti quadam communi urbe ac republica voluit inquiri," as the medieval commentator Calcidius wrote, Calcidii, *Comm.*, Wrobel (ed.), Leipzig, 1876.

<sup>161</sup> In the Preface to his version of *The Republic*, the Milanese humanist Uberto Decembrio wrote: "Postquam nulla libros concessa licentia nobis/ Cernere politicos Ciceronis lege notatos/ Platonis speculemur opus, quo fonte bibisse/ Tullius asseritur," *Medioevo e Rinascimento*, p. 235, n. 45.

<sup>162</sup> "Però non puote in popol ch'è corrotto / star la comunione che Plato intese / in popol giusto, sapiente e dotto. / Per questo Tullio tal cittade prese / quale esser puote governata e recta / dal senno, manca delle ingiuste offese. / Non l'ordinò com'esser può perfecta / in quella mente che appetendo figne, / ma come in terra dar si può più necta. / Così l'un finse e l'altro la dipigne, / l'un la disia e l'altro mostra," Matteo Palmieri, *Città di vita*, III, 22.

<sup>163</sup> See E. Garin, *Medioevo e Rinascimento*, p. 236, no. 48.

<sup>164</sup> "In libros Platonis de legibus ex greca lingua in latinam versos ac illustri Venete reipublicae senatori Francisco Barbaro Sancti Marci Procuratori, et per eum ipsi reipublicae dedicatos, Georgii Trapezuntii prefatio," in *Medioevo e Rinascimento*, p. 236, no. 49.

<sup>165</sup> Francisci Patricii Senensis Pontificis Cajetani, *De Institutione Reipublicae Libri IX*, Argentorati, 1608. *De Institutione Reipublicae* was probably composed between 1465 and 1471. The work was probably begun when Patrizi was exiled to Verona and completed when he was the governor of Foligno, a position that he owed to the benevolence of Pope Pius II (Enea Silvio Piccolomini).

<sup>166</sup> *De Regno* was composed later, most probably between 1481 and 1484.

Europe.<sup>167</sup> *De Regno*, above all, was regarded as the standard Humanist portrait of the good king. In 1608 an edition of both *De Regno* and *De Institutione Reipublicae* was issued under the editorship of Lazarus Zetznerus. The two works were collected in a single volume, and, contrary to their order of composition, *De Regno* was put first as a recognition of its superior importance. On the first page, the editor recommended the book as necessary and useful to all, particularly to the politicians ("*Politicis*").<sup>168</sup> This detail is important: for the editor of the early seventeenth century, the political man is no longer the ruler or the citizen of a republic, but the king who rules with justice. However, the note from the editor reflects more the mentality of a seventeenth-century educated person than the historical meaning of Patrizi's *De Regno*. Although it is a work in praise of the good king, the good king is never described as a political man, nor is the treatise itself presented as a treatise on politics.

As is well known, Patrizi's work poses serious interpretive problems: the book in praise of the republic was followed ten years later by a work intended to celebrate the excellence of the rule of a good king. I will not try to explain the motivations that led Patrizi to write a book on the republic first and then a book on Kingship, and I shall confine myself to interpreting how he manipulated the Humanist conventions on politics when he had to discuss a topic like the good king for which the civil philosophy that he largely used in *De Institutione Reipublicae* was inadequate. It is my view that in order to face the new political and ideological task of illuminating the superiority of the rule of a good king over republican government, Patrizi readapted some of the tenets of civil philosophy and dismissed others.

The central ideological claim that Patrizi seems to convey is that the rule of a good prince achieves the ideal of the republic much better than the rule of many. Although he claims that the rule of the good king is the best foundation of a well-ordered republic, he always uses the term *civilis sapientia* in reference only to republican government. *De Institutione Reipublicae* and *De Regno* are, as far as the assessment of the best political constitution is concerned, two antithetical works. The *De Institutione* opens with the statement that a well-tempered

<sup>167</sup> The first edition of the *De Institutione Reipublicae* was published in Paris in 1494. From 1518 to 1594 nine more editions appeared. The *De Regno* was published first in Paris, in 1519 and four more editions were issued, again in Paris, in 1531, 1567, 1578 and in Strasbourg, in 1594.

<sup>168</sup> "Opus historiarum ac sententiarum varietate refertum, et cum aliis omnibus tum vero Politicis cum primis utile et necessarium, ut ex Epistola cognoscere licebit."



republic ("*bene moratae Republicae*") has to be preferred to any principality. The republic is superior to princely rule because the individual that personifies the principality cannot be absolute and perfect, whereas the republic is an immortal and eternal institution. The prince, because of senility and death, is bound to last for a shorter time.<sup>169</sup> Being a collective body, the republic can benefit from the virtues and the prudence of many which gives a greater advantage for public decisions.<sup>170</sup> In *De Regno* we read that *imperium unius* is the most natural type of command for men and the rule of one is by far better than the rule of many ("*unum longe melius imperare quam plures*").<sup>171</sup> The deliberations of the many are affected by passions, and a republic that entrusts the most important matters to the judgment of the many is bound to collapse. The history of republics itself shows that in case of serious threat, one must resort to the rule of one. Republics suffer, then, a serious incompleteness ("*status Rempublicarum dimidiatos esse*");<sup>172</sup> in times of peace they are ruled by the many; in times of war, they shift to the rule of one. In peaceful times too, the rule of many is seriously defective. Nothing could be worse, stresses Patrizi with aristocratic disdain, than the public election of the magistrates that forces the candidates to submit themselves to the judgment of many and to seek their approval.<sup>173</sup> Because of its inconstancy and inclination to envy and furor, the multitude has been aptly compared to the sea.<sup>174</sup> It is hence highly imprudent to commit to it the rulership of the city, and much safer indeed to rely on a good prince.

In the *De Regno* Patrizi constructs his argument by transferring the attributes of the republic to the rule of one. Following the Ciceronian convention Patrizi identifies the fundamental features of the republic as the rule of law, justice and self-government. The political value that informs the institutional and moral life of the republic is *isonomia*, which Patrizi takes to mean that all citizens are equally entitled in the public administration ("*aequo inter omnes jure omnia administranda sunt*");<sup>175</sup> that the magistrate must do justice to all citizens equally;<sup>176</sup> that all deliberations must be taken publicly ("*omnia consilia in commune referantur*").<sup>177</sup> The aim of *isonomia* in its various dimensions is

<sup>169</sup> "Illa siquidem diuturna ac pene immortalis est, hic parvo temporis curriculo senio ac morte conficitur, Praestare etiam videtur Respublica, quia in Principe non possunt singula absoluta ac perfecta esse," *De Institutione Reipublicae*, I, 1, p. 13.

<sup>170</sup> *De Institutione Reipublicae*, I, 1, p. 14. <sup>171</sup> *De Regno*, I, 13.

<sup>172</sup> *De Regno*, IX, 2. <sup>173</sup> *De Regno*, IX, 2. <sup>174</sup> *De Regno*, VII, 3.

<sup>175</sup> *De Institutione Reipublicae*, I, 4. <sup>176</sup> I, 6. <sup>177</sup> I, 6.

to assure liberty.<sup>178</sup> Moreover, as long as the citizens are treated as equal before the law and they have equal access to the magistracies, the republic enjoys peace and concord.<sup>179</sup>

What makes a republic *optima*, though, is the way in which the laws rule over men.<sup>180</sup> The magistrates, accordingly, are simply the voice of the law, and the law is a mute magistrate (“*magistratus esse legem loquentem, legem autem mutum magistratum*”).<sup>181</sup> Where the law is sovereign, reason rules over passions, and a well-ordered republic may be said to reproduce the good order of the soul. The rational will of the law unifies the multitude of the citizens. When the citizens are called to deliberate in public matters<sup>182</sup> their power is unified into a single collective body (“*multitudoque universa potestatem habet collecta in unum*”).<sup>183</sup>

Finally, to complete the portrait of the republic, Patrizi reminds the readers that republican equality is not at all incompatible with, and actually requires, a hierarchy of honors. Just as differences in age, strength and sex are recognized within the family, in a well-ordered republic the citizens who stand out above the others in age, virtue, sex and social status, must be accordingly rewarded with public honors.

If we turn to Patrizi's portrait of the kingdom, we notice that liberty and civil equality, the two distinctive political values of the republic, have been removed from the center of the argument. Liberty is mentioned briefly in a passage where he advises the prince that he should concede to his entourage the liberty of speaking and in a quick reference to the ancient peoples who preferred death to servitude. Equality is mentioned only to point out the inequity of social and economic egalitarianism.<sup>184</sup>

Clearly, monarchy is not the place for liberty and civil equality. It is, though, the domain of unity and justice, as the republic too, if well ordered, was supposed to be. As we have seen, the plurality of the citizens who compose the republic attains unity in the deliberation of

<sup>178</sup> *De Institutione Reipublicae*, 1, 4.

<sup>179</sup> As the two most detrimental forms of degeneration of republican equality and causes of discord, Patrizi points to partiality in courts and the discrimination in the distribution of honors. *De Institutione Reipublicae*, 1, 6.

<sup>180</sup> The heading of ch. 5 in Bk. 1 reads: “Optimam rempublicam esse, in qua leges dominantur: et de legum virtute, quae quidem magistratibus praesse debent et de legumlatoribus.”

<sup>181</sup> *De Institutione Reipublicae*, 1, 5. <sup>182</sup> *De Institutione Reipublicae*, 1, 5.

<sup>183</sup> When they are not involved in public deliberations, the citizens resume of course their private status and attend to their own business; See *De Institutione Reipublicae*, 1, 5.

<sup>184</sup> “Et iniquum admodum videbatur rursus patrimonia partiri, et industriam desidiae parem facere,” *De Regno*, IV, 9, p. 233.

the sovereign body where the multitude of individuals becomes a collective body with a single will. But the rule of the king can, of course, assure a more perfect and stable unity. As natural reason and philosophers instruct us, unity is the origin of plurality and difference.<sup>185</sup> Republics, that pretend to attain unity through plurality and difference, are bound to be inherently defective, as their endemic unrest shows. Under the rule of one, on the contrary, cities enjoy a lasting concord.

The justice of the republics, too, pales before the *justitia regis*. The king is the guardian of the good and justice, almost the living law ("*est enim custos boni, et equi, quasi animatum ius*").<sup>186</sup> Those who appeal to him actually have access to justice and equity itself.<sup>187</sup> In the *De Institutione Reipublicae* the sovereignty of the law was meant to secure the rule of reason over passions. Since he is "*ius animatum*," the king is, in this respect too, immensely superior. In administering the law, the king is not perturbed by any emotion. He is therefore always fair and judges equally things that are equal and differently the things that are different. Patrizi's *Optimus Rex* is not only the guardian and foundation of justice, but he is himself subordinated to law and justice.<sup>188</sup> It would be unfair to prescribe to others laws that are not binding on him too.

In the *De Institutione Reipublicae*, Patrizi had portrayed the image of the civil man as the foundation of justice and the embodiment of virtues. The "civil man" is a good man useful to the Republic ("*vir bonum et Reipublicae utilem*").<sup>189</sup> Like the sailor whose duty it is to lead the ship to a safe harbor, the "*civilis vir*" must lead the republic to the goal for which it has been instituted, namely liberty and peace. To fulfill his duty, the political man must be temperate, constant, prudent and just. He must possess all these virtues to qualify as a "*bonus vir*" and to be able to succeed in the task of ruling the *republica*. The four virtues are like four sisters, none of whom can be perfect without the assistance of the others. Fortitude ("*fortitudo*") without prudence turns into temerity; prudence without justice becomes craftiness ("*calliditas*") or malice ("*malitia*"); temperance without fortitude is sloth; justice without temperance is corrupted into

<sup>185</sup> *De Regno*, I, 8.      <sup>186</sup> *De Regno*, II, 1.      <sup>187</sup> *De Regno*, II, 1.

<sup>188</sup> "Et primo quidem dicendum erit ut bonis legibus pareat ut illius exemplo alii omnes libentius alacriusque; illis obsequantur. Iniquum esset, jus aliis prescribere quo ipse non uteretur," *De Regno*, VIII, 6, p. 477.

<sup>189</sup> Francesco Patrizi, *De Institutione Reipublicae*, v, 2.

crudity. If the ruler displays the proper combination of virtues, the city can avoid sedition and discord and last forever ("*republicam diuturnum, atque immortale animal*").<sup>190</sup>

In addition to being *rector*, the civil man is *moderator*. He must keep the republic on its course and find the appropriate place for each member of the citizenry. If the city is corrupted, his task is even harder: he must reform the constitution and the laws of the city in order to restore political life. He needs to be skillful and capable of speaking, persuading and deliberating with prudence. But when the city has to be reformed, the political man must also be capable of shaping, like a good architect, new political institutions.

The same qualifications apply to the *Optimus Rex* too, particularly the attribute of being the foundation of justice and the example of virtue. God gave man a mind so that he might submit his action to its rule. The nature of man itself prescribes that the mind governs passions and imposes a restraint on them.<sup>191</sup> If their conduct conforms to reason, men succeed in living a life of virtue which is the most perfect goal of human life and true happiness.<sup>192</sup> The habit of virtue makes the prince a good man. Because of his life of virtue he attains his own happiness and leads all his subjects on the way to true happiness.<sup>193</sup>

Although it does not provide liberty and civic equality, the rule of the *optimus Princeps* is superior to the republic in terms of justice and unity. The rule of one, not that of many, realizes on earth the rule of reason and virtue that God wants men to pursue. In his shift from the republic to the principality Patrizi casts a veil of silence over some of the tenets of civil philosophy, while transferring others to the arguments conventionally used to claim the superiority of monarchy. The language of princely rule maintains a number of elements of civil philosophy whereas others are missed or transfigured. In his republican moments, on the other hand, Patrizi had presented the republic as the best form of government because it is unlikely that we can have a good king, not in absolute terms. If we had a good king, monarchy would be much better than the republic. What could be more beautiful – asks Patrizi in the *De Institutione Reipublicae* – than to live under a good prince in peace and security, protected from the ambition of the populace? Nature itself gives us the example to be followed: there is but one God ruling the universe, but one sun

<sup>190</sup> Francesco Patrizi, *De Institutione Reipublicae*, v, 2.

<sup>191</sup> *De Regno*, 1, 9.

<sup>192</sup> *De Regno*, 1, 9.

<sup>193</sup> *De Regno*, vi, 6.

governing over the planets and the stars during the daytime, but one moon lightens the night. The basic values that Patrizi uses to assess the two forms of government are justice, peace and unity, not liberty and even less equality.<sup>194</sup>

To be able to construct a plausible argument, Patrizi needed only to make the case that a good prince defends these values better, and to overcome the point he himself had made in the *De Institutione Reipublicae*, namely that kings normally incline to tyranny instead of being god kings. The most obvious response was to provide counter-examples from history, as he did to a good extent in the *De Regno*. His key move, however, was to shift to a philosophical argument rather than trying to provide an historical or factual description.

Borrowing extensively from Plato, Patrizi explains to the reader that true knowledge is that of ideas, the immutable and perfect forms that we can grasp through reason. In our inquiry upon the rule of one, we shall therefore adopt the rational approach and illustrate the idea of the good king, no matter if no such king ever existed on earth. Like Plato in his *Republic*, we are not concerned with the actual, but with the ideal, prince.<sup>195</sup>

The recovery of the Platonic theory of forms provides Patrizi with the philosophical foundation of his doctrine of the *Optimus Rex* as the embodiment of reason and source of justice. The portrait was then completed by the list of the virtues that a good king must possess to fulfill his difficult duties properly. Through a few subtle adjustments, Patrizi presents his *Optimus Rex* as the champion of civil virtues and equivalent of the political man of the republican tradition.

He constructs his argument starting from the assessment of the superiority of a life devoted to civil virtue ("*civiles virtutes*")<sup>196</sup> over a life of solitude and contemplation. Quoting again from Plato, but also from Aristotle and Cicero, Patrizi stresses the classical republican principle that we are not born for ourselves alone, but have obligations to our country, our parents and relatives and our friends. Therefore, the truly civil men ("*civiles illi*"), who virtuously serve their republic, assist princes, protect their parents and children and support their friends, deserve to enjoy the most complete happiness. He even goes so far as to quote the famous passage incorporated in the *Somnium Scipionis* where Cicero stresses that the *civitas*, the community of men associated to live together in justice, is most dear to God

<sup>194</sup> *De Institutione Reipublicae*, I, 1.

<sup>195</sup> *De Regno*, II, 4.

<sup>196</sup> *De Regno*, VI, 5.

("Civitas Deo gratissima").<sup>197</sup> Since their achievements are so highly regarded, the great men who ruled and preserved republics (*rectores et conservatores*), when they die, immediately return to the heavens from whence they came to serve their country. The glorious destiny that Cicero depicted for the saviors and the rulers of republics is now attributed to the good king. Clearly, the message that Patrizi intended to convey to his readers, nurtured on the conventions of civil philosophy, was that the kingdom ruled by a just king is in fact a *civitas*, and the just king is the sum of civil virtues.

In his elaboration of the ideology of monarchical rule, Patrizi borrows from the language of the republic, adapting it, of course, to the new political intent. When they are employed in the *De Regno*, however, the meaning of the terms originally forged for the language of the republic is substantially changed. The most relevant example is the case of the concept of civil science ("*civilis scientia*") or civil wisdom ("*civilis sapientia*"). In the covering letter of the *De Institutione Reipublicae* addressed to the Senate and the people of Siena, the term appears in the context of a eulogy of the citizens and institutions that permitted the republic to maintain its liberty while most of the Italian cities had fallen under the dominations of kings or tyrants.<sup>198</sup> The citizens of Siena, stresses Patrizi, are committed to liberty, and with the utmost skill practice civil wisdom ("*civilem sapientiam optime callent*"). In line with the conventional meaning, civil wisdom is here the practical knowledge that aims at the preservation of the free republic. In the *De Regno*, the term "civil science" ("*civilis scientia*"), equated with wisdom in general, is the science that helps the soul to overcome pleasure and sorrow and live according to virtue. The civility pertains to the soul of the prince, not to the institutions and the custom of the republic. The discipline that leads the prince to virtue is "civil" in the same sense that the *Politikòs* of Plato was translated as "*civilis vir*." It is civil because virtuous, that is, capable of keeping his soul in order, and consequently of living in orderly terms with the other men. Were the prince unable to behave virtuously, he would be a tyrant, and that is the antithesis of civility.

With the *De Regno*, working mainly within the neo-Platonic tradition, Patrizi completed the ideology of the *optimus Princeps*. In spite of the substantial borrowings from republican language, the

<sup>197</sup> *De Regno*, VI, 5.

<sup>198</sup> "Ad Senatum Populumque Senensem," in *De Institutione Reipublicae*.

work was not meant to be a work on civil discipline, as the *De Institutione Reipublicae* was meant to be – even less a treatise on politics, even if it so appeared to the reader of the early seventeenth century. By the end of the fifteenth century kingly rule had its systematic ideology, distinct from the ideology of the republic as well as from the art of the state, the most aggressive and powerful antagonist of the language of politics. However, whereas the language of the art of the state later succeeded in adorning itself with the then noble word of ‘politics’, the language of the *Optimus Rex* did not strip the republican ideology of its most distinguished ornament. Even though the ideology of kingly rule was intended to supplant the republican language, it was not its most dangerous enemy.

Nevertheless, by the end of the century, with the expulsion of the Medici and the institution of a republican government, the language of civil philosophy flourished again in the works of the Dominican friar Girolamo Savonarola. In his *Trattato del reggimento di Firenze*, a work designed to set the guidelines for the new republican constitution, Savonarola gives the traditional concept of a political regime, a decided republican thrust, stressing at the same time that only a true ‘civil government’ may succeed to prevent the rise of tyranny and protect the most precious good of liberty.

Drawing on Ptolemy of Lucca’s notion of political regime, Savonarola describes civil government [*“governo civile”*] as government of the whole citizenry [*“per tutto il popolo”*].<sup>199</sup> In theory, the best form of government would be monarchy. Yet, for Florence, only civil government would fit the habits of the citizenry and the political tradition of the city. Tyranny, on the contrary, would be the most unnatural.

The Florentines, admonishes Savonarola, should endure the inconveniences of even an imperfect civil government rather than accepting or invoking a tyrant because the tyrant is the worst of all men. He wants to dominate his fellow-citizens by force. His goal is his state (*“lo stato che tiene”*) and to maintain his state, he is prepared to do anything, no matter how wicked.<sup>200</sup>

<sup>199</sup> Girolamo Savonarola, *Trattato del reggimento di Firenze*, in L. Firpo (ed.), *Prediche sopra Aggeo*, Rome, 1965, p. 442. For Savonarola’s intellectual debt to the Thomist theory as well as to the Florentine tradition, see Donald Weinstein, *Savonarola and Florence*, Princeton, 1970, particularly pp. 289–315. Weinstein correctly stresses that Savonarola’s approach to politics was “neither entirely Thomist nor completely Florentine,” and was indeed determined “by his belief in the coming religious renewal,” p. 309.

<sup>200</sup> Girolamo Savonarola, *Trattato del reggimento di Firenze*, p. 457.

In full agreement with the conventional Humanist views, Savonarola too equates the art of seizing and preserving the state to the art of tyranny. In his account of the arts that the tyrant uses to preserve his state, Savonarola follows the outline of Bartolus' *De Tyranno*. To achieve his perverse goal, he rules public affairs in secrecy, foments discord among the subjects, lowers the most prominent and virtuous citizens, prohibits public meetings of the citizens because he does not want friendship to flourish and encourages the citizens to attend only to their domestic business and not to be concerned with state's mysteries ("*secreti del Stato*").<sup>201</sup> Furthermore, the tyrant is a master of the art of dissimulation. He always speaks ambiguously, never straight. Rather than by words, he likes to rule by nods. His rule is the rule of passions, not reason, and when one man's passions rule over the city, nobody can be secure in his properties as well as his dearest affections. Everything is exposed to the tyrant's arbitrary will. As long as the tyrant dominates, the city cannot enjoy the blessings of good government: no peace, no concord, no justice, no benevolence, no prosperity.<sup>202</sup>

Having explained what tyranny is and the means that the tyrant employs to preserve his state, Savonarola sketches the principles and the goals of the opposite art, that of instituting and preserving a civil government. The radical opposition between the art of the state and the art of the republic is indeed the central theme of the *Trattato*.

Savonarola begins his argument by stressing that the most serious threat against civil government comes from the wealthy and powerful citizens. Yet, even the wealthiest will not be able to buy the loyalty of a great number of citizens and cannot control the offices and the magistracies of the city. The safest way of preventing tyranny is then to entrust the supreme powers – the election of the magistrates and the passing of the laws – to a large body of citizens properly selected. The true *signore* of the city must therefore be a Great Council.

The citizens appointed to serve in the Great Council must be compelled to perform their duty even through legal sanctions, if the attachment to the common good is not enough. The meetings of the Council, however, should not be that frequent that attendance becomes detrimental for the citizens' private activities. Civil government requires willingness to devote a share of one's own time to the

<sup>201</sup> Girolamo Savonarola, *Trattato del reggimento di Firenze*, p. 459.

<sup>202</sup> Girolamo Savonarola, *Trattato del reggimento di Firenze*, pp. 468–469.



service of the republic; it does not, and cannot, require full-time participation. Like the civic humanists, Savonarola advocates a proper balance between private and political life, not a total devotion to the public good.

According to Savonarola, the preservation of a civil regime requires four conditions that are exactly the reverse of the conditions that make tyranny prosper. First, the citizens must fear God (the tyrant shows at most an apparent reverence to God); second, they must love the common good, and when they are called to serve as magistrates they must leave aside all passions and private concerns (the tyrant seeks his private interests and follows his passions); third, citizens have to be friendly and benevolent among themselves (tyranny nurtures discord and distrust); fourth, justice must preside over all public decisions (tyranny is the reign of discrimination and favors).

If they succeed in keeping the city immune from the horrors of tyranny, the citizens will live in true liberty (*"vera libertà"*), which is more precious than gold and silver.<sup>203</sup> They will live secure in their own city, attending to their private business and honest gains with joy and tranquillity. Neither their possessions nor their honors will be in danger because of the tyrant's ambition. They will be free to go wherever they please, marry their daughters as they like, have fun in company of their friends, cultivate virtue, or pursue the sciences and the arts according to their own preferences.

The citizens of a free city may enjoy all worldly happiness. Their rulers deserve, and will obtain, perennial glory and beatitude. God, stresses Savonarola, paraphrasing Macrobius, rewards according to merit, and nothing can be more excellent than preserving a civil rule. The Ciceronian celebration of the political man aptly concludes a treatise that was meant to be, and was received as, an exemplary work of that philosophy of the city that flourished in the Quattrocento upon the foundations that theorists of communal rule, civil jurists of the Trecento, and Aristotelian political philosophers had prepared.

The *Trattato* inaugurated a new season of civil philosophy. In the political and social scenario of Italy many things had changed since the times of Brunetto Latini, Baldus of Ubaldis and Ptolemy of Lucca. The contrast between republic and various forms of despotism (the state of someone) was complicated by foreign domination over Italy

<sup>203</sup> Girolamo Savonarola, *Trattato del reggimento di Firenze*, p. 481.

that began with Charles VIII's invasion in 1494. The champions of the republic accepted the new political and ideological challenge and responded by bringing civil philosophy to unprecedented levels of refinement. At the beginning of the fifteenth century civil philosophy enjoyed its highest moments of glory; the century to come would have witnessed its greatest intellectual splendor. It was, however, the splendor of a sunset.

### CHAPTER 3

## *Machiavelli and the republican concept of politics*

In the story of the transition from politics to reason of state the central place belongs to Niccolò Machiavelli. Over the centuries, Machiavelli has been regarded as being mainly responsible for the dismissal of the notion of politics as the art of the republic, and the spiritual father of the doctrine of reason of state.

Be it his sin or his greatest contribution to modern culture, what seems to be above dispute is that Machiavelli rejected the republican language and provided us with a new account of the goals and the means of politics. Against the view that politics is the art of establishing and preserving a good community, Machiavelli, it has been argued, stressed that the goal of politics is the pursuit of power, and that the "political man" cannot be the "good man of the ancients." While some scholars have stressed that the originality of Machiavelli consists in the redefinition of the aim of politics,<sup>1</sup> others have emphasised his contribution to a new methodology of political enquiry,<sup>2</sup> or have presented Machiavelli as the theorist of politics as innovation, whose symbol is no longer the Humanists' good man, but

<sup>1</sup> See for instance B. Croce, *Elementi di politica*, Bari, Laterza, 1925. Against Croce, Isaiah Berlin claimed that it is more appropriate to speak of conflict between two moralities, instead of discovery of the autonomy of politics (I. Berlin, "The originality of Machiavelli," in Myron P. Gilmore (ed.), *Studies on Machiavelli*, Florence, 1972, pp. 147–206); see also Friedrich Meinecke, *Die Idee der Staatsräson in der neueren Geschichte*, Munich and Berlin, 1929 (3rd edn.), pp. 36–37; J. H. Hexter, *The Vision of Politics on the Eve of the Reformation: More, Machiavelli and Seyssel*, New York–London, 1973, p. 228; G. Ritter, *Die Dämonie der Macht*, Munich, 1948 (6th, edn.), p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> Ernst Cassirer wrote: "What Galileo gave in his *Dialogues*, and what Machiavelli gave in his *Prince* were really 'new sciences'. [...] Just as Galileo's Dynamics became the foundation of our modern science of nature, so Machiavelli paved a new way to political science." E. Cassirer, *The Myth of the State*, New Haven, 1946, p. 130; see also G. Prezzolini, *Machiavelli Anticristo*, Rome, 1954, p. 18. On the same line, A. Renaudet wrote that the distinctive contribution of Machiavelli was the creation of "une méthode strictement positive" for the study of political science. A. Renaudet, *Machiavel*, Paris, 1955, p. 117. For a comprehensive account see V. Sellin, "Politik," in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, Stuttgart, 1978, 4, p. 790. The

the new prince. In his writings, politics assumes a more general significance meaning the art of dealing with contingent events, with fickle fortune, the symbol of pure, uncontrolled and unlegitimated contingency.<sup>3</sup> Others still, in more recent years, have emphasized Machiavelli as the theorist of a republican version of power politics, whose main goal is not liberty, but greatness, expansion and glory.<sup>4</sup>

This agreement among contemporary scholars could be further corroborated by the opinions of the political writers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, who called Machiavelli the corrupter of the true (Aristotelian) idea of politics and pointed to him as the thinker who transformed the most noble of humane arts into the art of tyrannical rule. As Innocent Gentillet wrote, Machiavelli invented “des Maximes tous meschantes, et basty sur icelles non une science politique mais tyrannique.”<sup>5</sup>

However, one political writer in Early-Modern Europe turned upside down the predominant view of Machiavelli, and claimed that his great accomplishment was the recovery of the republican view of politics. I am referring to James Harrington, who made this point forcefully in the “Preliminaries” of *Oceana*, issued in 1656. The premise of his argument is the distinction between “ancient” and “modern” prudence. “Ancient prudence” was revealed to mankind by God himself and was followed by the Greeks and the Romans. The government which was instituted according to the ancient prudence was the government *de jure*, that is, “the civil society instituted and preserved upon the common right and interest.” Modern prudence, on the contrary, “is the art whereby some man or some few men, subject a city or a nation and rule it according unto his or their private interest.” Since in government *de facto* laws are made to protect the interest of one man, or of few, it may be said that this is government by men and not by laws. Having clarified the distinction between ancient and modern prudence, Harrington writes:

interpretation of Machiavelli as the innovator of the science of politics who radically rejected the classical tradition is stressed also by Sheldon Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, Boston-Toronto, 1960, pp. 201-237.

<sup>3</sup> See Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*, p. 156.

<sup>4</sup> See Mark Hulliung, *Citizen Machiavelli*, Princeton, 1983, pp. 3-30 and 219-255.

<sup>5</sup> I. Gentillet, *Discours sur les moyens de bien gouverner et maintenir en bone paix un royaume ou autre principauté* (1576), A. d'Andrea and P. D. Stewart (eds.), Florence, 1974, p. 20. In *Le livre de l'institution du Prince* (1548), Guillaume Budé contrasted “le regime politique et l'honnesteté morale” with the vices that often follow from power and superiority.

The former kind is that which Machiavel (whose books are neglected) is the only politician that hath gone about to retrieve and that Leviathan (who would have his book imposed upon the universities) goes about to destroy.<sup>6</sup>

The two conflicting views of Machiavelli as the subverter or restorer of the republican idea of politics have been discussed also in terms of compatibility between the content of *The Prince* and the *Discourses*, or, to paraphrase Hans Baron's famous essay, between the "republican citizen" and the "author of *The Prince*."<sup>7</sup> Hence, if we want to clarify Machiavelli's role in the story of the transition from politics to reason of state, as well as to gain a better insight concerning his intellectual and political biography, we should reopen the question and ask: What did Machiavelli do with the conventional language of politics of his times? Did he dismantle or recover the view of politics as the art of instituting and preserving the good political community? Or did he, in fact, advocate a combination of some sort between the art of politics and the art of the state?

To answer these questions, I shall begin with *The Prince*, the text that has been pointed to as the evidence that Machiavelli rejected the ideology of politics as the art of the republic. And I shall begin by remarking that in *The Prince*, Machiavelli never uses the word "*politico*" or its equivalent.<sup>8</sup> For a book that has been celebrated or attacked as the keystone of the new science of politics this is surprising. If the reconstruction I have suggested in the previous chapters is correct, however, the absence of any *politico*-rooted word in *The Prince* should not be surprising at all. The vocabulary of politics is appropriate within a discourse on the city, but since *The Prince* is not a

<sup>6</sup> J. Harrington, "The Commonwealth of Oceana," in J. G. A. Pocock (ed.), *The Political Works of James Harrington*, Cambridge, 1977, p. 161. Hannah Arendt wrote that Machiavelli is the only postclassical political theorist who made an extraordinary effort "to restore politics to its old dignity." Arendt's view, however, is totally at odds with Harrington's interpretation since she identifies the recovery of the classical idea of politics in the passages of the *Prince* and the *Discourses* where Machiavelli describes the rise of private men to principedom or to a public position. See *The Human Condition*, Chicago, 1958, p. 35; for a useful account of the English interpretations of Machiavelli, see Felix Raab, *The English Face of Machiavelli*, London, 1964.

<sup>7</sup> Hans Baron, "Machiavelli: the republican citizen and the author of *The Prince*," in Hans Baron, *In Search of Florentine Civic Humanism*, pp. 101-151. The essay was first published in 1961 in the *English Historical Review*.

<sup>8</sup> The point has been forcefully focused by Dolf Sternberger. In *The Prince*, he writes, "die Wörter 'Politik,' 'politisch,' und 'Politiker' kommen in dem ganze Buche *De Principatibus* oder *Il Principe* nicht ein einziges Mal vor." *Machiavelli's Principe und der Begriff des Politischen*, Wiesbaden, 1974, p. 35. See also John H. Whitfield, *Discourses on Machiavelli*, Cambridge, 1969, pp. 163-79, and N. Rubinstein, "The history of the word *politicus* in early-modern Europe," in A. Pagden (ed.), *The Languages of Political Theory in Early-Modern Europe*, pp. 53-54.

discourse on the city, there is no reason for Machiavelli to use that language. The subject matter of his treatise is the state of the prince and how a state can be governed and preserved.<sup>9</sup>

For Machiavelli the word "state" has different meanings.<sup>10</sup> In several instances he uses the term to indicate the preeminent status or the regime of a prince (or a citizen, or faction).<sup>11</sup> When he reports in the *Istorie Fiorentine* Cosimo's famous line that "you can't hold states with prayer books (*paternostri*) in the hand," he knew well that Cosimo meant *his own* state, the state of the Medici, not the sovereign political community of Florence, as our concept of state would lead us to believe. If we read Cosimo's line along with the other no less famous motto: "better a city ruined than lost," we have another example of the same contrast between the interest of the state (*stato*) and the interest of the city, between the art of the state and politics that we have noticed in the works of the Quattrocento Humanists. With the sole, but crucial, difference that the Humanists condemned the art of the state and glorified politics, whereas Cosimo celebrated and practiced the former and (implicitly) mocked the latter.<sup>12</sup> What Cosimo was concerned with was the preservation of his *stato*, and for this reason he exiled, or sentenced to death or confiscated the properties of Florentine citizens. Not because they were enemies of the republic, but because they were the enemies of *his* state. Just as he rewarded others because they were *his* friends and partisans.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>9</sup> "Io lascerò indietro el ragionare delle repubbliche, perchè altra volta ne ragionai a lungo. Volterommi solo al principato, et andrò tessendo li orditi soprascritti, e disputerò come questi principati si possano governare e mantenere." N. Machiavelli, "Il Principe," in *Il Principe e i Discorsi*, S. Bertelli (ed.), Milan, 1983, pp. 15–16. For the English translations I am following here and henceforth the text of *The Prince* edited by Q. Skinner and Russell Price, Cambridge, 1988. In the letter to Vettori from December 10, 1513, Machiavelli stresses that the topic of *The Prince* is "che cosa è principato, di quale spetie sono, come e' si acquistano, come e' si mantengono, perchè e' si perdono." *Lettere*, F. Gaeta (ed.), Milan, 1961, p. 304.

<sup>10</sup> In the two pages long piece *Ai Paleschi. Notate bene questo scripto*, Machiavelli uses the word "stato" in four different senses: as *nation* or *political community* ("e' non gli muove el fare bene ad questo *stato*"); as *political regime* ("a me non pare che cosa alcuna, di che si truovi in colpa Piero Soderini, possa dare reputatione ad questo *stato* apresso al popolo: perchè di quelle medesime cose di che potessi essere incolpato Piero, sempre questo *stato* ne sarà o incolpato o sospetto"); as *political power*: ("stare uniti con lo *stato*"); as the power of a *signore* ("Però di nuovo dico che trovare e' difetti di Piero non dà reputazione ad lo *stato de' Medici*"). See Jean-Jacques Marchand, *Niccolò Machiavelli. I primi scritti politici (1499–1512)*, Padua, 1975, pp. 533–535.

<sup>11</sup> A well known exception is in the opening statement of *The Prince*: "All the state [stati], all the dominions that have held sway over men, have been either republics or principalities," *The Prince*, ch. 1.

<sup>12</sup> Niccolò Machiavelli, *Istorie Fiorentine*, Bk. vii, ch. 6, in A. Montevecchi (ed.), *Opere*, Turin, 1986.

<sup>13</sup> "Spogliata adunque la città de' nimici o sospetti allo stato, si volsono a benificare nuove genti per fare più gagliarda la parte loro," (*Istorie Fiorentine*), p. 525.

In other instances, Machiavelli uses the term 'state' in the sense of the territory over which a prince or a republic have sovereignty. In his response to the Cardinal of Rouen, Machiavelli argued that the Italians did not master the art of war, but the French ignored the art of the state.<sup>14</sup> Machiavelli meant that the French did not know the basic rules to be followed in order to preserve their dominion over a foreign province such as Italy (*"per tenere uno stato in una provincia disforme"*).<sup>15</sup>

When he claims that his *Prince* "will reveal that I have not been asleep or wasted my time during the fifteen years that I have been engaged in studying statecraft [*arte dello stato*],"<sup>16</sup> he is referring above all to the state in the sense of dominion over a territory, following the diplomatic usage of identifying *stati* with dominions.<sup>17</sup> As Secretary to the Ten of War, Machiavelli had to deal almost exclusively with foreign matters, and above all with issues related to the dominion and territorial integrity. The fact that he was working for a republic and not for a *signore* is not in this context a relevant distinction, since the Florentine Republic also was a state, *vis à vis* the other states and held a dominion. In some cases, the art of the state and the art of the city may indeed coincide. For instance, the skill of foreseeing dangers before it is too late to adopt countermeasures, and the ability to understand the actual intentions of one's neighbours, are equally important to preserve a state (the regime of a group or a single man) as well as political life (the rule of law).

However, like the Humanists of the Quattrocento, Machiavelli never spoke of the art of the state as a duplicate of the art of the republic or "*vivere politico*" for the simple reason that for him, and for them, "*stato*" was not just another word for republic or "*vivere*

<sup>14</sup> 'perchè, dicendomi el cardinale di Roano che li Italiani non si intendevano della guerra, io li resposi ch'e' Franzesi non si intendevano dello stato.' *The Prince*, ch. 3.

<sup>15</sup> *The Prince*, ch. 3.

<sup>16</sup> "Et per questa cosa [*Il Principe*], quando la fussi letta, si vedrebbe che quindici anni che io sono stato a studio all'arte dello stato, non gli ho nè dormiti nè giuocati."; letter to Vettori from December 10, 1513, in *Lettere*, p. 305. In another letter to Vettori, from December 10, 1514, having been requested by his friend to display his knowledge of the "arte dello stato," Machiavelli begins by making clear that what is at stake is the possibility for the pope to preserve the status of the Vatican State "volendo mantenere la Chiesa nella riputazione che l'ha trovata." p. 351.

<sup>17</sup> See Nicolai Rubinstein, "Notes on the word *stato* in Florence before Machiavelli," in J. G. Rowe and W. H. Stockdale (eds.), *Florilegium Historiale. Essays presented to Wallace K. Ferguson*, Toronto, 1971, p. 321.

*politico*.”<sup>18</sup> The “*vivere politico*” is a *specific* form of political organization which precludes tyranny and despotic rule and is incompatible with the state of somebody: if a citizen or a party succeed in dominating over the laws and the magistrates, one can no longer speak of republic. In contrast, any form of political organization is a state, as we can clearly see from *The Prince*, where Machiavelli speaks of “the Turkish Kingdom” (“*lo stato del Turco*”) a despotic state, along with “kingdoms ruled like France” (“*lo stato di Francia*”), a moderate kingdom,<sup>19</sup> or: “states . . . accustomed to living under their own laws and in freedom” (“*gli stati che sono consueti a vivere con le loro leggi e in libertà*”), that is, the republics.<sup>20</sup>

Machiavelli did not use the word *politico* or its equivalent in *The Prince* simply because he was not writing about politics, as he understood the term. He was writing about the art of the state, the art of preserving and reinforcing the state of the prince. To use the word ‘politics’ for the art of the state, or the adjective “politico” for the prince and *his* state would have been to speak improperly, or would have been a radical ideological innovation. *The Prince* was certainly a profoundly innovative piece of work, but it does not contain a new interpretation of politics.

As Quentin Skinner has correctly shown, to understand *The Prince*’s subversive meaning we have to read it in the context of the Quattrocento advice-books for princes. In this way we can see that Machiavelli’s book was a devastating critique of contemporary humanism and its classical Ciceronian sources.<sup>21</sup> If we consider also another ideological context, namely the literature on the art of the

<sup>18</sup> The meaning of the word “stato” has been the subject of a vast scholarly literature. In contrast with the views of F. Ercole, *La politica di Machiavelli*, Rome, 1926, pp. 123–142, Fredi Chiappelli pointed out that in *The Prince*, Machiavelli’s genuine political treatise, the word “stato” denotes, with a few exceptions, the political organization of a people over a territory independent from the particular form of their government or regime – that is, the modern abstract notion of the state (*Studi sul linguaggio di Machiavelli*, Florence, 1952, pp. 59–68). An opposite view is suggested by J. H. Hexter, who stressed that *Il Principe* does not contain the conception of the state as an abstract political body which transcends the individuals who compose or rule it (“*Il Principe and lo stato*,” in *The Vision of Politics on the Eve of the Reformation*, pp. 150–178). My opinion is that what we mean by the word “stato” corresponds to what Machiavelli means by the phrases “vivere comune” and “vivere insieme,” rather by the word “stato.” With a few exceptions, Machiavelli does not use the word “stato” in the modern sense, namely as a power-structure independent of those who have charge of it. <sup>19</sup>*The Prince*, ch. 4. <sup>20</sup>*The Prince*, ch. 5.

<sup>21</sup> See Q. Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, Cambridge, 1978, I, pp. 128–138; Of the same author see also *Machiavelli*, Oxford, 1981, pp. 31–47.



state, we may be able to identify other important sets of meanings, and to see that *The Prince* was intended to be at the same time a critique and an endorsement of the beliefs on the art of the state that were circulating in early fifteenth-century Florence.<sup>22</sup>

When Machiavelli sat in Sant'Andrea in Percussina to write *The Prince*, the art of the state was a well-established body of conventions, though not as refined as the rival language of civil philosophy. In Florentine discussions on government, the conventions and the vocabulary of the language of politics coexisted with those of the art of the state. Politics, however, enjoyed a much nobler public status than the art of the state. The principles of the art of ruling the republic were publicly discussed and recommended in scholarly works; the rules of the art of the state were almost exclusively whispered in restricted gatherings or couched in private letters and memoranda. By the time of Machiavelli, we may say, the art of the state was still creeping in the shadow of politics.

Examples of the coexistence of the two languages may be found in the records of the *Consulte* and *Pratiche*, the semi-official boards summoned by the various Councils of the republic (The Council of Eight, the Ten of Peace and Liberty) to give advice on issues of domestic and foreign policy. The citizens invited to attend the *Pratiche* belonged to the wealthiest and most distinguished families of the city and the protocols of these discussions offer us unique documents of the political language of the sixteenth-century Florentine elite.<sup>23</sup>

In the words of the distinguished citizens invited to the *Pratiche*, we may hear a clear echo of the conventional view of politics as the art of ruling a city according to justice and reason. Justice, it was said in the *Pratiche* of November 1499, "is the foundation of everything."<sup>24</sup> If you do not ensure the rule of law, admonished a participant to the *Pratica*

<sup>22</sup> These meanings of *The Prince* would remain totally inaccessible if we interpret the text, as Pocock suggests, as a work "inspired by a specific situation but not directed at it" in which Machiavelli is solely concerned "with relations between the innovator and fortune"; *The Machiavellian Moment*, p. 160. The importance of the Florentine context at the time of the Medicean restoration has recently been stressed by Q. Skinner: "an undercurrent of specific warning and advice appears to lie beneath the surface generalities of Machiavelli's text"; see "Introduction" to Machiavelli, *The Prince*, Q. Skinner and R. Price (eds.), Cambridge 1988, p. 13.

<sup>23</sup> Among the first to point to the importance of the *Consulte* and *Pratiche* was Felix Gilbert in his seminal essay "Florentine political assumptions in the period of Savonarola and Soderini," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 20 (1957), pp. 187-214.

<sup>24</sup> "Justizia ha in se ogni cosa," November 28, 1499, in F. Gilbert, "Florentine political assumptions," p. 212.

of July 1497, there is no remedy to the problems of civic discord.<sup>25</sup> If justice is not properly administered, we read in another protocol from the same year, a republic cannot last for long.<sup>26</sup> In a perfect Ciceronian style another speaker stressed that civic concord can only be attained if justice is adequately guaranteed.<sup>27</sup>

Reason too, the other key word of the conventional understanding of politics, plays a central role in the discussions of the *Pratiche*. By claiming that a decision ought to be taken because it is "according to reason," they usually meant that the suggested course of action was well-grounded upon the objective consideration of the situation and therefore likely to attain the desired goal. When Giovambattista Ridolphi urges to ponder with great caution the decision whether to wage a war against Pisa, stressing that "decisions induced by the will and not by reason have evil outcomes," he was inviting the Ten of War to consider important details such as the unfavorable season and the likely reaction of the enemies of Florence.<sup>28</sup> He wholeheartedly agreed that Pisa is "the soul of the city" and that Florence ought to do everything in its power to conquer it, but he was concerned with the risk of an excessive voluntarism. In other cases, like the *Pratiche* summoned to debate the suspected treason of Paolo Vitelli, the participants who discussed whether Vitelli ought, or ought not to be treated "according to reason," the term "reason" means here "justice," following the Ciceronian notion embodied in Latini's definition of politics.<sup>29</sup>

Along with the conventions of the art of the republic, the wise citizens attending the *Pratiche* resorted also to the language of the art of the state. At times, the conventional principles of politics were openly attacked on behalf of the rules of the art of the state, as was the case with the already mentioned *Pratica* on Vitelli. Since Vitelli was an influential man who may have been dangerous, if left alive, one of the speakers said that in his case we should not proceed according to the precepts of reason ("*secondo e termini di ragione*") and that matters of

<sup>25</sup> Quoted in F. Gilbert, "Florentine political assumptions," p. 212.

<sup>26</sup> "Una republica non possa stare o lungamente durare senza l'administrazione della giustitia," F. Gilbert, "Florentine political assumptions," p. 212.

<sup>27</sup> "Trovato modo di fare giustitia segue necessario la concordia della citta," June 16, 1497. Or: "la justitia fa unione et versovice l'unione fa justitia," June 13, 1497, in F. Gilbert, "Florentine political assumptions," p. 212.

<sup>28</sup> "Giovambattista Ridolphi dixè che li piaceva il discorso di messer Francesco, maxime circa considerare bene l'impresa di Pisa, perché sono partiti che, qualche volta indotti dalla volontà et non dalla ragione, fanno mali effecti," August 19, 1505, in *Consulte e Pratiche* (1505-1512), D. Fachard (ed.), Geneva, 1988, p. 48.

<sup>29</sup> See F. Gilbert, "Florentine political assumptions," p. 208.

state are not to be handled according to reason (“*e così non si suole nelle cose delli stati*”).<sup>30</sup> The practice of the art of the state is then invoked to justify a decision that contradicts the rational principle of justice embedded in the republican idea of politics. The same choice that Cosimo would have made to secure his *stato*, was invoked to protect the republican regime.

The rules of politics prescribed that justice ought to be respected in war too. The records of the *Pratiche*, however, report of citizens stressing that in foreign affairs there is no point in caring about honesty, even if it was a time-honored principle of Florentine foreign politics to respect the treaties and honor one's words.<sup>31</sup> In the important *Consulta* of July 30, 1512 summoned by the Council of Eighty, Alesso Lapaccini reiterates the conventional Ciceronian principle that honesty has priority over convenience, but concludes his speech saying that necessity, which has no law, may indeed compel us to depart from the path of justice.<sup>32</sup> In the same anti-Ciceronian mood Rucellai had spoken almost twenty years before: the ideal for the republican regime would be to gain the citizens' love, but failing to do that we have to be content with relying upon fear.<sup>33</sup>

As we shall see, Machiavelli transferred in *The Prince* significant doses of the wisdom on the art of the state that had been circulating in the discussions of the *Pratiche* of the Republic. When he was dismissed from his post in the Chancery of the Ten, in November 1512, Machiavelli lost the first-hand knowledge of the disputes on matters of state that he used to have during the years of the Republic. It is however highly unlikely that he lost touch with the discussions that accompanied and followed the Medicean restoration marking a new phase in the history of the art of the state.

<sup>30</sup> See F. Gilbert, “Florentine Political Assumptions,” p. 208.

<sup>31</sup> In the *Pratica* of July 17, 1512 Piero Aldobrandini stressed that “sia bene non mancare della fede promessa al Christianissimo, perché è stato sempre instituto antichissimo di questa Repubblica non ne mancare a persona”; and in the same *Pratica* Bono Boni urged the Ten to keep their engagements, since it is better to die than to violate one's promises “perché questa città non ne manchò mai a persona, et volere più tosto morire seco che mancharli della fede, perché sarebbe morte generosa,” in *Consulte e Pratiche 1505-1512*, pp. 320-325.

<sup>32</sup> “Quegli miei padri [...] sempre sono stati d'una medesima volontà, che la fede promessa non si debba violare, etiam, quando si potessi, incorrere pericolo; dalla quale sententia non vogliono in alcuno modo spiccarsi, perchè l'onestà precede all'utile, se già la necessità che non ha legge non ricerchassi altro,” *Consulte e Pratiche 1505-1512*, p. 353.

<sup>33</sup> “Se Dio non mette ne cuori de cittadini di volersi unirsi, tucti gli altri modi fanno pocho . . . nel caso dello stato si puo dirne se noi non possiamo havere l'amore, contentiamo al timore,” June 16, 1497, in F. Gilbert, “Florentine political assumptions,” p. 195.

The return of the Medici in Florence had indeed posed a new problem to the theorists of the state, namely, how to secure a state that had been abruptly imposed over the ruins of a republic. Accordingly, the common premise of all the discourses or memoranda addressed to the new rulers to explain to them how to secure their state was that this time the task was much more difficult given the hostility of the whole citizenry. All the advisers of the Medici had available a conventional wisdom that dated to the era of Cosimo and Lorenzo il Magnifico. The basic rule was condensed in the principles of civility, by which they meant a style of controlling the institutions of the city by working behind the scenes, without introducing institutional reforms or practices designed to give formal recognition to their power. Instead of relying on pure force, the preservation of the state was rather sought in the policy of friends and in a civilized mode of dealing with the citizens.

In this respect, one of the most illuminating texts is an *Instructione al Magnifico Lorenzo* (*Directions to the Magnifico Lorenzo*) composed between May and August 1513 by Giuliano de' Medici on behalf of Pope Leone X.<sup>34</sup> The memorandum is addressed to the nephew of the pope, Lorenzo de' Medici, who was about to move to Florence to assume the position of new prince of the city and reorder the regime (*stato*). The *Instructione* was in fact designed to instruct the inexperienced Lorenzo on what he should do to preserve the *stato* of the Medici. Within the genre of the memoranda on the art of the state, the *Instructione* deserves a place of honor, partly because the authors were true professionals and transfused into the document an expertise that they inherited from Cosimo, the unparalleled master,<sup>35</sup> partly because of its completeness: being addressed to a young Medici on his way to Florence, the document is unusually detailed and the principles of the art of preserving the state are explained with remarkable clarity. As we shall see, the other texts on the art of the state that I am considering reproduce the guidelines of the *Instructione*. In spite of more or less significant variations, the *arte dello stato* possessed its own recognizable language constructed around a number of recurrent conventions.

The most important of them can be summarized in a single word – friends (*amici*) – and in the fundamental principle of putting one's

<sup>34</sup> The *Instructione* was published in *Archivio Storico Italiano*, 1 (1842), pp. 293–306.

<sup>35</sup> Cfr. Rudolf von Albertini, *Firenze dalla Repubblica al Principato*, Turin, 1970, p. 361.

own friends in the most important institutions of the city. You must be capable, says Giuliano to his nephew, of placing your own men in the Signoria and all the decisive institutions of the city and be sure the people you choose are both loyal (“*fedeli*”) and bold (“*animoso*”). If you cannot avoid appointing to the Signoria someone you do not entirely trust, be at least positive that he is not very bold and not of outstanding intellect. You must also be constantly informed about the humors of the Signoria. If, as is often the case, there are disputes and antagonisms among the magistrates, you must be in a position to settle them with the greatest speed and tact. To do this, you have to be constantly informed, even of the least details, by a member of the Signoria who reports regularly and confidentially to you.

Another equally important aspect of the art of the state is the distribution of public honors. In appointing your friends to offices – admonishes Giuliano – you must pay the greatest respect to the noble families of the city (“*le case*”) and be careful not to offend a family by preferring a younger to an older member. You may do so only if the person who by right of age should be appointed is not reliable enough as a friend of the *stato*. In this case you may prefer a younger member of the family, but do not forget to compensate the excluded one, either by formal declarations of excuse or by assigning him an office of lesser importance.

For those institutions that are particularly important in preserving the reputation of the state, you must be equally careful to appoint men who are upright, loyal, and bold.<sup>36</sup> In this office, too, you must have a man of absolute loyalty who reports to you with the utmost secrecy, and is known as being the sole person entitled to speak on your behalf. In this way you are regularly informed of what is going on in the office and the magistrates know what is your will.

The preservation of the *stato* demands an almost complete control over the institutions. Particularly in the administration of justice, one of the fundamental functions of the state, the prince must not tolerate any interference whatsoever. No recommendation or pressure must interfere with the administration of justice. Favors, privileges, as well as abuses, must be prevented with the utmost energy. The magistrates, especially in civil litigations, are to be informed that no recommendation can be considered but those coming from the

<sup>36</sup> “Perchè da quello officio dipende ogni reputatione et timore che a lo stato si conviene.” “Instructione al Magnifico Lorenzo,” *Archivio Storico Italiano*, p. 301.

prince's own mouth, or from one or two persons known as his most loyal friends. It would be highly detrimental for the state to allow others to ask for privileges or exemptions. If a magistrate errs, the prince must severely reprimand him, even if he is a friend of the *stato*. If the prince tolerates abuses and favors, malevolence and hatred will spread among the subjects. He must then be equally firm, but more prudent, against those who conspire against the state. On the issue of the security of the state, it is of the utmost importance to be always informed. For that reason, admonishes Giuliano, be sure that the spies are vigilant and well remunerated.

A few offices may well include some people who are not friends of the state, provided they have reputation and merit. However, the majority must be firmly under your control, so that the reasonable desires of the civil prince can be carried out. Just as for the administration of justice, no exception or favor can be tolerated for the permission to carry arms. The prince must have an exclusive monopoly of arms. If he exempts one, he offends all the others. With private citizens carrying arms the prince's personal security is at risk and the capacity to control the state diminished. Finally, he must keep in mind that the available resources are always scarce, and he must distribute them with discernment. Priority has to be given, of course, to friends; later on he may consider benefiting those who are likely to become his friends, though he must never concede to them things that they can use against the state.<sup>37</sup> Particularly in regard to the poor and the peasantry, the new prince must be vigilant that they are not oppressed by the powerful citizens.

Giuliano's and Leo X's *Instructione* spells out the key rules of the art of the state as a subtle combination of ability and good luck, a lucky astuteness, as Machiavelli put it. In a document of the same genre, written a few months earlier, force and private loyalty reappear as the two main guarantees of the preservation of the state. Yet the emphasis this time is on force rather than industriousness. The text is a short memorandum composed by Piero Vettori for Cardinal Giovanni de' Medici, who was about to go to live in Rome and commit the rule of Florence into the hands of his brother Giuliano.<sup>38</sup> Vettori presents his tract as the contribution of a loyal partisan who feels a duty to inform his prince of what should be done to secure the state in a difficult

<sup>37</sup> "Havendo sempre innanzi a li occhi li amici," "Instructione al Magnifico Lorenzo," p. 305.

<sup>38</sup> "Ricordi di Paolo Vettori al cardinale de' Medici sopra le cose di Firenze," in Rudolf von Albertini, *Firenze dalla Repubblica al Principato*, pp. 357-359.

phase of transition. His main advice is straightforward: whereas your predecessors, from Cosimo to Piero, relied above all on the policy of friends, you must rely on force. You have too many enemies and too few resources to satisfy them. The only solution can be to pursue a policy that makes them fearful of hurting you.<sup>39</sup> Your first preoccupation, then, should be to organize your guard, enrolling people from the countryside (*contado*). They have been oppressed under the republic and do not regret at all the past regime; you may therefore find there your loyal soldiers. The politics of friends seems to be completely dismissed. Vettori only recommends that the cardinal deliver to Giuliano a list of ten or twelve citizens who are ready to bet on the fortune of the house of the Medici, to be selected as councillors.

As we have seen in Giuliano and Giovanni's *Istruzione* to Lorenzo, the strategy to be followed was summarized in three main recommendations: to benefit a number of citizens in order to obligate them to the state, to assure justice to the commonality, and to be harsh with the enemies of the state. With the exception of Vettori's *Ricordo*, all the texts written on the subject in the early years of the restoration show a remarkable affinity in the content and construction of the argument.

The language of the art of the state was organized around a core of shared beliefs and interpretations of the political and moral identity of Florence. The few variations that can be detected are in tone rather than in content. An important example is a discourse composed by Francesco Guicciardini as early as October 1512 which shows that a well-organized art of the state was available to secure the stability of the new-born state.<sup>40</sup> As Guicciardini remarked at the outset of his discourse, the art of the state cannot consist of general rules to be applied to any government. The statesman must imitate the skill of prudent and experienced physicians. They analyze first the specific nature of the disease and carefully consider the temper of the organism before administering the appropriate treatment. Otherwise they would not be able to prescribe the right treatment or would

<sup>39</sup> "Li antecessori vostri, cominciandosi da Cosimo e venendo infino a Piero, usorno in tenere questo Stato più industria che forza. A voi è necessario usare più forza che industria, perchè voi ci avete più nimici e manco ordine a soddisfarli; però a voi bisogna, non ve li potendo riguadagnare, che voi stiate ordinati che gli abbino paura a nuocervi," *Firenze dalla Repubblica al Principato*, p. 357.

<sup>40</sup> Francesco Guicciardini, "Delle condizioni in cui trovavansi le contrarie parti che dividevano la città per la mutazione dello Stato, e della difformità di pareri e d'intenti nel restringere il Governo," in F. Canestrini (ed.), *Opere inedite di Francesco Guicciardini*, Florence, 1858, II, pp. 316-324.

administer it in the wrong course. With the consequence of provoking the death rather than the recovery of their patient.

Similarly, the prudent statesman must first of all consider the particular nature of the city, which may be regarded as a more complex organism. In the case of Florence the most important quality to be taken into account is that the city has been used long since to living in liberty and to dominating Tuscany. The citizens are therefore used to regarding themselves as equals and are averse to recognizing someone as superior to them, and even more unwilling to accept an absolute ruler.<sup>41</sup>

Another important difference is that in the past the domination of the Medici had always been, even at the time of Lorenzo il Magnifico, indirect and civilized (*"con modi più civili"*). Nowadays, on the contrary, Florence has shifted abruptly from a popular government to the absolute domination of Cardinal Giovanni de' Medici. The *stato* is therefore surrounded by many and powerful enemies within the city including not only the citizens who feel expropriated of their state, but also the most important families, who think that the new regime is excluding them from the positions of power that they traditionally held.

From this analysis of the political situation of the city after the restoration, two alternative strategies were debated as the most appropriate to secure the new state. The advocates of the civil rule recommended a distribution of honors not too different from the one adopted by the republic and urged the new regime to guarantee justice to all citizens, curbing the insolence of the *grandi*. The supporters of the more aristocratic government (*"governo stretto"*) stressed instead that the primary aim of a ruler has to be to preserve himself and his state (*"il primo intento di chi regge e governa ha a essere di conservare sè e lo Stato suo"*).<sup>42</sup> It is therefore necessary for the state to crush its enemies with the utmost determination. Not only those who openly profess their hostility, but also the citizenry as a whole, as they will neither forget the republic nor accept the new regime. At the same time the prince must create a large enough number of friends to oppose the enemies of the state. The way to do that is to obligate a

<sup>41</sup> "E questo interviene più oggi che mai, per essersi i cittadini nutriti e avvezzi dal 1494 sino al 1512 a uno modo di Governo popularissimo e liberissimo, e nel quale parendo loro essere tutti equali, con più difficoltà si aspettano a riconoscere alcuno superiore, e massime vedendo uno solo tanto interamente assoluto arbitro e signore di ogni cosa." F. Guicciardini, *Delle condizioni . . .*, *ibid.*, p. 318. <sup>42</sup> F. Guicciardini, *Delle condizioni*, *ibid.*, p. 322.



number of citizens with favors and permit them to exploit the city, dominate and take advantage of their position so that they may become more powerful and wealthy. The more the partisans of the state are wealthy and powerful, the more the state is secure. The only sort of friendship that the state can count on is one grounded upon self-interest and fear. By allowing friends to prosper under the protection of the state and by permitting them to hurt and offend the other citizens, the prince would succeed in gaining their support, out of both their self-interest and their fear. They will soon realize that it is in their interest to preserve the state of the Medici, and fear that a new regime would repay them in kind.

In the *Discourse* of October 1512, Guicciardini simply notes his disagreement with the policy of concentrating power in the hands of the Medici and their friends with an unrestricted licence to unfold their longing for gain and domination. In another *Discourse* on the issue of how to secure the *stato* of the Medici composed in 1516, however, he takes a different position.<sup>43</sup> The argument begins from the assumption endorsed by all the theorists of the state, that particular interest is the true motive of men's actions.<sup>44</sup> The generous souls of the good old days are gone; nobody is willing to resist the new regime, on behalf of liberty or glory. From this premise Guicciardini derives a strong recommendation to pursue the policy of making partisans through the incorporation of a number of prominent citizens in the state. Since nobody pays serious attention to liberty, the new state can easily find enough friends by distributing favors. The policy of partisans does not however imply that the friends of the *stato* are to be left free to oppress the ordinary citizens and commit any kind of injury. There are more honest means to satisfy the friends of the regime (particularly having a pope in the family). The *stato* must on the contrary protect the powerless and weak citizens against the insolence of the wealthy and powerful. Above all, in matters of civil justice the prince must be vigilant to see that the judges are not acquiescent to recommendations or pressures, nor that jurisdiction on civil matters is subtracted from the courts and transferred to private citizens.

<sup>43</sup> F. Guicciardini, "Discorso del modo di riformare il Governo, per meglio assicurare lo Stato alla Casa dei Medici, la quale era rappresentata da papa Leone X, da Lorenzo e dal cardinal Giulio," in F. Canestrini (ed.), *Opere inedite di Francesco Guicciardini*, II, pp. 325-343.

<sup>44</sup> "Moverebbeli sopra ogni cosa lo interesse loro particolare, che è lo maestro che ne mena tutti li uomini," F. Guicciardini, *Discorso del modo di riformare il Governo . . .*, *ibid.*, p. 333.

Finally, the new rulers of Florence have to continue the tradition of dealing with the citizenry with "civility." The habits of moderation and "civility" must inform not only the conduct of the Medici, but also the behavior of their magistrates. The appearance, at least, of "civility" and liberty has to be preserved. The advice to move decisively toward an absolute principality would, on the contrary, be detrimental for the state and lead unavoidably to cruelties.

As we have seen, the crucial point on which all seem to insist is the necessity to establish a system of private loyalty capable of resisting both external and internal threats: the great powers that pursued domination over Italy and the surviving republican feelings of the majority of the citizens. On the external front, the recommendation most frequently addressed to Lorenzo was to build his own *militia* and to reconsider the traditional foreign policy of neutrality. On the domestic front, the crucial task for the art of the state was to define a strategy capable of checking the partisans of the republic by means of the partisans of the *stato*, and to turn the love for liberty and equality into loyalty to the prince and his state.

The tools that the masters of the art of the state recommended were always the same: fear, ambition and the desire of security. These passions were regarded as the final arbiters of the conflict between the state and the republic, or the memory of it. In addition to the texts that I have so far examined, two works of Lodovico Alamanni of November and December 1516, aptly illustrate the language of the art of the state that dominated the Florentine scenario. The first, composed in Rome, was addressed to Pope Leo X and is commonly entitled *Discorso di Lodovico Alamanni sopra il fermare lo stato di Firenze nella devozione de' Medici*.<sup>45</sup> The second, much shorter, is a letter on the same subject to Alberto Pio of Carpi, the ambassador of the emperor in Rome.<sup>46</sup> As the title of the first *Discourse* clearly indicates, the topic is again how to secure the state of the Medici. Or, better, how to secure the state of Florence in devotion to the Medici. Three preliminary points are laid out at the very beginning: that the pope and Lorenzo should attach the greatest importance to the preservation of their state in Florence and not regard it as a minor possession; that they must neither underestimate nor overestimate the enemies of

<sup>45</sup> In Rudolf von Albertini, *Firenze dalla repubblica al principato*, *ibid.*, pp. 376–384. The title was suggested by Roberto Ridolfi.

<sup>46</sup> "Lodovicus Alamannus, Ill. mo domino domino Alberto Pio, carpensi principi et caesareo oratori, S.D.," in Rudolf von Albertini, *ibid.*, pp. 385–390.

the state. Finally, that they should not believe that the consolidation of the state may be indefinitely procrastinated.

As Guicciardini too had stressed, the true statesman works at the consolidation of the state ahead of time. Like a good sailor, who makes the necessary repairs when he is safe in the harbor, not in the middle of the tempest. Similarly, the Medici have a good chance of securing their state in Florence if they act with the required speed. Augustus succeeded in securing his state in the city that had produced Brutus and Cato; Hieron of Syracuse managed to set his domination in the midst of the war against the Romans and the Carthaginians; Cosimo instituted a lasting regime ("*fondò lo stato*") even in a time when the Florentines were not at all used to the rule of one. A similar achievement must be much easier now that the Florentines are incapable of living without a ruler. Even during the republic, they had felt the need to institute a lifetime *gonfaloniere* in the person of Pier Soderini. If the Medici are determined enough in securing the state, the humors of the city are well disposed.<sup>47</sup>

Having firmly set forth the possibility of the consolidation of the state, Alamanni makes clear his position concerning the dilemma that most preoccupied the advocates of the *stato*, namely, whether the state is better secured by eliminating all opponents or through a policy intended to gain the support of enough friends prepared to defend it. The verdict is straight forwardly in favor of the time-honored Medicean practice of securing their state by binding the citizens through private favors and distribution of public honors. It has been argued that Alamanni did not hold this position consistently, as he concluded the *Discorso* by an appeal to the Medici to counteract the habits of "civility" by reeducating the young to the manners of court life.<sup>48</sup> It seems to me that the advice to set up a court as an antidote to the traditions of civil life is a logical conclusion rather than a betrayal of the policy of friends as opposed to the policy of sheer force.

The strategy of securing the state by eradicating enemies, stressed Alamanni, must be excluded because it would be impractical, counterproductive and would not bring fame to the Medici. The

<sup>47</sup> "Et però sua Ex.tia, per tucti e conti, troverrà la via assai bene preparata et facile, et la materia assai bene disposta ad stabilirse lo stato, s'ella si risolverà di farlo," "Discorso di Lodovico Alamanni sopra il fermare lo stato di Firenze nella devozione de' Medici," in Rudolf von Albertini, *ibid.*, p. 379.

<sup>48</sup> See Rudolf von Albertini, *Firenze dalla Repubblica al Principato*, pp. 35-36, where it is argued that Lodovico Alamanni was no doubt a contradictory character.

extermination of the opponents can be carried out either by striking those who manifestly act against the state or by striking the supposed opponents on the grounds of simple suspicion. In the first case the prince to repel them. In the second case the repression would be so imprudent as to show his plans before it is too late for the prince to repeal them. In the second case the repression would unavoidably strike guilty and innocent alike, with the obvious consequence of generating hatred against the state. Moreover, a prince coming from a family as noble as the Medici cannot be willing to be recorded as a wicked man. He must strive to follow the examples of Caesar and Camillus, not those of Agathocle or the most cruel Sylla and the miscreant Oliverotto of Fermo.<sup>49</sup>

Adopting the policy of creating a sufficient number of partisans will, on the contrary, secure the state and avoid infamy. The situation is highly favorable for that, as Lorenzo can rely for a policy of distribution of favors and honors on the Medici Pope. The most important thing is to avoid delays. A policy designed to create friends must be initiated when the state looks solid, not in the moment of peril. The citizens, above all the most important families, would not be prepared to risk their lives and possessions for a state that in the times of prosperity neglected them and becomes generous when in need.

Serious as it may be, the state can win the competition with the republic because it is better equipped to satisfy the three types of humors (*"tre sorte di animo"*)<sup>50</sup> that permeate the citizens of Florence. The first class of citizens, the most noble and esteemed, claim power and want to rule (*"pretende ad lo stato ed al governare"*); the second type are satisfied with honors and offices and do not long for power; the third are content to attend in peace to their business and demand only security. To the first type of citizens, the state can, of course, offer much more exclusive honors than the republic, as the appointment to positions of power is no longer in the hands of the Great Council. Moreover, the *grandi* have no longer to suffer the humiliation of being considered for appointment together with ordinary citizens (*"egli andavano in dozzina con ogni homo"*). For the citizens who are content with honors the state is more reliable by far, since it will not make the mistakes that the Great Council used to do, like distributing all the

<sup>49</sup> *Discorso di Lodovico Alamanni*, p. 380.

<sup>50</sup> *Discorso di Lodovico Alamanni*, p. 382.

honors to a single family or giving preference to the younger over the older. For the ordinary citizens, too, the state is better than the republic because it guarantees protection and peace, whereas the republic was in no position of guaranteeing anything to anybody.

Alamanni's *Discorso* carries to extreme conclusions the antagonism between the logic of the state and that of the republic. The preservation of the state demands not only that the institutions of the city be transformed into the private possession of the prince, thereby altering their public nature; it also requires that impersonal loyalty be turned into loyalty to the state of the prince, and that habits of civic equality and liberty be replaced by the customs of servitude. The concluding part of Alamanni's argument deals specifically with this last point. The Florentines, up to now reluctant to acknowledge anyone's superiority, with the exception of their magistrates, have to be re-educated and taught to recognize the prince as their superior. The customs of liberty (that should rather be called stupidity, notes Alamanni)<sup>51</sup> can be annihilated by calling some of the young of the best families to live at court with the prince, and distributing offices and favors to other families. Soon the young will throw off the habits of civility to assume the style of courtiers. Like laymen entering into a monastic order, they will abandon their attachment to the republic and become devotees of the order of the prince. They will not be able to return to civil life, neither will it be possible for them to regain the benevolence of the citizens. The way to the state is a one-way road. And without exit.

Urging the pope and Lorenzo to set up a court, Alamanni was advocating an important ideological shift from the tradition of civil rule. There was, however, no inconsistency between the advice of pursuing a policy of favors instead of sheer force and suggesting to introduce a court. Alamanni's point was to persuade the freshly restored Medici that the most urgent task was to fight the memory of liberty and equality. Against the love for liberty he was recommending the policy of obligating a number of citizens to the *stato*. As an antidote to the habits of equality, the second malignant fruit of the republic, he urged education to servitude. The logic of the state and

<sup>51</sup> "Ma e' sono avezzi in una certa loro asineria più presto che libertà, che in Fiorenza non degnano di fare reverentia a qualunque, benchè la meritassi, si non a' suoi magistrati, et a quegli per forza et con fatica," *Discorso di Lodovico Alamanni*, p. 383.

its radical opposition to the republic could not have been better spelled out.

In order to complete the reconstruction of Alamanni's interpretation of the art of the state, we have also to consider his letter to the Imperial ambassador at the papal court, written a few months later. The two safest ways to maintain a state, he writes, are good armies and money ("*il ferro e l'oro*").<sup>52</sup> If a prince can rely on good armies and money, he will surely maintain and expand his state and attain glory and reputation. Good armies can be only his own armies. A prudent prince must therefore devote his best energies to creating his own militia composed by his own subjects. The shameful habit of hiring mercenary troops has led Italy to its present state of servitude and must be abandoned with no hesitation. On the other hand, a well-organized militia is a formidable instrument for repelling any attack. As his own subjects, the soldiers are well aware that defeat would entail dishonor for their wives and the loss of their children and properties. Death on the battlefield would be for them a far lesser evil. They must of necessity be brave, with great security and honor for the prince and the state. As far as money is concerned, the Medici princes of Florence have the unique opportunity of accumulating a great treasury and gaining a reputation for magnanimity and liberality. As long as the pope is a Medici, they can benefit the most prominent citizens by using the large resources of the court of Rome and helping the overall prosperity of Florence.

By the time Machiavelli's *Prince* was delivered to Lorenzo de' Medici in 1516, if it was delivered at all, his desk was probably covered by many other discourses or letters advising him what to do to maintain his *stato*. To have some chances to be recognized as a reliable master of the art, and considered for appointment to a government post, Machiavelli had to show that he knew the art of the state better than anyone else and that his expertise was safer than the traditional wisdom that had inspired Medicean rule since the days of Cosimo.

Machiavelli firmly believed himself to be up to the task and perfectly well trained and competent in the art of the state.<sup>53</sup> For

<sup>52</sup> Lodovicus Alamannus. *Ill.mo domino Alberto Pio, carpeni principi et caesareo oratori, S.D.*, in Rudolf von Albertini, *Firenze dalla repubblica al principato*, p. 385.

<sup>53</sup> Niccolò Machiavelli a Francesco Vettori, Firenze, December 10, 1513, in Machiavelli, *Lettere*, F. Gaeta (ed.), Milan, Feltrinelli, 1961, p. 305.

Machiavelli the art of the state was his true calling, the only art to which he felt himself inclined and attracted.<sup>54</sup> His friends, too, considered him a person who possessed an outstanding talent for the “arte dello stato.” Asking Machiavelli’s opinion concerning the best policy for the pope to adopt to counter the new alliance between the French king and Venice, Francesco Vettori stresses that even though Machiavelli had been out of public office for two years, he certainly did not forget the art.<sup>55</sup>

*The Prince* was his effort to convince the Medici too.<sup>56</sup> As we have seen, early sixteenth-century literature on the art of the state revolved around a few conventional themes. The most recurrent were the issues of how to deal with the many foes of the state and, conversely, how to gain a reliable basis of friends, to what extent the ordinary citizens are to be protected, whether the prince must have his own armies, whether the tradition of civility and the appearances of liberty are to be preserved or dismissed, how to be sure that the most important offices are filled with the friends of the state, whether it is advisable to establish an overt principality and a court, whether a prince should or should not have his own guard.

Most of the texts on the art of the state shared some common assumptions concerning the moral identity of the epoch, and Florence in particular. As we have seen, there was a general consensus in identifying the position of the *stato* of the Medici in 1512 as an unprecedented one, given the disturbing memory of the republic. Equally unanimous was the remark that the times of noble sentiments were over and that base interest and fear were the true masters of the political arena.

In *The Prince*, Machiavelli takes positions on all the key issues of the art of the state. When he writes that “a prudent ruler [*signore*] cannot keep his word, nor should he, when such fidelity would damage him,”

<sup>54</sup> “Pure, se io vi potessi parlare, non potre’ fare che io non vi empiessi il capo di castellucci, perchè la fortuna ha fatto che, non sapendo regionare nè dell’arte della seta, nè dell’arte della lana, nè de’ guadagni nè delle perdite, e’ mi conviene ragionare dello stato, et mi bisogna o botarmi di stare cheto, o regionare di questo.” Niccolò Machiavelli a Francesco Vettori, Firenze, April 9, 1513, in *Lettere*, pp. 239–240.

<sup>55</sup> “Ancora che siano due anni passati vi levasti di bottega, non credo habbiate dimenticato l’arte.” Francesco Vettori a Niccolò Machiavelli, Rome, December 3, 1514, in *Lettere*, p. 349.

<sup>56</sup> Machiavelli had already tried to candidate himself as an impartial political advisor in November 1512, when he composed a short memorandum in which he exhorts the Medici not to follow the aristocrats in their campaign against the deposed Pier Soderini. Cf. “Ai Paleschi. Notate bene questo scripto,” in J.-J. Marchand, *Niccolò Machiavelli. I primi scritti politici*, pp. 533–535.

Machiavelli was upholding and reinforcing a line of attack against the republican–Ciceronian language of politics that was already rooted in the Florentine political language, as we have seen from the records of the *Pratiche*. His critique of the conventional view of politics was not uncommon or unheard of. He spoke just like other Florentines did. Like them he criticized politics on behalf of the necessary rules of the art of the state, which compel the prince to behave against the principles of integrity and rectitude.<sup>57</sup>

Contrary to those who advocated the art of the state before him, Machiavelli spoke in public and couched the rules of the art in a book constructed along the guidelines of the respected and respectable genre of advice-for-princes books. Machiavelli did not confine himself, like all the others who spoke of the art of the state, to discussing what the Ten should do in a particular circumstance or what the Medici should do in order to secure their state in the specific condition of Florence after the experience of the republic. Rather, he sets the inquiry on the state at a much higher and general level. He spoke as a theorist, but he spoke on the central issues of the early sixteenth-century Florentine art of the state.

As we have seen, one of the issues that preoccupied the theorists of the state most was the exceptional difficulty of securing the state of the Medici, because the new regime had been imposed upon the republic by means of foreign armies, with the support of the majority of the *grandi*. Machiavelli, as is well known, takes the issue of the new principalities as the main focus of *The Prince*. As he baldly states toward the end of the book, if the measures that he has recommended are skillfully put into practice, “they will make a new ruler seem very well established, and will quickly make his power more secure and stable [*più sicuro e più fermo nello stato*] than if he had always been a ruler.”<sup>58</sup>

If the prince has seized power abruptly by means of somebody else’s armies, as was largely the case with the Medici, the task of securing the state is immensely difficult. Even more arduous, is to introduce new institutions and laws in order to establish his power. The undertaking is unlikely to succeed because the partisans of the old order will oppose the innovations with the utmost determination,

<sup>57</sup> “And it must be understood that a ruler, and especially a new ruler, cannot always act in ways that are considered good because, in order to maintain this power [*per mantenere lo stato*] he is often forced [*necessitato*] to act treacherously, ruthlessly, or inhumanely, and disregard the precepts of religion,” *The Prince*, ch. 18. <sup>58</sup> *The Prince*, ch. 24.



whereas all those who might benefit from the new institutions are tepid, partly because they fear the partisans of the old order, partly because men are generally hesitant toward novelties. The only way to succeed is to be strong enough to be able to force the issue and impose the desired plan. The message that Machiavelli seems to be addressing to the Medici is, then, to be extremely prudent in dismantling the institutions of the city and replacing them with new ones more fit to sustain the new state, and to focus, first, on creating their own militia.

The traditional Medicean practice of ruling behind the scene with civility, remarks Machiavelli in the chapter on "civil principality," guarantees a poor foundation of the state. Ruling indirectly through public officials is a safe practice only in peaceful times, when the citizens need, and seek, the help of the regime ("*hanno bisogno dello stato*"). But when the regime needs the support of the citizens, very few of them are to be found. A prudent prince must then establish his power in such a way that the citizens will need him and his state ("*abbino bisogno dello stato e di lui*") both in times of peace and times of civil strife.<sup>59</sup>

The art that a prince must master cannot be the subtle skill of controlling public institutions through his own friends, nor is that of dissimulating power under the habiliments of civility. It must instead be the art of creating and disciplining the militia:

A ruler, then, should have no other objective and no other concern, nor occupy himself with anything else [*nè prendere cosa alcuna per sua arte*] except war and its methods and practices, for this pertains only to those who rule [*perchè quella è la sola arte che si aspetta a chi comanda*]. And it is of such efficacy [*virtù*] that it not only maintains hereditary rulers in power but very often enables men of private status to become rulers. On the other hand, it is evident that if rulers concern themselves more with the refinements of life than with military matters, they lose power [*lo stato loro*]. The main reason why they lose it is their neglect of the art of war; and being proficient in this art is what enables one to gain power.<sup>60</sup>

The key word of the passage is "art." Machiavelli wants to make clear, contrary to the views of most of the Medici's advisers, what the true art of the state really consists of. As we have seen, one of the most debated questions was whether the Medici should rule through civility and industry ("*industria*"), following the example of Cosimo,

<sup>59</sup> *The Prince*, ch. 9.

<sup>60</sup> *The Prince*, ch. 14. The italics in the brackets are mine.

or rely more on force. Machiavelli confronts the issue directly and gives his own answer: the prince must apply his industriousness to create and strengthen the militia, instead of ruling behind the scene pretending to be just a citizen like everybody else.

Machiavelli adopts an equally unconventional view on the question of securing the state by means of a policy designed to create partisans of the state through favors and the distribution of honors and benefits. The issue is discussed in various sections of *The Prince*. In ch. 19 he stresses that a prudent prince has nothing to fear from conspiracies as long as he has been careful to satisfy the people and please the nobles. Listing the good things that a virtuous new prince can do, he mentions, in addition to good armies, good laws, and good examples – good friends (“*buoni amici*”).<sup>61</sup> In ch. 9, discussing the case of a “civil principality” favored by the nobles (*grandi*), he stresses that the prince must first distinguish among the *grandi* those who are willing to associate their fortunes with that of the prince, and those who are not willing to compromise themselves with the new state. The former, if they are not rapacious, are to be honored and esteemed (“*si debbono onorare et amare*”). For the latter, a further distinction has to be made between those who do not want to commit themselves to the state because they are pusillanimous, and those who are ambitious. Whereas the pusillanimous can be used in the state, the ambitious are to be regarded as open enemies.

In the chapter dealing with the utility of fortresses, however, Machiavelli comes out with a much more subversive piece of advice: it is easier for a new prince to find reliable partisans among those who were hostile in the early stages of the regime than among those who have been friends of the state from the beginning. The most common advice was, conversely, to count on the time-honored friends of the state and the house. The argument that Machiavelli advances to sustain his position is that since prominent citizens always need the support of the prince, he can easily incorporate them within the state. Once the prince has firmly got their friendship, they are compelled to be particularly loyal, as they have to counteract the unfavorable opinion that they know the prince has about them.

Machiavelli's disagreement with the politics of partisanship is actually more substantial. It involves not only the ways of implementing it, but also its validity for the preservation of the state. In

<sup>61</sup> *The Prince*, ch. 24.

questioning this basic tenet of the conventional interpretation of the art of the state, Machiavelli employed an argument based on self-interest and fear, as were the arguments of the theorists of the state. From the same assumption that interest and fear are the sovereign forces that govern men's behavior, he derived the heterodox conclusion that friends gained through favors are a poor foundation of the state.

The issue is debated in ch. 17 on cruelty and mercifulness, where Machiavelli engages in the famous discussion as to whether it is better to be loved than to be feared. As in several other passages, the polemical target was the principle, directly derived from Cicero and Seneca, that a prince is more secure when he is loved by his subjects, than when he is feared. In addition to Humanist political philosophy, another ideological context seems to be relevant here, namely the debates on how to secure the *stato* of the Medici. The revealing tract is that Machiavelli explicitly refers to the "friendships that are acquired with money, and not through greatness and nobility of character." Whereas the current view was that the sort of friends gained through money and favors can be a secure bastion of the state, Machiavelli argues that a prince who relies primarily on such partisans grounds his state upon sand. Favors and honors generate a sort of love based on gratitude. But men easily break the bonds of gratitude whenever they think they have interest in doing so ("*da ogni occasione di utilità è rotto*").<sup>62</sup> Fear is much more effective, since it is sustained by the dread of punishment. If we really regard interest and fear as the most powerful motives for men's conduct, as the theorists of the state are correctly saying, we must conclude that for a prince it is much safer to be feared instead of relying on the gratitude of the partisans he has benefited. This means that the true art of the state must be that of creating a reliable militia, rather than of buying friendship for the state.

In his assessment of the politics of incorporating friends into the state, Machiavelli was in part distorting or misinterpreting the conventional wisdom. The current argument gave much more weight to the role of fear than Machiavelli seems to acknowledge. The friends of the state are expected to be loyal and ready to defend the regime in moments of danger, not only out of the gratitude that generates from self-interest, but also, and to a greater extent, out of fear for what

<sup>62</sup> *The Prince*, ch. 17. My italics.

might happen should the state collapse and a new regime replace it. In the words of Guicciardini, in his *Discourse* of 1512, the loyalty of friends does not originate from love, but from convenience, indeed necessity (“*non solo l'amore, ma più tosto la utilità, anzi necessità*”).<sup>63</sup>

Why did Machiavelli misrepresent the politics of patronage? I do not think that he overlooked what the argument was. He was well aware of the efficacy of the politics of friends. He knew the Medicean regime too well and was too familiar with the views that people such as Guicciardini had about the art of the state.

I think that Machiavelli deliberately distorted the point. But why? One possible answer is that he deeply despised the Medicean art of preserving the state through private favors and patronage. Both in the *Discorsi* and in the *Istorie Fiorentine* he describes the politics of private favors (“*modi privati*”; “*vie private*”) as corrupt and as a cause of civic strife.<sup>64</sup> The art of gaining friends through favors had been indeed very effective and allowed the Medici to build their regime. It was however inadequate for a prince eager to do great things, as Machiavelli wanted the addressee of *The Prince* to be willing and able to do.<sup>65</sup> He intended his art of the state to suit a prince capable of liberating Italy from the barbarians, not just a *signore* ruling Florence by conferring benefits on this or that individual, giving marriage portions to his daughters, protecting them from the magistrates and the like. He was dreaming of a new Cyrus, not just another Cosimo.

Another plausible interpretation of his distorted assessment of the politics of friendship can be found in his own beliefs concerning the ways to secure a new principality. As he repeatedly stresses in *The Prince*, the best foundation of the state is the prince's own virtue. The fear that guarantees the solidity of the state must stem from his virtue and it must be the fear of him. The current idea was, on the contrary, that the partisans are compelled to defend the state out of fear of the opponents of the regime, not of the prince. The theorists of the state were relying on a sort of fear that was not under the control of the prince. For Machiavelli anything that was not within the power of the prince to master was to be regarded as a poor foundation of the state.

Machiavelli also believed that the favor of the *grandi* was unquestionably less important than the support of the common citizens. A

<sup>63</sup> F. Guicciardini, *Delle condizioni in cui trovavansi le contrarie parti*, p. 323.

<sup>64</sup> See *Discorsi*, Bk. 3, ch. 28, and *Istorie Fiorentine*, Bk. 7, ch. 1.

<sup>65</sup> See *The Prince*, ch. 18, and the “Exhortation to liberate Italy from the barbarian yoke.”

prince should respect the nobles,<sup>66</sup> but it is necessary to have the people as his friend (*"è necessario avere el popolo amico"*).<sup>67</sup> The friendship of the ordinary citizens is not too difficult to attain. It is enough, as he strongly recommends in ch. 21 (*"How a ruler should act in order to gain reputation"*) to guarantee them security so that they can attend to their ordinary occupations in peace without fear of being dispossessed or oppressed. The nobles demand power, a much more difficult claim to satisfy. Besides, the *grandi* are much less dangerous than the people and in case of threat they may offer a lesser protection. Hence the goal of building a network of friends among the most prominent citizens was regarded by Machiavelli both as inherently defective and as less important than aiming at the people's friendship. Given this belief, Machiavelli had no compelling reason for scrutinizing what the theorists of the state had to say on the matter.

Machiavelli's insistence that the support of the people is more important than that of the *grandi* was another attack against the canonic view that the Medici's most irreducible enemy in Florence was the people, because they do not forget the republic. For him precisely the opposite was true. In addition to the arguments that we have already mentioned, he offered two more considerations, both astonishingly heterodox, against the view that those who were content with the previous regime are to be regarded as the decided enemies of the new state. Those who were discontented with the previous regime and welcomed the new one, stresses Machiavelli, are to be regarded with suspicion. They were disaffected with the former regime because it was not capable of satisfying them. But for the new prince, too, it is difficult to satisfy them and consequently almost impossible to have them as friends (*"con fatica e difficoltà grande se li potrà mantenere amici"*).<sup>68</sup> It is much easier to gain the friendship of those who were content with the past regime and were against him when he seized power. Machiavelli wanted to persuade the Medici that the friends of the republic were not to be considered the first enemies of the *stato*, and that the *grandi* who were the enemies of the republic because the republic was not capable of satisfying their immoderate pretensions were not, as everybody else said, the friends of the new regime.

As stated by a former Secretary in the Chancery of the republic, the

<sup>66</sup> *The Prince*, ch. 19.

<sup>67</sup> *The Prince*, ch. 9.

<sup>68</sup> *The Prince*, ch. 20.

argument sounds very much like self-promotion. It also fits beautifully, however, with the point that the people are potentially the best foundation of the new state, rather than its implacable enemy because of their fondness for the republic. The memory of the past is not such a powerful obstacle for the new prince, as it was almost common wisdom to believe. Men, reassures Machiavelli, in ch. 24, "are much more interested in present things than in those that are past, and if they find that their affairs are flourishing, they are content and do not seek changes."

With this argument Machiavelli rebuffed the view endorsed by all the councillors of the Medici that the consolidation of the *stato* was, this time, a much more difficult task owing to the still fresh and powerful memory of the republic. At the same time he was inflicting another blow against the strategy of grounding the state upon a number of partisans as a barrier against the people. In addition to the reasons so far mentioned, another and conclusive reason for Machiavelli to reject the strategy of the partisans was that it prevented the creation of a strong militia loyal to the prince. The ideas of the professionals of the art of the state were on this issue more differentiated than on others. Cardinal Giuliano and Pope Giovanni strongly advised disarming all the citizens; Piero Vettori urged the creation of a personal guard to be recruited from the countryside; Alamanni stressed the necessity of repudiating forever mercenary troops and supplanting them with a militia, but he did not explain how such a militia could be recruited from the very same people that he described as the most irreducible enemies of the new state.

Machiavelli's position was diametrically opposed to the ideas of Giuliano and Pope Leo X: "New rulers, then, never disarm their subjects; indeed, if they find them unarmed, they always provide them with weapons."<sup>69</sup> Enrolling the subjects in the militia is, leaving other considerations aside, the best way to transform them into your partisans ("*di sudditi si fanno tua partigiani*"). Not all the subjects, of course, are to be enrolled in the militia. Those who are selected can also be benefited and favored. In this way they become even more fond of the prince. On the other hand, those who are excluded will excuse the conduct of the prince because they will realize that those who fulfill more dangerous tasks deserve a better treatment.

Machiavelli wrote *The Prince* to convince the dedicatee of the book

<sup>69</sup> *The Prince*, ch. 20.

that he knew well the art of the state, even if he had served the republic. The challenge was not only to convince the prince that he was knowledgeable about the art, but also that he knew the art better than the Humanist rhetoricians and the contemporary practitioners. Placed in the context of early sixteenth-century discussions that accompanied the restoration of the Medici in 1512, *The Prince* reveals itself to be both a continuation and a reinterpretation of the Quattrocento art of the state. Machiavelli was fighting at the same time two ideological and political opponents: the Humanist masters of civil philosophy and the pragmatic advisers of the Medici. To the former he opposed, like others before him, the compelling rules of the art of the state; to the latter his own interpretation of the art designed to instruct a prince aiming at great things.

Yet, innovative as he was, Machiavelli never described the art of the state as politics, nor the prince concerned with preserving or imposing his state as a political man.<sup>70</sup> If we want to see Machiavelli using the language of politics and understand what he did with it, we have to turn to the works where he focuses on republics, particularly, the *Discorsi*,<sup>71</sup> but also the *Istorie*, the *Art of War* and the *Discursus florentinarum rerum*. When he resorts to the language of politics he is, without exception, consistent with the linguistic conventions of civil philosophy.

For Machiavelli the word “*politico*” is always joined with the familiar vocabulary of the *civitas* and never used in a different sense. The only amendment that Machiavelli introduces in the conventional vocabulary of politics concerns the assessment of the value of concord versus the enlargement of the social basis of the city in view of the necessity of expanding. As we shall see, Machiavelli’s innovation does not amount to a dismissal of the republican concept of politics.

The literature available to Machiavelli conventionally employed the word “*politico*” in order to contrast the authority restrained by

<sup>70</sup> In *The Machiavellian Moment*, pp. 157–160, Pocock seems to argue that Machiavelli considers innovation to be the genuine political act and the innovator as the true political actor.

<sup>71</sup> As Hans Baron has aptly remarked, *The Prince* and the *Discourses* have indeed a different topic and a different message. The practical goal of the *Discourses* is the “resuscitation of the wisdom of ancient politics for use in the present” and “the thrust of the argument is that the founder or restorer of a state will become a political savior *only if* he invigorates the institutions and laws that are the matrix of a people’s political health and ethos.” “Machiavelli: the republican citizen and the author of *The Prince*,” in *In Search of Florentine Civic Humanism*, II, pp. 111–112 (the text has been slightly modified from the 1961 edition).

laws with the authority "*legibus soluta*," that is, tyrannical rule. The *Discorsi* I, 25, offers an appropriate example of Machiavelli's full endorsement of current linguistic conventions. He who desires or proposes abolishing an ancient form of constitution in a city ("*un antico vivere*") and setting up a new and free form ("*uno vivere nuovo e libero*"), writes Machiavelli, must retain "as much as possible of what is old," and if changes are made in the number, the authority and the period of office of the magistrates, they should retain the traditional names. He then concludes:

This, as I have said, should be observed by one who proposes to set up a political regime, whether by way of a republic or by way of a monarchy. But he who proposes to set up a despotism, or what writers call a "tyranny," must renovate everything, as will be said in the next chapter.<sup>72</sup>

To have supreme authority *legibus restricta* is the best guarantee for the city being ruled justly and in moderation. The rule of law is recommended for princely rule and for popular government. History provides infinite examples of princes *legibus soluti* who were inconstant, ungrateful or imprudent; a prince who can do what he pleases, writes Machiavelli, "*è pazzo*". A populace unrestrained by laws can easily be undisciplined and infuriated. However, while an undisciplined populace can be restrained by the words of a good man, in the case of a bad prince there can be no remedy but the sword ("*nè vi è altro rimedio che il ferro*").<sup>73</sup>

In a "*vivere civile*," and even more in a republic, no exceptions to the laws or privileges are to be tolerated. Even those who are guilty of the worst crimes against the city are to be punished according to the laws. Appius Claudius was a cruel tyrant who despised the people and the laws of Rome; however, to deny him right to appeal to the people was, comments Machiavelli, "scarcely in accordance with civic customs" ("*fu cosa poco civile*").<sup>74</sup> In order to preserve a true "*vivere civile*" it is not enough to have the rule of law in the formal sense. The content of laws and institutions must also embody the common interest of the city, and not factional interests. If the institutions ("*ordini*") and the laws of the city are designed to sustain the interest of a faction, we have

<sup>72</sup> "E questo [. . .] debbe osservare colui che vuole ordinare uno vivere politico, o per via di repubblica o di regno; ma quello che vuole fare una potestà assoluta, la quale dagli autori è chiamata tirannide, debbe rinnovare ogni cosa." N. Machiavelli, *Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Tito Livio*, Bk. I, ch. 25. All quotations in English are from *The Discourses of Niccolò Machiavelli*, Leslie J. Walker, trans., New Haven, 1950.

<sup>73</sup> N. Machiavelli, *Discorsi*, Bk. I, ch. 58. <sup>74</sup> N. Machiavelli, *Discorsi*, Bk. I, ch. 45.



instead of the “*vero vivere libero e civile*”, and of the rule of the law, the rule of factions (“*con le sette più che con le leggi si vuole mantenere*”).<sup>75</sup>

Along with the rule of law, Machiavelli's use of the word *politico* reiterates another distinctive feature of the republican vocabulary of politics, namely the concept of civic equality. As he writes in *Discorsi*, Bk. 1, ch. 55:

The second reason why in these German towns political life survives uncorrupted, is that they do not permit any of their citizens to live after the fashion of the gentry. On the contrary, they maintain there perfect equality, and to lords and gentry residing in that province are extremely hostile.<sup>76</sup>

In connecting *politico* with civic equality, Machiavelli followed a convention of the republican political language of his time and restored a principle that Cicero and Livy recommended as the necessary foundation of the *respublica*. In the republican vocabulary civic equality meant above all the equality of the citizens before the law. In the *De Officiis*, Cicero had described the *aequum ius*, as the principle that must dictate the relations between citizens in such a way that everyone must deal with his fellow-citizens on the basis of equality (“*aequo et pari iure*”)<sup>77</sup> without being either arrogant or obsequious. In Livy, the *aequum ius* becomes a criterion for the interpretation of social conflicts in the early Roman Republic. The conflicts around the *aequum ius* originated from the opposing passions of those who disliked being forced to obey the laws like all ordinary citizens and those who wanted the laws to be universally applied. The classic example is the episode of the young aristocrats who enjoyed an unrestrained licence under the monarchy of Tarquinius the Proud and could not stand civic equality (“*aequato iure omnium*”).<sup>78</sup> The liberty of all, they complained, is our servitude. Under the rule of the

<sup>75</sup> N. Machiavelli, *Istorie fiorentine*, in Bk. III, ch. 5, pp. 419–420.

<sup>76</sup> *The Discourses of Niccolò Machiavelli*, Bk. 1, ch. 55; the Italian text is: “Quelle repubbliche dove si è mantenuto il vivere politico ed incorrotto non sopportono che alcuno loro cittadino nè sia nè viva a uso di gentiluomo: anzi mantengono intra loro una pari equalità, ed a quelli signori e gentiluomini che sono in quella provincia sono inimicissimi.” In the *Discursus florentinarum rerum post mortem iunioris Laurentii Medices*, Machiavelli contrasts the great power of the Medici family with the possibility of having a “civiltà” in Florence: “E’ Medici che governavano allora, per essere nutriti et allevati con li loro cittadini, si governavano con tanta familiarità, che la faceva loro grazia: ora, sono tanto divenuti grandi, che passando ogni civiltà, non vi può esser quella domestichezza, e, per conseguente, quella grazia.” in *Arte della guerra e scritti politici minori*, S. Bertelli (ed.) Milan, Feltrinelli, 1961, p. 265; see also pp. 267–268 concerning the impossibility of instituting a republican government where there is a marked social inequality. <sup>77</sup> Cicero, *De Officiis*, Bk. 1, ch. 34, 124.

<sup>78</sup> Livy, *Ab urbe condita*, Bk. III, ch. 3.

law there is no more room for licence and privilege. While the monarch is receptive to private favors and distinguished between friends and enemies, the law is deaf (“*lex rem surdam, inexorabilem esse*”) and for those who transgress there is neither indulgence nor exception. The rich and powerful always tend to be unhappy with civic equality and try to set themselves above the laws.<sup>79</sup> If the “*vivere politico*” is to flourish, the concern of good rulers must be then the preservation of civic equality.

Along with civic equality, the republican writers and their Humanist disciples also insisted on the *aequa libertas*, that is, equal access to the highest offices on the basis of virtue. In his history, Livy presented most of the quarrels between the Plebs and the Senate as conflicts concerning the access to the magistracies. The political moral that Livy always tried to convey to the reader was that the highest offices are to be open to the most virtuous citizens independently of their social position or their birth. Unless *aequa libertas* is properly carried out, the city cannot achieve liberty nor greatness. A good example of conflict concerning the *aequa libertas* can be found in Bk. iv, where Livy considers the claims of the plebeians for the restoration of the mixed marriages and the possibility of appointing a plebeian consul. The prevention of mixed marriages and of electing a plebeian consul, says the spokesman of the plebs, makes us feel in exile inside our city and actually divides the city in two (“*duasque ex una civitate faciatis*”).<sup>80</sup> We only want it to be recognized that we also are citizens even if we do not possess as many riches as others do. If you accept our claims and allow virtuous citizens to be appointed to the consulship even if they are plebeian, as equal liberty prescribes, there will be again one single city.<sup>81</sup>

Machiavelli repeats these republican ideas: the good political order requires that the most wise and honored citizens sit in the highest magistracies. He stresses this point in the *Discursus florentinarum rerum*, a text intended to propose constitutional reforms for Florence. Having explained that the major institutions of the city, the Signoria and the Collegi, should be reformed so that the most wise and honored citizens might be appointed to them, Machiavelli argues that if the reform is not carried out, the best citizens, who personify the majesty of the state, will be confined to a purely private status or to only the

<sup>79</sup> N. Machiavelli, *Discorsi*, Bk. 1, ch. 2.

<sup>80</sup> Livy, *Ab urbe condita*, Bk. iv, ch. 4.

<sup>81</sup> Livy, *Ab urbe condita*, Bk. iv, ch. 5.

less important public institutions. Such a situation contradicts all principles of *political* order (“è contro ad ogni ordine politico”).<sup>82</sup>

The example to be followed is once again that of the Roman Republic, in which civic virtue was rewarded and poverty did not block access to the highest magistracies.<sup>83</sup> The good city has its hierarchies and the *vivere politico* has nothing to fear from the higher rank or nobility of some citizens. The question is how rank and reputation are achieved. Reputation obtained through “private means”<sup>84</sup> is fatal to the *vivere politico*. Reputation obtained through “public means,” such as wise advice or good deeds, produces the greatest benefit for the civil life and has to be recognized as the most legitimate source of access to the magistracies.

As we have seen, in the ideological context of the time the word *politico* was used to denote not only the political constitution of the city in the strict sense, but also its concrete collective life: the customs, the habits and the passions of the citizens. The *vivere politico* demands that citizens be willing to give priority to the interest of the city over their particular interests. In other words, the “vivere politico” requires habits of civic virtue both in the magistrates and the ordinary citizens. In a corrupt city, where citizens give priority to their particular interests, no “vivere politico” can exist.

Whether derived from Aristotelian or Roman sources, the contrast between corruption and *political* life was a recurrent theme in the Humanists’ works. In this respect too, Machiavelli follows the current conventions of the vocabulary of politics. After having reported the episode of Manlio Capitolino, who failed in his ambitious designs because the city was still virtuous, he concludes:

There are two things here which should be borne in mind. One is that, in order to obtain glory, a man must use different methods in a city that is corrupt from what he would use in one in which political life is still vigorous. The other, which is almost the same as the first, is that in the way they behave, and especially where deeds of moment are concerned, men should take account of the times, and act accordingly.<sup>85</sup>

<sup>82</sup> N. Machiavelli, *Discursus florentinarum rerum*, p. 269.

<sup>83</sup> See for instance *Discorsi*, Bk. III, 25: “[. . .] per la povertà non ti era impedita la via a qualunque grado ed a qualunque onore, e come e’ si andava a trovare la virtù in qualunque casa l’abitasse.”

<sup>84</sup> “Le vie private sono, facendo beneficio a questo ed a quello altro privato, col prestargli danari maritargli le figliuole, difenderlo dai magistrati e faccendogli simili privati favori, i quali si fanno li uomini partigiani e danno animo a chi è così favorito di potere corrompere il publico e sforzare le leggi,” *Discorsi*, Bk. III, ch. 28.

<sup>85</sup> “Dove sono da considerare due cose: l’una, che per altri modi si ha a cercare gloria in una città corrotta che in una che ancora viva politicamente; l’altra (che è quasi quel medesimo

Rome was said to live still "politically" since both the customs and the habits of the citizens were virtuous. For Machiavelli, like his republican teachers, a fundamental goal of politics is to shape, to educate, the passions of the citizens. For Machiavelli, too, the goal of political institutions is to educate good citizens. Without good citizens *political* life is impossible. In this respect, politics has an important ally in religion. A republic where citizens hold strong religious beliefs and respect worship, is good and united ("*buona e unita*").<sup>86</sup> On the contrary, in pointing out the corruption of Rome under the emperors, Machiavelli mentions "the Capitol demolished by its own citizens, ancient temples lying desolate, religious rites grown corrupt, adultery rampant throughout the city."<sup>87</sup> Referring to Florence at the times of the fights between the Albizzi and the Ricci, he stresses that there was neither friendship nor unity among the citizens, and that this was because both religion and the fear of God had disappeared ("*e perché in tutti la religione e il timor di Dio è spento, il giuramento e la fede data tanto basta quanto l'utile*").<sup>88</sup> For Machiavelli, religion is one of the most reliable foundations for the greatness of the city because it helps to instill in the people the courage and willingness to fight with the utmost determination against the enemies of the city, and because it helps to have good citizens and good customs. As he himself explains:

It will also be seen by those who pay attention to Roman history, how much religion helped in the control of armies, in encouraging the plebs, in producing good men and in shaming the bad.<sup>89</sup>

Along with civic virtue, another recurrent convention of the vocabulary of politics was the recommendation to preserve concord as one of the necessary foundations of the "*vivere politico*." In this respect Machiavelli parts company with the Humanist and the

che la prima), che gli uomini nel procedere loro e tanto più nelle azioni grandi debbono considerare i tempi ed accomodarsi a quegli," *Discorsi*, Bk. III, ch. 8.

<sup>86</sup> *Discorsi*, Bk. I, ch. 2. <sup>87</sup> *Discorsi*, Bk. I, ch. 10. <sup>88</sup> *Istorie fiorentine*, Bk. III, ch. 5.

<sup>89</sup> "E vedesi, chi considera bene le istorie romane, quanto serviva la religione a comandare gli eserciti, ad animare la Plebe, a mantenere gli uomini buoni, a fare vergognare i rei." *Discorsi*, Bk. I, ch. 11; but see also chs. 12–15. The importance of religion for military achievements is stressed in the *Arte della guerra*: "Valeva assai, nel tenere disposti gli soldati antichi, la religione e il giuramento che si dava loro quando si conducevano a militare; perchè in ogni loro errore si minacciavano non solamente di quelli mali che potessono temere dagli uomini, ma di quegli che da Dio potessono aspettare." In *Arte della guerra e scritti politici minori*, p. 441; In the *Legation* from October 3, 1506, Machiavelli reports the speech of an orator of Bologna to the Pope in which the "*vivere politico*" and religiosity are presented as two strictly connected features of the city's life: "mostrorno in ultimo el politico vivere di quella città, e con quanta religione e osservanzia di legge." *Legazioni e commissarie*, S. Bertelli (ed.), Milan, 1964, II, p. 1007.

Ciceronian tradition. The point has been convincingly discussed by Quentin Skinner,<sup>90</sup> and here I confine myself to showing that the revision of the traditional advice implied a revision of the classical image of the “*vivere politico*.” While the classical advice stated that in order to enjoy the “*vivere politico*” we must devote our best efforts to preserve concord and peace, Machiavelli stressed that social conflicts are unavoidable and beneficial for the preservation of political liberty, if they do not degenerate into civil war. Republican leaders must therefore learn to preserve the “*vivere politico*” also in the presence of social conflicts.

Machiavelli discusses this question at length in the famous ch. 6 of Bk. 1 of the *Discorsi*, where he addresses the question “whether in Rome such a form of government could have been set up as would have removed the hostility between the populace and the senate.” In his typical style of reasoning, Machiavelli contrasts two possible answers, exemplified in the Roman model, on the one hand, and in the Venetian or Spartan one, on the other. Rome had a large population and employed it in war, with the consequence that she managed to acquire a great empire, but at the same time gave the plebs endless opportunities for commotion. Venice, instead, did not employ its populace in war. Sparta did not admit foreigners into its city and kept its populace small. Both republics maintained concord, but they were not in the position to expand. When they tried to enlarge their territories, they both failed and collapsed. Considering the question on rational grounds, as the conventional rules of politics prescribe us to do, the best solution would be to elect the Venetian or the Spartan model, rather than the Roman one. Reason would certainly recommend that one shapes the constitution of the city so that it is well organized for defense and can discourage those who are eager to subjugate it. At the same time, so as not to arouse fear of subjugation in its neighbours, the city has to proclaim that it will not expand. If this balance could be maintained, comments Machiavelli, the city would enjoy both the true “*vivere politico*” and true concord:

Nor have I the least doubt that, if this balance could be maintained, there would be genuine political life and real tranquility in such a city.<sup>91</sup>

<sup>90</sup> Q. Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 2 vols., Cambridge, 1978, 1, pp. 113–115.

<sup>91</sup> *Discorsi*, Bk. 1, ch. 6: “E senza dubbio credo che potendosi tenere la cosa bilanciata in questo modo, che e’sarebbe il vero vivere politico e la vera quiete d’una città.”

However, necessity is more powerful than reason, as the advocates of the art of the state used to say. If the city is led to expand by necessity, it would be unprepared for the task and would collapse in failure. Even in the happy case that the city never needs to expand, idleness will either make it effeminate or give rise to factions. In this case, too, the result would be the loss of liberty. The conclusion of Machiavelli's line of reasoning is well known: "credo ch'e sia necessario seguire l'ordine romano e non quello delle altre repubbliche." The constitution of a city must be designed in a way that allows the inhabitants to increase in number and gives the populace, who bear the burdens of war, their place in institutional life. The squabbles and conflicts that a Roman-like constitution is likely to produce should be considered inconveniences which are necessary to keep the city free and able, if needed, to expand.

If the cost of having a city capable of fighting and, if necessary, expanding, is civil conflict, then the city must be prepared to deal with it. In recommending the tumultuous but powerful Roman republic over the peaceful but weak republics of Venice and Sparta, Machiavelli was not dismissing the republican ideal of politics as the art of establishing and preserving a free city. He was simply pointing out to his contemporaries that politics must face the additional task of handling civic discord as a fact of life in the city. He did not change the goal of politics, which remains for him the "*vivere politico*"; he tried however to argue that the "*vivere politico*" may coexist with civic discord, provided, of course, that conflicts do not exceed the boundaries of civility.<sup>92</sup>

One could argue that, in recommending the Roman model, Machiavelli was actually sacrificing the substance of the *vivere politico* and liberty in the pursuit of greatness.<sup>93</sup> He was perfectly aware that the pursuit of greatness is in the long run fatal to the liberty of the city. The history of Rome itself provided the most convincing example. Having expanded over an immense territory, Rome was forced to keep its armies far away for long periods and to prolonging the tenure of military commands accordingly. This turned out to be one of the causes of the loss of liberty.<sup>94</sup> The other major cause of the collapse of Roman liberty was the extreme virulence of the conflicts between the

<sup>92</sup> See the contrast that Machiavelli draws between the social conflicts in Rome and factional strife in Florence in *Istorie Fiorentine*, Bk. III, ch. 1.

<sup>93</sup> See for instance Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*, pp. 197 and 218.

<sup>94</sup> *Discorsi*, Bk. III, ch. 24.

plebs and the senate over the Agrarian Laws. Rome had always been a tumultuous republic, but the proposal of the Agrarian Laws pushed the hostility far beyond the boundaries of the civil life.<sup>95</sup>

Rome's liberty would have survived longer, Machiavelli commented, if the city could have been kept more tranquil and had proceeded more slowly in its conquests. History teaches us – Machiavelli admonishes in *Dell'asino d'oro* (1517) – that expansion caused the ruin of many princes and republics. The ambition to expand has destroyed states, and the great wonder is that on this all agree but no one avoids such a fatal mistake.<sup>96</sup> Having said this, one would expect a strong recommendation to avoid designing a constitution with a view toward expansion, and to institute a true political life according to the Venetian model. But this is not, as we have seen, the advice of Machiavelli. His position on war and expansion was that a republic (like *any* state) must attain an appropriate size and be capable of fighting, if its liberty has to be preserved. Both goals may be reached by means of an efficient military organization, diplomatic skill, and a fair policy toward the inhabitants of the conquered or annexed territories.

Of the three possible methods of expansion adopted by republics, the best is for Machiavelli the Roman way, namely forming alliances in which you reserve leadership, and thus the whole authority, for yourself, and granting citizenship to conquered people. The worst is to treat the peoples of the conquered territories merely as subjects, as Sparta and Athens, and Florence, did. However, since the Roman model appears to be too difficult, the most recommendable policy for Florence would be to follow the example of the ancient Tuscans, that is to form leagues or federations on fair terms. Even if they did not become a large empire like Rome, the ancient Tuscans attained enough power to live securely for a long time, with the greatest glory and the most praiseworthy customs and religion.<sup>97</sup>

<sup>95</sup> "e si accese per questo tanto odio intra la Plebe ed il Senato che si venne nelle armi ed al sangue, fuori d'ogni modo e costume civile," *Discorsi*, Bk. I, ch. 37.

<sup>96</sup> "Questo appetito gli stati distrugge:/ e tanto è più mirabil che ciascuno conosce questo error, nessun lo fugge." N. Machiavelli, "Dell' asino d'oro," 46–47, in N. Machiavelli, *Il teatro e tutti gli scritti letterari*, F. Gaeta (ed.), Milan, Feltrinelli, 1965, p. 287.

<sup>97</sup> "E quando la imitazione de' Romani paresse difficile, non dovrebbe parere così quella degli antichi Toscani, massime a' presenti Toscani. Perché se quelli non poterono, per le cagioni dette, fare uno Imperio simile a quel di Roma, poterono acquistare in Italia quella potenza che quel modo del procedere concesse loro. Il che fu per un gran tempo sicuro, con somma gloria d'imperio e d'arme, e massime laude di costumi e di religione" *Discorsi*, Bk. II, ch. 4. See also *Discorsi*, Bk. II, ch. 19, and the letter to Vettori from August 25, 1513, in *Lettere*, p. 294; *Del modo di trattare i popoli della Valdichiana ribellati*, in S. Bertelli (ed.), *Arte della guerra e scritti politici minori*, Milan, 1961, pp. 71–75; *Discorso dell'ordinare lo stato di Firenze alle armi*, in *Arte della guerra*, p. 95.

War, wrote Felix Gilbert, is for Machiavelli “the most essential activity of political life.” In *The Prince* and the *Discorsi* war appears “as an inescapable, grandiose and terrifying force” and “we find nothing about the desirability of peace.”<sup>98</sup> All that is true, but for Machiavelli war is also horrible, inhumane, cruel. There is no grandiosity in Machiavelli’s portrait of war in the tercets *On Ambition*:

Turn your eyes whoever wishes to see  
the troubles of others, and look again whether yet  
the sun ever saw so much cruelty.

One weeps for the dead father and one for the husband,  
that wretched other, from under his own roof,  
is to be seen dragged out beaten and naked.

O how many times, the father holding close  
in his arms the son, with a single blow alone,  
the breast has been sundered of one and the other.

That one abandons his paternal soil,  
accusing the cruel and ungrateful Gods;  
within, his family full of grief.

O examples never having existed in the world!  
Because one sees every day many births  
born out of the wounds of their womb.

Behind her daughter full of troubles  
the mother says, “To what an unhappy wedding,  
to what a cruel husband have I brought you!”

The ditches and water are dirty with blood,  
full of skulls, legs, and hands,  
and other limbs torn and cut off.

Rapacious birds, forest animals, dogs  
are then their paternal graves:  
O sepulchers crude, ferocious and strange! . . .

Wherever you turn your eyes, you see  
the land full of tears and blood,  
and the air of shrieks, sobs, and sighs.<sup>99</sup>

<sup>98</sup> Felix Gilbert, “Machiavelli: The Renaissance of the Art of War,” in P. Paret (ed.), *Makers of Modern Strategy*, Princeton, 1986, p. 24.

<sup>99</sup> I am quoting from Sebastian De Grazia’s translation in *Machiavelli in Hell*, Princeton, 1989, pp. 165–166. For an excellent account of Machiavelli’s position on war and peace see pp. 164–173.



War is a cruel martyrdom, a long devastation, an irreparable ruin.<sup>100</sup> When it is not necessary war is unjust, as was the case with the wars that Florence fought to enrich its wealthiest citizens.<sup>101</sup> Worse than war is to be defeated or defenseless against men's furor and ambition, particularly of those people whose ferocity is joined with an armed virtue.<sup>102</sup> Whereas war is often inescapable, defeat with all its horrors is, if the city has its own militia and the citizens are trained to military discipline. Wise legislators and prudent rulers must, above all else, care to save the city from military defeat and conquest. If a war has to be fought it has to be fought with determination and skill. The shorter the war the better for the city, particularly for the noncombatants. To shorten the war and to win, all military virtues are required: courage, discipline, enthusiasm, ferocity. The art of war has to be learned since in the battlefield military expertise decides the victory, and therefore the liberty of the city. It is then a fundamental task of the art of the city to be sure that the art of war is properly cultivated without becoming, for some citizens a permanent occupation.

The point that Machiavelli stresses again and again is that a city must be in a position to fight to protect its liberty, and that one must go to war in order to have peace. They should not, however, put at stake peace in order to have war. The fundamental obligation of the good ruler must be to seek peace and the security of his subjects: it is for the sake of peace and the protection of his subjects, not for the sake of war and conquest, that he has to know how to make war.<sup>103</sup> The goal is to live in peace in the city and cultivate the arts of peace, and, if there is war, to do everything that can be done to end it as soon as possible. Machiavelli, indeed, recommended the cultivation of the art of war, but as a component, not as the ultimate goal, of the art of politics.

In Machiavelli's language, politics is still the art of the city. But the city must be established and preserved in an insecure world where

<sup>100</sup> "L'empio e cruel martoro/ de' miseri mortali,/ il lungo strazio e 'nrmediabil danno,/ il pianto di costoro/ per li infiniti mali che giorno e notte lamentar gli fanno/ con singulti e affanno,/ con alte voci e dolorose strida,/ ciascun per sé merzé domanda e grida." "Degli spiriti beati," in *Il teatro e tutti gli scritti letterari*, p. 332.

<sup>101</sup> See *Istorie fiorentine*, Bk. IV, ch. 14.

<sup>102</sup> "Dell' ambizione," 91-93, in *Il teatro e tutti gli scritti letterari*, p. 332.

<sup>103</sup> "E perchè voi allegasti me, io voglio esemplificare sopra di me; e dico non aver mai usata la guerra per arte, perchè l'arte mia è governare i miei sudditi e defendergli, e, per potergli defendere, amare la pace e saper fare la guerra," N. Machiavelli, "Dell'arte della guerra," in *Arte della guerra e scritti politici minori*, p. 342.

liberty can be sustained only through virtue. Politics must order all other arts which are cultivated in the city in view of the common good.<sup>104</sup> Only republican politics can succeed in building a city where virtue is honored and rewarded, poverty is not despised, military valor is esteemed and the citizens love each other and are attached to the public good. Whoever achieves such a city creates the conditions under which men can live a happier life.<sup>105</sup>

Machiavelli also continued his reflections on the art of the republic in the *Istorie Fiorentine*, composed between 1520–1525 and in the “Discourse on Florentine Public Affairs after the Death of Junior Lorenzo,” composed in 1520. Particularly in the *Discursus*, Machiavelli contrasts the art of the state with the art of constructing a well-ordered republic. Instead of advising a prince on how to preserve *his* state, he wants to teach how a true political order should be and how to move from the *stato* of the Medici to a republic. It is not simply a question of a more or less stable state of the prince, that is, ultimately, a private domination over a city. Rather, the whole point is to return the city to the citizens, freeing the public institutions from the control of the prince and his friends. That being the task, the language of politics, not surprisingly, re-emerges against the art of the state.

The unexpected death of Lorenzo de’ Medici in 1519 had reinvigorated the debate on the future of the Medici state as well as on the possibility of constitutional reforms to be introduced in Florence. Whereas the friends of the Medici had to face the challenge of identifying the best way to secure their state, the opponents welcomed the political crisis as a chance to restore the republic.

One of the most illuminating documents of the time is an *Istruzione* of Goro Gheri, the archbishop of Pistoia, addressed to Cardinal Giulio de’ Medici in Rome.<sup>106</sup> In his *Istruzione* this loyal servant of the Medici recapitulates all the main tenets of the conventional art of the state. The keystone of Gheri’s argument is the thesis that the foundation of the state of the Medici is “friends.” Only “friends” have always helped the state to overcome the many moments of

<sup>104</sup> *Arte della guerra*, p. 325, “Proemio.”

<sup>105</sup> “La quale cosa chi ordina, pianta arbori sotto l’ombra de’quali si dimora più felice e più lieto che sotto questa.” *Arte della guerra*, pp. 332–333.

<sup>106</sup> Goro Gheri, “Istruzione per Roma,” in Rudolf von Albertini, *Firenze dalla Repubblica al Principato*, pp. 360–364.

crisis that have occurred since the time of Cosimo. No one else but friends will guarantee the future of the state. From this postulate, Gheri derived the equally traditional advice of trying to incorporate into the state the respected and esteemed citizens, without, of course, endangering the authority of the Medici, and advantaging always the friends, particularly the old ones, over the others.<sup>107</sup> Through a selective distribution of favors and honors, two equally important targets are met: the friends are kept content and ready to defend the state if the need arises; others will understand that the best way of satisfying their claims is to become friends of the state.

The zeal of the friends is decisive for the preservation of the state, particularly if a strong republican opposition arises in the city. In this case having many and powerful friends, along with full control over the institutions, the magistrates and the armies, would be enough to repel the opponents.

Along with the politics of friends, the Medici should also pursue the traditional politics of ruling with civility ("*governare civilmente et honorevolmente*") guaranteeing justice to all citizens. With the *grandi* who long for power, the best conduct is to be extremely cautious, even if they happen to be relatives. In matters of the state, the bonds of family are of slight importance and ambition often pushes men to overwhelm the voice of reason. Finally, concludes Gheri, the preservation of the state demands the ceaseless presence of a ruler. The best candidate would be Ippolito de' Medici, but he must move to Florence in a civil way and accept the manners of civility.

In another document of the same years – a *Discourse* of Niccolò Guicciardini addressed to his father Piero<sup>108</sup> – we find the same themes and similar arguments. The *Discourse* opens with an overview of the political history of Florence since the invasion of Italy by the French king in 1494, with particular emphasis on the restoration of the Medici in 1512. The return of the Medici was welcomed, comments Guicciardini, only by a few citizens who were dissatisfied with the republic and believed that the new regime would grant them the reputation that they used to have before the republic. The majority of the citizens deeply opposed the restoration because they

<sup>107</sup> Goro Gheri, *Istruzione per Roma*, p. 362.

<sup>108</sup> Niccolò Guicciardini, "Discorso del modo del procedere della famiglia de' Medici in Firenze et del fine che poteva havere lo stato di quella famiglia," in Rudolf von Albertini, *Firenze dalla repubblica al principato*, pp. 365–375.

felt deprived of the political rights that they enjoyed in the republic, particularly eligibility for offices.<sup>109</sup>

The followers of the regime, however, were soon disappointed by the manners of Lorenzo, who deviated from the practice of civil rule, and behaved more and more as an absolute master. Despite the failure of the conspiracy of the Boscoli and the election of Cardinal Giovanni de' Medici to the papacy in 1513, creating favorable conditions for adopting a civilized style, Lorenzo persisted in ruling as an absolute prince, appointing the magistrates as he pleased, using public money for private purposes and treating the citizens with open disrespect. Should all these abuses and injustices continue, the people will unavoidably be infuriated, rebel against the state of Lorenzo and institute a popular government, no doubt worse, admonished Guicciardini, than the present one. As a remedy for preventing the collapse of the state, Niccolò Guicciardini offers a conventional piece of advice. First, Florence needs a prince who regains the friendship of the people by ruling with justice and taking care of their interests. Second, he must create a militia composed by inhabitants of the countryside and as many Florentine noblemen as possible. Third, he must surround himself with good and powerful friends. Finally, he must be prudent and courageous, avoiding at the same time being insolent and intemperate.

The fear of an imminent collapse of the state because of Lorenzo's imprudence also pervaded a *Discourse* written by Alessandro de' Pazzi for Cardinal Giulio de' Medici in 1522.<sup>110</sup> The whole citizenry, remarked Alessandro, is ill-disposed, there are many enemies, and the friends are lukewarm toward the state since they did not receive the benefits that they expected. The only way to prevent a traumatic change of regime that would cost the Medici and their friends their properties and even their lives, would be the institution of a mixed republic on the example of Venice. The transition, recommends Alessandro, should be led by Cardinal Giulio himself. Or, better still, the cardinal should perhaps hint at the constitution and delay its implementation until circumstances are more favorable. The people should not suspect that the cardinal was acquiescing to the republic

<sup>109</sup> On the importance of eligibility in Florentine republic experience see N. Rubinstein, "Machiavelli and Florentine republican experience," in G. Bock, Q. Skinner and M. Viroli (eds.), *Machiavelli and Republicanism*, Cambridge, 1990, pp. 3-16.

<sup>110</sup> Alessandro de' Pazzi, "Discorso al Cardinale Giulio de' Medici," in *Archivio Storico Italiano*, 1 (1842), pp. 420-432.

out of his own interest, not out of his love for the city, as his true motivation certainly was.

Alessandro de' Pazzi's position was unquestionably the most innovative compared to the views of Gheri and Niccolò Guicciardini, which repeated the traditional wisdom of the art of the state in the epoch of the Medici. After *The Prince*, Machiavelli had another chance to come to terms with that body of ideas and once again he reiterated his distrust of the practice of disguising power under appearance of civility. An interesting piece of evidence in this sense is Machiavelli's attitude toward Cosimo, the symbol of the Florentine art of the state. He was not, of course, in the position of speaking openly, as the Medici were paying his salary for the *Istorie*. Hence, not surprisingly, Cosimo is depicted as the champion of civility, and as the unsurpassed expert of the art of ruling a principality as well as civil governments.<sup>111</sup> However, in addition to the fact that the eulogy of Cosimo in chs. 5 and 6 of Bk. vii sounds contrived, we have an important indication found elsewhere of Machiavelli's true ideas. Donato Giannotti, who was well-acquainted with Machiavelli, reveals in a letter of June 1533 an interesting confession of Machiavelli concerning the *Istorie*. I will not write what I really think of Cosimo, said Machiavelli, and I will leave aside the description of the means he used to seize power. I will instead put my true ideas in the mouth of Cosimo's opponents. The reader can find there what I would have said, had I been free to write my true thoughts.<sup>112</sup> Machiavelli's spokesman, we may guess, is most probably Rinaldo degli Albizzi, the most implacable opponent of Cosimo. His opinion about Florence is clearly expressed in the speech he delivered before going into exile in 1434 when Cosimo returned to Florence. His oration reiterates the traditional themes of civil philosophy, even though Rinaldo was not the best example of a good citizen. I will always assign little value, says Rinaldo, to a city where men are more

<sup>111</sup> *Istorie Fiorentine*, Bk. vii, ch. 5.

<sup>112</sup> The words of Machiavelli, in Giannotti's report were: "Io non posso scrivere questa historia come io la scriverei se io fossi libero da tutti i rispetti; le azioni saranno vere, et non premetterò cosa alcuna, solamente lascerò indietro il discorrere le cause universali delle cose; verbi grazia. io dirò gli eventi e gli casi che successero quando Cosimo prese lo Stato; lascerò stare indietro il discorrere in che modo, et con che mezzi et astutie uno pervenga a tanta altezza, et chi vorrà anco intendere questo, noti molto bene quello ch'io farò dire ai suoi adversarii, perchè quello che non vorrò dire io come da me, lo farò dire ai suoi adversarii." Donato Giannotti, Lettera a Marcantonio Michieli, June 1533, in Luigi A. Ferrai (ed.), "Lettere inedite di Donato Giannotti," in *Atti del R. Istituto veneto di scienze, lettere ed arti*, iii, 1884-1885, p. 1570.

powerful than laws. It is desirable only to live in a city where one can enjoy freely properties and friends, not in a city where one can be easily dispossessed, and where friends are compelled to abandon you when you are most in need of them. Wise citizens, concluded Rinaldo, always preferred an honorable exile to servitude. Rinaldo was reported by Machiavelli to have been speaking in this way to the Duke of Milan, asking for help against Cosimo. Rinaldo's position was not an easy one. He was asking the archenemy of Florence to wage war against his own *patria*. The betrayal had to be justified. And the justification was that Florence was no longer the common fatherland, but was, on the contrary, the *stato* of Cosimo. Only that fatherland that loves all citizens equally deserves to be loved by them. No reason can be as compelling as to free the fatherland from servitude. In the past, concludes Rinaldo, you attacked a free city, now we are imploring you to help the same city to recover its liberty against the tyrant.<sup>113</sup>

According to Machiavelli, if we take Rinaldo's words as Machiavelli's own, Cosimo was just a tyrant who imposed his own power over the city thanks to exiles, confiscations, executions and a ruthless policy of favors designed to put his own friends in the magistracies of the city. Nonetheless, in his proposal for the constitutional reform of Florence to Cardinal Giulio de' Medici, Machiavelli could not, of course, speak like Rinaldo degli Albizzi. His rejection of Cosimo's model of ruling Florence had to be phrased in different terms. Against those who urged imitating Cosimo, Machiavelli responds that, if applied to Florence's present conditions, Cosimo's methods would be completely unsuited. The state of Cosimo and Lorenzo was neither a genuine republic, nor a genuine principality, but a hybrid of the two. By its own nature it inclined either to evolve toward the principality or toward the republic. A genuine principality, instead, might evolve only toward the republic, and a true republic can evolve only toward a principality. Moreover, the mood of Florence's citizens has deeply changed since Cosimo's times. They have experienced the republic, and compared to the republic Cosimo's regime would be much less satisfying. Besides, the Medici themselves are no longer those of 1434. They are now far too powerful. Between them and the citizens there can be no civil relationship.<sup>114</sup>

<sup>113</sup> *Istorie Fiorentine*, Bk. v, ch. 8.

<sup>114</sup> N. Machiavelli, "Discursus florentinarum rerum post mortem iunioris Laurentii Medices," in *Arte della guerra e scritti politici minori*, p. 265.

The dismissal of Cosimo's model of a principality, veiled by republican institutions and civility, allows Machiavelli to restrict the range of possible political alternatives to a straight principality or a well-ordered republic. He then excludes the principality on the grounds that in Florence there is a great deal of equality among the citizens, whereas a principality is appropriate only in cities like Milan where there is a sharp distinction, between the citizens and the nobility. To try to institute a principality in Florence would be an extremely difficult achievement unworthy of anybody who wants to be regarded as a compassionate and good man ("*pietoso e buono*").<sup>115</sup>

As we have seen, the argument that a straight principality is unsuitable for Florence because of the equality that existed long since among the citizens, was the favorite point of the advocates of a civil principality, which simply meant a principality that paid some respect to the habits of equality that traditionally informed the relationships among the citizens. Having dismissed the civil principality as unstable, Machiavelli then employs the arguments of equality to support a republic. Interestingly, Machiavelli uses another typical theme of the advocates of the state of the Medici against its own proponents, namely the idea that Florence needs a ruler. It certainly does, he replies, but the citizens prefer a public ruler ("*capo pubblico*") and dislike a private one ("*capo privato*"), which means that they want a republic, not the state of the Medici.<sup>116</sup>

Having dismissed the mixture of republic and principality because of its instability, as well as the principality because of its inadequacy to meet the humors of the citizenry, Machiavelli took upon himself the burden of proving that a republic is more stable and more capable of producing an adequate leadership in harmony with the traditional habits of civic equality. He was challenging the advocates of the state on their own ground. He had to convince Cardinal Giulio that a peaceful and prudently steered transition to the republic would be in the best interest of the Medici and their friends. He was not in a position to stress that a republic is better simply because it guarantees liberty and is conducive to greatness. He had to borrow the weapons from the enemy's arsenal. He chose the two weapons that the state had always, and often successfully employed against the republic: stability and efficiency.

In this context, and as a response to the argument of the art of the

<sup>115</sup> *Discursus florentinarum rerum*, p. 268.

<sup>116</sup> *Discursus florentinarum rerum*, pp. 265–266.

state, Machiavelli elaborates the concept of a well-ordered republic as a political order. Political, because the public institutions are not in any way under the control or the influence of private citizens; order, in the sense that every component of the city has its right place in the institutional framework of the republic. Writing under the assumption that the *stato* of the Medici was about to dissolve, Machiavelli intended to provide republican theory with the tools to win the political and ideological competition with the theory of the state.

His rhetorical strategy is twofold. On the one hand, he discards the arguments in favor of the return to some more-or-less veiled form of the state of someone. On the other, he acknowledges that the republic of 1494, the republic where he had served as secretary, was a disordered one because a relevant component of the city, the *grandi*, did not have their place in the institutional framework and the highest magistracies were filled by citizens of poor reputation. The consequence was that the majesty of the republic was where it should not have been, and the public institutions were actually under the influence of private citizens.

In writing that the past republic was not well-ordered because it denied political recognition to the *grandi*, Machiavelli intended, of course, to reassure the cardinal that the republicans would not repeat the same mistake, and that the friends of the Medici had no reason to fear and oppose the institution of a well-ordered republic. More importantly, he was focusing on the theme of moderation to make republican political doctrine capable of instituting a more stable republic. And this was a task that only a political man, not a "man of state," could possibly carry out.

In his last political work, Machiavelli urges the Medici cardinal to imitate the political men of the republican tradition. Having his last chance to advise a ruler, he points him to the example of the great political men of the *Discorsi*: the founders of republics and kingdoms as opposed to those who imposed tyrannies; Scipio against Caesar, Agesilaus, Timoleon; Dion of Syracuse against Nabis of Sparta and Dionysius; the princes of republics and the emperors who ruled under the laws against Caligula, Nero and Vitellius. He contrasts good princes ("*principi buoni*"), or simply the good ("*i buoni*"), against wretched and corrupt tyrants.<sup>117</sup>

Only the excellent men who institute, or preserve, or reform a

<sup>117</sup> *Discorsi*, Bk. 1, ch. 10.



“vivere politico” in a city deserve true glory. Nothing is as beloved by God, writes Machiavelli in the *Discursus*, as the deeds of those who did good for their country and reformed through the laws kingdoms or republics.<sup>118</sup> The founders of republics and kingdoms and the good political men who preserved the order of the city were, above all, moderators and rulers. The great legislators of antiquity displayed their outstanding talents in designing political constitutions where all components of the city had their proper place. They were like Lycurgus, who assigned the kings, the aristocracy and the populace to their rightful places (“ordinò in modo le sue leggi a Sparta dando le parti sue ai Re, agli Ottimati e al Popolo”) and “introduced a form of government which lasted for more than eight hundred years to his very great credit and to the tranquillity of the city.”<sup>119</sup> Solon, on the contrary, established a place for the populace alone and neglected the other components of the city. He failed to create a truly moderate constitution; as a result, the Athenian democracy fell forty years later under the domination of the tyrant Pisistratus. The best example of a moderate constitution, however, was the Roman Republic, which achieved a perfectly institutional balance only when the plebs obtained, through the Tribunes, their place in the institutional life of the city. It was precisely by virtue of this moderation that the Roman Republic qualified as the “perfect republic” (“perfetta repubblica”).

Any city that intends to preserve its liberty must have its moderator. In the *Discursus florentinarum rerum*, Machiavelli’s basic recommendation to Cardinal Giulio de’ Medici was to reform the constitution of Florence in such a way that all three types of men who inhabit the city have their place.<sup>120</sup> Failing to do this, the city will never rid itself of the disorders that produced its decline. Whether it is because the populace was not represented (“il popolo non vi aveva dentro la parte sua”),<sup>121</sup> or because the populace pretended to expel the nobility from the government of the city,<sup>122</sup> the outcome was the

<sup>118</sup> “Io credo che il maggiore onore che possono avere gli uomini sia quello che voluntariamente è loro dato dalla loro patria: credo che il maggiore bene che si faccia, e il più grato a Dio, sia quello che si fa alla sua patria. Oltre di questo, non è esaltato alcuno uomo tanto in alcuna sua azione, quanto sono quegli che hanno con leggi e con istituti reformato le repubbliche e i regni: questi sono, dopo quegli che sono stati Iddii, i primi laudati.” N. Machiavelli, *Discursus florentinarum rerum*, p. 275. On the apotheosis for political leaders see De Grazia, *Machiavelli in Hell*, pp. 360–385. <sup>119</sup> *Discorsi*, Bk. I, ch. 2.

<sup>120</sup> “Coloro che ordinano una repubblica debbono dare luogo a tre diverse qualità di uomini, che sono in tutte le città; cioè primi, mezzani e ultimi.” *Discursus florentinarum rerum*, p. 268. <sup>121</sup> *Discursus florentinarum rerum*, p. 262. <sup>122</sup> *Istorie Fiorentine*, Bk. III, ch. I.

constant oscillation between tyranny and licence, two equally blameworthy extremes which jeopardized the liberty of the city.<sup>123</sup> The only chance to recover the badly ordered city is the arrival of a "wise, good and powerful citizen" ("*un savio buono e potente cittadino*") who will introduce institutional reforms and laws which can moderate the appetites of the nobility and the populace and thus restore liberty.<sup>124</sup>

The good man who wants to rescue his city from corruption or preserve its good political order must be a good architect and a good orator, capable of persuading the soldiers, of lightening their fears, setting their courage afire, increasing their determination, reproaching them, filling them with hopes, doing everything through which human passions are extinguished or excited. As representative of the city he has to be capable of finding the right wording in dealing with foreign rulers, addressing the people in the Great Council, discussing with the senators or his councillors.

The city is a universe of passions, for it is inhabited by concrete human beings who love, hate, fear, hope, have ambitions and desires, want to be recognized, esteemed and rewarded. Some of them seek domination; many others seek security for themselves and their relatives. The art of politics deals with the unstable universe of human passions, and the living *ethos* of a community.<sup>125</sup> For the purpose of restraining and educating human passions those who possess the *civilis disciplina* must be able to use both the laws and rhetoric. Such good, wise and powerful men, "good and prudent," "good and merciful," who populate so many pages of the *Istorie*, the *Discorsi* and the *Arte della guerra*, exhibit the features of the republican civil man, the good man who reforms the institutions and laws of the city to the greatest benefit of all citizens.

Machiavelli never rejects the conventional image of the political man as a good man who benefits the "vivere politico." His hero is, as it was for the republican writers, the good man. Even if they were great conquerors and military commanders Caesar and Pompey attained fame ("*fama*"), but not glory. To attain glory it is not enough to be a great captain; one must also be a good man who devotes his talents to preserving the liberty of the republic and not to destroying

<sup>123</sup> *Istorie Fiorentine*, Bk. iv, ch. 1.      <sup>124</sup> *Istorie Fiorentine*, Bk. iv, ch. 1.

<sup>125</sup> S. Wolin, on the contrary, stresses that Machiavelli is one of the forerunners and founders of "the great tradition of interest politics." *Politics and Vision*, p. 236.

it, as Caesar and Pompey did. Lasting though their fame may be, it can never parallel the glory of Scipio and Marcellus:

I say, then, that Caesar and Pompey, and almost all the Roman generals who lived after the Second Punic War, acquired their reputation as skillful men, not as good citizens; but those who lived before that time won glory by being both civic-minded and skillful.<sup>126</sup>

The conventional idea of the good man plays a central role in Machiavelli's language and it may help us to grasp the meaning of those passages in *The Prince* which have always been quoted to prove that Machiavelli rejected the republican idea of politics.

A man who wants to be good under all circumstances, Machiavelli writes in the famous fifteenth chapter of *The Prince*, will certainly come to ruin among the many who are not good. Therefore "a ruler who wishes to maintain his power must be prepared to act immorally [*"imparare a poter essere non buono"*] when this becomes necessary".<sup>127</sup> What Machiavelli seeks to accomplish, in writing that the prince must learn to be "*non buono*," is to stress that civil philosophers were in fact teaching the prince to behave in a way that would cause him his ruin.

The necessity of learning how to not be good is relevant for the prince who is concerned with the preservation of his *stato* as well as the political leaders of republics: they too might easily find themselves forced to break promises, be unjust and deceive. Pier Soderini, the *Gonfaloniere* of the Florentine Republic, believed he could handle the pro-Medici enemies of the republic through patience, goodness and rewards. Even though he was aware that much harsher measures were necessary, he never managed to resort to them because he did not want to break the laws and civil equality.<sup>128</sup> His inability to drop his natural patience and humility brought him to ruin, and ruined also the Florentine Republic.<sup>129</sup> When he died, Machiavelli wrote

<sup>126</sup> "E dico che Pompeo e Cesare, e quasi tutti quegli capitani che furono a Roma dopo l'ultima guerra cartaginese, acquistaron fama come valenti uomini, non come buoni; e quegli che erano vivuti avanti a loro, acquistaron gloria come valenti e buoni." *Arte della Guerra*, p. 337 (Neal Wood, trans., Bobbs-Merrill, 1965, p. 17). Mark Hulliung, who maintains that for Machiavelli the end is greatness, not liberty, or republican government and not even the unification of Italy, does not find it necessary to discuss this passage. If we accept Hulliung's point – that Machiavelli's true concern was glory – we must conclude that Machiavelli's message was that we should imitate Scipio and Marcellus, not Caesar: be good citizens and good soldiers, not be committed to conquest for the sake of conquest and predation. Cf. M. Hulliung, *Citizen Machiavelli*, p. 26. On the distinction between fame and glory see also: Victor A. Santi, "'Fama' e 'laude' distinte da 'gloria' in Machiavelli," in *Forum Italicum*, 12 (1978), pp. 206–215. <sup>127</sup> *The Prince*, ch. 15. <sup>128</sup> *Discorsi*, Bk. III, ch. 3.

<sup>129</sup> *Discorsi*, Bk. III, ch. 9.

sarcastically, his soul was not admitted in hell, but sent instead to limbo. Had he accomplished his duty, he would have been welcomed in hell, the right place for a political man.<sup>130</sup>

The necessity of using extraordinary means arises also for the civil man who pursues the goal of the restoration of a political life (*vivere politico*) in a corrupt city. Reforming a defective institution which has proved to be incapable of checking corruption can be done either all at once or little by little. Both ways, explains Machiavelli, are very unlikely to succeed. Even in the happy case that a prudent man realizes that the old institutions will soon be inadequate and will cause the corruption of the city, he will not be able to persuade his fellow citizens of the necessity of reform, because men who are accustomed to a certain mode of life are unwilling to change it on the grounds of pure conjectures. With regard to a reform to be introduced all at once, he who plans to carry it out must resort to extraordinary means, such as force and arms, in order to become prince of the city and have the absolute power necessary to succeed in the restoration of political life. Machiavelli states clearly in the *Discorsi* the dilemma of a politics aiming at the restoration of the corrupted city:

But, to reconstitute political life in a state presupposes a good man, whereas to have recourse to violence in order to make oneself prince in a republic supposes a bad man. Hence very rarely will there be found a good man ready to use bad methods in order to make himself prince, though with a good end in view, nor yet a bad man who, having become a prince, is ready to do the right thing and to whose mind it will occur to use well that authority which he has acquired by bad means.<sup>131</sup>

The good man must become bad (*cattivo*) in order to achieve the goal that republican writers have always considered most worthy for a truly good man to pursue. Having revealed how difficult the task of republican politics is, Machiavelli does not dismiss it at all. On the contrary, he recommends the restoration of liberty and *political* constitution in a corrupted city as the most glorious aim to which a man can possibly commit himself. If a man is truly eager to acquire

<sup>130</sup> "The night that Piero Soderini died/ his soul went to the mouth of hell./Pluto shouted: 'What hell? Silly soul./Go up to the limbo with the other children,'" *Epigramma*, transl. by S. De Grazia, *Machiavelli in Hell*, Princeton, 1989, p. 323.

<sup>131</sup> "E perchè il riordinare una città al vivere politico presuppone uno uomo buono, e il diventare per violenza principe di una repubblica presuppone uno uomo cattivo; per questo si troverà che radissime volte accaggia che uno buono, per vie cattive, ancora che il fine suo fusse buono, voglia diventare principe; e che uno reo, divenuto principe voglia operare bene, e che gli caggia mai nello animo usare quella autorità bene che gli ha male acquistata." *Discorsi*, Bk. 1, ch. 18.

perennial glory, he should ask God to allow him to live in a corrupted city and to have the chance to reform it.<sup>132</sup>

In writing the *Discorsi*, Machiavelli's purpose was to excite in the young the desire to emulate ancient virtue and follow the precepts of republican politics. This was the last resort of a good man whom the evil circumstances of his time prevented from carrying out the principles of true politics:

For it is the duty of a good man to point out to others what is well done, even though the malignity of the times or of fortune has not permitted you to do it for yourself, to the end that, of the many who have the capacity, some one, more beloved of heaven, may be able to do it.<sup>133</sup>

Here, he was speaking about himself and making explicit the goal he was trying to achieve. This was the message he wanted to convey to future generations: if you want to acquire perennial glory, you must devote yourself to the establishment and the preservation of the "*vivere politico*" following the example of the heroes of republican politics. He was not, however, in the position of promising, as did Macrobius and Palmieri, that after their death they would go directly to heaven and enjoy perennial happiness.<sup>134</sup> He knew that they were likely, instead, to go to hell. Future generations who wanted to devote themselves to the noble goal of politics must know that *Scipio's Dream* was only a dream. Though he admired the princes and the captains who knew how to use the art of the state, Machiavelli never presented any of them as true heroes of politics.<sup>135</sup> He repeatedly flirted with the masters of statecraft, but his deepest love was for those who possessed the art of instituting a political life. No other goal is as truly worthy for a good man, even if it may require him to do evil.

To go back to the question whether Machiavelli rejected or

<sup>132</sup> *Discorsi*, Bk. 1, ch. 10.

<sup>133</sup> "Perchè gli è offizio di uomo buono, quel bene che per la malignità de' tempi e della fortuna tu non hai potuto operare, insegnarlo ad altri, acciocchè sendone molti capaci, alcuno di quelli più amato dal Cielo possa operarlo." *Discorsi*, Bk. II, "Proemio."

<sup>134</sup> Machiavelli's father Bernardo, possessed a copy of Macrobius' *Somnium Scipionis* and *De Saturnalibus*; see Bernardo Machiavelli, *Libro di Ricordi*, Florence, 1954, p. 70.

<sup>135</sup> See for instance his letter to Vettori from January 31, 1515: "Duke Valentino, whose works I should always imitate if I were a new prince, realizing this necessity, made Messer Rimirro President in Romagna; that decision made those people united, fearful of his authority, fond of his power, and trustful in it; and all the love they felt for him, which was great considering his newness, resulted from this decision." *The Letters of Machiavelli*, A. Gilbert (ed.), New York, 1961, p. 186. For a different interpretation see De Grazia, *Machiavelli in Hell*, pp. 376-385; see also M. Viroli's review of De Grazia's book: *Political Theory*, 19 (1991), pp. 292-295.

maintained the view of politics as civil philosophy or whether he advocated a combination between politics and art of the state, I believe that the answer is that he perpetuated the republican language of politics, and contrived to keep alive the republican ideal of the political man. He recommended the necessity of integrating civil philosophy with the art of the state, but he did not reduce or equate the former to the latter. He maintained the distinction and assigned politics a superior rank. Even when he wrote of the art of the state, as he did in *The Prince*, he never called it "politics" and always regarded it as a subordinate and transitory component of politics. Machiavelli did not contrive to change the meaning of politics. Rather, he reworked civil philosophy to make it apt to face the historical tasks of the restoration of the republic and the liberation of Italy. Both of them required the arrival of a true political man capable of using also the art of the state, if necessary. The purpose of Machiavelli was to educate the great political man that a future republic and Italy needed.

#### CHAPTER 4

### *Francesco Guicciardini: between politics and art of the state*

Francesco Guicciardini may be regarded with Machiavelli as the symbol of the epoch of transition from the language of politics to that of reason of state. They both aimed at integrating the language of civil philosophy through extensive borrowings from the language of the art of the state. Guicciardini brought the language of the art of the state to an unprecedented level of intellectual refinement and introduced the expression "reason of the states" later to become the core of the new understanding of politics. Compared to Guicciardini's *Ricordi* and *Discourses*, the works of the earlier writers on the art of the state look remarkably rudimentary. Even *The Prince* looks like the work of someone who knew a lot, but not all, that he needed to know in order to be credited as a professional in the art of the state, or like the work of someone who refused to speak like all the others who discussed the same subject.

Although Guicciardini's attempt to integrate the language of politics with that of the art of the state takes place in the discourse *Del modo di ordinare il governo popolare* (also known as the *Discours of Logrogno*) and in the *Dialogo del reggimento di Firenze*, we can find his elaborations of the art of the state in his *Ricordi*, on which he worked from 1521 to 1530,<sup>1</sup> and in his memoranda and letters to the Medici. The core of his interpretation of the art of the state is the conviction that the art of ruling the state is substantially a derivation of the art of ruling a household and the art of commerce in general. Machiavelli had confessed to Francesco Vettori that he had no competence about the art of commerce and that he knew only the art of the state. Had he known this confession, Guicciardini would have probably doubted Machiavelli's competence on the art of the state altogether. The art of the state and commerce both deal with men's passions and humors

<sup>1</sup> See G. Sasso, *Per Francesco Guicciardini*, Rome, 1984, p. 5.

and they both aim at securing, increasing and enlarging wealth, in the case of commerce, power, in the case of the art of the state. Hence, one can be a master of the art of the state only if he also marshalls the art of administering estates or commerce or banking.

By stressing the affinity between the art of preserving the state and commerce, Guicciardini illuminates the difference between the art of the state and politics. The former is an extension of economics; the second, as we have seen, was understood as a derivation of ethics and law. The art of the state aims at enlarging somebody's status and possessions; politics, instead, looks after the public good, just like ethics and law. The art of the state is largely the art of consolidating and creating private loyalties; politics strives to restrain private loyalties and reinforce impersonal attachments, such as the love for liberty, justice and country.

According to Guicciardini, ruling or reforming a city requires the same competence that many citizens have acquired through the practice of commerce and the administration of their families and estates. It is basically a talent of making good choices, a skill that presupposes a deep knowledge of men. The successful tradesman or banker knows how to deal with people. He interprets their passions and intentions, and he makes his predictions accordingly. His fortune or his ruin depend on his capacity of reading and understanding the mobile and intricate universe of passions. If he succeeds, he can turn to his advantage the passions of his fellow-men. If he fails, he loses his reputation and possessions.

The rule of a city also consists in dealing with men, though on a larger scale. In state affairs what really counts is the ability to discern the person we are dealing with. General rules do not help, and assumptions on men's rationality help even less. It is naive, and dangerous, to assume that a prince is following the precepts of reason. It is much safer to make one's plans by considering which are his inclinations and his habits. This is true for the art of the state, when one deals with princes, as well as in private negotiations.<sup>2</sup>

In the art of the state general rules find very little application.

<sup>2</sup> In maxim 128, for instance, Guicciardini writes: "Nelle cose degli stati non bisogna tanto considerare quello che la ragione mostra che dovessi fare uno principe quanto quello che secondo la sua natura o consuetudine si può credere che faccia." And in maxim 151: "Abbiate sempre la mira, come è anche detto sopra de' principi, non tanto a quello che gli uomini con chi avete a negoziare dovrebbero fare per ragione, quanto quello che si può credere che facciano considerata bene la natura e costumi loro." *Ricordi*, in *Opere*, Emanuella Lugnani Scarano (ed.), Turin, 1974, p. 764 and p. 771.



Every situation is characterized by a specific set of circumstances. We have always to deal with exceptions. One cannot learn statecraft from books, just as no book can teach us how to succeed in business.<sup>3</sup> The ability to discern is in part a natural talent, in part the product of experience.<sup>4</sup> Even the reference to examples and similar situations is not a safe guide to make the most appropriate choice. A small difference between the example and the real situation makes all the difference in the world. What really matters is to detect and discern what makes the situation a different one.<sup>5</sup> Prudent men prefigure two or three different scenarios and then decide which one of them is more likely to occur. It may however happen that an unforeseen scenario actually occurs. One should then elect the safest course of action taking into consideration a wide range of possibilities.

Time also is very important in private as well as in public matters.<sup>6</sup> Many plans fail not because they were wrong but because they were undertaken at the wrong time, too late or prematurely.<sup>7</sup> Sometimes fools who challenge fortune rather than following reason do better than prudent men who conduct themselves the other way round.<sup>8</sup> Both the brave and the prudent are ultimately bound to yield to destiny (*"Ducunt volentes fata, nolentes trahunt"*).<sup>9</sup> Prudent men who lengthily ponder the advantages and the disadvantages of the various courses of action make, however, fewer mistakes.

In his earlier writings Guicciardini shared the commitment of civil philosophy that a corrupted city may be reformed and that we must indeed devote our best energies to this noble goal. The political reform of the city is, in fact, the central theme of the *Discorso di Logrogno* composed in 1512, while he was following the court of the King of Spain as Ambassador of the republic of Florence. Guicciardini begins his reasoning with the analysis of the corruption of Florence's institutions and customs. Florence's public life, he remarks, does not at all resemble a well-ordered republic.<sup>10</sup> A

<sup>3</sup> See *Ricordi*, p. 729.      <sup>4</sup> *Ricordi*, p. 828.

<sup>5</sup> "e el discernere queste varietà, quando sono piccole, vuole buono e perspicace occhio," *Ricordi*, p. 762.

<sup>6</sup> "Crediate che in tutte le faccende e pubbliche e private la importanza dello espedirle consiste in sapere pigliare el verso," *Ricordi*, p. 786.

<sup>7</sup> "Le cose medesime che, tentate in tempo, sono facili a riuscire, anzi caggiono quasi per loro medesime, tentate innanzi al tempo, non solo non riescono allora, ma ti tolgono ancora spesso quella facilità che avevano di riuscire al tempo suo: però non correte furiosi alle cose, non le precipitate, aspettate la sua maturità, la sua stagione," *Ricordi*, pp. 750-1.

<sup>8</sup> *Ricordi*, p. 767.      <sup>9</sup> *Ricordi*, p. 767.

<sup>10</sup> F. Guicciardini, *Discorso di Logrogno*, in E.L. Scarano (ed.), *Opere*, p. 249.

widespread licence to do evil reigns in the city; the citizens have neither respect nor fear of the laws and the magistrates; the most virtuous and wise lack the chance to display their qualities in office; those who do good things for the republic receive poor rewards, and a universal ambition to attain all the honors possesses the citizenry; everybody pretends to meddle in every public matter no matter how important and delicate; the customs of men are effeminate and enervated and the style of life too delicate and sumptuous; nobody seeks true glory and true honor, all crave only riches and wealth.

To reform such a situation, it is not enough to introduce one or a few laws. It would be necessary to reshape the whole substance of the city, or, like the good physician, to create a new disposition of the whole body attacking the causes of the disease by means of several drugs. No other therapy can in fact succeed when the body suffers from several diseases. It is, of course, an almost prohibitive task, worthy of a very good physician, but not impossible.<sup>11</sup> If the city were young, it would be much easier to reform it. Nevertheless, even though Florence is aged, the task can be accomplished, if a number of generous and wise men devote themselves to this noble goal with the same industry that they usually employ to accumulate riches and do evil.

Writing in 1512, soon after the restoration of the Medici, Guicciardini was less passionate in his eulogy of the city and good government. This time, he was advising the Medici about how to preserve *their* state in a way that amounted to the dissolution of the city and the good government into a poorly disguised tyranny.<sup>12</sup> The main preoccupation of the ruler, remarks Guicciardini, must be to preserve himself and his state.<sup>13</sup> To attain this goal he must follow a simple rule: to debilitate and to strike the enemies and to create and bolster a reliable network of partisans to check the opponents of the state, that is, in the case of Florence, the citizenry. Whereas in the *Discorso di Logrognò* he described as bad government the practice of

<sup>11</sup> "Il che se bene è difficile e ha bisogno di buono medico, pure non è impossibile," "*Discorso di Logrognò*," in *Opere*, p. 250.

<sup>12</sup> "Perchè del buono governo ne seguita la salute e conservazione di infiniti uomini, e del contrario ne resulta la ruina ed estermínio delle città; di che nella vita delli uomini nessuna cosa è più preziosa e singulare che questa congregazione e consorzio civile," "Delle condizioni in cui trovavansi le contrarie parti che dividevano la città per la mutazione dello Stato, e della difformità di pareri e d'intenti nel restringere il Governo." October 1512, in G. Canestrini (ed.), *Opere inedite di Francesco Guicciardini*, Florence, 1858, vol. II, p. 317.

<sup>13</sup> "il primo intento di chi regge e governa ha a essere di conservare sè e lo Stato suo," *Delle condizioni*, p. 322.

excluding a component of the citizenry from public honors and rewarding others on the grounds of private services instead of virtue, a few months later he was recommending the same policies as the most efficient means for the Medici to secure their *stato*.

If judged by the standard of politics, what he was suggesting as a rule of the art of the state was the best way to destroy the friendship and the concord among the citizens that the Humanists had always praised as the most secure foundation of the liberty of the city. When he was writing as a professional of the art of the state, Guicciardini was perfectly prepared to recommend policies that in fact transformed the city into the dominion of a family sustained by a network of private loyalties. Whereas the republic must encourage noble passions, the state relies and fosters particular interests. Out of interest, not out of love or friendship, men can be faithful and devoted to the state. What the Medici need to secure their *stato* are partisans who perceive that it is more convenient for them to be friends of the Medici, than friends of their fellow citizens. As Guicciardini coolly remarks, the partisans would be capable of committing any iniquity in order to support the state that is the source of all their honors and their possessions.<sup>14</sup> The consolidation of the state requires a number of citizens prepared to regard the many who are excluded from it and regarded as enemies. The origin and historic meaning of the art of the state could not be more transparent: it was the art of dissolving the city.

A few years later, he offers another remarkable essay showing his mastery of the language of the art of the state. The point of the *Discourse* of 1516 (*Del modo di riformare il Governo, per meglio assicurare lo Stato alla Casa dei Medici la quale era rappresentata da papa leone X, da Lorenzo e dal cardinal Giulio*) was again how to reinforce the domination of the Medici over the city. Compared with the *Discorso di Logrognò*, the perspective is totally different: in the *Discorso di Logrognò*

<sup>14</sup> "Nessuna amicizia oggidì si misura, se non quanto è accompagnata dalla utilità; e dove non è questa, non si può avere nessuna fede. Però bisogna, quelli che lo Stato elegge e disegna, avere per amici, incorporarseli in modo, che vi veggino drento tanto guadagno; ed è converso, tanta perdita, mutandosi lo Stato, che li sforzi a conservarlo, non solo l'amore, ma più tosto la utilità, anzi necessità. La quale seguirebbe gagliarda con questi modi; e massime che offendendo altri, e a petizione dello Stato e per le cupidità loro private, temerebbono nelle mutazioni non solo del perdere li onori, ma le facultà e la vita; e però sarebbe forza che non avessino rispetto a nulla per mantenerli" F. Guicciardini, "Delle condizioni in cui trovavansi le contrarie parti che dividevano la città per la mutazione dello Stato, e della difformità di pareri e d'intenti nel restringere il Governo." (October 1512), in G. Canestrini (ed.), *Opere inedite di Francesco Guicciardini*, Florence, 1858, II, pp. 323-324.

Guicciardini was seeking to persuade the Florentines to reshape their public life to make it resemble more a republic and less a mob-rule; now, he deals with the problem of how to make the city a more secure possession of the Medici, and to strengthen the evolution of the republic into a private dominion.

The basic assumption of Guicciardini's reasoning in the *Discorso* of 1516 is the acknowledgment that the Medici are the masters of Florence and of the dominion.<sup>15</sup> The only difference between the position of the Medici and that of an absolute prince is that the latter rules without intermediaries and his words are law, while the former do what they please through the mediation of magistrates dependent on them. The state of servitude of the city is a fact to be accepted. To make it more secure, Guicciardini lists three main pieces of advice: that the Medici themselves be willing to look after their possession and live in Florence instead of regarding it as something of lesser importance; to create a network of friends and partisans totally loyal to the House; to satisfy, to a degree, the claims of the populace. Of the three recommendations, the second is clearly the most revealing of the distance that separates the art of the state from politics. Whereas a republic must honor and reward the citizens for their services to the common good, the art of the state prescribes that a number of citizens must be rewarded and elevated to the magistracies because of their services to a few private individuals, or because they seem available to serve loyally.

The task of establishing the Medici's regime, assures Guicciardini, is not an impossible one. We are no longer living in the times of Rome and Greece when the city was inhabited by generous souls seeking glory.<sup>16</sup> The passions of love and hatred are much weaker in our times. Nowadays, Florentines are concerned only with their particular interest.<sup>17</sup> What the Medici should do then is to satisfy the particular interest of a number of citizens. These citizens will then realize that their status and their security depend upon the preserva-

<sup>15</sup> ("sono padroni di questa città, e di tutto questo Dominio," "Discorso del modo di riformare il Governo per meglio assicurare lo Stato alla Casa dei Medici," in F. Guicciardini, *Opere inedite*, II, p. 327).

<sup>16</sup> "Non sono più i tempi antichi de' Romani e dei Greci, nè quegli ingegni generosi e tutti aspiranti alla gloria; nessuno è a Firenze che ami tanto la libertà e il reggimento popolare, che, se gli è dato in uno altro vivere più parte e migliore essere che non pensa di avere in quello, non vi si volti con tutto lo animo," "Del modo di riformare il Governo, per meglio assicurare lo Stato alla Casa dei Medici," in *Opere inedite*, II, pp. 333-334.

<sup>17</sup> "Del modo di riformare il Governo, per meglio assicurare lo Stato alla Casa dei Medici," in *Opere inedite*, II, p. 333.

tion and the flourishing of the state of the Medici and would be, in consequence, reliable supporters.

The argument is exactly the reverse of the point, forcefully expressed in the *Discorso di Logrogno*, that a well-ordered republic must encourage ambition to attain glory through honest deeds and give generous citizens the chance to display their virtue. The prescription of the art of the state is, instead, to count on a lack of magnanimity, and to encourage private interests and personal loyalties at the expense of noble passions and civic virtue. Politics and art of the state rest upon two alternative interpretations of the identity of the city. They suppose, and advocate, different standards of ranking and esteeming the individuals and seek to build two diverse types of people. The state requires individuals who are willing to achieve distinction and superiority through the benevolence of the holders of the state; the republic needs individuals, or at least a significant number of them, who like the superiority attained serving the public good and granted by a public body.

Guicciardini reveals a remarkable talent in shifting from the language of civil philosophy to that of the art of the state. He masterfully adopts the language appropriate to the political circumstances: the language of politics when the republic existed or seemed about to come; the language of the state when the Medici succeeded in imposing their own state. Machiavelli, too, tried to speak both languages, but he ended up with producing an unconventional interpretation of the art of the state, and was much less capable of adapting to changing political circumstances.

Another interesting example of Guicciardini's talent of shifting from politics to the art of the state is the *Dialogo del reggimento di Firenze*, composed in 1521–25. The *Dialogo* is Guicciardini's major political work. He began to write it while in Lombardy acting as general commissar of the Papal army engaged in the siege of Milan. The death of Lorenzo de' Medici in 1519 seemed to have re-opened the possibility of a restoration of a republican government in Florence. As he writes in the *Proemio*, the dialogue deals with public governments which he equates, as we can see from the earlier version, with the art of ordering a free government.<sup>18</sup>

Guicciardini reiterates here his commitment to the ideal of a well-structured and well-ordered liberty. Our obligation to our

<sup>18</sup> "de' modi di ordinare la libertà della nostra città"; "de' modi di ordinare uno governo libero nella nostra città." F. Guicciardini, "Dialogo del reggimento di Firenze," in *Opere*, p. 477.

country, he writes in a straight Ciceronian language, has priority over any other obligation. I cannot therefore be reproached if I am illustrating how a well-ordered, honest and truly free government should be introduced in Florence.<sup>19</sup> Even if there is no hope of realizing the goal of a well-ordered liberty, it is most praiseworthy and honorable to meditate upon such a noble subject.<sup>20</sup> The existence of a free and well-ordered city affects, in fact, the well-being, the safety, the life of men, and is the precondition for the accomplishment of noble deeds.

The language of politics as civil discipline pervades the whole *Proemio* and aptly introduces the main argument of the *Dialogo* – the ideal of well-ordered liberty founded upon a mixed government that refrains from the excesses of popular government and tyranny. Guicciardini presents his work as the reconstruction of a discussion that took place in 1494 – at the time of the restoration of the republic after the expulsion of the Medici – between Bernardo Del Nero, Piero Capponi, and Pagolantonio Soderini. Piero Guicciardini, Francesco's father, acts as a witness and a reporter. Guicciardini's spokesman is Bernardo Del Nero, who was sentenced to death in 1497 by the republican government, charged with plotting for the return of the Medici in Florence.

Bernardo welcomes the three younger Florentines to his villa, where he had retired from political life and looked after his plantations. It is to Bernardo del Nero, a victim of the republican government of 1494, that Guicciardini commits the task of explaining to the zealots of the republic that the republican government is not always conducive to liberty, and may easily be worse than a princely rule or even a mild tyranny such as the Medici's regime at the time of Cosimo. In the dialogue Bernardo Del Nero is depicted in the same position of Guicciardini in 1521–3. Like Guicciardini, he was a man of the Medici. Nevertheless, as Guicciardini did in the *Proemio*, he pledges that his loyalty to the city has priority over the attachment to the Medici.

<sup>19</sup> "Uno governo onesto, bene ordinato, e che veramente si potessi chiamare libero," *Dialogo del reggimento di Firenze*, p. 300.

<sup>20</sup> "E' tanto bello, tanto onorevole e magnifico pensiero el considerare circa e' governi pubblici, da' quali dipende el bene essere, la salute, la vita degli uomini e tutte le azioni egregie che si fanno in questo mondo inferiore, che ancora che non s'avessi speranza alcuna che quello che si pensa o si disegna potessi mai succedere, non si può dire se non che meriti di essere laudato chi applica l'animo e consuma ancora qualche parte del tempo nella contemplazione di sì onesta e sì degna materia [. . .]," *Dialogo del reggimento di Firenze*, p. 299.

Bernardo gladly accepts the invitation of discussing public and civil matters with his younger guests. They are more learned and have a better knowledge of the classical works on politics than he has, but Bernardo is a man of immense experience in the art of the state.<sup>21</sup> Although Guicciardini's spokesman is a professional of the art of the state, his teaching does not deal with the preservation of somebody's state but with the establishment of a good government, that is a government where the laws are respected, justice is granted to every citizen, the common good is properly realized and every group of citizens is ranked in its just place.

A good government, Bernardo explains, must be a lasting one. Our task, he says, must be to investigate what is the best form of government for Florence not only for the span of a generation, but with a view to posterity. Like the great founders of states, we must aim at the creation of institutions that could be perennial. The level of the discussion that Guicciardini wishes to set through the words of Bernardo is clearly the level of architectural politics. Whereas the art of the state only deals with the preservation of an established power and rarely goes beyond the lifetime of the prince, or his sons, the discussion of the *Dialogue* concerns the possibility of reforming the existing political institutions that affect the identity of the city in the long term.

The *stato*, as we have seen in Guicciardini's *Discorso* of 1516, is based upon a system of private loyalties as a compensation for the benefits that the prince granted to particular citizens. The loyalty can of course go beyond the person who grants honors and rewards and encompass the family itself (the House of the Medici). Nevertheless, the *stato* has to be constantly reproduced through the distribution of new honors and rewards to the sons of those who had been previously benefited. The art of the state consists in this respect in the exercise of discretion, in the ability to select the right persons to benefit and in the talent for assessing how much a particular individual or a family should be honored in comparison with others.

The republic, on the other hand, requires the definition of rules and procedures that could be implemented by anybody and applied to anybody. The rotation of the magistrates does not imply the reconstruction of the basis of the consensus. The public nature of the republic, its substantial institutional and moral identity could, in

<sup>21</sup> *Dialogo del reggimento di Firenze*, p. 307.

principle, last forever. If the art of politics is properly applied, the product could be perennial, as the grand political men always dreamed of. Instead, the highest target that the professional of the art of the state can possibly aim at is the preservation of the state of a particular person for his lifetime. With the death of the prince the enterprise has to start all over again. In discussing the shape of a well-ordered republic, Guicciardini was speaking of an enterprise that could give eternal glory to the generous soul willing to pursue it; when he wrote how to assure to the house of the Medici the *stato* in Florence, he was dedicated to a much less rewarding accomplishment, at least for the ambition of a great mind, as he unquestionably considered himself to be.

Though very uncertain, the institution of a good republic is still regarded in the *Dialogo del reggimento di Firenze* as possible. What is wrong is to try to institute it instantaneously through extraordinary means.<sup>22</sup> Florence, stresses the experienced Bernardo to the younger republican zealots, is old and lacks the vitality to overcome its many diseases. Prudence and virtue may not be sufficient. Bernardo strongly warns against the pernicious ideological belief that virtue can and must overcome fortune. Against this creed of civil philosophy, Guicciardini never ceases to admonish caution. Better to achieve a small result than to spoil the whole plan. Even if we pursue the noble task of restoring a corrupted city, it is unwise to rely too much on our own virtue and try to force the situation. Yet we should not give up our plans, and must hope that fortune is benevolent to us.<sup>23</sup>

A well-ordered government can be instituted in two ways, through force or through persuasion. The best way to introduce a well-ordered republic through persuasion would be for a prince to abdicate and introduce a republic. If men realized what true glory consisted of, we would have many examples of princes ready to put the good of the city before the interest of their own house and descendants. Unfortunately, men have long lost the desire to pursue true glory and it is very unlikely that such a prince will ever materialize.

<sup>22</sup> Guicciardini, however, was not in principle against the use of extraordinary means to restore or protect the liberty of the city. See F. Guicciardini, "Se sia lecito condurre el populo alle buone legge con la forza non potendo farsi altrimenti," in *Scritti politici e Ricordi*, R. Palmarocchi (ed.), Bari, 1933, pp. 229-231.

<sup>23</sup> "a ogni modo è mala cosa che non si abbia a sperare di riordinarlo," *Dialogo del reggimento di Firenze*, p. 446.



The other possibility for restoring a good government through force would be the rise of a great political man, a citizen who deeply loves his city and concentrates in his hands an extraordinary authority to use it for the good of the city. As we have seen, Machiavelli had discussed the same dilemma in the *Discorsi*.<sup>24</sup> Although he remarked that it is almost impossible to find a man capable of getting absolute power and using it to reform a corrupted city, nevertheless, he regarded such a man as the sole hope of defeating corruption. Guicciardini is less inclined to cultivate the hope of a great political man rising to rescue the republic. He stresses the risks of such a solution more than the likely benefits. To consolidate the new order such a man of extraordinary authority should remain in power for a long time. It is then highly probable that he would get so accustomed to his extraordinary power that he would not want to stand down.<sup>25</sup>

The wisest solution, explains Bernardo, is to pursue the goal of instituting a good government with determination and prudence, avoiding, above all, impatience to attain everything at once. Bernardo's reasoning is pervaded by the feeling that, although the era of the free city is almost over, there is still something that can be done. Keeping the city alive as a political and independent body, if not in perfect health and good order, is already an important achievement. The prudence and circumspection of the art of the state, with its long-standing skill of dealing with the variety of human passions and humors, can serve the purpose of the art of the city. Here the art of the state is invoked as a corrective to the inclination of civil philosophy to assume a one-sided moralistic thrust that would turn into a complete failure. Any business man knows that an enterprise undertaken at the wrong time may ruin his wealth. Much better to be content with a smaller gain and to be in the position to do better as soon as the circumstances are more favorable. The civil philosopher should learn the same lesson and instruct those who are willing to engage themselves in public affairs accordingly.

Precisely because it is so difficult, the restoration of the city from its corruption would be the most glorious achievement.<sup>26</sup> Like the most

<sup>24</sup> G. Sasso has aptly stressed the importance of Machiavelli's *Discorsi* in the background of the *Dialogo*; see G. Sasso, *Per Francesco Guicciardini*, pp. 92-93.

<sup>25</sup> "Sapete come dice el proverbio: che lo indugio piglia vizio," *Dialogo del reggimento di Firenze*, p. 444.

<sup>26</sup> *Dialogo del reggimento di Firenze*, p. 251.

orthodox Humanist, Guicciardini stresses that only a man who is at the same time generous and prudent can succeed. The restoration of the city is a job for a political man, a good and prudent man, not for the practitioner of the art of the state. The contrast between civil philosophy and the art of the state occupies most of the second part of the *Dialogue*. Capponi is the first to recapitulate the classical argument of civil philosophy: cities having been founded for the common good of the citizens, it is therefore contrary to the very foundations of civil life for the interest of a single man or of a part of the city to prevail over the common good. The Medici, like every tyrant, can claim that it is necessary for them to elevate a number of citizens at the expense of the others. Necessity, however, does not absolve them from the charge that their *stato* instilled hatred and malevolence within the citizens, and hence corrupted the benevolence and the friendship which are the basis of a true civil society and the true bond of the city.<sup>27</sup>

Capponi's exposition of the philosophy of the city is aptly supported by Soderini's comments. It is, of course, of the utmost importance that the city should be ruled in justice and the citizens live in security. A no less important goal that a city must pursue is majesty and magnificence. If we consider private life, humility, parsimony and modesty must have priority, but in public life generosity, magnificence and the splendor of the city must be ranked first. To be concerned with one's own private interest is certainly appropriate for private citizens, but in politics, greatness and splendor must have priority over interest.<sup>28</sup> If the honor and the splendor of the city must have priority over private interest, the obvious conclusion is that liberty is to be regarded as the basic value, since liberty is the precondition for a city to attain honor, reputation and splendor in the eyes of the other cities. On the other hand, a city that serves a tyrant is a city without honor that cannot attain magnificence and splendor. Guicciardini here strikes another typical Humanist note: the only political constitution that naturally fits Florence is a constitution that

<sup>27</sup> "El maggior vincolo delle città e quello che è più utile e più necessario, è la benevolenza de' cittadini l'uno con l'altro e come manca questo manca el fondamento della società civile; ma come una parte si vede senza giusta causa oppressata dall'altra, bisogna che di necessità vi nasca uno odio, una malivolenzia inestimabile," *Dialogo del reggimento di Firenze*, p. 387.

<sup>28</sup> "Perchè el pensare solo allo utile e a godersi sicuramente el suo, è più presto cosa privata che conveniente a uno publico, nel quale si debbe risguardare a l'onore, alla magnificenza e alla maestà, e considerare più quella generosità e amplitudine che la utilità," *Dialogo del reggimento di Firenze*, p. 394.

gives absolute priority to liberty, understood as the rule of law and public institutions.<sup>29</sup> Liberty is the heritage that our fathers gave us and we have the obligation to preserve it at the cost of our life.

The form of government that better guarantees the preservation of liberty is a mixed government, with a Great Council that appoints the magistrates and passes the laws, a lifetime *gonfaloniere*, and a body of counsellors or senate. Each component is designed to fulfill one of the main functions of government: the lifetime, or at least a long-term, *gonfaloniere* guarantees the continuity of command and supervision over the various institutional bodies of the republic. The senate, composed of the most experienced and prominent citizens, provides a valuable resource of prudence and wisdom in the most important deliberations. The Great Council is the foundation of the liberty of the city.

Guicciardini stresses with particular force that the magistrates and the offices must be appointed by the great council, if we want to preserve the republic. The fact that the honors are assigned by the Great Council guarantees that the magistrates have no obligation to a particular citizen or to a few of them.<sup>30</sup> Instead, if the magistrates and public honors are distributed by a powerful or a few powerful citizens, the magistrates would be compelled to obey their will, with the loss of liberty as the obvious consequence.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, it is important that the citizens perceive that only the magistrates who behaved well are reappointed. That would, in fact, encourage the citizens to serve the republic to the best of their capacity. The passing of the laws, the other main function of the Great Council, is equally important for the preservation of liberty. If legislative power were intrusted to a minority of citizens, they would most likely pass laws that benefit them instead of the whole city. For this reason it is more prudent to commit legislative power to a body that represents the whole citizenry. However, the discussion within the council should be conveniently disciplined to avoid chaotic and endless debates.<sup>32</sup> The comments of Soderini complete the picture. The city's basic values are justice and greatness. If justice and the common good are properly

<sup>29</sup> "né è altro la libertà che uno prevalere le legge e ordini publici allo appetito delli uomini particolari." *Discorso di Logrogno*, p. 255. On Guicciardini's debt toward the Florentine tradition of civic humanism see N. Rubinstein, 'Guicciardini politico,' in *Francesco Guicciardini 1489-1583*, Florence, 1984, pp. 180-182.

<sup>30</sup> "nessuno abbi a riconoscere lo stato da uno o da pochi," *Discorso di Logrogno*, p. 262.

<sup>31</sup> *Discorso di Logrogno*, p. 256. <sup>32</sup> *Dialogo del reggimento di Firenze*, p. 264.

carried out, benevolence and concord grow spontaneously among the citizens.

The ideal of politics as the art of the city could not have been formulated more clearly. Equally clear is the position of Bernardo, who advocates the necessity, and even priority, of the art of the state. The ideals of liberty and the principles of civil philosophy are inadequate to institute and preserve a good government. One must also know how to deal with the concrete reality of the city, with the humors and the passions of the citizens, and to move in the dangerous and complex arena of international relations. If the rulers do not possess these skills, the republic will inevitably degenerate into a mob rule, which is worse than tyranny, or fall under the domination of a foreign power. The art of the state must integrate the republican art of the city. Like an aged and debilitated man, Florence needs a skilled physician, not an enthusiastic amateur. Her physician must be some person or persons who know the art of the state and are willing to apply it. Unexperienced zealots would only aggravate the condition of the city. For this reason, stresses Bernardo, it is essential to institute a mixed government where the deliberations of importance are in the hands of competent citizens, while at the same time preserving liberty.

Mixed government can satisfy all kinds of ambitions existing within the citizenry, and compete successfully against the Medicean state, since there is no doubt that the honors and the reputation granted by a public body are much more praiseworthy than these obtained as the tyrant's favors.<sup>33</sup> For the same reason, the tenure of the *Gonfaloniere* should be for life. Such an outstanding office would serve the purpose of inflaming the noble ambitions of those who want to attain the greatest reputation under the law and in the respect of liberty. The possibility of reaching such a distinguished station would encourage the noblest citizens to display their devotion to the common good. At the same time they would be discouraged from pursuing excellence through tyranny. More than any other city, a free republic needs a few citizens of outstanding qualities capable of leading it to great achievements. The ambition to attain the greatest honors, if pursued under the laws and through devotion to the public good, is not at all

<sup>33</sup> "E gli altri onori poi che si hanno con opinione della virtù e non del favore, e poi che gli uomini che gli conseguiscono gli esercitano secondo e parere loro e non a' cenni degli altri, quanto sono più belli e più onorevoli!" *Dialogo del reggimento di Firenze*, p. 420.

detrimental – as a wrong interpretation of civil equality seems to imply – to the liberty of the city.<sup>34</sup>

In the *Dialogue*, Guicciardini's main polemical target is the populist interpretation of the republic, namely the idea that the republic must not, and cannot, allow hierarchies of honors and different levels of responsibility in public life. He saw that mistake also in the *Discorsi*, where Machiavelli assigned too preponderant a role to the people.<sup>35</sup>

Through the words of his spokesman Bernardo, Guicciardini accepts without limitations the principle that the Great Council must be the source of all magistracies and honors. At the same time he endorses the doctrine that in any city there are three different types of citizens: the *grandi* who aim at glorious deeds and are pushed by an honest ambition; those who are happy with some form of recognition; and the majority who are content to attend to their own business. To guarantee the stability of the republic, the city must have a constitution whereby every type of citizen can find his place: the *gonfaloniership* is the appropriate goal for the most glory-seeking; the senate and the lesser magistracies are the appropriate station for those who are eager to be honored; the large council is the place for the ordinary citizens who are concerned with their own security and the liberty of the city.

According to Guicciardini's reasoning, a well-ordered republic must have a place for the ordinary citizenry, for the "wise men" and for the outstanding individuals. A republic that pretends to lower the wise men (*savi*) and the exceptional citizens to the level of the populace, is bound to produce its own decay. A good citizen must expect that the republic honors its citizens for their virtue without considering lineage and the status of the family.<sup>36</sup> On the other hand, the ambitious and malicious citizens expect from the tyrant or the prince the license to usurp other citizens' properties, as well as to interfere with the administration of justice.

In failing to provide the appropriate institutional place in the

<sup>34</sup> *Discorso di Logrognò*, p. 274.

<sup>35</sup> "A fuggire queste cose bisogna non rimettere al popolo alcuna cosa importante, eccetto quelle che se fussino in mano di altri, non sarebbe la libertà sicura, come è la elezione de' magistrati, la creazione delle legge, le quali non è bene venghino al popolo, se non prima digestite e approvate da' magistrati supremi e dal senato; ma quelle ordinate da loro non abbino già vigore se non sono confermate dal popolo." *Considerazioni sui "Discorsi" del Machiavelli*, in *Opere di Francesco Guicciardini*, pp. 612–613. See also Guicciardini's comments on chapters 47 and 58, pp. 652–658.

<sup>36</sup> "quella remunerazione dico, che e' buoni hanno a desiderare e aspettare da una repubblica, non a quelle che si ricercano da' principi e da' tiranni," *Discorso di Logrognò*, p. 286.

hierarchy of honors, the republic would expose itself to the danger of sedition. Seeing no place appropriate for them, the most prominent citizens and the most illustrious families would inevitably seek constitutional changes in the direction of an oligarchic government (*stato stretto*), or rally round a tyrant who promises to grant them the recognition that the republic denied them.

The civil philosopher must learn the art of the state if he wants the republic to be something more than a vain speculation or a rhetorical exercise. Learning the art of the state requires experience. The *studia humanitatis* do not explain what a ruler really needs to know. The works of Cicero and the other Humanists depict politics as a morally rewarding activity, but even a ruler of a republic must resort to the art of the state, which is much less pleasant for an upright man.

In the words of Bernardo, the difference between republics and *states* emerges in the clearest way. Republics have a legitimate origin; states are grounded on violence. The legitimacy of the republic, however, goes as far as the city walls and it does not concern dominions.<sup>37</sup> As far as the dominions are concerned republics are in the same position as any other state: their dominions are grounded upon sheer force or the force of money poorly veiled by pretensions of honesty (*"non è altro lo stato e lo imperio che una violenza sopra e' sudditi, palliata in alcuni con qualche titolo di onestà"*).<sup>38</sup>

Nonetheless, the preservation of the *dominio* is a necessity, and a republic must be capable of defending itself and its dominion. Good institutions founded according to political reason must be sustained by military strength. Reason must be corroborated by force.<sup>39</sup> The appropriate policy, in perfect agreement with the creed of the Humanists and Machiavelli, is the civic militia.<sup>40</sup> To give arms to the citizens is not at all alien to the principles of a republic, but, rather, the safest way of securing it.<sup>41</sup> One must dispose the appropriate means – the civic militia.

The republic, on the domestic side, is an exception, an island of justice within an ocean of states created and preserved through violence. But, if a republic has a dominion and subjects, its ruler must learn the harsh rules of the art of the state, as princes, emperors and

<sup>37</sup> *Dialogo del reggimento di Firenze*, pp. 464–465.      <sup>38</sup> *Discorso di Logrogno*, p. 254.

<sup>39</sup> "Non basterebbe che la fussi ordinata bene drento e vivessi con la ragione, se la forza la potessi soprafare." *Discorso di Logrogno*, p. 251.

<sup>40</sup> On Guicciardini's different views on the militia over the years see G. Sasso, *Per Francesco Guicciardini*, pp. 80–81.      <sup>41</sup> *Dialogo del reggimento di Firenze*, p. 252.

the priests have learned so well, with no difference, except in the case of the priests, whose *stati* are grounded upon a twofold violence: temporal and spiritual.<sup>42</sup>

If we want to preserve states, we must then leave aside the imperatives of moral conscience, cease to think as Christians, and think in the terms of the "reason" and the customs of the states. ("*secondo la ragione e uso degli stati*").<sup>43</sup> The term that embodies the new idea of politics appears here for the first time. Two and a half centuries after Latini had defined politics as the art of ruling a city according to reason, Guicciardini takes the trouble to explain to the late pupils of Cicero that, besides moral reason, there is another reason, the reason of the states, that must at times guide the actions of the political man.

As the text clearly reveals, the concept of "reason of the states" is forged in order to favor an intellectual change of importance. In saying that all the states (even republics insofar as they are states that hold dominion over subjects) have their origin in violence and that there is a reason for the states overwhelming moral reason, Guicciardini meant that the language of politics as civil philosophy was seriously defective. Not that it was wrong; it was valid only within restricted boundaries, those of the republic understood as the community of the citizens. Guicciardini was not glorifying the art of the state. He was simply pointing to its inescapability. In terms of dignity and excellence, the highest rank still belongs to the art of the city. The *Discorso di Logrogno* ends significantly with the invocation of a great political man, a new Pericles capable of reforming the city, who deserves immortal glory for his virtue and his love of the city.<sup>44</sup> I am prepared, had written Guicciardini, to give my life and my properties to see our republic recover one day and become a well-ordered one.

Instead of a new Pericles, Alessandro de' Medici came in 1530,

<sup>42</sup> "E el medesimo interviene a tutti gli altri, perchè tutti gli stati, a chi bene considera la loro origine, sono violenti, e dalle repubbliche in fuori, nella loro patria e non più oltre, non ci è potestà alcuna che sia legitima, e meno quella dello imperatore che è in tanta autorità che dà ragione agli altri; nè da questa regola eccettuo e' preti, la violenza de' quali è doppia, perchè a tenerci sotto usono le arme spirituali e le temporali." *Dialogo del reggimento di Firenze*, p. 464.

<sup>43</sup> *Dialogo del reggimento di Firenze*, p. 465.

<sup>44</sup> "E certo secondo el gusto mio, io non veggio quale maggiore premio possi essere preposto a uno animo generoso, che trovarsi capo di una città libera, non per potenza e parentadi e sètte, ma per una reverenza e autorità e una buona opinione che sia di lui, causata per conoscerlo prudente e amatore della sua città. Questo grado el quale ebbono anticamente molti uomini nelle repubbliche, e sopra tutti in Atene Pericle, mi pare da proporre a ogni potenza e autorità di alcuno tiranno: conoscersi stimato e grande solo per le virtù e sue buone qualità." *Discorso di Logrogno*, p. 287.

backed by the Imperial troops of the Prince of Orange, to restore the state of the Medici. As he did after the restoration of 1512, Guicciardini resumes the language of the art of the state. His writings of the years of the Medicean restoration reveal a more and more acute awareness that the logic of the state and the logic of the republic are incompatible. A state, wrote Guicciardini in the *Ricordi*, cannot be ruled according to the principle of liberty, while a republic cannot be ruled according to the art of the state. In 1527 the Medici lost the state because in several matters they ruled according to liberty. The republic, in turn, collapsed when its leaders ruled on many occasions in a way that was appropriate to ruling the state.<sup>45</sup> To preserve their state, the Medici should have devoted their efforts to nourishing a small number of partisans through a selective distribution of honors and favors. Instead, they pursued a rather egalitarian policy in the distribution of honors and profits and were not generous enough to their friends. As a result, they upset the partisans, and failed to attain the support of the people who were still longing for a republic in which every citizen was eligible for honors. They lost the state because they adopted a policy that resembled the practice of the republic.

A republic can last only as long as it gets the support of the people. It cannot be the goal of a republic to cultivate a few partisans or friends. The republic needs the friendship of all the citizens, which can only be secured through a commitment to justice and equality. The state can, and must, discriminate to nourish its partisans; the republic cannot, and must not. Injustices and discriminations would harbor partisans and discords that a republic is incapable of managing. The very same policy that strengthens the state destroys the republic.

As the Medici regime establishes, the themes and the vocabulary of civil philosophy gradually disappear from Guicciardini's writings. However, he never abandons the traditional Florentine and aristocratic commitment to the ideal of civility, nor does he support the open introduction of the principality. His main argument is that the times are not yet mature for such a transition. The duke is too young, he wrote, and lacks experience in Florentine affairs. He must devote

<sup>45</sup> "On several occasions, I have said and written that the Medici lost control of the state in '27 because they respected so many republican institutions ['per averlo governato in molte cose a uso di libertà']; and that I was afraid the people would lose their liberty because they exercised such a tight control of the state ['per governarla in molte cose a uso di stato']," *Ricordi*, series c, no. 21, pp. 844-845; English transl. by Mario Domandi, *Maxims and Reflections of a Renaissance Statesman*, New York, 1965, p. 45.



the first period of his rule to reassure possible supporters that he is not rapacious. In other words, he should first gain the trust of the citizens, or of some of them. For that he must display the manners of civility, instead of the harsh face of the principality. Later on, the matter may be reconsidered and perhaps one may move decisively toward the institution of the principality. For the time being, though, it is better to restrain the power of the duke by some bonds that can be later released.<sup>46</sup> Guicciardini intended to suggest that the duke proceed slowly and postpone the institution of the principality for fifty or a hundred years. The examples he points to are Augustus and the other emperors who wisely maintained the appearances of liberty.<sup>47</sup>

Guicciardini's resistance to principality is on behalf of commerce and business, not liberty. As he repeatedly stresses, too open an institution of the principality would generate among the wealthiest citizens the anxiety that the prince may be rapacious, and this would in turn discourage entrepreneurship. Commerce and finance need a reliable legal framework that assures that their fruits are safe from the prince's appetites. The argument was not against the state of the Medici, but only against the formal institution of the principality. In his *Discorsi* of 1531, Guicciardini repeats his recipe for the preservation of the state: to strengthen the pressure over the common citizens and create, through favors and benefits, a group of friends of the state. The state cannot hope to gain the support of the commonality. They feel, and they will always feel, that the state of the Medici has dispossessed them of the rights that they enjoyed under the republic. No liberal policy, generous as it may be, can repair such a loss. The only wise policy must then be that of guaranteeing some justice in civil matters and discouraging any attempt to shake the state on behalf of the bygone ideal of the republic. The state is not, and cannot, be the state of all. It must rely on friends and partisans, but friends and partisans do not come by themselves. The prince has to approach them, overcome their reluctance and their suspicions.<sup>48</sup> He has to take the initiative and favor those he wants to assimilate in the state.

This central element of the art of the state supposes, of course, a talent for identifying the right persons to be benefited. The prince must be able to "smell the humors" of the likely candidates to the

<sup>46</sup> *Opere inedite*, II, p. 380.

<sup>47</sup> "I savii nelle città solite a essere libere non hanno mai spente queste immagini: Augusto e gli altri Cesari in Roma, Bologna e Siena" *Opere inedite*, II, p. 373.

<sup>48</sup> *Opere inedite*, II, p. 370.

state.<sup>49</sup> Their assimilation within the state creates an obligation, since all the protégés know that they owe the prince their position. They are concerned with the preservation of the state because of the benefits they receive, and, more importantly, for fear of the consequences that the collapse of the regime would have upon them. The fear of revenge by the enemies of the state is much more reliable than gratitude for received benefits. I am absolutely positive, writes Guicciardini, that the state is secure only as long as perception of the advantages is combined with fear for the consequences of its fall.<sup>50</sup> Once again, the recommendations of the art of the state are at odds with the precepts of the art of the city: the republic demands liberty, cultivates the concord and friendship of the citizens, rewards virtue, excites the right ambition for true glory.<sup>51</sup> The state demands subjection, cultivates division of the citizens, nurtures suspicion, hatred, envy, stimulates sordid ambition and mean self-interest. These are two alternative ways of configuring human passions, two interpretations of the moral identity of the city. As we have seen, the only point of overlap between the republic and the state is the dominion, where actually the republic ceases to be a community of citizens and becomes a state. Not surprisingly, the only instance in which Guicciardini urges the Medici to follow the footsteps of the republic is in the policy toward the dominion. In the dominion the republic and the state have to act in the same way, that is to mold it to the advantage of the city. The republic pursued this policy in two ways: by destroying the strongest communities and bringing the inhabitants into Florence; and by inducing the subjects to pay taxes. Whereas the former strategy demanded sheer force, the latter, more subtly, was attained through the incorporation of the most prominent inhabitants of the dominion into the life of the city. In exchange for

<sup>49</sup> "fiutare l'umore di questi," *Opere inedite*, II, p. 370.

<sup>50</sup> "Puossi fare fondamento in su quelli che sono scoperti amici, nel quale vivendosi così concorreranno dua cose: l'una, vedersi buono essere in questo modo di Governo; l'altra, il non potere sperare di salvarsi nella mutazione. Qualunque di queste mancassi, io non prometterei per persona, perchè gli uomini amano più se sè stressi che altri; ma congiunte insieme, mi pare facciano sicurtà intera a Nostro Signore, chè se lo Stato s'arà più a perdere, non perderà solo la Casa sua; questo io l'ho per certissimo, e anche a beneficio dello Stato desidero assai che Sua Santità lo creda," *Opere inedite*, II, p. 364.

<sup>51</sup> Felix Gilbert has correctly assessed the role of ambition in Guicciardini's political positions as well as in the aristocratic milieu of Florence. It is worth specifying that Guicciardini meant the "vera ambizione," namely the desire for glory to be attained through the services to the republic, not the thirst for honors and superiority as such, and even less for the honors granted by a prince in reward for services to him. F. Gilbert, *Machiavelli and Guicciardini. Politics and History in Sixteenth-Century Florence*, Princeton, 1965, p. 97.

citizenship and honors, the newcomers helped the republic to collect taxes from the subjects. The Medici, advises Guicciardini, should simply follow the steps of the republic, and never think to pursue a liberal policy toward the dominion. A liberal policy would reinforce the dominion at the expense of the Florentines, and put them in the position of endangering the state.<sup>52</sup>

"I want to see three things before I die but I doubt whether I shall see any of them no matter how long I live," wrote Guicciardini in the *Ricordi*. I want to see a well-ordered republic in our city; Italy liberated from all the barbarians; and the world delivered from the tyranny of the wicked priests."<sup>53</sup> He witnessed instead the definitive triumph of the Medici's regime over the republic (and even actively contributed to the restoration from September 1530 to June 1531), the further enslavement of Italy to foreign powers, and the growth of the power of the Church. With the coming to power of Cosimo in 1537, the last vestiges of the republic were removed and the principality was formally introduced. It was no longer the time for politics. It was rather the time to learn from Tacitus how to live and behave prudently under a tyrant.<sup>54</sup>

As he himself noted in the *Ricordi*, it is the duty ("ufficio") of good citizens to collaborate with the tyrant to restrain and prevent him, as far as possible, from inflicting greater harm on the city.<sup>55</sup> Both tasks required, of course, familiarity with the art of the state, the most useful and prized art in times of tyranny.

As he knew very well, all the states originate from violence.<sup>56</sup> The

<sup>52</sup> "Lo Stato passato, in ogni altra cosa imprudentissimo, in una sola aveva forse giudicio, che era volto a dimagrire il Dominio, e accrescere gli abitatori e le entrate della città," *Opere inedite*, II, p. 366.

<sup>53</sup> "Tre cose desidero vedere innanzi alla mia morte, ma dubito, ancora che io vivessi molto, non ne vedere alcuna: uno vivere di repubblica bene ordinato nella città nostra, Italia liberata da tutti e' barbari e liberato il mondo dalla tirannide di questi scelerati preti," *Ricordi*, series B, 14, p. 800.

<sup>54</sup> "Cornelius Tacitus teaches those who live under tyrants how to live and act prudently; just as he teaches tyrants ways to secure their tyranny," *Ricordi*, series C, n. 18, p. 732; *Maxims and Reflections*, *ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>55</sup> "Whenever a country falls into the hands of a tyrant, I think it is the duty of good citizens to try to cooperate with him and to use their influence to do good and to avoid evil. Certainly it is in the interest of the city to have good men in position of authority at all times. Ignorant and passionate Florentines have always thought otherwise, but they should recognize how disastrous the rule of the Medici would be if there were no one around them but foolish and evil men," *Ricordi*, series C, n. 220, p. 793; *Maxims and Reflections*, *ibid.*, p. 98. See also the maxim n. 100, series C, p. 757.

<sup>56</sup> "Political power cannot be wielded according to the dictates of good conscience. If you consider its origin, you will always find it in violence – except in the case of republics within their territories, but not beyond. Not even the emperor is exempt from this rule; nor are the

state of the Medici, restored in 1530, was the perfect example. It had to be accepted, though. Guicciardini was not prepared to fight for the restoration of the republic. When the state definitely replaced the free city, he dismissed, once and for all the language of politics. Yet he never glorified the state and its art. He glorified only the true political man who preserves and reforms the city, and praised only the art of the city. He neither completed the transition of identifying politics with the art of the state, nor did he choose to remain firm in the defense of the old concept of politics. In his writings, the distinction between the art of the republic and the art of the state is clearer than anywhere else. He knew perfectly well what the state really was and how different it was from the free city. He was however too cautious and had too deep a knowledge of the political reality of Italy and Florence to embark himself on hopeless dreams about the restoration of the republic, as others did.

Perhaps the famous charge pressed by Francesco De Sanctis, in 1869, that Guicciardini seemed to lack any temper and was incapable of raising himself above his particular interest ("*particulare*") is a bit too harsh.<sup>57</sup> For him, liberty, virtue, fatherland, justice, were perhaps more than empty words without passion, as De Sanctis claimed. His *Ricordi* reveals an extreme lucidity in understanding that the times of politics were over. They also reveal a genuine repulsion for tyranny as well as its sinister sister, the license of the populace.<sup>58</sup>

After all, the definitive victory of the state over the republic under Cosimo de Medici was also the end of Guicciardini's political career. His recommendation not to proceed toward the formal institution of the absolute principality, and to preserve instead some appearance of civility, cost him the favor of the new master of the city. Although he

priests," *Maxims and Reflections*, *ibid.*, p. 54. The translation is slightly misleading. The original text recites: "Non si può tenere stati secondo coscienza, perchè – chi considera la origine loro – tutti sono violenti, da quelli delle repubbliche nella patria propria in fuori, e non altrove: e da questa regola, non eccettuo lo imperadore e manco e' preti, la violenza de' quali è doppia, perchè ci sforzano con le arme temporale e con le spirituale," *Ricordi*, series c, 48, p. 742.

<sup>57</sup> "E la sua impotenza è in questo, che a lui manca la forza di sacrificare 'il suo particolare' a quello ch'egli ama e vuole: perchè quelle cose che dice di amare e di desiderare, la verità, la giustizia, la virtù, la libertà, la patria, l'Italia liberata da' barbari, e il mondo liberato da' preti, non sono in lui sentimenti vivi ed operosi, ma opinioni e idee astratte, e quello solo che sente, quello solo che lo move, è il suo particolare"; F. De Sanctis, "L'uomo del Guicciardini," in *Saggi critici*, Naples, 1933, III, p. 143.

<sup>58</sup> "The mortar that holds together the rule of tyrants is the blood of citizens. Let everyone strive not to have such edifices constructed in his city." *Ridordi*, series B, n. 20, p. 801; *Maxims and Reflections*, *ibid.*, p. 102.

had a much more brilliant career than his friend Machiavelli, he, too, ended up writing history.<sup>59</sup>

The *History of Italy* on which he began to work in 1536, however, was not just a recollection of events. In the most crucial passages of the story Guicciardini always inserted his political judgments. With regard to the last Florentine republic, for instance, he reiterated the positions that he had been advocating since the *Discorso di Logrognò*, namely a commitment to the ideal of a republican liberty grounded upon the wisdom and the prudence of the aristocrats. The generosity of the Florentines in resisting the Emperor and the Pope's armies in 1529, he wrote, commands the highest admiration and respect; yet, along with the infamy of the French king who disregarded his obligations to Florence, one has also to blame the imprudence of the republican rulers who led the city to an impossible military confrontation, instead of appeasing the enemies with money or dividing them through skilled diplomatic maneuvering, as the Florentine leaders traditionally did. As in his earlier writings Guicciardini's targets are the greed and the rapacity of princes and popes, as well as the incompetence of the republican leaders. The collapse of Florence's liberty and the termination of the tradition of civil rule were the outcome of the unintended cooperation of these two forces.<sup>60</sup>

During his life Guicciardini managed to deal successfully with political and moral corruption; he had to pay high costs, though. Serving people that we deeply despise is not a pleasant job. And Guicciardini, who despised popes and priests more than anything else on earth, was the loyal governor of papal dominions and the chief commander of their army. He hated princes who owed their state to private favors and violence, and he was one of the principal agencies of the Medicean restoration of 1530, when he had to punish, following the rules of the art of the state, his own fellow-citizens because of their republican feelings. Like Machiavelli, he understood that the Humanists' language of politics was no longer appropriate to facing the challenges of the times. He also understood, particularly in his later years, that the mastery of the art of the state imposes severe costs upon its practitioners, even the most skilled ones.

<sup>59</sup> Guicciardini's intellectual evolution has been often described as a shift from politics to history. See the fundamental studies of Vittorio de Caprariis, *Francesco Guicciardini dalla Politica alla Storia*, Bari, 1950; and Felix Gilbert, *Machiavelli and Guicciardini. Politics and History in Sixteenth-Century Florence*, Princeton, 1965, p. 235 and particularly p. 271. For an interesting discussion of De Caprariis' notions of "politics" and "history," see G. Sasso, *Per Francesco Guicciardini*, p. 73.

<sup>60</sup> F. Guicciardini, *Storia d' Italia*, Bk. 19, ch. 12; Bari, 1929, v, pp. 266–267.

## CHAPTER 5

### *The last glimmerings of civil philosophy*

By the close of the Medicean regime of 1512–27, the republican language of politics knew a new floridness. To a large extent, it was the product of Machiavelli's teaching, particularly the *Discorsi*, composed between 1515 and 1518–19, and the *Art of war*, published in 1521. Although the *Discorsi* were published only in 1531, Machiavelli's appeal for the restoration of the "*vivere politico*" found an attentive audience in the younger Florentines who attended the meetings at the Orti Oricellari. Traditionally a Medicean circle, the Orti Oricellari became, in the 1520s, a center of the republican opposition. Along with Machiavelli, Antonio Brucioli, Donato Giannotti, Jacopo Nardi, Filippo and Lorenzo Strozzi attended the gatherings, to discuss politics and the republic, rather than erudite questions. Their common Humanist education provided a fertile ground for the renewed republican ideals. Classical and Roman history nourished the aspirations for the restoration of the republic and the resurgence of communal self-government.

One of the most genuine representatives of the Humanist tradition was Antonio Brucioli. Born in the last decade of the fifteenth century, Brucioli was a pupil of the Neoplatonic philosopher Francesco da Diacceto. After the failure of the antiMedicean conspiracy of 1522, he fled to Venice and later to Lyon, where he completed his major work, the *Dialogi della moral filosofia*, published for the first time in Venice in 1526. He returned to Florence in 1527 after the expulsion of the Medici. The new republican regime, however, looked on him suspiciously because of his connections with the aristocratic Alamannis. After the fall of the moderate *gonfaloniere* Niccolò Capponi he was sent to exile because of his sympathies for the Reformation. He spent the rest of his life in Venice, translating and editing classical and theological works.

In the *Dialogi*, Brucioli took up the theme of politics as the art of the republic, and elaborated it as an essential component, along with

philosophy, of human identity. The dialogues specifically addressed to political themes form a recognizable section of the whole work: *Of the Republic* (Dialogue vi), *Of the Laws of the Republic* (vii), *Of the Just Prince* (viii), *Of the Captain* (ix), *Of Tyranny* (x). As Brucioli explains in the dedicatory epistle of the 1526 edition, the art of instituting and preserving good customs and sacred and inviolable laws belongs to philosophy, the love and friendship of wisdom<sup>1</sup> which alone can lead us to a life of virtue.

Politics, the art of good government of republics and kingdoms, originated from philosophy for the good of mankind. Good government leads men to live a life according to reason, the divine component of men's soul, which makes us similar to God and opens the pathway for return to heaven whence we came.

As Brucioli stresses, the *Dialogi* focus on political virtue ("*della politica virtù*")<sup>2</sup> to restate the Aristotelian idea of politics as the art of creating and preserving a community where men can live a virtuous life. Brucioli's borrowing from the Aristotelian tradition is explicit in his definition of the republic, which faithfully reproduces the various meanings of *politia*. The republic, he writes, is a society, or a company of several families instituted for the purpose of living well and in justice ("*per causa di vivere bene e rettamente*").<sup>3</sup> Men are naturally inclined to form civil societies, as we can easily infer from the fact that man alone possesses the faculty of language. Later on Brucioli's spokesman, Gianiacopo, speaks of the republic as the constitution of the city, namely the ordering of the magistracies.<sup>4</sup> Finally, he borrows again from Aristotle's language when he qualifies the republic as the life of the city.<sup>5</sup>

When he uses the term "political life" ("*vivere politico*"), Brucioli consistently refers to the Aristotelian notion of "*politia*." And for him political life is the precondition for the virtuous life for which men are destined by nature.<sup>6</sup> In the political community laws compel men to conform to justice, and prevent them from abandoning the way of virtue.

<sup>1</sup> Antonio Brucioli, *Dialogi*, A. Landi (ed.), Naples-Chicago, 1982. The text is from the 1544 edn. Venice *Dialogi della morale filosofia*. <sup>2</sup> *Dialogi*, p. 12. <sup>3</sup> *Dialogi*, p. 102.

<sup>4</sup> *Dialogi*, p. 109.

<sup>5</sup> "E tutte queste diffinitioni bisogna che sieno circa alla virtù e al vizio della città e alla republica, perchè la republica niente altro è che una certa vita della città," *Dialogi*, p. 112.

<sup>6</sup> "Perchè l'uomo è il più nobile di tutti gli altri animali, se vorrà usare la virtù alla quale egli è naturalmente inclinato, e il vivere politicamente più che cosa del mondo gli dimostra il modo, ma se quello da varie passioni deviato, senza alcuna legge e senza alcuna giustizia vive, il più pessimo fia ancora di tutti gli altri animali," *Dialogi*, p. 102.

Proceeding from a general account of the political life to a description of the forms of government apt to sustain a republic, Brucioli emphasizes that a true republic is solely that where all the citizens are equally entitled to participate in public decisions. Hence, only popular government is a true republic. Any other form of government where only part of the citizenry is admitted to participate in public decisions, be it an oligarchy or a principality or a tyranny, is not a true republic.<sup>7</sup>

The participation of the citizenry in public decisions cannot be, of course, total and permanent. Appropriate forms of rotation and selection of the magistrates are to be devised following the model of a mixed government. Nevertheless, the crucial distinction between a state of a few ("*stato di pochi*") and the republic remains, and provides the grounds for limiting politics to the art of the republic, the state of all and therefore of nobody, as opposed to the art of the state, be it the state of the wealthiest, the nobles, the prince or the tyrant. The Aristotelian separation between good and corrupt forms of government is dismissed in favor of the distinction between any state of some, but not all, on the one hand, and the state of all, which solely deserves the qualification of republic.

Having defined what a true republic is, Brucioli explains what makes a republic perfect and consequently capable of lasting for a long time. He insists much more on the customs and habits of the citizens than on the institutions. After all, again with Aristotle, the republic is a form of life, and the sort of life that is appropriate for a republic, and guarantees its longevity, is life according to reason and moderation.

A republic that is least inclined to degenerate into a state of the few is a "mediocre" one – "mediocre" in the sense that it is composed of citizens who are neither too rich, nor too poor, and therefore are neither insolent, nor servile. Citizens of moderate wealth and moderate intellectual qualities are the most likely to obey reason instead of passions. Those who are too rich, or too noble, or outstanding in bodily and intellectual talents are often contemptuous of the others and long for immoderate pleasures and honors. Hence, they tend easily to overcome the boundaries of reason and justice.

<sup>7</sup> "Dico che quando certi di tutte le cose consultano, non vi avendo gli altri parte alcuna, questo essere lo stato de' pochi, il quale o di ottimati o di ricchi o del principe o del tiranno è costituito, ché tante sono le specii de' pochi che regnano, e che noi dicemmo non essere della vera repubblica, ma tutti giudicare di tutte le cose appartiene al popolare stato, desiderando il popolo tale equalità," *Dialogi*, pp. 126–127.



Those who are too poor, or too abject, or too weak, do not live according to reason as well. They tend to be miserly in small things, prideful and arrogant in the great ones. Since they have almost nothing to lose, they tend to be criminals and do not care about honor.

The core of Brucioli's reasoning is Aristotle's account of civil or political virtue: since the aim of the republic is the sufficient and virtuous life, and since virtue is "mediocrity," the perfect republic is one whose life is consistent with its *telos*, namely a republic of citizens who are "mediocre" and do not exceed the measure in one sense or another. "Mediocrity" is important in another respect also. Republic means that the citizens equally participate in public life, which in turn requires that friendship of some sort reigns among the citizens ("*uno certo amicabile*").<sup>8</sup> If the republic is not composed of "mediocre" citizens, contempt and envy would dominate the life of the city, making a true republic impossible.

Finally, in order to have a perfect and happy republic it is advisable to entrust the administration of government to those citizens who possess civil virtue. They cannot be either merchants, or craftsmen, or peasants. All these activities divert the citizens from civil virtue. The citizens to be entrusted with the rule of the republic must be trained in moral discipline and have time and leisure to ponder what is conducive to the common good. Along with those who are in charge of government, one must count among the most perfect citizens those who are in charge of the administration of justice, as well as the soldiers.

To appoint the most virtuous to public offices, citizens must be well acquainted with one another. That requires the republic to be "mediocre" in size: neither too small to be incapable of being self-sufficient, nor so large that the citizens no longer know one another. A well-ordered republic cannot lack the material goods that make a good life possible. It must therefore embrace a sufficient number of citizens who attend the various activities necessary to sustain the city and must also have a territory large enough to permit the cultivation of most of the products of the soil. It cannot, however, afford to be composed of strangers: if the citizens do not know one another, they cannot appoint the most virtuous to public offices. As civility is a manner of life that requires a long acquaintance and

<sup>8</sup> *Dialogi*, p. 114.

common habits, no civil life is possible between individuals who have scarce or no dealings with one another.

Once again Brucioli follows Aristotle's *Politics*. However, on the crucial political issue of the right size of the republic, he emends the Aristotelian model along Machiavellian arguments. Machiavelli is actually one of the participants in the dialogue *On the Republic*. With a typical Humanist irony, Brucioli makes him speak as an advocate of the Venetian model, namely a republic that can well defend itself from external attacks but has no intention of expanding. A republic of this sort does not need a large army, which in turn implies that there is no reason to put serenity and internal peace at stake by arming the people and extending citizenship to foreigners. Brucioli's spokesman, "the Aristotelian," refutes Machiavelli's argument with literally Machiavelli's words. The picture that you are presenting – says the Aristotelian to Machiavelli – would be the true political life and the true peace of a city ("*il vero vivere politico e la vera quiete della città*").<sup>9</sup> But it would work only if we assume that the republic in question could maintain forever the right size without being enslaved by a foreign power or expanding its territory. Experience shows that such a perfect balance cannot last. Even in the happy, though improbable, case that a republic does not meet the necessity of going to war, peace too would be, in the long run, no less detrimental, since it would produce a relaxation of customs and introduce civil discords. Instead of remaining loyal to the model of the "true political life," it is much safer to shape the constitution of the city in a way that makes it able to defend itself, expand and maintain conquered territories, avoiding the corruption of civic temperament. To attain all three goals a prudent legislator should leave aside the model of the aristocratic and peaceful republic, institute a citizen militia, and open to all citizens the access to the highest magistracies.

Putting Machiavelli's words in the mouth of an Aristotelian, and making the Machiavelli of the dialogue speak like an advocate of Venice, Brucioli was probably teasing his admired companion of the Orti Oricellari gatherings. From his rhetorical inversion, we also learn that the distinction between the Aristotelian and the Machiavellian interpretation of the *vivere politico* was recognizable by the readers of the *Dialogi*. Brucioli was thus playing with a conventional distinction. The thrust of the dialogue seems to indicate that Brucioli

<sup>9</sup> *Dialogi*, p. 119; For Machiavelli's position see the *Discorsi* 1, 6.

considers the Machiavellian more prudent than the Aristotelian position. Nonetheless, the fact that the advocate of the latter is the great (for the friends of the Orti Oricellari) Machiavelli seems to mean that it was discussed as a very serious and respectable position. By expressing a preference for (the real) Machiavelli, Brucioli is not dismissing the republican notion of politics. He is only admitting that an Aristotelian "mediocre" republic with its modern realization, Venice, was not the only possible form of political life. Brucioli's dialogue with Machiavelli allows us to see that the discussion of the comparative merits of a peaceful aristocratic and non-expansionist republic, as opposed to the larger and popular republic capable of expansion, was actually a reconsideration of the Aristotelian notion of political life and politics. Both Machiavelli and his disciple Brucioli agree that such a notion of political life is self-contradictory, as it is bound to fall into servitude or produce the corruption of its institutions and customs. In both cases it would no longer be a political community in the Aristotelian sense.

The crucial element in the emendment of the Aristotelian model, however, concerns the boundaries of citizenship. On this issue too the "Machiavelli" of the dialogue is explicit. The preservation of political order requires that the republic does not increase the number of citizens too much by extending citizenship to foreigners. Public offices should be distributed only to members of a few noble families, and the defense of the city should not be committed to the populace. Instead, Brucioli is as firm as the real Machiavelli in advocating the citizen militia as the necessary foundation for the preservation of the republic. He even stresses that the army of the city should include the residents and inhabitants of the *contado* and dominion. But if the defense of liberty is committed to the citizens and the residents of the territory as well, public honors cannot be reserved only to the citizens. All who serve the republic loyally must be admitted to citizenship and honors. The preservation of liberty needs the loyalty of the citizens, which can only be obtained if the republic opens the pathway to honors to all virtuous citizens, not only to the members of a few noble families. It also requires that the number of citizens is large enough. The policy to imitate is, therefore, that of the Romans who granted citizenship to all the inhabitants of the conquered territories within fifty miles of Rome. In sum, political life must be open to inclusion and recognition. Liberty has to be equal, as the Roman masters of republican politics taught. If liberty is unequal the republic degenerates into the private property of a few families.

Though he accepts the emendation of the Aristotelian interpretation of political life in order to meet Machiavelli's challenge on the enlargement of the boundaries of citizenship, Brucioli remains firm in restricting the qualification of "political" to the community of the equal and free citizens. Accordingly, the art of politics is only the art of ruling a community of that sort, in no way the art of the tyrant. The art by which the tyrant maintains his state ("*si servano in stato*")<sup>10</sup> consists solely of wicked, unjust and infamous plans that have nothing in common with politics.

The quintessence of the art of tyranny may be summarized in three main principles. First, to debilitate the minds of the citizens and to reduce them to a state of ignorance and abjection: no man of poor and debased temperament rebels against the tyrant. Second, to destroy the bonds of trust and encourage suspicion among the citizens so that they cannot agree on plans against the tyrant. Finally, to impoverish the most prominent citizens, so that nobody in the city has sufficient power to oppose the tyrant's domination.<sup>11</sup>

The art of the good king is completely different. The true king pursues honesty and rectitude; the tyrant aims to satisfy his passions and whims. The king's reward is the honor that comes from virtue; the tyrant's the citizen's wealth. The king rules in the interest of the republic ("*a utilità della repubblica*"); the tyrant in his own. The king governs by means of wisdom, integrity and beneficence; the tyrant through fear, deceit and malignant deeds;<sup>12</sup> The king rewards and honors the citizens; the tyrant is suspicious of any citizen who surpasses him in virtue and prudence. Finally, the main preoccupation of the good king is to preserve peace and concord; the tyrant nourishes dissention and faction and if he perceives that the republic is flourishing too much, he does not hesitate to wage war.

The true art of politics consists in the capacity of maintaining the vessel of the republic on the right course, firmly repelling the assaults of injustice.<sup>13</sup> Brucioli's good prince reproduces the features of the Ciceronian *princeps*. He is *rector* and *moderator*.<sup>14</sup> He is also an orator,

<sup>10</sup> *Dialogi*, p. 267.    <sup>11</sup> *Dialogi*, p. 270. See also pp. 267-270.    <sup>12</sup> *Dialogi*, p. 267.

<sup>13</sup> "Perché, come il buono nocchiere vigila sempre per conservare la nave dalle tempestose onde marine, così debbe sempre l'intelletto del principe essere vigilante, tenendo il timone dell'equità sicuramente in mano, scacciando con forte animo l'impetuose onde della iniquità, acciò che la nave della sua mondana repubblica non sia dalle procelle dell'ingiustizia percossa e rotta," *Dialogi*, p. 214.

<sup>14</sup> "Nessuno sia che di questo dubiti, perchè niente altro è uno re che uno moderatore e correttore de' popoli, e chi tale opera non pensa o si diffida di potere fare fia il suo meglio che a un più atto di sè lasci il regno," *Dialogi*, p. 217.

but his eloquence is never divorced from virtue. The capacity of persuading the citizens is one of the most important qualities that the prince of a republic must possess in order to succeed in his role of moderator. But, if eloquence is separated from the virtues, especially from justice, it is instead the most pernicious instrument of corruption. The good prince is capable of moderating the citizens because he himself is a model of moderation and the example of the truly civil man. Finally, concludes Brucioli, the good prince is the physician of the republic; he tries to cure it with words and virtues when corruption and malignant humors have distempered its body.<sup>15</sup>

In 1547, Brucioli, exiled in Venice, completed his translation of Aristotle's *Politics* into Italian and, in the dedication to Pietro Strozzi, one of the few opponents left of the Medici, he stresses, once again, that virtue and generosity alone make a citizen a true prince, entitled to rule the commonwealth.<sup>16</sup> In spite of current opinion, continues Brucioli, the rule of the *Signore* is not the same as the rule of a true prince over the republic. Neither are all principalities alike. The fundamental difference is between the rule of free men over free and equal men and the rule over serfs. The science of politics pertains to only the former. It is the most useful science for all mortals, and has to be committed to the most prominent men, so that all the others can learn from their example.<sup>17</sup> By contrast, the science of the despot who rules over serfs is the most ignoble and does not deserve any praise.<sup>18</sup>

Translating Aristotle's *Politics*, as well as Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis*,<sup>19</sup> was for Brucioli the sole way still practicable of persevering

<sup>15</sup> "[...] il principe nel vero niente altro è che uno medico della repubblica", *Dialogi*, p. 232.

<sup>16</sup> "Et così il governo regio, et la Republica dimostrasse essergli accetti. Et perchè questo investigatore de gli ordini della natura, non vuole, che da altri siano amministrati questi due dominij, che da uomini liberi, e per virtù nobili e generosi, queste mie fatiche e vigilie, in simili studij consumate, statui di mandare a qualche Signore, o personaggio sopra gli altri notabile per egregi fatti, al quale si convenisse benissimo questo attributo di nobiltà, per la quale, secondo la sententia di Aristotile, fussi da essere posto nella dignità degli alti magistrati, et governi," *Gli otto libri della repubblica che chiamano Politica di Aristotile. Nuovamente tradotti di Greco in volgare italiano*, per Antonio Brucioli, Venice, 1547 p. 3.

<sup>17</sup> "Perchè come la dottrina de gli ottimi governi, è una lucerna necessaria a tutti i mortali, così anchora collocare si debbe in candelieri tanto eminente, che a tutti maravigliosamente risplenda," *Gli otto libri della repubblica*, p. 3.

<sup>18</sup> "Et questa scientia non contiene in sè alcuna gradezza di lode o di gloria, poichè quelle cose che bisogna che il servo sappia fare, le medesime fa di mestiero che il signore sappia comandare," *Gli otto libri della repubblica*, 1. 5.

<sup>19</sup> *Il sogno di Scipione di Marco Tullio Cicerone, cavato dal libro della Repubblica, tradotto . . .*, Venice 1539 and 1544. Besides the *Politics*, Brucioli translated also the *Rhetoric* (*La retorica di Aristotile*, Venice, 1545), and other works on natural philosophy. The most complete work on Brucioli is still G. Spini, *Tra Rinascimento e Riforma: Antonio Brucioli*, Florence, 1940.

in his commitment to liberty after the collapse of the Republic in 1530. He fought with his usual weapons, celebrating the excellence of politics as long as it is the art of the republic, and extolling the civil man over the *signore*. Brucioli's *Dialogi* are an effort to contrast the ongoing ideological trend of equating politics with the rule of the *signore*, annulling the difference between republic and principalities.<sup>20</sup> His hero was still the civil man capable of redeeming through laws the corrupted city. An Aristotelian, though, rather than a Roman citizen, one who should know well the concrete city that he intends to reform, having before his eyes the model of the perfect republic.

Though ephemeral, the experience of the last Florentine Republic had important consequences upon the development of the language of politics.<sup>21</sup> The partisans of the republic had another chance, the last, to employ the language of politics to institute a republic rather than merely philosophizing. The harsh lesson of the defeat of 1512 provided a new awareness that the art of politics is far from being simple and that it needed serious refinements to be able to compete successfully with the powerful art of the state.

Not surprisingly, most of the texts of the period 1527–30 analyze with particular care the political and institutional flaws that produced the collapse of the previous republic and impeded an effective defense against internal and external enemies. The point that almost all commentators stressed was that the previous republic failed to satisfy the humors of the different sorts of citizens. Being dissatisfied, the citizens, or most of them, denied the republic the necessary support in the moment of need. Not only the *grandi*, but also the commonality failed to identify with the republic of 1494–1512, and never became its friends.

Another point no less recurrent was the comment that the republic did not properly accomplish the three main functions of government: counselling, deliberating and executing. The consequences were, of course, pernicious, particularly in matters of legislation and foreign policy. The most urgent task that the new republic had to face was that of reshaping the constitution to satisfy the interests of all citizens, and perform all functions of government efficiently. The solution was found in the reelaboration of the theory of the mixed government,

<sup>20</sup> *Gli otto libri della repubblica*, p. 4.

<sup>21</sup> On the last Florentine Republic see R. von Albertini, *Firenze dalla repubblica al principato*, pp. 104–178; C. Roth, *The Last Florentine Republic*, London, 1925; J.N. Stephens, *The Fall of the Florentine Republic (1512–1530)*, Oxford 1983, pp. 203–255.

and a renewed emphasis on the political man as a *moderator* who knows the right place for every component of the city and is capable of curbing the inclinations of the various groups, or parties, to predominate over the rest.

Finally, the new generation of republicans wholeheartedly embraced the Humanist (and Machiavellian) principle that liberty can be preserved only through a citizen's army. A well-disciplined civic militia was regarded as a bastion both against the threat of the *ambiziosi* who want to become tyrants, and foreign powers who aimed at reducing the city to servitude. The principle that liberty requires the militia was now further elaborated and not only presented as a guarantee for liberty, but also as a powerful means of reinvigorating the citizen's sense of belonging.

Whereas the practice of the *stato* was to encourage in the friends of the regime the sense of distinction and difference with regard to the common citizens, the republican theorists maintained that the republic needed to instill the belief that they were above all else citizens of the republic. In spite of important innovations, the texts on republican government produced during the last Florentine Republic revitalized the basic themes of the language of politics as the art of preserving the city's liberty and instilling virtuous habits.

Niccolò Guicciardini, the nephew of Francesco, opens for instance his *Discursus de florentinae rei publicae ordinibus*<sup>22</sup> by stating that the goal of legislation and political institutions is that of making men behave well and prudently.<sup>23</sup> A wise legislator should arrange the institutions of the city in such a way that public administration is entrusted to the best citizens, excluding the audacious and the malevolent, rewarding virtue and punishing vices.

If they find their reward in the service of the republic, the good citizens will defend it, while the wicked will be discouraged from putting their plans into effect. In order to succeed in the enterprise, the good legislator must be above all a moderator, in the Ciceronian sense. He must be capable of ordering the republic in such a way that the three main kinds of citizens – the commonality, the middle class and the most prominent – are properly arranged in the institutional

<sup>22</sup> Niccolò Guicciardini, *Discursus de florentinae rei publicae ordinibus*, in Rudolf von Albertini, *Firenze dalla repubblica al principato*, pp. 391–407. The *Discursus* was addressed to the Gonfaloniere Niccolò Capponi and was composed in 1527.

<sup>23</sup> "Tutte le leggie et ordini non hanno altro obiecto che di fare operare bene et prudentemente," *Discursus de florentinae rei publicae ordinibus*, in *Firenze dalla repubblica al principato*, p. 391.

body, and every component is guaranteed the appropriate place and controls and binds the others.<sup>24</sup>

As long as the proper order is preserved, the republic is safe from internal corruption, be it in the form of a principality, or mob rule. On the other hand, deprived of the necessary restraint and wisdom, it will inevitably fall into servitude. The right response to the problem of a good ordering of the republic, stresses Guicciardini, is a mixed government formed by a Great Council, a Senate and a *Gonfaloniere*. In its institution, the legislator must be extremely careful in avoiding the disorders that corrupted the previous republic, namely the disproportionate authority of the *Signoria*, the bad practice of private consultations with the most influential citizens (*pratiche*), the excessive power of the magistrates. All these deficiencies weakened the body of the republic and created the divisions and discontent that ultimately prepared for its decay.

It is not an immutable law of nature that a city, particularly Florence, is bound to change its form of government almost every ten years, going from bad to worse. Against the conventional idea that good fortune inevitably turns into bad, that all things are bound to progress and decay, that happiness must be converted into sorrow, Niccolò Guicciardini stressed that many republics have enjoyed a longer and safer liberty than Florence did. There is no good explanation of why God should be particularly malevolent toward Florence. The causes of the evils of Florence are clearly identifiable and can be emended: we must just learn again to rule our city in justice and cultivate the other virtues that make a republic flourishing and secure.

The task, however, is not an easy one as he admitted in a discourse composed a few months later.<sup>25</sup> In recent times the citizens of Florence have been more and more absorbed in commerce, and have neglected the art of war and the administration of public affairs. Their lack of civil virtue has opened the way for a single citizen to

<sup>24</sup> "Et come gli è impossibile che in una Repubblica non bene ordinata et che non cappia equalmente in tutti li sua membri, nè satisfacci a ogni sorte di cittadini et a ogni actione che in quella si ricerca, cioè di consiglio universale deliberatione et executione si mantenga, perchè lo inclinare più in una parte che in una altra la fa variabile et corruptibile, così è impossibile che bene ordinata et in modo che l'uno membro riguardi, conrisponda et legghi l'altro, da sé medesima drento si corrompa: perchè, non prevalendo ordine alcuno, non può risolversi in alcuno di quelli mezzi che la corrompono, o di Principe o di Governo di pochi o di plebe sola," Niccolò Guicciardini, *Discursus de florentinae rei publicae ordinibus*, p. 392.

<sup>25</sup> Niccolò Guicciardini, *Quemadmodum civitas optime gubernari possit et de monarchia, aristochratia et democratia discursus*, in *Firenze dalla repubblica al principato*, pp. 407-412.



acquire a predominant position and, later, to impose a tyranny over the city, as was the case with Cosimo de' Medici. Commerce and finance have extinguished the love for liberty and glory, as well as their competence in ruling the republic. In order to obtain favors, they have been willing to serve a powerful citizen. The responsibility for the rise of Medici domination lies, then, with the Florentines themselves.

Niccolò Guicciardini's analysis coincides with that of the theorists of the state: the state of the Medici has its basis in the lack of civic spirit. To a large extent it is the product of the citizens' readiness to trade liberty for private favors. The differences between Niccolò Guicciardini and the ideologists of the state is that he was denouncing as corrupt the practices that they were advocating. As a corrective, he evokes the classical theme of political liberty as the sole condition for a people to acquire reputation and glory.

Instead of combatting the ideology of the state on the ground of security and self-interest, he appeals to the aspiration for self-government and nobility of soul that leads men to pursue glory. Even if we could have a good prince, explains Guicciardini, we should prefer a republic. Under a prince all the reputation and the glory go to him, not to the people, no matter how much they have contributed to the great deeds of their sovereign. We speak of the glory of Alexander, or Mithridates, or Anthiochus, but nobody mentions their people. In the case of Rome, on the contrary, we speak of the glory of the Romans. Since they see no self-interest and no chance of glory, the subjects of a prince are disinclined to virtue, while self-government encourages virtue and the desire to do great things. The love of the people for the *vivere libero* derives exactly from their desire to make their virtue resplendent, and to achieve reputation. This is a goal, concludes Guicciardini, that only a republic makes possible.<sup>26</sup>

On November 6, 1528, the civic militia was reintroduced in Florence, mainly by the initiative of Donato Giannotti, the Secretary of the Ten, like Machiavelli in 1498–1512. For the first time,

<sup>26</sup> "Et per questo et per potere operare nel governarsi da sè in modo che la loro virtù si potessi conoscere, credo che e nobili animi de' popoli siano voluti vivere liberi et da' capi loro valorosamente habbino cacciato el giogo della servitù. Et in verità nel medesimo modo può stare sottoposto al governo d'un savio Signore uno sciocco quanto un valente uomo. Et la virtù consiste et conoscesi nel governarsi da sè et in modo che grande riputazione et potentia si acquisti." Niccolò Guicciardini, *Quemadmodum civitas optime gubernari possit*, in *Firenze dalla repubblica al principato*, p. 412.

moreover, citizens who paid taxes, not only those who were eligible for the magistracies, were enrolled. The populace and the residents of countryside, however, were still excluded. The new militia was an important political and ideological event. If not an invincible bastion against the Imperial and Papal troops, it soon became the symbol of the liberty of the city against tyranny. In addition, the champions of the republic focused on the militia as a means to reinforce the collective identity of the city as a free community.

As we have seen, almost all the ideologists of the state had always stressed in their *Discourses* the necessity of disarming the citizens and arming the prince's guard. Even if composed of Florentines, the guard of the prince was his own guard. Just as with any public institution, the art of the state demands that the militia has to be transformed into a possession of the prince. The republic, however, is protected from becoming the possession of one or several powerful men as long as the citizens bear arms under the command of the magistrates, and obey the laws of the city.

The civic militia, stresses Luigi Alamanni, in a speech delivered in January 1529, is the basis of our liberty and security. Before the institution of the militia, he said, our republic was defective and crippled, ready to be enslaved.<sup>27</sup> We used to call the northerners "barbarians," instead, we should learn from the German cities which have protected their liberty by their own armies. In entering the militia, the citizens must leave aside all their private concerns and interests and be totally devoted to the common good. The civic militia is the servant of the laws and liberty. To be a soldier of the militia does not give a special license or immunity. It imposes an even stronger obligation to obey the laws of the city and political customs ("*costumi politici*").<sup>28</sup> The citizens in an army are committed to defend liberty and justice, just as they are in civil life. As soldiers they must cultivate the same virtues that make them good citizens: pity, charity, fortitude, reverence and religion.

A few days later, addressing the militia, Piero Vettori stressed the importance of the militia as the necessary fulfillment of civil life. A well-disciplined militia, he said, is the foundation of civil life ("*vivere civile*") and the guarantee for a tranquil, serene and peaceful state of the city. The militia guards liberty against the insolent who despise

<sup>27</sup> "Orazione di Luigi Alamanni alla milizia fiorentina," in M. Fancelli (ed.), *Orazioni politiche del Cinquecento*, Bologna, 1941, p. 4.

<sup>28</sup> *Orazione di Luigi Alamanni alla milizia fiorentina*, p. 7.

civic equality and want to achieve an unjustifiable superiority. Moreover, military discipline is the school of liberty: the citizens used to serving in the militia are not prepared to obey anybody else but the laws and the magistrates.

Whereas the main preoccupation of tyrants has always been to disarm the citizens,<sup>29</sup> one of the basic principles of politics is to institute a civic militia as the foundation of the liberty of the city, and a school of political habits ("*costumi politici*").<sup>30</sup> The contrast between the type of obedience that a principality requires and that of the "*vivere politico*" is once again clear, as is the contrast between the art of the state, which teaches obedience to powerful citizens, and the art of politics, which teaches obedience to public authority and the laws. A few months before the republic surrendered to the Imperial troops on February 3, 1530, Bartolomeo Cavalcanti saluted the militia by stressing that without militia the republic has an honest but fragile body, and that the ancients were right in saying that only communities which can defend their liberty with their own armies deserve the name of city.<sup>31</sup> In joining the militia, the citizens must forget private rivalries and enmities, and cultivate only their love for the republic and hatred for the enemy. They have to be friendly and benevolent among themselves, and fierce and merciless toward the enemy. The soldiers of the militia are compelled to obey the laws of the city even more strictly than ordinary citizens. They must be just to protect justice; good to guard everybody's goodness, honest and temperate to maintain the right order of the republic ("*il bel temperamento*").<sup>32</sup>

As both Alamanni and Valori had remarked, the militia is a school

<sup>29</sup> "Io non parlo tanto de' tempi non molto lontani ai nostri, quando in questa città ogni nobil persona et ogni gentile spirito exercitava l'arme come suo principal mestiero, le quali poi a' nostri padri furono iniquamente tolte di mano da chi gli voleva poter tirar dritto alle sue effrenate voglie, et come pareva a lui maneggiarli, sapendo che i cuori nutriti in sì lodevole et virtuoso exercitio non sanno servire nè posson sopportare altro padron che le leggi," "Orazione di Pietro Vettori, fatta alla militare ordinanza fiorentina l'anno M.D. XXIX il dì (5 febbraio)," in *Firenze dalla repubblica al principato*, p. 419.

<sup>30</sup> "Et lungamente maggior riprensione meritereste voi se disubbidiste a qualunque prepostovi dalle leggi; a' quali, sendo nutriti in una terra civile et piena di buoni ordini, si conviene esser ornati di costumi politici, de' quali il principale et più necessario è ubbidire con gran riverenza a i magistrati et fare interamente quello che impongano le leggi," *Orazione di Piero Vettori, ibid.*, p. 422.

<sup>31</sup> "li antichi savi hanno giudicato il nome di città quelle non meritare, le quali, nell'altre parti loro bene ordinate, non sono per sè stesse sufficienti, mancando delle proprie armi, a difendere la loro libertà," "Orazione di Bartolomeo Cavalcanti Patrizio Fiorentino fatta alla militare ordinanza fiorentina," in *Orazioni politiche del Cinquecento*, p. 11.

<sup>32</sup> *Orazione di Bartolomeo Cavalcanti, ibid.*, p. 22.

of civic life. By serving in the militia, the citizens learn to obey with respect the orders of the Captain appointed by the republic, as in civil life they have to obey the laws and the magistrates. Just as a disobedient soldier is a threat to the army, the disobedient citizen is a danger to the republic. The citizen in an army who disobeys commits a twofold crime: as a soldier and as a citizen. As a citizen he violates the laws of the republic, as a soldier he violates the laws of the military discipline. He is at the same time a rebellious soldier and an insolent citizen.<sup>33</sup>

The theme of the militia as the foundation of political life also reappears with equal emphasis in the speech composed by Giannotti between the end of 1528 and the beginning of 1529.<sup>34</sup> Against the opinion that an armed citizenry is incompatible with civic life because of the contest between the manners of war and the habits of civility, Giannotti replies that a well-disciplined army would, in fact, be the foundation for civil life since it educates the citizens to obey the laws and captains appointed by the republic. The militia is a guarantee against external invasions and internal plots of the citizens who dislike liberty. In addition to being a necessity because the republic cannot afford to pay mercenary troops for its defense for very long, the militia is a powerful instrument for bolstering civic concord and friendship, the two most solid defenses against the plans of tyranny, which always fosters division and discord. It would be a serious mistake, writes Giannotti, to refuse to enrol in the militia those who supported the Medici regime. Including the former friends of the Medici in the militia would satisfy their desire for honor and hopefully make them partisans of the republic. Besides, once the militia is firmly instituted, the partisans of the old regime will understand that any plan to subvert the republic is bound to fail. Interest, honor and necessity are again invoked as the decisive forces in political affairs. The militia seems to be capable of employing all three to promote in all citizens, even the former enemies, feelings of friendship toward their fellow citizens and the love for the common good.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>33</sup> *Orazione di Bartolomeo Cavalcanti, ibid.*, pp. 19–20.

<sup>34</sup> Donato Giannotti, "Discorso di armare la città di Firenze fatto dinanzi alli Mag. ci signori e gonfaloniere di giustizia l'anno 1529," in Donato Giannotti, *Opere Politiche*, F. Diaz (ed.), Milan, 1974, I, pp. 167–180.

<sup>35</sup> "E perciò io concludo, che le dette armi si debbino assolutamente dare a quelli ancora che hanno auto partecipazione alcuna con la tirannide; per fare una unione ed una fratellanza tra tutti i cittadini, e mettere in ciascuno grandissimo desiderio del bene comune," Donato Giannotti, *Discorso di armare la città di Firenze*, p. 173.

Whereas tyrants always seek to weaken the customs that lead men to generosity, and encourage those that make them cowards, the rulers of the republic must act in the opposite way. As the ancient masters of politics recommended, the republic must reward the good citizens with honors, not with money, and punish crimes against the republic with dishonor and exclusion from the community. For the disloyal citizen the most severe punishment must be expulsion from the militia.

The prescriptions of the art of the republic are, in this case, too diametrically opposed to those of the art of the state, which recommends a selective inclusion counterbalanced by permanent exclusion. The state needs a large number of loyal friends who want, above all, to be recognized as being *different* from those who are excluded from the state. Since the foundations of the republic are concord and union, the fundamental rule of the art of the city is to seek to include and incorporate all the citizens in the institutions and the life of the city. In the republic exclusion is a punishment for misdeeds, in the principality it is a punishment for being enemies of the prince. The ability of the art of the city must then be to cultivate in the citizens the longing to be, and to be recognized, as members of the republic. To make the collective identity of the citizen more powerful than the desire to be different, the art of the republic must rely on symbols rather than money. For this reason the republic has to have an absolute monopoly over military symbols as well as public ceremonies. All coats of arms of private citizens are to be abolished, as are feasts organized by private citizens because they are in fact powerful instruments to steer devotion toward private individuals instead of the republic.

On the eve of the definitive triumph of the principality over the republic, the art of politics seemed to have refined its own language to the point of being able to combat the art of the state on every point. The theory of the three ambitions and mixed government was the response to the politics of patronage; justice and equality were the reply to the civility of the prince toward the commonality; the militia was the defense against the ambitious as well as an efficient tool to educate citizens to civic virtue; the monopoly of symbols and public ceremonies was supposed to transform loyalty to powerful citizens into love of the republic.

For Donato Giannotti politics is still, and only, the art of the republic, whose greatest task is the restoration of a corrupted city. This was an art most needed when a city that has recovered its liberty

faces the task of reordering its institution in a way that prevents it from falling again under a tyranny. An example is the institution of the republic in Florence, in 1494. After the expulsion of the Medici, it was impossible to introduce any *political* institutions because, as he wrote retrospectively in 1552, nobody possessed enough competence and enough authority to introduce true political institutions and reorder the corrupt city.<sup>36</sup>

Thanks to the wisdom of Paolo Antonio Soderini, who had been ambassador to Venice, and the inflammatory speeches of Savonarola, a true *political* institution – the Great Council – was at last instituted and became the foundation of the republic. In every city, the election of the magistrates is the distinctive prerogative of the sovereign. Since in a free city all citizens are equally sovereign, they are all entitled to participate in the distribution of offices.<sup>37</sup> For Giannotti, the Florentines acted politically only when they instituted a free republic. If the Sienese want to preserve the liberty that they have just recovered they must also resort to the art of politics, the only art that can help them to reorder the institutions of the city. For this task the city needs a political man like the famous heroes of Plutarch: Solon, Lycurgus, Brutus, Publicola, Timoleone. Unfortunately, such masters of politics do not exist any longer except perhaps in Venice, the model of politics, which Giannotti turned his attention to in 1525–6, when he wrote *The book of the republic of the Venetians*. Had the Florentines in 1494 fully imitated the statutes of Venice, they would still enjoy liberty and avoid the miserable state of decay in which they are at present under the domination of the Medici. As Giannotti points out, through the words of the Venetian nobleman Trifone, the institution of a republic grounded upon the Great Council is the masterpiece of civility and politics, a work of unparalleled beauty.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>36</sup> “Nella città di Firenze, nell’anno 1494, poi che i Medici furono cacciati dalla terra, non si potette indurre cosa alcuna politica: prima, perchè non vi era chi avesse tanta autorità, di quanta avea bisogno uno introduttore di cose sì nuove, come furono quelle che allora si introdussero in Firenze: secondariamente, non vi era chi avesse pratica e scienza delle cose civili, tal che potesse considerare quello ch’era necessario nel riordinare una repubblica corrotta,” D. Giannotti, *Discorso sopra il riordinare la repubblica di Siena* in *Opere politiche*, p. 446.

<sup>37</sup> E questo è il più vero e libero modo di eleggere gli uffici che si possa trovare: perchè nelle città libere tutti i cittadini sono egualmente signori; e però a quella azione, la quale dimostra la superiorità e signoria, debbono tutti convenire,” *Discorso sopra il riordinare la repubblica di Siena*, p. 451.

<sup>38</sup> “Saria stata, adunque, cosa miracolosa che i nostri maggiori, senza avere esempio alcuno, avessero nel riordinare la nostra Repubblica saputo trovare ed introdurre sì bella, sì civile, sì utile ordinazione, come è questa del Gran consiglio,” D. Giannotti, *Della repubblica de’ Viniziani*, in *Opere politiche*, p. 62.

An excellent achievement of politics is a well-proportioned constitutional system. Being similar to a natural body, the republic, refined by human art, achieves its perfection and beauty insofar as the different components are well tempered so that none of them is preponderant. The excellence of the republic of Venice resides in the proportion existing among its major components: the Great Council, the Senate de' Pregati, il Collegio, il Doge.<sup>39</sup>

Following the conventional teachings of civil philosophy, Gianotti regards reasoning and writing about republics as the most congenial occupation of a generous soul.<sup>40</sup> In a republic, where they can participate in public life, the citizens have the best opportunity to achieve nobility. In a tyranny, on the other hand, where the subjects are prevented from participation in public life, they have no chance to commit themselves to elevated matters and inevitably descend to the level of beasts.<sup>41</sup>

A life of true nobility, a human life in its fullest sense, requires the existence of a well-ordered republic. In this respect Venice can stand in comparison with Rome. Though Rome conquered a much larger empire, Venice can display its peace and tranquillity. Between empire and tranquillity, priority goes no doubt to the latter: "the happiness of a republic does not consist in the extension of empire, but in living in tranquillity and universal peace."<sup>42</sup>

After the fall of the Florentine republic in 1530, Giannotti was imprisoned by the restored Medicean regime. Thanks to the protection of influential friends, he was released in January, 1531, and sentenced to exile in his villa in Comeano, where he composed the

<sup>39</sup> "E perchè tra loro è sempre certa proporzione e convenienza, sì come tra i membri di ciascuno altro corpo; chi non conosce questa proporzione e convenienza ch'è tra l'uno membro e l'altro, non può come fatto sia quel corpo comprendere," *Della repubblica de' Viniziani*, p. 38.

<sup>40</sup> "E veramente, niuno ragionamento può recare maggiore delectazione a' quegli animi ne' quali risplende qualche luce di generosità che quello dove si tratta di una Repubblica, se non in tutto [...], almeno nella maggior parte rettamente ordinata," *Della repubblica de' Viniziani*, p. 113.

<sup>41</sup> "Perciocché egli non è dubbio alcuno, che gli uomini, dove egli non si truovano a trattare cose pubbliche, non solamente non accrescono la nobiltà loro, ma perdono ancora quella che hanno; e divengono peggio che animali, essendo costretti vivere senza alcun pensiero avere, che in alto sia levato. La qual cosa agevolmente potrà comprendere chi andrà in quelle città che da tiranni, o da altri stati violenti sono governate: li quali hanno per oggetto l'abbassare e l'invilire in maniera gli uomini, che non sappino se in questo mondo vivono o dormono," *Della repubblica de' Viniziani* p. 49.

<sup>42</sup> "Perciocché la felicità d'una repubblica non consiste nella grandezza dello imperio, ma sì bene nel vivere con tranquillità e pace universale," *Della repubblica de' Viniziani*, p. 36.

four books *Della Repubblica fiorentina*, his most important political work. As Giannotti declared in the dedication to Monsignor Niccolò Ridolfi, in writing *Of the Florentine Republic*, he meant to provide the outline of a new political constitution to be established in the eventuality of a collapse of the Medicean regime. Giannotti's hopes for the recovery of liberty were grounded on the consideration that the Florentines would not endure for long the open dissolution of the traditional magistracies and the despotic manners of the Duke Alessandro. He was relying upon a magnanimity and nobility of soul that were no longer the predominant features of his fellow-citizens. He appealed also to the friends of the Medici, trying to persuade them that they would gain from the institution of a stable republic. Whereas he tried to persuade the supporters of the Medici that a well-ordered republic would have assured them peace and tranquillity, the theorists of the *stato* stressed that the restoration of liberty would mean for them the loss of honors and properties, if not of life itself.

Giannotti's approach was less abstract than some interpreters have claimed.<sup>43</sup> He proceeded from the consideration that the fall of the Republic in 1530 was in part owing to the hostility and boycotting of the *grandi*, who either actively conspired against the republic or did not contribute to its defense against the Spanish troops. The crucial point was then to be able to persuade that a new republican constitution could satisfy all citizens – the poor, the middle class and the *grandi*. Giannotti's endorsement of the theory of mixed government was not simply a literary heritage. In other words, it was meant to be a practical solution to the concrete political problem of combining liberty and stability. Or, put differently, it was meant to prove that the republic is compatible with hierarchies of honors and that liberty is not a threat to the *grandi*.<sup>44</sup>

His expectations proved to be misplaced. After 1531, the *grandi* slowly rallied round the Medician regime. The favors of the state and the threat of popular revenge were much more powerful incentives

<sup>43</sup> It is the view endorsed by Delio Cantimori and accepted by Furio Diaz in his *Introduzione* to Giannotti's *Opere Politiche*, pp. 10–11. According to Cantimori the *Della repubblica fiorentina* exemplifies Giannotti's inclination to avoid confrontation with the concrete political issues of his time and find instead a refuge in a philosophical theorizing nurtured by classical references. See D. Cantimori, "Le idee religiose del Cinquecento, la storiografia," in *Storia della letteratura italiana. Il seicento*, Milan, 1967, pp. 61–64.

<sup>44</sup> *Della repubblica fiorentina*, p. 188.



than disgust for tyranny and attachment to the tradition of civility. The ideal of a well-tempered mixed republic was not sufficiently alluring or reassuring. However, the failure of his political project does not mean that the *Repubblica fiorentina* was not intended to be a concrete political prospect.

The structure of Giannotti's argument reveals that his main preoccupation was to champion a republican constitution for Florence, accepting the reality of the city and its history as it was. For this reason he refused to follow the footsteps of Aristotle and other classical masters who began their works with a definition of the city and a distinction between public and private spheres, then proceeded to discuss who was eligible for honors and who was properly a citizen, and finally considered the forms of government.<sup>45</sup> There is no need to discuss what a city is, since everybody knows what Florence is, namely a community composed of poor and wealthy, nobles and commons, ambitious and abject. Neither is there any need to define what a public is or who is a citizen, since the customs of the city have already settled these matters. Giannotti's argument begins instead with a discussion of the best form of government and with an assessment of the qualities that a city has to possess in order to be able to maintain the best political constitution. The preliminary discussion is finally concluded by evaluating whether Florence possesses the features that qualify her in the ranks of the cities that can be well-ordered.

As far as the first question is concerned, Giannotti's answer is that the best constitution is a mixed one because it satisfies the aspirations of the nobles, the middle class and the poor. Each group has a distinctive passion or humor: the nobles want to dominate, the middle class desire liberty and honors, the poor are content with liberty, in the sense of not being under the whims of the *grandi*, but only the laws.<sup>46</sup> The three humors are present in every city, though in different proportions. The art of politics consists of finding the appropriate measure to combine them. For Giannotti politics, as the art of moderation, has to define the "republic," that is the right "mode" or "rule," or "ordering" of the inhabitants of a city.<sup>47</sup>

As we have seen, in his later *Discorso sopra il riordinare la repubblica di*

<sup>45</sup> *Della repubblica fiorentina*, p. 191.

<sup>46</sup> "I poveri non si curano di comandare; ma, temendo l'insolenza de' grandi, non vorriano ubbidire se non a chi senza distinzione a tutti comanda, cioè alle leggi; e però basta loro essere liberi, essendo quello libero che solamente alle leggi ubbidisce," *Della repubblica fiorentina*, p. 197.

<sup>47</sup> "Questo modo o vero regola è quello che noi chiamiamo repubblica; la quale è una certa istituzione o vero ordinazione degli abitatori della città," *Della repubblica fiorentina*, p. 193.

*Siena*, Giannotti commented that the institution of the Great Council was a genuine political achievement. In *Della repubblica fiorentina*, he describes the same episode in a way that illuminates what he meant. The institution of the Great Council was not a political act simply because sovereignty was returned to the people but because the intention of its proponents was to secure the liberty of the city, not to oppress the *grandi* and exalt the people by denying the former the access to magistracies. The Great Council was designed as a means to preclude anyone or any group from attaining a power or status incompatible with liberty, and to protect everybody's security from the hindrances of any private power. It was a genuine political institution, because, and insofar as, it was designed to introduce into the life of the city the proper measure and the right mixture of different humors.

Like the art of the state, politics deals with passions and humors. However, the art of the city seeks to moderate the different humors, whereas the art of the state aims at the satisfaction of but a single humor—in the case of Florence the desire for domination of the *grandi*. But if the republic satisfies the desire of honor and superiority of the *grandi*, it cannot at the same time meet the claim for liberty of ordinary citizens, with the consequence that the commonality is made servant to the will of the *grandi*. When this is the case, we have no longer a city, since the city, as Giannotti reminds us, means “a civil congregation of free men.”<sup>48</sup>

Tyrannies and republics alike need partisans, though very different in kind. The masters of tyrannical and violent states create their own partisans by distributing judiciously favors and honors and seeking to appease the ordinary citizens by displaying civility and benevolence.<sup>49</sup> A republic is in need of devoted partisans even more than tyranny, as it is ordinarily threatened by powerful external and internal forces. It is therefore of vital importance to rely on citizens who are prepared to defend it with ardor. A republic must, in sum, be able to gain the love of its citizens to the point that they are prepared to protect it not as a public, but as a private possession.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>48</sup> “In tali città si può facilmente introdurre la potenza de’ pochi, perchè sono subietti capaci di tale amministrazione, la quale non è altro che una compagnia di signori e servi: laonde quelle città in tale maniera governate, non si possono chiamare città, perchè città vuol dire una congregazione civile d’uomini liberi,” *Della repubblica fiorentina*, p. 199.

<sup>49</sup> *Della repubblica fiorentina*, p. 219.

<sup>50</sup> “Però è necessario con ogni industria provvedere che i cittadini siano partigiani ed affezionati alla repubblica loro, acciò che ne’ pericoli d’essa ciascuno sia pronto a difenderla, non come cosa pubblica, ma come cosa privata,” *Della repubblica fiorentina*, p. 259.

Yet, to create partisans is much easier for a tyrant than for a republic. Men are very keen to love their own property and are very cool toward what they possess in common. Whereas the master of a state has simply to encourage men's natural tendency through private favors and honors, the republic must steer men's love to public institutions, working against their natural inclination. Another important consideration that makes the task of the republic even more difficult concerns the general corruption of the sense of honor and glory. According to Giannotti, had the *grandi* of Florence been concerned with true glory, the republic would have still been alive. Instead, they longed for false glory, for power, not for the reputation of being a wise and valiant citizen. Since power is their own real concern, they are much more favorable to tyranny, with the hope of being among the few admitted in the tyrant's entourage. They think that to be seen sitting or walking close to the tyrant, or talking with him, means to be powerful and to participate in the tyrant's power. They do not understand that they are in fact the servants of the tyrant. Given the nature of their ambition, the republic has then nothing to offer them.

Desperate as it may appear, the task of the republicans is to accept the challenge of tyranny on its own ground. As Giannotti puts it, we must rethink the theory of the republic and outline a political constitution capable of having its own partisans and satisfying the different humors of the city. The last two Florentine republics did not collapse only because they were assaulted by powerful foreign armies. They did not resist because the citizens did not love the republic, and when the danger came only a few were ready to fight. The citizens at large did not love the republic because it was not capable of meeting their expectations: common citizens were disappointed in their desire for liberty; the middle class was not satisfied in its aspiration for liberty and honors; the *grandi* could not find adequate rewards for their ambition. None, finally, enjoyed tranquillity and peace.<sup>51</sup>

Giannotti's denunciation of the institutional flaws of past republics is merciless. Both the republic of 1494–1512 and that of 1527–1530, did not guarantee liberty: a few citizens were actually sovereign, and the magistrates, not the laws, ruled. Finding themselves at the mercy of the whims of the magistrates, citizens felt insecure and, not surprisingly, ended by hating the republic. Apart from having an

<sup>51</sup> *Della repubblica fiorentina*, pp. 219–220.

almost absolute authority, the magistrates of the city were in fact under the influence of a few prominent citizens. Past republics, remarks Giannotti, were actually too oligarchic (*strette*), not too popular (*larghe*). It cannot be considered too popular a republic where six magistrates had total control over the life and status of everybody, seven mastered the state of the city, and six decided over every public and private matter.

As a consequence of the persistence of private powers within the city, the republic failed to guarantee liberty to all and to provide adequate institutions for those seeking honors. Since public magistracies were in fact under the influence of private citizens, it was not particularly honorable to be a magistrate of the republic of Florence. The prestige of the magistracies of the republic was also diminished by the fact that the magistrates, because of their tyrannical behavior, were hated by the citizens. When a magistrate finished his office, his status had declined. Magistrates felt so ashamed that they could not find a place to hide themselves from the eyes of their fellow citizens – a striking contrast with the republic of Venice, where a citizen was more glorious and respected when he left office than when he was appointed. Given the poor prestige of public offices, the citizens who sought honors longed for a different constitution and welcomed the return of the Medici.

The *grandi*, finally, had even less reason to love the republic and to be willing to defend it. Instead of being honored, they were frequently the victims of popular resentment and became, in consequence, foes of the republic. Their reaction, especially when it took the form of an open attack against the republic, was far from being justifiable. However, remarks Giannotti, we cannot expect the *grandi* of our times to be willing to imitate the example of Scipio, who, having suffered the consequences of the envy of his fellow-citizens, elected to go into exile instead of seeking to vindicate himself and to overturn the republic.

For a republic, it is of the utmost importance to be able to capitalize for the common good the political experience of the most prominent families. This implies that the republic must recognize and exalt the outstanding citizens without, of course, yielding to immoderate pretensions. Once again, it is a question of tempering the institutions of the republic in the right way, avoiding the temptation of destroying the *grandi* as a political component of the city. They have always been the arbiters of Florence's political life and they still are. Even if they

bear the main responsibility for the collapse of the republic in 1530, remarks Giannotti, they are the only force capable of achieving the restoration of liberty in Florence as they did in 1494 and in 1527.<sup>52</sup>

The book *Della repubblica fiorentina* seems then to be primarily designed to persuade the *grandi* of Florence that they have no reason to oppose the popular and political life ("*vivere universale e politico*").<sup>53</sup> Provided it is well tempered, a political constitution can meet their expectations, as well as those of the other components of the city, better than the tyranny of the Medici. Giannotti's work is an effort to find a response to the defeat of the republic and its ideology within the tradition of civil philosophy. From the defeats of 1512 and 1530, he did not conclude that the ideal of the city was wrong. Past republican regimes were defective because they were only a pale imitation of a true city and were badly tempered. They failed to meet the essential requirements of the city: liberty, the rule of law, the recognition of virtue. The point was then to redefine a more appropriate composure, a better order of the city. In the case of Florence, the solution could only have been a mixed republican constitution with a marked popular thrust. If we want to institute a republic that can last, stressed Giannotti, it must be a republic that satisfies the humors of the three main components of the city while recognizing the popular component as its foundation. To support his argument, Giannotti revises the Polybian model. It is wrong to think, as Polybius seems to recommend, that the three principles of government, monarchy, aristocracy and republic, must possess equal strength within the constitutional framework. If all the components possess an almost equal power, each of them will seek to overcome the others. The consequence would be a state of permanent unrest. Equally wrong would be to pretend to dissolve the different components in a new mixture as happens with the blend of natural products. Men, unlikely natural substances, cannot be chopped and crushed. A well-ordered republic must then be one in which a component of the city has a leading political role over the others, provided that the predominant group offers adequate guarantees that it will not use its eminence to destroy the liberty of the city.

<sup>52</sup> "Si come in Firenze veggiamo essere adivenuto: perchè nel 1494, non furono cacciati i Medici da altri che da' magistrati e più onorati cittadini di Firenze; nel 1512, fu convertita la repubblica in tirannide da' più savi e valenti e reputati della Città; nel 1526, li medesimi in gran parte recuperarono la libertà; e nel 1530, da quelli stessi fu ruinato, con infinito detrimento della Città e dominio di quella. Ed al presente, chi aspettiamo noi che ce la renda?", *Della repubblica fiorentina*, p. 247. <sup>53</sup> *Della repubblica fiorentina*, p. 214.

The conclusion of the argument was that in order to protect liberty the republic must assign a predominant role to the people. Giannotti was not the only one to stress that ordinary citizens are the true lovers of liberty and the support of the republic. A year before, Luigi Alamanni had remarked that in ancient times the poor instituted republics and brought down the tyrants because they realized that without the shield of the laws and concord, the wealthiest would have reduced them to a condition worse than the beasts.<sup>54</sup> In a speech delivered in 1533, the arrogance of the nobles and the wealthiest citizens had been pointed to by Giovanni Guidiccioni (1500–41), the future governor of Rome and counsellor of Pope Paolo III, as the main cause of the decay of the republic of Lucca. Not content with honors and offices, the insolent rich wanted to impose their arbitrary domination over the poor. Because of their superiority in wealth, they believed that they were entitled to an absolute superiority. But as Aristotle, “the great moderator of political life,” clearly understood, the republic can last only as long as all the citizens accept civic equality and moderate their appetites. The most secure foundation of the republic is composed, therefore, of the poor, since they are content with living in peace under equal laws enjoying civil life and friendship.<sup>55</sup>

The opposite view had been championed by Francesco Guicciardini and other advocates of the aristocratic positions. The *grandi*, Guicciardini had repeatedly emphasized, are wiser and more prudent, infinitely more able to rule a city than the populace.<sup>56</sup> To refute the conventional argument in favor of the *grandi*, Giannotti resorts to the Ciceronian theme of the correlation of the virtues. Moral virtues, like sisters, go together. If someone possesses one of them, he is likely to have them all. Ordinary citizens live in modesty and restraint. We have reason to believe that they are more likely to possess right judgment, that is, prudence too. The *grandi*, on the contrary, are dominated by an extreme ambition that perverts their capacity to see the truth and give reliable advice for the good of the city. Finally, being infinitely superior in number, the people form a much greater aggregate of prudence.

<sup>54</sup> *Orazione di Luigi Alamanni alla Milizia fiorentina*, in *Orazioni politiche del Cinquecento*, pp. 3–4.

<sup>55</sup> *Orazione di Giovanni Guidiccioni alla Repubblica di Lucca*, in *Orazioni politiche del Cinquecento*, p. 33.

<sup>56</sup> “To speak of the people is really to speak of a mad animal gorged with a thousand and one errors and confusions, devoid of taste, of pleasure, of stability,” F. Guicciardini, *Ricordi*, series c, n. 140, p. 768, Engl. transl. *Maxims and Reflections*, p. 76.

In his attack on the ideology of the *grandi*, Giannotti resorts to Aristotelian conventions. In addition to the argument of the superior prudence of the many over the few, he also mentions the famous lines from *Politics* (1333a), that to rule well one must first learn to obey. From this it follows that ordinary citizens are more entitled to rule than noblemen. They are used to obeying the magistrates and the laws, whereas the *grandi* are used to command, and often pretend to rule over the laws and the magistrates. Their education and their habits induce them to be insolent. Thus, they are a threat to the liberty of the city. With almost the same words that Machiavelli had used in the *Discorsi*, Giannotti concludes his argument stressing that the *grandi*, because of their immoderate lust for command, are the natural enemies of liberty, whereas ordinary citizens are its true partisans. The *grandi* want to have in their power the properties, lives, and honor of the others to dispose of them as they please.<sup>57</sup> Ordinary citizens, on the other hand, since they love to live in freedom (*"desiderando vivere liberi"*), want the common good, which simply means being ruled in justice, the necessary condition to be able to enjoy one's own legitimate property, one's own life, one's own honor.

Giannotti's argument, that sovereign power in the city must belong to the whole citizenry, is based upon the republican notion of the relation between the public good and liberty, and the Ciceronian notion of the *civitas* as the public good. Every citizen, so the argument runs, can live in security and enjoy his property without fear of being offended or dispossessed, as long as justice is assured to all (*"ottenere la sua ragione"*) and the magistrates are the servants of the laws. To live under the laws and to be ruled by upright magistrates is a good that is common to all citizens, a public good that permits every citizen to live in freedom, protected from encroachments on, and affronts to, his life, his property, his honor. The city is this kind of public good (*"bene pubblico"*). It is a good for every citizen and it is a good that enables each citizen to enjoy his private goods: his life, the fruits of his industriosity, his honor. If the public good is corrupted and a few individuals succeed in imposing their interests over the laws and dominate over the magistrates, the other citizens become their servants and there is no longer a city. As Giannotti writes, the *grandi*

<sup>57</sup> "I grandi desiderando comandare, non solamente non conferiscono al bene comune, ma lo distruggono: perchè chi vuole comandare, vuole che gli altri siano servi, ed egli solo esser libero; e chi vuole avere gli uomini servi, vuole avere in potere suo la roba, la vita, l'onore degli altri, per poterne a suo piacere disporre," *Della repubblica fiorentina*, p. 274.

who want to have at their disposal the possessions, the life and the honor of the citizens, actually want to destroy the city. The city is, in fact, a congregation of free men, instituted in view of the common good life ("*bene vivere*") of the inhabitants. A city where the *grandi* can satisfy their desires is nothing but a company of masters and slaves instituted for the purpose of venting the dishonest whims of those who dominate.<sup>58</sup>

One may ask whether Giannotti's argument concerning the predominant position of the people in his outline of a well-tempered republic is consistent with his purpose of persuading the *grandi* to desist in their hostility toward the "political and popular life." On this crucial issue, Giannotti's argument was that the *grandi* should find in the institutions of the Senate, the Collegio (a body of counsellors) and the *gonfaloniere*, all the opportunity to satisfy their desire for honor and greatness. The Senate to be instituted would be in charge of the deliberations concerning questions of war and peace. Within the senatorial body everyone would have his chance to express his view and there is nothing as honorable as to see one's own proposal accepted as the wisest course.

As he himself acknowledges, the whole plan supposes that the *grandi* are more keen for glory than for riches, or, put differently, more eager to attain the true glory that comes from services to the republic than the false glory that comes from power or riches. Even though a good Christian should do good, having in view exclusively heavenly glory, a well-ordered republic must take care of providing all the opportunities of attaining worldly glory.

Once instituted, the republic should be able to check successfully any tyrannical tendency. Every component of the city seeking to attain an excessive power would be neutralized by the others. Giannotti did not assume that the evil inclinations to corrupt the republic out of greed for riches or superiority would disappear forever. He rather stressed that the nefarious plans of the ambitious and the greedy would not succeed. Loved by all its citizens, with its own militia<sup>59</sup> entrusted to the youth, a well-ordered republic would

<sup>58</sup> *Della repubblica fiorentina*, p. 274.

<sup>59</sup> For Giannotti the institution of the civic militia is the foundation of the empire of law and city's liberty: "[The institution of the militia] vuol dire regolare gli uomini, e renderli atti al potere difendere la patria da gli assalti esterni e dalle alterazioni intrinseche, e porre freno a' licenziosi: li quali è necessario che ancora essi si regolino, vedendo per virtù della ordinanza ridotti gli uomini ad equalità, né essere autorità in persona, fuori che in quelli a chi è dato dalle leggi"; *Discorso di armare la città di Firenze fatto dinanzi alli Mag. ci Signori e Gonfaloniere di Giustizia l'anno 1529*, in *Opere politiche*, p. 170.



be a formidable obstacle for external and internal enemies. With an enthusiasm that could not have been more misplaced, Giannotti even hints at the dream of a well-ordered Florentine republic capable of imitating Rome's greatness.<sup>60</sup>

Giannotti's faith on the capacity of politics to transform the moral identity of the city and lead it to the attainment of glory through liberty, has a clear Machiavellian echo. In spite of his remarkable and dramatic political experience, Giannotti's perception of the world is at odds with the conclusions that his contemporary Francesco Guicciardini had reached in the same years concerning the impossibility of politics in a world pervaded by corruption and base ambitions. Giannotti, too, acknowledges the widespread corruption, but he is not prepared to give up politics for the art of the state.

The transition from Medici tyranny to liberty and its consolidation through well-tempered institutions is still possible for him. It is of course an extraordinary achievement that can be accomplished only by a man committed to liberty and motivated by the desire for glory, who possesses a perfect knowledge of the reality of the city and is prepared to face every unexpected challenge that may arise. The agent to institute a well-ordered republic, the political task *par excellence*, should be, once again, the political hero of the republican tradition.

The last chapter of *Della repubblica fiorentina*, dedicated to the discussion of the forms of the transition, is in fact a speculation upon a political hero yet to come. Giannotti distinguishes various candidates: a legitimate prince, a tyrant who becomes prince through violence, a citizen who attains exceptional authority without violence, a citizen who acquires greatness without violence. The possibility that a citizen who has attained an extraordinary authority by means of violence will restore the republic has to be excluded, since it is unlikely that a man would be willing to set aside the power he has won by his own forces. On this issue Giannotti's position diverges from that of Machiavelli, who had admitted in the *Discorsi* the possibility of the restoration of political life led by a citizen who attained power through extraordinary means. A man who seized absolute power through violence, maintained Giannotti, will not be prepared to lay

<sup>60</sup> "E se la fortuna concedesse a questa Repubblica con le sue armi armata, una sola vittoria; acquisterebbe la nostra Città tanta gloria e riputazione, che toccherebbe il cielo: e non saria maraviglia alcuna se Firenze diventasse un'altra Roma, essendo il subietto, per la frequenza e la natura degli abitatori, e fortezza del sito, d'uno imperio grandissimo capace," *Della repubblica fiorentina*, p. 361.

down his power, even if his intention was to have power in order to restore the “*vivere politico*.” The case of a tyrant who, like Sulla, voluntarily withdrew to private life is almost unique. Absolute power obtained through violence is a station from which men are not likely to exit. Equally implausible is the conjecture of a transition led by a citizen who has attained an extraordinary reputation without violence. In the context of Florence, there are no ways for any citizen to achieve such a status. Also the attainment of the necessary authority to reform the city through violence, namely by killing the tyrant, is unlikely. Machiavelli, remarks Giannotti, has already explained with the utmost prudence the difficulty of conspiracies.

The most realistic and auspicious solution is a reform to be introduced by a legitimate prince, as Pier Soderini was from 1502–12. When he was elected *gonfaloniere*, he enjoyed such widespread support that he was in the position of introducing the necessary reforms to reorder the republic. He failed because he was unprepared for the task. He was a man of outstanding uprightness, but he never regarded himself as a future prince of a republic. When he assumed office he had no plans for the reform of the republic. A great occasion was then missed. Soderini can be excused; another prince of a future republic would not be. As he also stressed in the *Discourse on the reordering of the Republic of Siena*, the reform of the institutions of the city must be undertaken soon after the recovery of liberty, when the enthusiasm for the attainment of liberty surmounts the malignant humors. The more the reform is delayed, the harder it becomes to succeed, because of the resurgence of adverse humors. Consequently, many reformers give up, discouraged by the difficulty of the task.<sup>61</sup>

To reorder a city used to living under a tyrant, the words of wise citizens are often not enough. An extraordinary authority is required, be it a charismatic authority, like Savonarola, or the authority of arms. This time Giannotti takes Machiavelli’s message more seriously. Servitude is a disease that deeply erodes the temper of a city. It can be eradicated only with extraordinary treatments, repugnant as they may be for a true political man. Nevertheless, in spite of its difficulty, Giannotti believed that it was still the time for politics, and for a true political man capable of leading the transition from servitude to liberty.

Giannotti remained unrepentantly loyal to the values of civil

<sup>61</sup> D. Giannotti, “Discorso sopra il riordinare la repubblica di Siena,” in *Opere politiche*, p. 446.

philosophy. He firmly reiterated his commitment to liberty and his opposition to tyranny even when many republicans inclined to more moderated attitudes. In a dialogue composed in 1546, Giannotti reports a discussion that supposedly took place between himself and his friend Michelangelo Buonarroti as to whether or not Dante was fair in placing Brutus and Cassio, the killers of Caesar, in the mouth of Lucifer.<sup>62</sup> According to Giannotti, Dante made an unforgivable mistake to be attributed, he hopes, to mere ignorance, rather than malevolence. He must have ignored the fact that Caesar was a tyrant and that he seized the supreme power in Rome. He also was unaware that those men who killed the tyrant in order to restore liberty in their own country are universally honored and celebrated. Finally, he should have known that all the laws in the world grant the greatest rewards, to those who kill the tyrant. Against Dante's position, concludes Giannotti, I would have placed Brutus and Cassius in the most honored part of Paradise.<sup>63</sup>

Michelangelo, who plays the role of Dante's supporter, is upset by Giannotti's charge. The question has been long since settled, he responds, and should not be reopened. However, he is ready to explain to his friends Dante's apparent inconsistency. Dante, stresses Michelangelo, fiercely opposed tyranny, as is clear from the punishment that he inflicts on the tyrants in *Inferno*, XII, and from the way he presents Cato. Dante put Brutus and Cassio in the deepest hell as betrayers of the imperial majesty, then represented in Rome by Caesar. He needed famous names and selected Brutus and Cassius, but he did not mean to justify tyranny.

Michelangelo's explanation does not convince Giannotti at all. Towards the end of the discussion, pressed by Giannotti's acute replies, Michelangelo makes a point that represents a direct critique of the ideology of republicanism. The sharp contrast between liberty and tyranny, the keystone of civil philosophy, was for him an oversimplification of reality. It is a sign of the greatest presumption to kill a prince. Nobody can know for sure whether the death of the prince will produce benefits. I myself, remarks Michelangelo, find those who think that good can only originate from evil, namely death, very boring. They do not consider that things and circumstances change, and the good that many longed for may well come

<sup>62</sup> D. Giannotti, "Dialogi dei giorni che Dante consumò nel cercare l'Inferno e 'l Purgatorio," in *Dialogi di Donato Giannotti*, D. Redig de Campos (ed.), Florence, 1939.

<sup>63</sup> *Dialogi dei giorni che Dante consumò nel cercare l'Inferno e'l Purgatorio*, pp. 88-90.

unexpectedly and unplanned. Who knows if Caesar would not have eventually abdicated after having pacified the republic? Sometimes it is much more prudent, Michelangelo implicitly recommends, to accept tyranny hoping that one day some good may come from it, instead of attempting to bring about liberty through death and violence.<sup>64</sup>

Giannotti does not reply. He simply asks Michelangelo whether he is finished with his beautiful sermon, which indeed deserves to be written in golden characters. He then volunteers to accompany Michelangelo to his home in order to placate him after the bitter quarrel that has upset the great master. Giannotti, the old fashioned republican, and the more conciliative Michelangelo can still be friends in spite of their disagreement. Giannotti, however, did not give up his hope that a well-ordered republic might one day replace tyranny. A republic, though imperfect, is still, as he wrote in *Della repubblica fiorentina*, the sole form of government under which everyone, poor or rich, noble or common, can happily live the life that God and nature granted him.<sup>65</sup>

Giannotti was one of the last voices of Florentine republican thought. By the second half of the sixteenth century, the language of civil philosophy survived in Venice, the last existing Italian republic, in spite of the economic and military setbacks that weakened its prestige and power.<sup>66</sup> It was a Venetian nobleman, Paolo Paruta (1540–98), who composed one of the final celebrations of politics as civil discipline: the dialogue *Of the perfection of political life*.<sup>67</sup> As Paruta himself explains, the dialogue, was meant to be a critique of the then predominant style of treating civil discipline. The abundant literature designed to instruct men of all conditions, princes as well as private individuals, says M. Barbaro, one of the participants in the dialogue, has not improved our knowledge of civil discipline (“*facultà civile*”). We have not improved over the ancients at all, and our desire to understand this complex matter better is far from being satisfied.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>64</sup> *Dialogi dei giorni che Dante consumò nel cercare l'Inferno e 'l Purgatorio*, pp. 96–97.

<sup>65</sup> “e ponendo fine a tutta la presente opera, discorreremo quali occasioni e quali mezzi si ricerchino allo introdurre quello, se non ottimo [...], almeno buono e durabile governo, sotto il quale ciascuno, così povero come ricco, nobile come ignobile, possa la vita che Dio e la natura li dona, felicemente passare,” *Della repubblica fiorentina*, p. 192.

<sup>66</sup> See W. J. Bouwsma, *Venice and the defence of republican liberty*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1968, pp. 95–161.

<sup>67</sup> On Paruta's political career see Bouwsma, *ibid.*, pp. 199–201, 230–291.

<sup>68</sup> Paruta Paolo, *Della perfettione della vita politica libri tre. Ne' quali si ragiona delle virtù Morali, e di tutto ciò che s'appartiene alla Felicità civile*, Venice, 1582.

The book is written in the conventional form of a dialogue, occurring in the palace of the Ambassador Matheo Dandolo, in Trento, among a number of illustrious senators and noblemen of the republic of Venice: Michele della Torre Bishop of Ceneda, Michele Suriano, Filippo Mocenigo, Francesco Foglietta, Francesco Morlino and Giovanni Grimano, Patriarch of Aquileia. The theme of the discussion is the classic Humanist question of the relative merits of a life of solitude and leisure as opposed to a life of active commitment in public affairs. The dispute is opened by Monsignor of Ceneda, who expresses his distaste for court life and public affairs and praises the excellence of leisure and retreat (*"otio giocondissimo"*). His view is immediately refuted by the Ambassador Suriano, who responds in the most straight Ciceronian terms: our life is nothing but a life of activity and the most perfect activity is the one that seeks the good of many. The man who devotes himself to the service of the republic commits himself to the true and most perfect life.<sup>69</sup> It is true that power and honors may have corrupting effects. However, he who longs to live a life of virtue cannot be concerned only with himself, but must serve his city also. We cannot live a life of virtue in a corrupted city. Hence, the wise man cannot leave the rule of the city in the hands of incompetent and corrupt men, and will devote his best qualities to the service of the republic. The best and wisest men are compelled to take the rulership of the republic into their own hands, to prevent its destruction by the wicked. Dangerous and unpleasant as it might be, we cannot refuse help to our country. Our obligation to our country is too great, stresses the Ambassador.<sup>70</sup> The preservation of the good order and liberty of our republic is the necessary condition for us not only to enjoy our properties and our domestic affections safely, but also to pursue virtue, the most precious of all goods. We are bound to civil life both by nature and by choice. To rescind the bonds that link us to the community amounts to degeneration from our condition as men.

The Monsignor of Ceneda is correct, continues the Ambassador, in saying that by serving the republic we are actually enslaving ourselves. But any fondness, like friendship or love, is a kind of servitude. From that, however, we cannot conclude that we should

<sup>69</sup> "si dona ad una vera e felicissima vita," *Della perfettione della vita politica*, p. 7. The theme of the city as a community ordained for the virtuous life is stressed also by Contarini in *Della repubblica e magistrati di Venezia*, Venice, 1678, pp. 17–18.

<sup>70</sup> "Tropo grande è l'obbligo che habbiamo alla patria," *Della perfettione della vita politica*, p. 9.

live an emotionless life. We must learn, rather, to master our passions, with the help of virtue, which can sustain us in whatever condition we are. Our ideal should be Ulysses, the symbol of wisdom, who drank from the cup of Circe, tasted pleasures and affections, but, instructed by Mercury, the symbol of prudence, did not enslave himself to the passions and debase himself to the level of beasts. Political life can be compared with fire. We must stay at the right distance, neither too far, or otherwise we become cold and pusillanimous, nor too close and too eager to attain honors and glory, or otherwise we produce our own ruin.

The dispute reaches a moment of stalemate when the Ambassador's argument is strongly challenged by Monsignor Mocenigo, who emphasizes that, in theory, it is easy to check our thirst for power and to commit ourselves to public life without producing our own ruin and misery, but in practice we do not yet know how to cure ambition.

It is the young Francesco Morlino, who suggests a new terrain of discussion. Addressing his words to the Ambassador Suriano, he remarks that to demonstrate the excellence of a life devoted to the service of the republic, he must be able to show that political life can lead us to a degree of perfection and happiness that we would not be able to reach if we abandon the city to commit ourselves to a life of solitude and philosophical investigation.<sup>71</sup>

Morlino's intervention sets the core issue of the dialogue, namely to defend the idea of politics as civil discipline against the temptation of withdrawal to private life, as well as the predominant tendency to equate civil discipline with the art of the state. To meet the challenge posed by the young Morlino, the Ambassador resorts to the Aristotelian argument that a virtuous civil life is the most congenial to man. Man's nature, he explains, is composite. He is reason and senses, perfection and imperfection, perennially suspended between heaven and earth, divinity and bestiality. His distinctive quality is neither a life of pure reason, nor a life of senses and passions, but a combination of both. For a true life of virtue, both reason and passions are necessary, since virtue is the rule of reason over passions, not their annihilation. The true sort of happiness that corresponds to man's nature and that can be attained through virtue is civil happiness ("*felicità civile*"). Like human nature, civil happiness does not consist of a single sort of good, but of the satisfaction of senses and reason as

<sup>71</sup> "Questa maniera di vita, la quale voi con nome assai conveniente, POLITICA, chiamar solete . . ." *ibid.*, p. 22.

well. Living with our fellow men we have in fact a better chance to meet our material and emotional needs and we have the opportunity of developing virtue. Neither of the two would be possible in solitary life. If all men followed the example of Anaxagoras and preferred solitary to civil life, the world would be deprived of all ornaments that make life more pleasant, and disorder would reign everywhere. Men would be reduced again to the condition of beasts. We should therefore be most grateful to the great founders of civil society, who understood that solitary life is unfit for men and gathered them in cities. They taught their fellow men to obey the laws, to cultivate the arts, and created the conditions for the refinement of civility. Deservedly, hence, the founders of civil society, have been regarded as endowed with divine virtue and rewarded with power in their lifetime and with perennial glory after death. To them, and to all those who benefited the civil life by introducing new laws or by giving their life for the fatherland or liberating the city from tyranny, must go our adoration and reverence.

I concede, remarks the Ambassador, that philosophical speculation is the most perfect activity. However, it is highly uncertain whether we may ever attain happiness through contemplation. Philosophers proclaim that the most perfect happiness consists in the contemplation of truth, but they do not explain whether human nature is fit for it. Civil happiness, though less perfect in absolute terms, is more perfect for us. A virtuous civil life not only fits better our composite nature, but ultimately brings us closer to God, and anticipates that state of beatitude, of perfect and unchanging happiness that we will be able to enjoy in heaven.

Having firmly restated the excellence of civil and virtuous life over solitude and contemplation, Paruta introduces the second major point of his argument, namely that men can attain true happiness only through the practice of virtue. Nevertheless, the science of civil life has been disgracefully neglected since the times of ancient Greece, and no philosopher teaches the doctrine of good customs and virtuous life. Modern men pay scarce attention to the pursuit of virtue, and devote all their energies to the attainment of the goods of fortune. In this way they preclude themselves from the enjoyment of true happiness, the civil happiness that only virtue assures. The science of civil and virtuous life was called by Cicero, "true Philosophy" ("*vera Filosofia*")<sup>72</sup> and coincides with Politics, the science of the good

<sup>72</sup> *Della perfezione della vita politica*, p. 100.

customs. The name "philosopher," stresses Paruta, was rightly attributed only to him who knew and practiced the doctrine of good customs: Socrates correctly defined Sparta as the home of philosophy because its citizens were taught and learned civil virtue.

Having set the general framework of his science of civil happiness, Monsignor Barbaro has already prepared the ground for the subsequent and conclusive passage in his argument, namely that since civil happiness demands the actual practice of virtue, to be truly happy we must inhabit a city that permits a life of virtue, and such a city can only be a free and well-ordered one. The issue of liberty is forcefully raised by Monsignor Grimano toward the end of Book III. I believe, he remarks, that our discussion has so far been seriously defective because we have never mentioned that without liberty men cease to be men, let alone happy.<sup>73</sup> When a man is forced to serve somebody else's whims, he is deprived of the most excellent quality of human condition. Without liberty, any other good is worthless. The necessary condition for a man to be happy is to be born and to live in a free city, where even if he is not a prince, he is not compelled to serve.

Grimano's argument is challenged by Monsignor Ceneda, who champions an interpretation of liberty as a gift of God that no human power can deprive us of. If we educate ourselves to true virtue, he says, we can face the worst tyrant prepared to renounce all our most precious goods, including life, in order not to abandon justice.

The concluding comment on the issue of liberty is delegated to the prestigious Ambassador Dandolo. To be submitted to a tyranny, he remarks, is of course the most miserable condition for man. However, obedience to a good prince is not servitude. Republics often nurture license rather than liberty. There is nothing wrong, as Monsignor Foglietta maintains, in the division between rulers and subjects. On the contrary, absolute equality is the most blatant injustice, since it pretends to treat equally those who are different in important respects. Differences must be taken into account: those who are most fit must rule; the others must obey their commands. If in the rule of cities, we conceded to all the most unrestrained liberty, we would banish order, the most divine and beautiful thing of human society.<sup>74</sup>

Order requires inequality and hierarchy. And the order that best guarantees concord and civil happiness is the mixed republic

<sup>73</sup> *Della perfettione della vita politica*, pp. 285–286.

<sup>74</sup> *Della perfettione della vita politica*, pp. 289–290.



composed of a prince who rules under the laws, a council of the most virtuous and noble citizens who serve in the public offices, and a large council of citizens in charge of the election of the magistrates and the ratification of the laws. The populace excluded from the citizenry contributes to the welfare of the republic by their own labor.

Paruta reiterates the concept of politics as the art of civil life also in the *Discorsi politici*, published for the first time in 1599. As the title itself suggests, the *Discorsi* are much less philosophically oriented than the *Perfettione della vita politica*.<sup>75</sup> In the *Discorsi*, Paruta discusses a wide range of issues, focusing above all on Roman republic and Italian contemporary politics, with particular attention to Venice.

If the *Perfettione* was a celebration of the institutions of Venice, the *Discorsi* are largely a justification of Venice's politics. Most of his considerations on Rome are, in fact, designed to diminish its value as the model republic to the advantage of Venice. To a large extent, Paruta's *Discorsi* are the Venetian polemical response to Machiavelli's *Discourses*.<sup>76</sup> If the true goal of the city is the virtuous life of the citizens, remarks Paruta, Rome does not deserve the title of perfect republic. Its institutions and laws were in fact exclusively designed with a view to expansion. Practically no laws and no customs were introduced to educate the citizens in justice, temperance and the other civil virtues. But the exclusive care for military discipline and valor contradicts civil happiness, which is the true goal of the city. As Aristotle correctly says, civil happiness is the reward for behaving virtuously with our fellow citizens in times of peace, not for deeds against the enemies. Finally, the pursuit of expansion and war inevitably brings about injustices, and if a republic passes laws that violate justice, it contradicts the aim of civil life.<sup>77</sup> If we judge Rome on the grounds of justice and concord, which are the true goals of civil life, we must conclude that Rome was far from being the model republic and should not be imitated.

<sup>75</sup> Paolo Paruta, *Discorsi politici. Ne i quali si considerano diversi fatti illustri, e memorabili di Principi, e di Repubbliche Antiche, e Moderne*, Venice, 1599.

<sup>76</sup> The name of Machiavelli is mentioned only at the beginning of the 3rd discourse ("Che da gli infelici successi della guerra dopo la rotta dell'esercito Venetiano ne'l fatto d'arme di Giaradadda, non si possa argomentare alcune imperfettione nella Repubblica") for having unfairly commented that the reverse at the Ghiaradadda, the republic of Venice revealed its lack of virtue and the defectiveness of its institutions. The reason why the name of Machiavelli is not explicitly mentioned, though Machiavelli's *Discorsi* are often the implicit polemic target, was, as Paruta himself confesses, (pp. 15–16) because his works had been condemned by the Church.

<sup>77</sup> Paolo Paruta, *Discorsi politici*, "Discorso primo: Quale fusse la vera, e propria forma del governo, co'l quale si resse la Repubblica di Roma; e s'ella poteva insieme havere il Popolo armato, e essere meglio ordinata nelle cose civili," Venice, 1599, pp. 16–18.

In another discourse, however, Paruta admits that justice and fairness are not the sole grounds, and not even the most important ones, for evaluating the politics of a republic. Besides justice and equity there is the reason of state ("*termini di Stato*"). The same conduct that is repugnant on the ground of justice can be justifiable, and even commendable, if pondered through the reason of state. In matters of foreign policy<sup>78</sup> the appropriate criterion to adopt is clearly that of reason of state, that is the interest of the state or the Prince, regardless of justice.<sup>79</sup> Paruta, one of the last advocates of civil philosophy, surrenders to reason of state, the politics of modern times.

Even in the last surviving republic, politics could not consist solely in the practice of civil virtues. As Paruta himself realized and confessed in the *Soliloquio*, a meditation composed during a diplomatic mission in Rome, one cannot serve two masters, God and the world. We must accept the rules of the world even though they go against Christian teaching. It is not through the laws of God that princes and kings maintain their states. Through the ambiguous name of reason of state, stresses Paruta, men confuse human and divine affairs.<sup>80</sup> A life of commitment to public affairs is not conducive to happiness, as he had forcefully advocated in the *Perfezione*.

Too many bonds, however, prevent us from withdrawing from the world. Our duties to our children and family, the ties to our properties and our country are too compelling, or, perhaps, we are too weak to cut them. We are bound to do our part: take care of our family, administer our properties, serve our country at our best. God alone, in his wisdom and benevolence, can assure that in serving our earthly city we are also preparing for the heavenly one.

Once confronted with the harsh reality of reason of state, politics can no longer assure that by serving the republic we will attain perennial beatitude. In the age of reason of state only faith in the superior wisdom of God can reassure the political man that he will not lose his soul in service to the republic. The solution of the conflict between reason of state and Christian morality is a task that overcomes men's ability. Only God can assure that the road of politics will not make men lose that to the Heavenly City.

<sup>78</sup> The topic of the discourse is, in fact, whether Venice deserves to be blamed for having supported Pisa against Florence. Cf. Bk. II, Second Discourse.

<sup>79</sup> *Discorsi politici*, Bk. II, p. 393 and 404.

<sup>80</sup> "E a questo corrotto secolo principalmente, nel quale con certo vano nome di ragion di stato si vanno spesso perturbando, e confondendo le cose umane e le Divine [. . .]," *Soliloquio*, in *Discorsi politici*, p. 10.

## CHAPTER 6

### *The triumph of reason of state*

As the century came to its end, the language of politics as civil philosophy gave way gradually to the conception of politics as reason of state. The ideological transition manifested itself in various ways: the language of the art of the state penetrated the advice-for-princes books, finding its place close to the conventions of civil philosophy; at the same time learned men gradually regarded the language of politics as practically irrelevant; finally, new concepts and idioms were introduced forming the web of the language of politics as reason of state.

For most of the seventeenth century political writers, reason of state was a new concept to be defined by comparison with the already familiar concept of politics. Some regarded it as the opposite of politics; others as a component of it. As the century went by, the difference between politics and reason of state gradually faded to the point that the two notions became almost synonymous. Once identified with the art of preserving a man or a group's power, politics was no longer regarded as the noblest of all practical sciences. Although the ideological resistance against reason of state never ceased, it was like the resistance of a manifold of generous survivors after a lost battle. Noble as it was, the task of restoring the language of politics as civil philosophy proved to be historically impossible.

A particularly illuminating example of the rise of the language of the art of the state to a public status may be found in the new wave of advice-for-princes books that marked the intellectual scenario of the second half of the century. For most of the writers of the new generation, the model of the good prince was now Cosimo de' Medici, the Duke of Florence.<sup>1</sup> As Rosello stresses at the outset of his work, the

<sup>1</sup> Rosello, Lucio Paolo Padoano, *Il ritratto del vero governo del principe dall'esempio vivo del Gran Cosimo de' Medici*, Venice, 1552, p. 15b. The book is dedicated to Don Francesco de' Medici, son of the "Grand" Cosimo, Duke of Florence.

best way of teaching virtue is through examples. He explains that he had wanted to do a useful thing by describing the great prudence that Cosimo, the dedicatee's father, displayed in ruling the state. When princes are elective, monarchy is by far the best form of government, and Cosimo is the model of the good prince, as he did not attain principality by cruelties or wicked means, but was freely elected Duke. Once in power, he wisely sought to unify his people, ruling like a good father who tries to prevent the people from committing sedition, rather than punishing them afterwards.<sup>2</sup>

In theory, the prince should benefit his old partisans and try to appease his enemies. If this is not possible, he can find more loyal partisans among his former enemies, turning, through honors and favors, their hatred into devotion. As Machiavelli had suggested, friends have higher expectations and turn hostile if the prince does not satisfy their claims. The policy of Cosimo was to try to unify his subjects through a wise distribution of benefits favoring the citizens who distinguished themselves for their virtue and their capacities in public administration. This policy imparts the reputation of liberality without falling into the extreme of prodigality. The prince must then address his liberality only towards soldiers and virtuous men.

Following once again Cosimo's example, the prince must avoid both cruelty and excessive clemency. He should use a severe justice ("*severa giustitia*") with culprits, and clemency with the rest. Above all else, he must avoid the ignominy (*infamia*) of cruelty which makes him hideous to friends and enemies alike. As moral philosophers would say, the prince should use cruelty with a few to terrorize the others.<sup>3</sup>

The precepts of the art of the state, particularly Machiavelli's teaching, emerge also on the traditional question of fear versus love as the best foundation of princely rule. As long as the prince manages to make himself feared, he has no reason to worry about the hatred of the subjects.<sup>4</sup> Those who believe that the prince is much safer if he relies on fear rather than love correctly stress that whereas the memory of benefits is weak, fear never slips from men's mind. However, it is also true that he who fears many is exposed to a greater danger than the many who fear one. The best attitude is, again following Cosimo, to

<sup>2</sup> *Il ritratto del vero governo del principe*, pp. 11b-12a.

<sup>3</sup> *Il ritratto del vero governo del principe*, p. 15b.

<sup>4</sup> "Pur che temuto sia, poco mi curo/ De l'odio altrui, che non mi può dar noia," *Il ritratto del vero governo del principe*, p. 16a.

combine love, gained through favors, with an equal justice mingled with pity. In sum, when the prince does not harm the subjects, does not pillage their possessions, and does everything with good reason, the subjects who want to live in peace and security will love him wholeheartedly.<sup>5</sup>

All these pieces of advice coming directly from the language of the art of the state coexisted with the old humanist doctrine of the good prince. Like the good prince of the humanists, Rosello's ideal ruler must keep his word, if he wants to avoid the ruin of the state.<sup>6</sup>

It is virtue, not the display of riches, that gives reputation.<sup>7</sup> The classical moral philosophers, stresses Rosello, were right in pointing to the four cardinal virtues as the guides of the princes. If the prince follows prudence, temperance, justice and fortitude, he can never err. Since the virtues are intertwined in such a way that the possession of one cannot be divorced from the possession of all, it is natural that a prince, though more prominent in one or another of them, must possess them all. Furthermore, the pursuit of virtue is, for the prince, the best way to attain happiness.<sup>8</sup> The wicked behavior of the prince, however, does not affect the institution of the principality, whose excellence remains unquestioned.<sup>9</sup>

The conclusion of the dialogue is an exhortation to a life of virtue constructed through the employment of the traditional themes of civil philosophy. Virtue, remarks Rosello, is the most praiseworthy pursuit of man, the sole quality that makes him similar to God. The highest reward for the prince should not be glory, which may lead him to tyranny, but a good conscience.<sup>10</sup> The ultimate reward comes from God, who is most happy to recompense those who have ruled their people with justice and compassion.

In the second half of the sixteenth century the advice for princes books assume a new form. Instead of well-organized sets of rules with

<sup>5</sup> *Il ritratto del vero governo del principe*, p. 19.

<sup>6</sup> *Il ritratto del vero governo del principe*, p. 25.

<sup>7</sup> "Ma questo splendor apparente, per mio parere poco solleva il Principe, anzi direi, che lampeggiano più chiaramente i Principi, i quali con singolari virtù si mostrano al loro popolo superiori, perchè la virtù è di questa natura che sospende gli animi a riputare più che umano colui, nel quale veggono alcuni raggi insoliti di giudicio e di virtù," *Il ritratto del vero governo del principe*, p. 25.

<sup>8</sup> What assures happiness, says Rosello's spokesman, is "Il regnare con onestà, che è opera d'animo virtuoso." *Il ritratto del vero governo del principe*, p. 30.

<sup>9</sup> *Il ritratto del vero governo del principe*, p. 29.

<sup>10</sup> "Il vero premio de' nostri meriti è la buona coscienza, la quale non può essere da invidia, nè da altro vizio macchiata." *Il ritratto del vero governo del principe*, p. 83.

an apparent logic, we have collections of stories, events, considerations, examples, somehow related to the theme of government. Guicciardini's, rather than Machiavelli's approach, seems to prevail. The ruler has to make his decisions on particular issues, in specific circumstances. An art of the state couched in general rules would not help, and might even be counterproductive. New ways of discussing the theme ought to be devised. The best example of this new style of thinking about the art of the state is perhaps Giovanfrancesco Lottini di Volterra's *Avvedimenti civili*, published after his death in 1574 by his brother Girolamo.<sup>11</sup> By the express will of the author, the book is dedicated, like Rosello's, to Francesco de' Medici, the son of Cosimo I.

Ruling a state, stresses Lottini at the outset of the book, implies dealing with accidents that are so different in kind that no ruler can ever hope to experience all of them and acquire a perfect mastery of the art of the state. Instead of taking a single prince as example, or constructing an ideal one, he collected thoughts and opinions from various sources. Since the rule of states has in fact no order, there cannot be, properly speaking, an "art" of civil matters. What really counts is practice ("uso"), rather than knowledge of any universal rules.<sup>12</sup> Operations are all, in the last instance, particular. We have therefore to take into account universal rules only insofar as they instruct us to operate in specific cases.<sup>13</sup>

The statesman who has dealt many times with difficult matters not only knows what the issue consists of, but is also trained to recognize the specific details that make every situation different. The only general piece of advice that can be offered is that, to rule well and preserve the state for any length of time, the prince must above all rely on good counselors and guarantee justice to all his subjects.<sup>14</sup>

Although presented in a new form, the orthodox idea of the prince ruling in justice and guardianship of the laws emerges also in Lottini's *Avvedimenti*. Being just to all, the prince protects himself from the hatred of the subjects. In his public person he is justice, and the subjects who appeal to him appeal to justice. If a prince disregards the administration of justice and pursues his own appetites, he corrupts

<sup>11</sup> Giovanfrancesco Lottini, *Avvedimenti civili*, Florence, 1574, in G. Mancini (ed.), *Scrittori politici italiani*, Bologna, 1941. <sup>12</sup>*Avvedimenti civili*, n. 291, p. 129.

<sup>13</sup> "Quando convenga saper di una cosa, che s'abbia da adoperare, o l'arte o l'uso, cerchisi pur di saper l'uso, perciocche alla fine l'operazioni sono de' particolari, e tanto si tien conto de gli universali in simil caso, quanto e possono insegnarci a particolarmente operare." *Avvedimenti civili*, n. 293, p. 130. <sup>14</sup>*Avvedimenti civili*, n. 6.

the institution of the Principality into the most pernicious private power. The dictum "the prince is the living law" (*"il Principe sia la legge viva"*)<sup>15</sup> means not only that the prince possess the intelligence and the power to make the laws, but also that he must be the example of obedience to the law. The more the prince is absolute, the more he must endeavor to pursue justice since principalities have been instituted for the good of the subjects. The famous principle that "the will of the prince is law" does not refer to the whims of the prince, but to what he must will.<sup>16</sup> The laws must be designed to preserve and ameliorate things. Like a shoemaker who cannot give the shoes the form he likes, or use the leather as he pleases, but has to consider the quality and the welfare of the foot, so the prince must pass laws that are convenient to the nature of his subjects and aim at their good. Otherwise, they would be orders, and the prince would be just a person with power. In addition to the constraints of justice and customary laws, the prince should also impose upon himself some laws, of course without diminishing his authority. To see that even the prince obeys a few laws would make the subjects happy, as they would regard him as their fellow.<sup>17</sup>

In spite of the emphasis upon laws and justice, Lottini recommends that the prince must not hesitate to resort also to the rules of the art of the state, no matter if they are repugnant to the principles of justice. As far as civil and criminal laws are concerned, writes Lottini, the prince may well obey the rules of justice and act as the guardian of the law. But if we consider the laws that pertain to the preservation of the state, namely the laws concerning the appointment of the magistrates and the distribution of public offices, justice may be left aside. Even though there are citizens who deserve more, honors and offices must be distributed instead to the friends of the state. The first concern of the new prince in the phase of consolidation of his power must then be that of changing the "laws of the state" to be sure that the government is in the hands of his friends.<sup>18</sup> Later on the state will

<sup>15</sup> *Avvedimenti civili*, n. 16, p. 9.

<sup>16</sup> "Quando si dice, che la volontà del Principe è la legge, non si dice, quanto ad ogni cosa, che gli venga voglia di volere, ma quanto a quello, che dee volere." *Avvedimenti civili*, no. 36.

<sup>17</sup> *Avvedimenti civili*, n. 20.

<sup>18</sup> "... Io parlo di quelle leggi con cui gli stati propriamente si mantengono, perciocchè quanto alle leggi, che hanno rispetto particolare alle cose private, acciò che il traffico, e la conservazione si possa mantenere con giustizia, elle sono quasi le medesime per tutto. Ma le leggi dello stato son fatte solamente per quelle persone, che sono confidenti allo stato. Onde a tali solamente si danno i Magistrati, e le cose pubbliche in governo, ancor che vi fussero nella città de gli altri, i quali per havere miglior qualità meritassero di governare più di loro." *Avvedimenti civili*, n. 42.

guarantee justice, but its origin and establishment require an arbitrary discrimination.

A no less illuminating example of the diminishing practical relevance of the language of politics is the work of Francesco Sansovino, who published in 1561 the book *Del governo de i regni et delle repubbliche così antiche come moderne*.<sup>19</sup> In the *Proemio* Sansovino states that his intention in writing the book was to discuss a “new Politics” (“*una nuova Politica*”), following the example of Aristotle and the other philosophers who wrote about princely rule and republics. The reader, however, should not expect to find the usual definitions and divisions that characterize treatises of politics. Since the aim is decidedly practical, he said, I have conceived my work as an accurate description of ancient and contemporary republics and kingdoms. I do in fact believe that true knowledge and prudence consist in the knowledge of the states, the laws, the customs, the habits of the people. Homer was absolutely right in choosing, not a philosopher, but a man who traveled widely and saw many people as the symbol of an astute man capable of succeeding in worldly affairs. (“*eccellentissimo e astutissimo nelle cose de maneggi del mondo*”).

Through my account, says Sansovino, the reader will easily form his own judgment and decide the best conduct. As he recommends on the front page, specific histories and descriptions are the most useful and necessary learning in civil life (“*utili e necessarie al vivere civile*”). Interestingly, in reissuing the book six years later, the frontispiece is slightly revised and the book is recommended as necessary and useful for any civil man and any “man of state” (“*utili e necessarie ad ogni huomo civile e di stato*”).<sup>20</sup> Along with the style of the books on politics, the addressee too is changing: the “man of state” is now the addressee of the works on politics.

The vocabulary of politics as the art of the good republic survives in Sansovino’s book, but as a utopian language deprived of practical relevance. After having described laws, institutions and customs of various kingdoms and republics, Sansovino concludes his work with a summary of the *Utopia* of Thomas More. More, a citizen of London, a man of saintly life replete with justice and religion, was moved to

<sup>19</sup> *Del governo de i regni et delle repubbliche così antiche come moderne Libri XVIII. Ne quali si contengono i Magistrati, Gli Uffici, et gli ordini proprii che s’osservano ne’ predetti Principati. Dove si ha cognitione di molte historie particolari, utili e necessarie al viver civile*, Venice, 1561.

<sup>20</sup> Francesco Sansovino, *Del governo de regni et delle repubbliche antiche et moderne libri XXI. Nel quale si contengono diversi ordini, magistrati, leggi, costumi, historie, et cose notabili, che sono utili e necessarie ad ogni huomo civile e di stato*, Venice, 1567.



write *Utopia* out of his distaste for the corruption of his times. He wrote about that most happy country, a republic ruled by excellent laws and with everyone living in the greatest peace and happiness, so that men might learn from his fiction the right way to live well and contentedly.

A puzzling conclusion indeed for a book presented as a useful work in civil matters and for "men of state." It is hard to see what practical utility a man of state might have derived from the account of *Utopia*. The only lesson to be derived from *Utopia*, as Sansovino himself was aware, was how to institute a perfect republic. Or better, as the title of the work states, the *optimo statu reipublicae*. It was then a lesson for a civil man, not for a man of state.

No longer important for statesmen, politics also disappears from the education of the civil man. In 1542, the Sienese Humanist Alessandro Piccolomini (1508–78), lecturer of moral philosophy at the Universities of Rome and Padua, issued the book *Of the general education of the man born noble and in a free city*, promising in the subtitle to discuss Ethics, Economics and Politics.<sup>21</sup>

The subtitle was misleading. In fact, Piccolomini postpones the discussion of politics – the constitution of the city, the principles of government, the different kinds of government – to another book that never appeared.<sup>22</sup> In the *Proem* to the most beautiful Madonna Laudomia Forteguerrri, Piccolomini voices his disdain for the manner in which contemporary scholars, so industrious in cultivating Physics, Mathematics, Metaphysics, Medicine and Geometry, are neglecting the most important of all those disciplines that teach us "the pathway to virtue and good habits, which is the true way to attain happiness."<sup>23</sup> As he repeats in the dedicatory epistle to his brother Giovanbattista in the 1560 edition, we are abandoning the true architectonic and civil art that teaches us how to live, and we are only concerned with the body, the less important component, that does not last, and we neglect the soul. To live in a well-ruled city is an

<sup>21</sup> Alessandro Piccolomini, *De la Institutione di tutta la vita de l'homo nato nobile e in città libera libri X in lingua Toscana*, Venice, 1542. The subtitle adds: "Dove e paripateticamente e platonicamente, intorno a le cose de l'Ethica, Iconomica, e parte de la Politica, è raccolta la somma di quanto principalmente può concorrere a la perfetta e felice vita di quello." In later editions the title is much shorter; cfr. Alessandro Piccolomini, *Della istituzione morale. Libri XII*, Venice, 1560.

<sup>22</sup> A very general reference to politics appears only in Bk. 3, ch. 4 [in the edition of 1460 Bk. 4, ch. 1], under the heading of the division of Practical Philosophy, where he reiterates the canonic Aristotelian argument.

<sup>23</sup> *De la Institutione di tutta la vita de l'homo nato nobile e in città libera*, p. 2.

important, though not sufficient, condition for happiness, which consists of the habit of virtue, in living virtuously according to our own will and inclination. The purpose of the laws has always been that of curbing the appetites of those men who are not capable of moderating themselves. Laws are therefore surrogates of reason and compel men to live virtuously, but this is not yet the virtuous life that gives true happiness. More than the laws, what counts is education which instills in us the habits of virtue, and teaches us to live well. The first concern of the legislators should not be expansion and conquest, but to make the citizens good and prudent (“*buoni e prudenti*”).

After this opening in the style of civil philosophy, one should indeed expect a detailed discussion of politics. Yet he omits it. Either he seems to take for granted that the noble child he is addressing in the book will be forever living in a free city; or he assumes that moral and economic education is enough to attain happiness. All that we have to learn is how to rule ourselves and our household. Piccolomini remarks that happiness can be attained only through an active life, but he dismisses a crucial tenet of civil philosophy, namely, that civil life involves relations with our fellow citizens and the city as a whole. Although he constructs his argument upon the premises of civil philosophy, Piccolomini in fact neglects politics as an outdated tool that we no longer need. If the city is at liberty, we have simply to enjoy it within our family; if it is enslaved, better to stay away from public life and confine our life, once again, within our family.

To be sure, celebrations of the nobility of politics can be found throughout the seventeenth century. Most of those eulogies were repetitions of conventional Aristotelian idioms.<sup>24</sup> However, there are examples of commentators of Aristotle who remarked that although politics is a noble art, the highest rank must be attributed to ethics and theology. The same passages that Leonardo Bruni and other Humanists used to quote approvingly to proclaim the excellence of politics, are now reconsidered in order to exalt the status of ethics and metaphysics.

In his Italian translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics* issued in 1550

<sup>24</sup> “Di tutte le scienze [wrote for instance Felice Figliucci] e tra tutti i precetti, che a la moral filosofia s'appartengono, e con li quali l'humana vita al ben fare s'indirizza, e si istituisce; non ha dubbio alcuno, che il più degno, e alto luogo quella ritiene, che Politica è detta, la quale intorno à li governi de le Republiche, e à le istituzioni de le Città consiste e si essercita [...]”; Felice Figliucci, *De la Politica overo Scienza Civile secondo la dottrina d'Aristotile*, Venice, 1583, p. 2. On this point see the accurate analysis of R. De Mattei, *Il pensiero politico italiano nell'età della Controriforma*, Milan-Naples 1982, 2 vols., I, pp. 53–67.

and dedicated to the Duke of Florence Cosimo de' Medici, for instance, Bernardo Segni assures his readers that Aristotle's thesis on the excellence of politics must be taken to be true only with regard to practical sciences. Since politics concerns the common good it is certainly the most important practical science, but unquestionably less noble than ethics and metaphysics, which open to us the pathway to contemplative happiness, by far the most excellent and divine good.<sup>25</sup>

The sort of happiness that politics promises us is merely practical and presupposes a well-ordered city, a condition that can only be met in the heavenly Jerusalem.<sup>26</sup> Aristotle's famous passage at the end of the *Nicomachean Ethics* concerning the necessity to complete ethics with politics, remarks Segni, is correct insofar as we are concerned with civil or practical happiness. If we are only concerned with speculative happiness, as we should be, there is no need to combine ethics with politics.<sup>27</sup> To the readers of his new translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Segni explains that Aristotle could have saved himself the bother of writing the *Politics*, and that they should take politics much less seriously than the Humanist commentators and translators did. After all, in the age of Cosimo, politics had become quite superfluous: neither the subjects nor the prince needed it. The former no longer had the opportunity to participate in political life; the latter just needed the art of the state.

<sup>25</sup> "E molto più desiderabil cosa il procacciare e l'acquistare la felicità a un popolo, et a una gente che non è a procacciarla e ad acquistarla a un solo. o a pochi. Questa conclusione sarebbe certamente vera se la felicità, di che considera questa filosofia, Fusse solamente l'attiva; ma perchè la felicità, di che si tratta in questi libri dell'Ethica è anchora la speculativa, ed è quella, che dell'attiva è senza alcun dubbio più nobile: però dico l'Ethica, che tratta nell'ultimo del bene, e della felicità speculativa, che da un sol huomo, o da pochi, e forse non da molti può esser partecipata, viene per questa sola cagione ad esser più eccellente dell'altre; parendo nel vero che con questo rispetto ella trapassi in Filosofia soprannaturale e divina." *L'Ethica di Aristotile tradotta in lingua volgare fiorentina et commentata per Bernardo Segni*, Florence, 1550, *Proemio*, p. 13. The book is dedicated to the "illustrissimo et eccellentissimo il signore Cosimo de' Medici, duca di Firenze signore et padre mio."

<sup>26</sup> "Dicasi adunque (salvando il detto del Filosofo) il fine della dottrina morale essere forse maggiormente nella Politica in quanto alla felicità attiva; conciosia che molto più desiderabil cosa e più nobile è da stimarsi, che una Città intera la possa conseguire, che un solo. Et che la Città intera possa conseguirla è forse possibile, benchè difficile, nella Repubblica ottima, siccome io ho detto. Ma non si dica già, che ella sia più nobil dell'Ethica in quanto all'ultima vera felicità contemplativa; la quale è il fine ultimo, che l'Ethica s'ha proposto: ed è quella, che può esser partecipata da un solo, o da pochi, e non mai da molti, nè da una intera Città; perchè solamente potrà ella essere partecipata da tutti nella celeste Hierusalem, nella quale li cittadini vi saranno perfettamente felici." *L. x*, 8, p. 536.

<sup>27</sup> "perchè invero la felicità speculativa sebbene è nell'uomo, ella v'è pure con quella ragione ch'egli è più che huomo: e ha la sua perfezione in questo trattato." *L. x*, 9, p. 545.

Deprived of practical relevance for the conduct of government affairs, removed from the educational curriculum of civil man, diminished from its rank as most excellent human discipline, politics gradually lost its identity. By the end of the century, it was no longer clear what could actually be called politics and who actually was a political man. Doubts arose as to whether politics was, in fact, simply rhetoric, and whether the political man might actually be distinguished from the secretary. These dilemmas preoccupy the participants in the dialogue, *The Secretary*, written by Batista Guarini in 1594.<sup>28</sup> The first point on which all the discussants agree is that the secretary's job is essentially rhetorical in kind. As such, it is also political insofar as rhetoric is a subsidiary part of politics. Politics, they clarify, understood not as abstract speculation about the perfect republic, but as the concrete art of government.<sup>29</sup>

Since politics is the architectural discipline *par excellence*, it must be regarded as superior to rhetoric. Politics takes precedence over rhetoric and all other human arts so far as their employment is concerned. It does not interfere with the formal principles of rhetoric, but only defines the way in which the art is used by the orators. The orator can commit a sin either against the art or against the law. If he errs against the rules of the art, the duty to correct him pertains to dialectic to which he is subject as orator. But if he is a bad citizen, it is the duty of politics to reprimand him.<sup>30</sup>

Having succeeded in clarifying the position of rhetoric with regard to politics, the discussants focus on the relationship between economics and politics. Economics, as well as any other discipline, consists of form and content. The form is the rule of the persons under the father of the family; the content is wealth. As to its form, economics is the principal part of politics.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, Aristotle has built the

<sup>28</sup> Batista Guarini, *Il Segretario. Dialogo nel quale non sol si tratta dell'ufficio del Segretario et del modo del compor lettere, ma sono sparsi molti concetti alla Retorica, Loica, Morale, e Politica pertinenti*, Venice, 1600. The first edition issued in 1594, did not include in the title the words "e Politica." In the Dedication to Cardinal Ascanio Colonna, Guarino stressed the importance of the Secretary for the success and the glory of the princes, mentioning the examples of Charles V and Francis I, who had at their service excellent secretaries. The participants are Girolamo Zeno, Sebastiano Veniero, Giacompo Contarini, Francesco Morosini.

<sup>29</sup> "Nel negozio politico non solo s'ha d'haver cura di trovar la suprema e ottima forma di tutte l'altre Repubbliche, ma quella ancora che si possa metter in uso, e che d'ogni altra più comoda, e opportuna à tutti riesca, e che da molti popoli agevolmente possa riceversi." *Il Segretario*, p. 28.

<sup>30</sup> "Il dicitore in quanto tale è figliuolo della Dialettica, in quanto cittadino è servo della Politica." *Il Segretario*, p. 31. <sup>31</sup> *Il Segretario*, p. 32.

foundations of his political theory with the stones of economics.<sup>32</sup> As to the material goals, economics is clearly subordinated to politics since it is politics that decides the use of riches in the city. Nevertheless, the political man (*"il Politico"*) has nothing to say about the art of saving, investing and similar activities.

Although in different ways, politics and rhetoric are both practical sciences.<sup>33</sup> The political man makes men behave well through laws; the orator through persuasion. Neither the former nor the latter use concepts for purely theoretical purposes. If the political man has conceived in his mind a law to be proposed, he is not doing so for the sake of elaborating a law; his goal is to provide a remedy for a disorder that affects the republic, just as the physician applies a poultice to the corrupt or sick part of the body.<sup>34</sup> The concepts of the scientists, however, do not have a practical finality. What really matters in politics are deeds, not concepts, and not even words. An active political man (*"politico operante"*) is certainly more worthy than an orator, but an orator is certainly superior to a politician who produces only concepts or knows only the political philosophy of the Greeks, without accomplishing anything of practical importance.<sup>35</sup> Generally speaking, concepts are more important than words, but in the case of the secretary the opposite seems to be true. He finds concepts, but only as means, arguments, insinuations and amplifications. The deliberations, the conclusions and the maxims all come from the prince.

Since these are the tasks of the secretary, how much should he know about political matters? If he does not know anything about politics, he cannot write properly. If he knows as much as any intelligent politician, where is the difference?<sup>36</sup> The answer is that the secretary has to know political matters in the way that a rhetorician knows them. There is in fact a remarkable difference between the understanding of politics through principles, as the political man is supposed to do, and the understanding of politics only for the purpose

<sup>32</sup> "con le pietre di lei ha fabbricati il filosofo i suoi politici fondamenti." *Il Segretario*, p. 32.

<sup>33</sup> *Il Segretario*, p. 36.

<sup>34</sup> "Se'l Politico ha concepito nell'animo di far pogniamo caso una legge non si serve di quel discorso per terminarlo nel concetto sol della legge; ma per l'opera, e per l'effetto, che ne desidera, che è di far à uso di medico un empiastro da guarire alcuna parte corrotta, o poco sana della Repubblica." *Il Segretario*, p. 49.

<sup>35</sup> *Il Segretario*, p. 50.

<sup>36</sup> *Il Segretario*, p. 68.

of persuasion, as the secretary does.<sup>37</sup> To know something in order to persuade, is not the same as to be able to decide a course of action. In this sense rhetoric is different from politics. The orator may use any means he thinks fit to persuade. The politician must know good and evil, but must do only the good. The rhetorician knows the words and the expressions of political language, but only the political man knows what should be done with the words.<sup>38</sup> The secretary has to be competent in politics so far as it is necessary to persuade. He is not required to understand political concepts in the same way that the political man does, but only to use them under well-defined guidelines.<sup>39</sup>

The difference between the politician and the secretary is similar to that between a composer who knows music and one who plays by ear. Like the former, the political man has to know why something is just or honest or good, not according to the opinion of the populace, but according to natural reason. He must know the truth in the same way that the philosopher does.<sup>40</sup>

This elevated image of the political man was clearly conflicting with the reality of politics of the times. As one of the interlocutors stresses, the civil manners of the old days are now totally inappropriate. In modern times, the language of politics is dominated by servile necessity ("*servile necessità*") to the point that only a fool would dare to write to a Prince or any eminent person in a familiar and urbane style.<sup>41</sup>

Neither can justice be the main concern of the political man as it was in civil philosophy. Anticipating a theme later to be taken up by the theorists of reason of state, Guarini's dialogue voices the view that the jurists are the least appropriate to deal with political matters, which must rather be entrusted to experienced and prudent men. Understandably, princes are irritated by those who constantly mention laws and rules like bonds or fences by which one wants to

<sup>37</sup> "Hagli a saper come li sa il R., e non come il Politico. essendo gran differenza a saperli per li principi loro, e per l'operazione, ch'è propria del politico a saperli per pratica, e per valersene alla persuasione, ch'è propria del Segretario." *Il Segretario*, p. 68.

<sup>38</sup> "Questi sanno il perchè delle cose, e quelli stanno come si dice, al quia. I politici sono fondati nella ragione, e i retori nell'opennione. I politici dall'assenso de i soli savi, i retori da quel del volgo dipendono." *Il Segretario*, p. 69.

<sup>39</sup> "Que' concetti politici, che maneggia dalla sola Retorica gli riceve; ma non gli intende, nè è tenuto a intendergli con quella ragion teorica, che gli intende il politico, ma con quella pratica, che gli esercita l'oratore." *Il Segretario*, p. 71.      <sup>40</sup> *Il Segretario*, p. 72.

<sup>41</sup> *Il Segretario*, p. 99.

limit their power. The prince gives laws to others, but he does not like to be subject to them. He is the living law, rather than the guardian of justice.<sup>42</sup> Contentions among princes are never resolved through reference to rules or laws, but through prudence or wars. Politics is no longer surrounded by the virtues, nor is it seated upon jurisprudence and the art of legislation; it is just the art of ruling, of making prudent choices. The political man is assimilated to the prince, with whom we are entitled to speak only with due reverence, without ever daring to mention that he has obligations and must respect the laws. There is nothing left of the "civil man" with whom the citizens can deal on a ground of civil equality and who is subject to the laws of the city just as any other citizen is.

The Aristotelian language that pervades the dialogue and provides the foundation for the reconstruction of the identity of the political man is seriously impoverished. In the dialogue there is no reference to the Aristotelian themes of the alternation in office, and the qualitative difference between political, economic and despotic rule. Nor do the participants in the discussion ever mention the rule of law as the basic requirement of any *politia*, as the Humanist commentators always did.

Nonetheless, the new conception of politics is presented as the most fit to sustain individual liberty. For Guarini the prince can guarantee liberty and peace better than elective magistrates, who serve in office for a limited period of time and are vulnerable to pressures of various sorts. In particular, they fear the revenge and the resentment of the citizens whom they have punished or taxed while they were in office. As a result, the magistrates of a republic incline to clemency instead of strictness, and the laws are consequently enervated. A prince of outstanding merit and fortune, however, who is above the laws and has nothing to fear from the subjects is in a better position to guard the laws and administer justice properly to the wealthy and the poor alike. A noble prince, stresses Guarini in his *Treatise on political liberty* of 1600, is the sole remedy for the disorders of the republics, as the history of republics themselves shows. Most of the Italian republics have, in fact, decided to "convert" themselves into principalities in order to find a remedy for their chronic instability.<sup>43</sup>

In a principality the subjects are, of course, deprived of what

<sup>42</sup> *Il Segretario*, p. 160.

<sup>43</sup> Batista Guarini, *Trattato della politica libertà*, in *Opere*, M. Guglielminetti (ed.), Turin, 1971, p. 867.

Guarini calls the "use" of political liberty, which consists in the right of electing the magistrates, participating in the law-making process and serving in courts. But principality guarantees the fruits of political liberty in the sense of public and private tranquillity. To the wealthy the principality assures liberty of attending to their business and accumulating riches without fear of being dispossessed. To the poor, it guarantees protection from the insolence of the wealthiest and relief from misery through the development of the arts and industry and through charity. In accepting a principality, the citizens trade the vain and wearisome exercise of political liberty for its fruits. Only a fool would deny that the fruits of liberty are much more important than its exercise.<sup>44</sup>

In a letter from 1565, answering a friend who had asked his counsel as to whether he should abandon the quiet of private life to join the court and enter the prince's service, Guarini had expressed a quite different view. In a city dominated by a prince, he wrote, there is no shelter against the winds of envy and ambition. The subjects of a prince cannot live securely unless they are dependent on him. When a prince dominates the city there is no other solution but to serve.<sup>45</sup> In a principality the privilege of liberty is the reward for personal servitude.

Guarini, a champion of princely rule, illuminates the consequences of the loss of political liberty better than many republican writers. To be exempted from civic duties may be a relief, but it may well turn out to be a way of enslaving ourselves. Being a civil man devoted to the liberty of the republic is not an easy task, as the republican writers had always stressed. Serving in councils is boring and exposes one to dangers and preoccupations. Even worse is to serve in office, to administer justice or discharge important political functions. The dismissal of the ideals of civil philosophy has, however, consequences that deeply affect liberty in the most ordinary sense, leaving aside the sense of personal dignity that for some men is one of the most important values.

<sup>44</sup> "E per venir al punto decisivo e finale, la libertà ha due parti: l'una è l'uso, l'altra il frutto, ch'è una medesima cosa col fine. Quanto all'uso, è vero che il cittadino soggetto al prencipe ha perduta la libertà; ma quanto al frutto, l'ha guadagnata. Non ha libero il voto, ma ben ha libero il godimento e possesso di quelle cose per cagione delle quali da chiunque ha sano intelletto si desidera, si combatte e si pregia la libertà." *Trattato della politica libertà*, pp. 875-876.

<sup>45</sup> "Ond'io conchiudo che, come chi le cose non mira al lume del sole, imperfettamente le mira, così chi vive in signoria, senza la dipendenza del suo signore, nè contento nè sicuro viver ci può." Letter to Livio Passeri, in Pesaro, in *Opere*, p. 87.



Times were ripe to put the republican language of politics back in the archives of history, and elaborate a new vocabulary more fitting to the political context of principalities and monarchies. The natural candidate was, of course, the language of the art of the state, which had reached a remarkable degree of sophistication and refinement without attaining a public status comparable to the one that civil philosophy had enjoyed. To be able to supplant the conventional language, the art of the state needed public recognition. An important contribution in this sense came from Giovanni Botero's famous book *Of Reason of State*, published for the first time in Venice in 1589.

As we have seen, the language of the state had so far been almost exclusively a sort of confidential language used in memoranda and letters, or whispered in the prince's ears, or discussed in the secret of the prince's rooms. The maxims of reason of state, that is, the rules that a prince must follow in order to preserve his state, could not be openly recommended, and only the appeal to necessity partially justified them.

Through his work, Botero severed the notion of reason of state and the language of the art of the state from the negative moral connotations that had so far accompanied them. As he explains in the dedication to the archbishop of Salzburg, Volfango Teodorico, his main motive for writing the book was to refute the notion of reason of state then currently associated with the names of Machiavelli, who elaborated the precepts of government, and Tacitus, who vividly described the arts that Tiberius employed to attain and preserve his empire.<sup>46</sup>

I cannot accept, stresses Botero, that an impious writer like Machiavelli and a tyrant like Tiberius are regarded as models for the government of states. And, above all, I hold it truly scandalous to oppose reason of state to the law of God and dare to say that some actions are justifiable on the ground of reason of state and others by conscience.

Against the current meaning derived from Machiavelli and Tacitus, Botero explains that the notion of reason of state means the knowledge of the means appropriate to establish, maintain and enlarge a state, defined as "firm empire over a people."<sup>47</sup> Empires

<sup>46</sup> Giovanni Botero, *Della Ragion di Stato. Con tre libri delle cause della grandezza delle Città*, L. Firpo (ed.), Turin, 1948, Dedicace, p. 2.

<sup>47</sup> "Stato è un Dominio fermo sopra popoli; e Ragione di Stato è notitia di mezzi atti a fondare, conservare, e ampliare un dominio così fatto." *Della Ragion di Stato*, Bk. 1, ch. 1.

(*dominii*) can be natural or by acquisition. Natural empires are those founded upon the express or tacit will of the people. Empires of acquisition originate from conquest or have been bought.<sup>48</sup>

As Federico Chabod wrote in an unparalleled essay of 1934, Botero did not invent in any way a new doctrine of the state.<sup>49</sup> For Botero, the state ultimately is the prince; is still the state of the prince and his doctrine of reason of state is the conventional art of the state. The arguments and the practical prescriptions of *Della Ragion di Stato* rest upon the acknowledgment of the existence of the state, without questioning its origin and legitimacy. Leaving aside the details, the difference from Machiavelli's *Prince* is that Botero's prince has to be solely concerned with the preservation of his state and should not seek those "great things" ("*grandi cose*") that Machiavelli passionately pointed to in his ideal new prince. Significantly, one of Botero's models was the "most wise" Cosimo, the master of that sort of art of the state that Machiavelli despised as the art of mediocre men incapable of aiming at, and attaining, glorious deeds. However, by purifying it from Machiavellian and Tacitian connotations, Botero gave the art of the state a new, more acceptable meaning. The whole language of the art of the state emerged into the light after a long sojourn in the shadows of the noble language of politics.<sup>50</sup>

Botero's advice does not substantially diverge from the traditional doctrine. The best foundation of the state, he stresses at the outset of *Della Ragion di Stato*, is the virtue of the prince.<sup>51</sup> Although he must possess all the virtues, some are particularly appropriate to produce love, others reputation. The two virtues that assure the prince the love of the subjects are justice and liberality. Justice is the foundation of natural peace and concord. The prince must then be just in his relationships with the subjects, not overburden them with taxes, distribute honors and offices to those who deserve them most. If the most virtuous subjects do not obtain the rewards that they deserve, they will cease to be loyal and might even decide to rebel against the prince. Besides, if the prince rewards flatterers or the wealthy, instead of the virtuous, the subjects are encouraged to become flatterers or to

<sup>48</sup> *Della Ragion di Stato*, Bk. 1, ch. 2.

<sup>49</sup> Federico Chabod, *Scritti sul Rinascimento*, Turin, 1967, p. 325. See also pp. 303–304, where Chabod presents Botero's theory as a product of the exhaustion of the spirit of civil philosophy.

<sup>50</sup> On the ennobling power of the locution "reason of state" see Ludovico Zuccolo, "Della ragion di stato," in B. Croce, *Politici e moralisti del Seicento*, Bari, 1930, p. 33.

<sup>51</sup> See *Della Ragion di Stato*, Bk. 1, ch. 9: "Quanto sia necessaria l'eccellenza della virtù nel principe."

display their wealth, two tendencies equally detrimental for the state. No less important is that the prince be vigilant in preserving justice among the subjects. If left unpunished, frauds and crimes will inevitably destroy peace and concord. On the other hand, if the prince is determined in guaranteeing justice to all the subjects, he will obtain their lasting gratitude and love.<sup>52</sup> Finally, he must watch over the magistrates to ensure that they are discharging their duty properly. As Plutarch wrote, in Egypt the statues of the judges had no hands and the eyes turned toward the ground, to denote that those who are in charge of justice do not accept presents nor concede favors. If magistrates are corrupt, the hatred against them will later be invested on the prince also.

Along with justice, the other way of obtaining the subjects' love is the display of liberality, particularly by alleviating the poor and promoting virtue.<sup>53</sup> He must then reward men of letters, artists and all those who adorn the kingdom, as the great kings always did. In being liberal, though, the prince must be careful to reward only those who truly are deserving, to be always moderate, and never give someone everything at once, but rather in small amounts over a long period. As a general rule, it is better for the prince to give to many with moderation, rather than to a few without limitations. Like the sun which gives its light to all, the prince's liberality must benefit as many as possible.<sup>54</sup>

While justice and liberality assure love, prudence and valor give the prince reputation. As for justice and liberality, Botero explains how the prince may cultivate these two virtues. To refine prudence, the prince must possess a deep knowledge of the different customs in different countries, as well as of the different forms of government. Along with moral philosophy and politics, he should also cultivate rhetoric and possess a good knowledge of natural philosophy, particularly geography and laws of generation and corruption of natural bodies. As he lacks the time to do the necessary reading, the prince should surround himself with philosophers, historians and scientists and have with them all sorts of cultivated conversations. The most important discipline that helps the prince to increase his talent for ruling is history. The mother of prudence is in fact experience, which can be obtained either directly or indirectly. The

<sup>52</sup> *Della Ragion di Stato*, Bk. I, ch. 15.

<sup>53</sup> *Della Ragion di Stato*, Bk. I, chs. 19–22.

<sup>54</sup> *Della Ragion di Stato*, Bk. I, ch. 22.

amount of experience that a single person can attain by himself is necessarily very limited. He can, however, rely on ambassadors and travelers who have seen different people and countries. Without leaving his room he can understand why some princes flourished while others were ruined.<sup>55</sup>

The golden rule of prudence is that self-interest is the sole motivation of men's actions, and that the only bonds he can rely on are the bonds of interest. In matters of state, friendships and even family relationships are of no importance, as the theorists of the art of the state had always stressed. The prince must also remember that it is always advisable to face dangers with courage, unless one is in a position of manifest inferiority, in which case it is wise to procrastinate. A prudent prince does not allow small disorders to grow to the point where they are uncontrollable, neither does he cultivate the illusion that he may find a policy that does not carry with it inconveniences of some sort. In foreign policy, he should never begin many military enterprises at the same time, nor begin a new one without having consolidated previous conquests. He should never offend or hurt a more powerful prince; if hurt or offended by a more powerful prince it is prudent to look the other way. If he is surrounded by more powerful neighbors, he should work to promote peace among them. In every decision of importance, he must be careful not to miss the right time: if he acts too late or too early, everything will be much more difficult. He should never offend a republic: whereas the resentment of a prince dies with him, republics never forget.

In domestic politics, his foremost concern must be the preservation of peace and tranquillity, avoiding all sorts of unnecessary innovations. He must be wise in appointing magistrates who are up to the task and who feel honored to hold their office. A prince who intends to preserve his state for long should not benefit the nobility at the expense of the people: if he does, he becomes the ruler of only part of the kingdom and the enemy of the multitude, an unsafe position indeed. Finally, he should never trust someone whom he has offended in the past: he would place close to him a resentful enemy who will take advantage of the first favorable chance.<sup>56</sup>

Of the two foundations of the prince's domination, love and reputation, the most reliable and secure is by far reputation, as Botero explains at length in the two books *On Reputation* that he included as a

<sup>55</sup> *Della Ragion di Stato*, Bk. II, ch. 3.

<sup>56</sup> *Della Ragion di Stato*, Bk. II, ch. 6.

supplement of *Della Ragion di Stato*. Reputation is the recognition of an astonishing virtue that escapes our understanding and therefore compels us to think about it over and over again (*re-putare*). Only persons capable of doing great things obtain reputation. Mediocre persons may inspire love, not reputation.<sup>57</sup> Reputation is much safer a basis for domination than love or fear. In theory, a domination grounded upon the love of the subjects is the safest. In practice, however, because men are greedy, unstable and insatiable, it is impossible for any prince to maintain the lasting love of his subjects. Fear is also a solid foundation, but it is very difficult to prevent it from degenerating into hatred, which is a serious threat for the prince's state.<sup>58</sup> Reputation encompasses both love and fear: love reinforces the attachment of the subjects to the prince; fear keeps them submissive and docile. Of the two, fear is the preponderant component of reputation, as we can easily understand from consideration of its effects. A man who enjoys a good reputation because of his outstanding virtue, excites in others feelings of submission, distance, separation, which are also associated with fear. A man who is loved excites instead feelings of unity, closeness, attraction. Reputation is then much closer to fear than to love.<sup>59</sup>

The practical advice that Botero derives from his inquiry on reputation amounts to a quite conventional suggestion: the art of preserving the state consists above all in the prince's ability to preserve his, and the state's, reputation, both with regard to other states and to his subjects. The art of politics, stresses Botero, deals with the preservation and the increase of reputation.<sup>60</sup> It is the art of maintaining the separation and the inequality between the prince and the subjects, and of moderating or seconding the passions of the subjects in the way that is most conducive to the preservation of the reputation of the prince and the state.<sup>61</sup> By detaching politics from the values that civil philosophy had associated with it – justice, friendship and concord – and presenting it as the art of preserving and

<sup>57</sup> *Della riputazione*, Bk. I, ch. 2.

<sup>58</sup> *Della riputazione*, Bk. I, ch. 3.

<sup>59</sup> "Ma mi domanderà alcuno quale ha più parte nella riputazione: l'amore o'l timore. Il timore senza dubbio, perchè, sì come il rispetto e la riverenza, così anche la riputazione sono per la eminenza della virtù, onde procedono spezie di timore anzichè d'amore." *Della riputazione*, Bk. I, ch. 3.

<sup>60</sup> See *Della Ragion di Stato*, Bk. I, ch. 11, where Botero mentions politics (*politica*) among the virtues that give reputation.

<sup>61</sup> *Della Ragion di Stato*, Bk. II, ch. 2: "... la politica insegna a temperare o secondare queste passioni, e gli effetti che ne seguivano ne' sudditi, con le regole del ben governare."

increasing reputation, Botero was in fact advocating an interpretation of politics that followed the guidelines of the art of the state. At the same time, by redeeming the art of the state from its immoral connotations, Botero made it ready to assume for itself the name "politics" that once described the art of the republic.

The next step of the metamorphosis was the identification of politics with reason of state. An important passage of this intellectual transition was Trajano Boccalini's *Advertisments from Parnassus*, published in 1612–13. The innovative character of Boccalini's book was well-understood by William Vaughan, the editor of the first English translation issued in London as early as 1626 with the title: *The New-found Politicke. Disclosing the secret natures and dispositions as well of private persons as of Statesmen and Courtiers; wherein the Governments, Greatnesse and Power of the most notable Kingdomes and Common-wealths of the world are discovered and censured*. The title *New-found Politicke*, explains Vaughan, in his dedication to the King, intends to stress the "newnesse of the stile and matter" of the book.<sup>62</sup>

The title, as well as the subtitle, could not have been more appropriate. In the *Ragguagli di Parnaso*, Boccalini is not only treating political and moral matters in an ironical and humorous style (in itself a remarkable innovation): he also equates politics with reason of state, marking a transition point in the history of the language of politics. No less correct also was Vaughan's remark that the *Ragguagli* should be understood as a rebuke of modern politics. As Boccalini himself confesses in the *Dedicace* that opens the second *Century*, his intention was to treat politics and morals in a cheerful and amusing way, as nobody else has so far tried to do.<sup>63</sup> At the same time, he intended to tell, jokingly, the truth, and condemn the corruption of his century. It was a resigned critique, though, of corruption, devoid of any project for, or hope of, overcoming it. For Boccalini, politics is simply the art that princes use to preserve their states. It cannot be the art of reforming the corrupt city as the republican political writers vainly dreamed of. Moral corruption has penetrated so deeply into the body of society that no reform is conceivable. The time of grand

<sup>62</sup> Trajano Boccalini, *The New-found Politicke*, William Vaughan (ed.), London, 1626.

<sup>63</sup> "Delle cose Politiche, e morali seriamente hanno scritto molti begl'ingegni Italiani, e bene; con gli scherzi, e con le piacevolezze niuno, ch'io sappia." Trajano Boccalini, *Ragguagli di Parnaso. Centuria seconda*, Venice, 1613. See also the dedication to Cardinal Borghesi in the *Ragguagli di Parnaso. Centuria Prima*, Venice, 1612, where Boccalini says that he has written the *Ragguagli* in his spare time from the work of commenting on the *Annals* and the *Histories* of Tacitus, the Prince of political writers, with the intent of producing a cheerful composition.

politics that aims at transforming the moral identity of a society was over. As Francesco Guicciardini had already remarked in his *Ricordi*, the best we can do is to learn how to find our way in a corrupt city. The best way, adds Boccalini, is to use a good deal of irony and circumspection. When politics surrenders to corruption, irony seems to be the last resort.

Boccalini inaugurates the new era, but without enthusiasm. Assuming the meaning of reason of state, politics loses its nobility and may well be treated with irony. The elevated tone of the works on the "*vivere politico*" or "*scienza civile*" is unsuitable for the vile art of preserving one's own state. Boccalini brilliantly introduces the new image of politics in the first "Advertisement," where he describes the warehouse where the "Society of Politicians" sell the diverse sorts of merchandise useful to the virtuous living of the learned. Among the most noteworthy merchandise, the "Politicians" sell stores of pencils that are very useful for those princes "who upon urgent occasions are forced to paint white for black unto the people."<sup>64</sup> They also have spectacles (for which there is great demand) that help men blinded by passions to discern honor from shame, a friend from an enemy, a stranger from a kinsman. They also have spectacles that serve the opposite purpose, namely, to conceal the disgusting things of the corrupt world. Very highly priced are spectacles recently invented in Flanders that princes buy in great quantity for their courtiers, which make rewards and dignities appear near to them, which "they shall never arrive at as long as they live."<sup>65</sup> The world of politics is so repellent that courtiers are eager to buy an oil that serves to strengthen their stomachs, so that they can digest the bitter tastes which they are often compelled to swallow at Court. The new politics is the realm of deceit, vainglory, ambition, self-interest, stupidity, avarice, servility. The "Politicians" ("*Politici*") know that, and take advantage by providing princes and courtiers with what they need.

Republican politics had its masters and heroes: Aristotle, Cicero, Seneca, Livy. The symbol of the new "politicians" is Tacitus. He represents the pure politician, who is by nature compelled to seek absolute power and measures all things by the standards of reason of

<sup>64</sup> For the English translations I am following, with some modernizations of the spelling, the Henry the Earl of Monmouth edition: *I Ragguagli di Parnaso: Or Advertisments from Parnassus in two Centuries with Politick Touch-stone*, London, 1656.

<sup>65</sup> *I Ragguagli di Parnaso*, c. 1, Adv. 1.

state.<sup>66</sup> All modern princes rule according to the precepts of Tacitus' politics, the most refined reason of state. However, Boccalini's irony does not except the venerable master of reason of state. In the turbulent life of Parnassus, he is involved in a number of misadventures that seriously spoil his reputation, as for instance, when he is appointed Prince of Lesbos on the grounds that nobody could rule better than the master of politics himself. To the ambassadors of Lesbos he explains in two words the main principle of his program. I shall imitate diligently, he reassures the ambassadors, the conduct of the previous prince in those actions that gave content to the people, and I will exceedingly detest him in those with which they were displeased. Having revealed the quintessence of politics, Tacitus admonishes the ambassadors not to reveal it to anyone. If the secret of politics were made common knowledge, shop-keepers and even the meanest sort of men would be able to rule kingdoms and empires.

Whereas the old politics was regarded as an art that every citizen ought to possess, the new one must be exclusively restricted to princes. I am speaking obscurely, explains Tacitus, because the "politick precepts" ("*precetti Politici*") lose much reputation when they are spoken in popular Latin, and because I do not want to communicate that "political Science" to the base rabble, but only to princes. The old politics required a clear language because it was meant to be a public activity. It was the art of preserving the city and since the city belonged to all the citizens, they had to be educated to know that art. In turn, they might be called on to serve in public offices, which required an even greater competence in civil discipline. The practice of reason of state pertains to the prince and his entourage. Since the state does not belong to the citizens, they have no need to know the art of ruling it. To reveal to the ordinary people the secrets of politics may excite in them an appetite to actually rule the state. Indeed, that is a terrifying thought that would amount to the dissolution of the state. If the rule of the city were returned to the subjects, they would become citizens and the state of the prince would turn into a republic. In fact, as soon as he entered his new office as Prince of Lesbos, Tacitus encourages in every form the nobles and the citizens to abandon "the ancient care of public affairs and the thought of military exercises."<sup>67</sup>

<sup>66</sup> "Gli uomini affatto politici, come son io, i quali per fomite di natura hanno l'anietà di voler possedere tutta la dominazione, e che ogni cosa vogliono misurar con la loro ragione di Stato, nel governo dei principati elettivi riescono infelicissimi." *I Ragguagli di Parnaso* c. 1, Adv. 29.

<sup>67</sup> *Advertisements from Parnassus*, c. 1, Adv. 29.



To eradicate the bad habits of liberty, he also devotes great care to glutting the citizens with perpetual plenty and abundance, and to entertaining them with comedies, hunts and other delightful spectacles. Next, he surrounds himself with a militia of foreign soldiers and builds everywhere strong citadels entrusted to his friends. To complete his plan to erect a tyrannical government, Tacitus fills the Senate and the city with spies, and tries to get rid of the most prominent senators. Unfortunately, his plans are frustrated by a conspiracy that forces him to flee from Lesbos and return to lead a private life in Parnassus. Rethinking his unfortunate experience as a prince with his nephew Pliny, Tacitus gloomily admits that heaven is not so far distant from earth, nor snow so far different in color from coal "as the exercise of Empire is far from, and unlike unto the theory of political precepts and the best Rules of Reason of State."<sup>68</sup> I was not capable of restraining the lust for power, he confesses, and I miserably failed in ruling an elective principality.

As master of reason of state, too, not only as a prince, Tacitus did not have an easy life in Parnassus. One day the monarchs of the world imprisoned him on the charge of sedition. His *Annals* and *Histories*, they complained, are "Politic Spectacles" that permit simple men to see what princes are and what politics really is. The spectacles also protect ordinary people from the dust that Princes are accustomed to throw in their eyes.<sup>69</sup> All men with some understanding of the state know, stressed the lawyer of the monarchs, that for the peace and quiet of their kingdoms princes often find it necessary to perform unwarrantable actions which they must veil with good intentions and proclaim that they have in view the common interest if they want to maintain the reputation of being good princes. To throw dust in the people's eyes is the most important instrument of government which "any Politician had yet ever found out in any of the most excellent Reasons of State." Tacitus' spectacles would prevent princes from employing it any longer, with the consequence of endangering the stability of all principalities. Apollo and the Censors of Parnassus, upon mature consideration, agreed that Tacitus' *Annals* and *Histories* should be banished from the company of men. However, out of their high esteem for the Master of Politics, the court decides not to enact sentence, provided that Tacitus solemnly promises to divulge his

<sup>68</sup> *Advertisements from Parnassus*, c. I, Adv. 29.

<sup>69</sup> *Advertisements from Parnassus*, c. II, Adv. 71.

doctrine only to princes and their counselors, not to ordinary men who are manageable only as long as they remain ignorant. Should they become learned or find a learned guide, they would become seditious.<sup>70</sup>

Boccalini gives a definition of politics in the "Advertismen" that reports a discussion about Botero's thesis that politics is the "knowledge of fitting means to ground, maintain and enlarge a State." Botero craftily and cunningly applied the definition of politics in general to reason of state in order to make it appear a good thing. Leaving aside the censure of Botero's work, the whole passage is of crucial importance for the transition of the idea of politics from art of the republic to the art of the state. Boccalini accepts the idea that politics is the art of preserving and enlarging a state, and also speaks of reason of state as a component of politics ("*parte della Politica*").<sup>71</sup>

Having won out over civil philosophy, the art of the state assumes the name that once belonged to its opponent. With the title comes nobility, at least to some extent. Boccalini does not describe the new politics as the most excellent among human disciplines, as the old one was. More soberly, he simply gives it a positive connotation. It was, however, a remarkable promotion. So far none of the writers on the art of the state had said that the art of preserving the state of a prince was a good thing. Even if reason of state, its essential component, remains a wicked thing,<sup>72</sup> the new politics has now a decent status. It can even claim a complete independence from moral philosophy.

<sup>70</sup> The ambivalence of Tacitus' teaching is discussed also in the Advertismen n. 17 of the Second Century, this time with reference to the republics: "Tacitus being excluded from the most famous Commonwealths ("*Libertà*") of Europe, makes a grievous complaint to Apollo; and is by them with much honour received again, and much made of." The same charge of making the people see what they should not is leveled with bitter tones against Machiavelli. He was banished from Parnassus upon pain of death because he transformed the sheep into wolves and made them rebel against the shepherds. His malicious doctrine aimed at making "simple men wickedly malicious, and to make those blind see, which out of a great deal of circumspection, wise nature had made blind," with the consequence of putting the "whole world in combustion." *Advertisements from Parnassus*, c. 1, Adv. 89. In c. 1 Adv. 47, Machiavelli is called "un Fiorentino, scellerato maestro della politica." Interestingly, Boccalini makes Machiavelli say that *The Prince* contains only "political precepts" ("*precetti politici*") and "rules of state" ("*regole di stato*"), thereby acknowledging, at least implicitly, the difference between the two concepts. Cf. M. Sterpos, "Boccalini tacitista di fronte al Machiavelli", *Studi Secenteschi*, 12 (1971), pp. 255-283. <sup>71</sup> *Advertisements from Parnassus*, c. 11, Adv. 89.

<sup>72</sup> The right definition of "Reason of State," writes Boccalini, not Botero's misleading one, should be: "The Reason of State is a Law useful for Commonwealths [*'stati*', in the Italian], but absolutely contrary to the Laws both of God and Man." By will of Apollo this definition written in Letters of gold was affixed upon the columns of the Peripatetic Porch. *Advertisements from Parnassus*, c. 11, Adv. 89.

Reason of state concerns interest and the new political man, the statesman, is not supposed to rule for the good of his subjects, but for his own. The world is nothing but a great public shop and the purpose of merchandising is gain. Politics is no exception. Civil philosophers had constructed the notion of politics upon the premise of the qualitative difference between the art of politics and economics; the philosophers of reason of state cancels the difference.

The dismissal of the old language of politics affects its alleged fathers. First of all, not surprisingly, Aristotle. Enraged against him, some princes besieged his country-house in Parnassus with a great number of foot and horse ready to open fire with their cannon upon the house. Informed of the regrettable episode, Apollo sends two legions of veteran satirists toward them. Unfortunately, their verses fail to convince the princes to abandon the siege. Apollo then sends the Duke of Urbino, a lover of letters. He asks the princes to explain the reason for their fury against the poor philosopher. Aristotle, they answer, is the culprit who defined the tyrant as the prince who rules having in view his own, more than his subjects', interest. By this malignant definition all potentates, no matter how good or ancient, could be equated with tyrannies. Following Aristotle's principle, the shepherd should die of hunger and let the flock flourish fat instead of milking and shearing it. Such an absurdity, urge the princes, is but one example of the nonsense that men of letters usually produce when they tamper with reason of state.

Politics does not, and cannot, possess a theory to be applied like a grammar. The "art of how to govern States" can be learned from the Great Princes' secretaries and in state councils, not from the scribbled papers of the philosophers.<sup>73</sup> The Duke of Urbino acknowledges that the rage of the princes towards Aristotle is well-justified: the Philosopher must revoke his definition. Scared to death, Aristotle admits that the tyrants he referred to were a certain kind of men of ancient times "the race whereof was wholly lost now."<sup>74</sup> In addition to that he begins to admonish the *litterati* to attend their studies and "let alone Reason of State."

The construction of the new language of politics requires the

<sup>73</sup> *Advertisements from Parnassus*, c. II, Adv. 76. The issue of tyranny is discussed also in c. I, Adv. 18, where the ambassadors of the Hircanians consult Apollo on the important question whether it is lawful for the people to kill a tyrant. Apollo, deeply outraged by the question, firmly denies that it is commendable to kill a tyrant, and concludes his response with the words of Tacitus: "Bonos imperatores votos expetere qualescumque tolerare" [To pray for good princes and to bear with any]. <sup>74</sup> *Advertisements from Parnassus*, c. I, Adv. 79.

dismissal of another no less crucial tenet of civil philosophy, namely, the idea that the citizens have the duty to fight to defend their country's liberty. Reason of state demands that princes have the authority to compel the people to take up arms and fight against the enemy even if they are not defending their free republic. The victim of the princes' indignation is, this time, Marcus Cato, one of the most prominent republican heroes. He engraved in gold letters upon the portal of his house the famous words *pro patria pugnā*. A few days later he added *libera*. Noticing the motto, the princes of Parnassus vehemently protest to Apollo. These words might set all the world afire. Cato must hence be severely punished as a seditious man who wants to appear to the vile plebeians as a lover of truth and teach them "an impertinent Liberty."<sup>75</sup> Apollo summons Cato and bitterly reproaches him for having provoked the legitimate resentment of the princes. To Apollo's charges, Cato fiercely responds that good men do what their conscience tells them and do not care about the threats of princes. I added the word "*libera*," he states, because it was necessary to explicate the full significance of the sentence. Without "*libera*" the sentence could be used to make the common people understand that they have to give their lives and faculties to defend their country "as a thing properly belonging to them," whereas they do not in fact have the least interest in it. The princes may well possess the power to compel their subjects to fight. They cannot, however, make them fight with courage and valor. To that Apollo replied that good princes have the power to make their subjects fight for the state of the prince ("*lo Stato del Prencipe*")<sup>76</sup> with the same undaunted valor as if they were defending their own private patrimony. The word "*libera*" is then both superfluous and dangerous and must be erased.

As his English translator aptly remarked, however, Boccalini was at the same time an observer and a censor of the new politics. He reveals what politics according to reason of state is and acknowledges that there is nothing, or almost nothing, that can be done against it. Nevertheless, Boccalini did not at all glorify reason of state. Particularly in the famous *Pietra del paragone politico* (*The Politick Touchstone*), he castigates the mistakes that princes and kings of his time commit in ruling their states.<sup>77</sup> Apollo, who is deeply concerned that the people should be properly ruled, has introduced the

<sup>75</sup> *Advertisements from Parnassus*, c. II, Adv. 31.

<sup>76</sup> The English text reads "their Princes Dominions." *Advertisements from Parnassus*, c. II, Adv. 31.

<sup>77</sup> See dedicatory letter in Trajano Boccalini, *De i Ragguagli di Parnaso. Parte terza*, Venice, 1615.

admirable custom of summoning once a year all the most important rulers of Europe to be reviewed by the Censor of Politic Affairs (*"pubblico Censor delle cose Politiche"*).<sup>78</sup>

No state is exempt from more or less grave criticisms: the Roman Court for tolerating the disgraceful felonies and seditions of the Colonnas against the Pope; the Roman Empire for the disorder in Austria and Germany owing to the negligence of the Emperor Rudolf; the "warlike French Monarchy" for not being able to curb the furious, restless and too rash spirits of the French; the "Hight and Might Monarchy of Spain" for the inhuman rule that her Dons exercise over Naples, Sicily and Milan; the Monarchy of Poland for not being severe enough against the seditious nobles; the Duchy of Muscovy for opposing letters and keeping its people in a state of disgraceful ignorance in order to keep them docile; the "Venetian Liberty" for being too permissive toward the insolence of the young noblemen; the Duke of Savoy for being too pro-Spanish instead of remaining neutral, as he should do; the Duchy of Tuscany for provoking the Turks with its maritime policy; the Commonwealth of Genoa, finally, for permitting financial practices that enriched the nobles and impoverished the republic.

The two charges that most closely touch the issue of reason of state are, however, those leveled against the Monarchy of England and the Ottoman Empire. The Political Censor charges the English Monarchy with having committed the "impious and detestable folly of falling away from the Divine Majesty of God and the Divine Supremacy of the Pope." The "politic precept" of submitting religion to ambition was a point of reason of state (*"una certa ragione di stato"*) that the Ancients did not know of and never dared to use so as to not offend God. To the severe and just censure of having put religion after reason of state, the English Monarchy "fall a crying."

Not so the Ottoman Empire, which was not at all touched by the charge of violating the rules of morals on behalf of reason of state. It is a cruel and unjust practice, says the Censor, to seize the properties of the ministers sentenced to death. Besides the consideration that the important dignitaries of the state should be punished only if their crimes are of outstanding gravity and proven beyond any doubt, the practice of dispossessing their descendants casts upon the Emperor

<sup>78</sup> *Advertisements from Parnassus*, c. II, Adv. 31, p. 439 ("All the states of the world are censured in Parnassus for their errors").

the suspicion that greed and not justice was the motive for the punishment. To this reprimand the Ottoman Empire replies that there are but two means of preserving the peace of the state: reward without measure and punishment without limit. These are the tools to obtain ministers' loyalty. Had the French Monarchy followed the same principle, it would have triumphed over the insolence of the nobles long since.

All the virtuous residents of Parnassus are greatly offended by the wicked words of the Ottoman Empire and protest that such words are unworthy of a person who has a soul. At which the Ottoman Monarchy, smiling, replies that "in the political concepts, by which others governed kingdoms, respect was had to the commodiousness of moral precepts which, by well-regulated customs, were serviceable to goodness. And that yet the tranquillity and peace of states were to be preferred before all other human interest."<sup>79</sup> The "Politic Censor" did not reply and turned his head to the Dukedom of Moscovy.

Although there is little to be done against the overwhelming power of the new politics, the champions of the reason of state are not Boccalini's heroes. The sole positive example that emerges from the *Advertisements*' irony is in fact the "Venetian Liberty." As the learned men of Parnassus aptly stress during a passionate debate, the excellence of Venice is the consequence of the correct implementation of several important political rules. First of all the stability of its laws and institutions are guarded by the Senate. Secondly, there is the admirable public spiritedness and modesty of the Venetian noblemen. It was a remarkable achievement indeed to be able to divorce wealth from insolence. No less important was the predominant concern for peace over expansion, a quality that clearly made Venice superior to Rome.<sup>80</sup>

Finally, particularly laudable are the impartial justice that rules over noblemen and poor alike and the rigid observation of secrecy in state matters. The Venetian Liberty, intervening in person in the debate, only remarks that along with secrecy good counsel is equally important and for this reason the highest affairs of the state were discussed in the Senate instead of restricted councils.

<sup>79</sup> *Advertisements from Parnassus*, c. II, Adv. 31, p. 446.

<sup>80</sup> See also *Advertisements from Parnassus*, c. I, Adv. 79: "The ancient Commonwealth of Rome, and the modern Venetian Liberty, argue together, what the true rewards of honour be, by which well ordered commonwealths do acknowledge the worth of their well-deserving senators."

The same qualities that make the Republic of Venice the example of politics, also make it unique. Liberty requires

a genius affecting quietness in all its operations, a soul which knows how to submit itself to a Citizen, who though superior as Magistrate, is yet inferior in all other respects; how being rich and young, to honor a poor old man with submission, to bestow all his love upon his Country (next to his God) rather than upon his children or wealth; to prefer the public good before private interest; to judge uprightly in civil and criminal affairs between friends and parents, to tremble at the severity of the laws in a free state; to possess the wealth of a prince, and have the mind of a simple citizen, capable of accepting the will of the citizenry, and finally to have the taciturnity in public affairs, and to possess all those habits worthy of a free man, which are observed to be so exactly in every Noble Venetian.<sup>81</sup>

This sort of custom exists nowhere else. To try to institute a republic would therefore be foolish. Liberty is too perfect a thing for such a corrupt world. Nor is there any possibility of reforming it. As long as there are men, as Tacitus aptly wrote, there will be vices.<sup>82</sup> Instead of dreaming of the impossible recovery of liberty, better to learn how to deal with corruption and to learn to live in the world as it is, as princes and monarchs have been doing so well according to the precepts of reason of state. The dismissal of the language of politics as the art of the republic goes hand in hand with the recognition that the world is bound to remain deeply corrupt. It was the exact reversal of the hopes and attitudes that had accompanied the golden era of civil philosophy, namely, that the moral identity of a people should, and could, be different and better.

The term "reason of state" and its equivalents rapidly became popular. Boccalini himself remarked in 1616 that even the fishmongers in the marketplaces meddle in political discussions and in an amateurish way quote reason of state.<sup>83</sup> The acquisition of the language of reason of state, both among the intellectual elite and the

<sup>81</sup> *Advertisements from Parnassus*, c. 1, Adv. 39.

<sup>82</sup> "Vitia erunt, donec Homines," *Histories*, Bk. iv. Quoted in c. 1, Adv. 77 ("By order of Apollo, a general reform of the world is published by the seven wise men of Greece, and by the other Litterati").

<sup>83</sup> "Fin nelle piazze, i pescivendoli s'insinuano ne' discorsi di politica, schiaffeggiando alla peggio la *Ragion di Stato*," from a (pseudo) letter of Trajano Boccalini to Benedetto Cantoni in Paris, November 1, 1616. I am quoting from R. De Mattei, *Il problema della "Ragion di Stato" nell'età della Controriforma*, Milan-Naples, 1979, p. 25. The same remark is reiterated by Ludovico Zuccolo: "non pure i consiglieri delle corti e i dottori nelle scuole, ma i barbieri eziandio, e gli altri più vili artefici nelle botteghe e nei ritrovi loro discorrono e questionano della *Ragion di Stato*, e si danno a credere di conoscere quali cose si facciano per *Ragion di Stato* e quali no," *Ibid.*

ordinary people, marked a radical intellectual and ideological watershed, as witnesses of the time clearly perceived.

In the famous *Speech of Monsignor Giovanni della Casa addressed to the Emperor Charles the V concerning the restitution of the City of Piacenza*, the author of *The Galateo* uses the term "reason of state" in contrast with "civil reason," that is, justice, the foundation of the old conception of politics. To return the city of Piacenza to the legitimate ruler Duke Ottavio Farnese, would be, stresses Della Casa, an act conforming to the norms of civil reason ("*la ragione civile*"). To keep it, would instead be an act conforming to reason of state, which considers only the interest of the state, disregarding all principles of justice and honesty.<sup>84</sup>

Nowadays we vulgarly call reason of state, remarked Campanella in 1631 with distaste, what once we used to call political reason ("*Ratio demum politica*"). We call reason of state, he wrote in the same year, the same political reason ("*Ratio politica*") that was in the past identified with equity and justice. Reason of state, stresses Campanella, is in fact false politics, a degeneration of true politics ("*falsam illam politicam, quam vocatis de statu rationem*").<sup>85</sup>

As Campanella remarks in his *Aforismi politici*, the ancient political reason ("*ratio politica*") has not to be confused with the modern concept of reason of state ("*Ratio Status hodierna*"). The former consists in equity ("*aequitas*") and authorises the violation of the letter – but not the aim – of the law on behalf of a higher and common good; the latter is an invention of tyrants ("*inventio tyrannorum*") that justifies the violation of civil, natural, divine and international laws in the interests of whoever is in power.<sup>86</sup> Nor can the true legislator be equated with the astute politician ("*astutissimus politicus*") who merely imitates them to gain the favor of the populace.<sup>87</sup>

Campanella's belief that a new and false concept of politics was replacing the old and true one, is particularly evident in the *Atheismus Triumphatus*, composed between 1604 and 1608. In this work Campanella engages in a strenuous counterattack against the wrong

<sup>84</sup> "Et perchè alcuni accecati nella avarizia e nella cupidità loro affermano che Vostra Maestà non consentirà mai di lasciar Piacenza, che che disponga la ragion civile, conciossiachè la ragion degli Stati nol comporta, dico che questa voce non è solamente poco cristiana, ma ella è ancora poco umana." R. De Mattei, *Il problema della "Ragion di Stato" nell'età della Controriforma*, p. 13, n. 34. The *Oratione* was written in 1547.

<sup>85</sup> *Quod reminiscuntur*, Padua, 1939, p. 62.

<sup>86</sup> T. Campanella, *Aforismi politici*, L. Firpo (ed.), Turin, 1941, p. 163.

<sup>87</sup> *Aforismi politici*, p. 167.



conceptions derived from the “most ignorant” Machiavelli who did not investigate politics in a scientific manner, but from the point of view of a pragmatic and astute man. The admirers of Machiavelli maintain that Machiavelli’s adversaries misunderstand politics and confuse it with ethics and theology (“*contra politicam loquuntur*”). It is in fact absurd, so the “Machiavellians” argue, to believe that politics is exclusively concerned with the perfect republic. The task of politics is to indicate the best ways of preserving both the good and the bad political constitution, including tyranny.<sup>88</sup> The students of politics who condemn Machiavelli because he said that the prince may pretend to be religious without actually being so, plainly misunderstand politics (“*est a Polititica [sic!] schola alienum*”). Nor is it true that the cruel prince commits a sin against politics (“*non peccat in politicam*”).<sup>89</sup> The task of politics can well be that of preserving tyranny (“*ad Politicam vero servare*”);<sup>90</sup> to condemn it is the task of Ethics.

To this new concept of politics as the art of preserving *any* state by *any* means, Campanella opposes the old and declining belief that politics is only the art of good government. All his arguments indeed reveal the contrast between two conflicting interpretations. The philosopher who teaches the prince to be good, he remarks, does not transcend the boundaries of politics, whereas Machiavellian politics, which instructs the tyrant how to satisfy his lust for power, is a corrupt art: it is not political prudence, but wicked cunning. In fact it cannot be considered an art, since no art can possibly teach evil.<sup>91</sup> Art means right reason in practical matters and the aim of any art is good. To speak of politics as the art to preserve a tyranny is like speaking of medicine as the art of getting and maintaining syphilis. The true art of politics (“*vera ars politicae*”) can only be the art of destroying or reforming tyranny.<sup>92</sup> True Ethics and true politics can never conflict since a truth can never contradict another truth. Nor can it be said that it pertains to ethics and not to politics to condemn tyranny. Ethics rules over the individual, politics over the republic as a whole. Since the judgment over the part is one and the same with the judgment over the whole, it is perfectly legitimate to condemn

<sup>88</sup> T. Campanella, *Atheismus Triumphatus*, Paris, 1636, p. 240.

<sup>89</sup> *Atheismus Triumphatus*, p. 241.      <sup>90</sup> *Atheismus Triumphatus*, p. 242.

<sup>91</sup> “Ergo cum sit mala ista sua Politica perniciosaque, Ars non est, nec conservationem mali docere potest ex arte,” *Atheismus Triumphatus*, p. 243.

<sup>92</sup> *Atheismus Triumphatus*, p. 247.

tyranny from the point of view of the art of politics ("omnes ruinosas formas politiae detestantur ex arte").<sup>93</sup>

Other seventeenth-century political writers lamented that even learned people had only confused ideas about the connection between politics and reason of state. As Ludovico Zuccolo wrote, some wrongly equate politics with reason of state, while others maintain that the former is just a component of the latter without going any further than that.<sup>94</sup> Elsewhere he observed that in the common opinion politics aims at the common good, while reason of state pursues the interest of the rulers.<sup>95</sup>

Another example of the perception of the difference between politics and reason of state can be found in Filippo Maria Bonini's *Ciro Politico* (1647). Politics – he wrote – is the daughter of reason and the mother of the laws; reason of state is the mother of tyranny and the sister of atheism. Politics indicates to the prince the right way of governing, ruling and defending his own people, both in times of peace and times of war. Reason of state is, on the contrary, the knowledge of the means – just or unjust – apt to preserve any state. For this reason politics is the art of princes, reason of state that of tyrants.<sup>96</sup>

Understood as the art of good government politics was regarded by Bonini and other seventeenth-century writers as the highest human art whose task is to fight injustice. However, this high consideration of politics was not at all a product of the eighteenth-century political philosophy, as has been said, but a reiteration of Aristotelian themes

<sup>93</sup> *Atheismus Triumphatus*, p. 251.

<sup>94</sup> Ludovico Zuccolo, *Considerazioni Politiche e Morali sopra cento oracoli d'illustri personaggi antichi*, Venice, 1621, p. 55.

<sup>95</sup> Ludovico Zuccolo, "Della Ragion di Stato," in B. Croce, *Politici e moralisti del Seicento*, p. 26.

<sup>96</sup> "La Politica è figlia della ragione e madre delle leggi, la Ragion di Stato è maestra delle tirannidi e germana dell'ateismo. La Politica, infine, è una pratica cognizione di tutti que' precetti che insegnano a' Principi il vero modo di rettamente governare, reggere e difendere così in pace come in guerra i suoi popoli. La Ragion di Stato è una intelligenza e cognizione di tutti quei mezzi che in qualsivoglia modo, o siano giusti o ingiusti, sono istrumenti a conservare e mantenere chi regna nello stato presente. Per questo la politica è propria de' principi, la Ragion di Stato de' tiranni," F. M. Bonini, *Il Giro Politico*, Genoa, 1647, Proem. The distinction between politics and reason of state was taken up also by Tommaso Tommasi, to stress that the latter is much more apt than the former to satisfy princes' curiosity. A prince, he wrote, may find the maxims of politics ("massime politiche") in S. Thomas, *De regimine principum* and in Aegidius Romanus' works. However, he would surely find these books boring and too ordinary. Instead, the books of Machiavelli, Nua and Bodin, where the maxims of reason of state are properly laid down, will surely provide him with the intellectual nourishment he is eager for. D. Tommaso Tommasi, *Il principe studioso nato ai servigi del serenissimo Cosimo gran principe di Toscana*, Venice, 1642, pp. 106–107.

that had been circulating since the thirteenth century, and had lost most of their power after the emergence of the concept of reason of state. Like other seventeenth-century writers, Bonini was celebrating the old notion of politics that had been corrupted by the new concept of reason of state.<sup>97</sup> In addition it must be said that the celebrations of politics were in some cases clearly ironical in tone. The word "politics," wrote for instance Giovanni Leti, is so sweet that nowadays everyone wants and looks for it; even the vile populace that cannot practice politics wants at least to talk of it.<sup>98</sup> What he means, however, is that the word "politics" was used in an improper way to conceal nefarious practices of bad government. His celebration was actually a critique of politics as his contemporaries understood and practiced it.<sup>99</sup> As he perceptively observed, the names of things have changed. Princes have successfully banished the frightening name of tyranny and introduced that of politics.<sup>100</sup> Whereas the ancients used to call tyranny by its name; modern politicians call it "politics."<sup>101</sup>

The change of meaning of politics and its loss of status also emerges in the works of the most pious Giovanni De Luca, the author of *Il principe cristiano pratico*. Modern political writers, remarks De Luca, do not mean by politics good government and good administration, but the preservation and the aggrandizement of the power of a person or a family. According to the common-sense view politics is nothing else but lying, deceiving, plotting to pursue one's own interest and ambition. By current standards only fools believe that politics means sincerity, truth and honor.<sup>102</sup> The consequence of this ideological and linguistic "revolution" was that "politics" ceased to be the pleasant and noble name that it used to be. Far from being the century of the

<sup>97</sup> Filippo Maria Bonini, *Il Ciro Politico*, Venice, 1668, p. 142.

<sup>98</sup> Gregorio Leti, *Dialoghi politici, o vero la politica che usano in questi tempi, i Principi, e le Repubbliche Italiane, per conservare i loro Stati, e Signorie*, 2 vols., Genoa, 1666, I, p. 72.

<sup>99</sup> "Se s'uccidono gl'innocenti, i Principi, o vero i loro Ministri, coprono la crudeltà col dire la *Politica lo vuole*, Se si bandiscono gli Huomini più necessari al Regno, quelli che regnano dicono subito, la *Politica lo vuole*, Se si mandono de' Capitani men valorosi, all'imprese più difficili, non per altro che per farli perdere la vita, acciò non portassero ostacolo alcuno alla nascente fortuna del Privato, si dirà incontenente, la *Politica lo vuole*, se s'impoveriscono i più ricchi, la *Politica lo vuole*, se si demoliscono le Chiese, e si distruggono gli Altari, la *Politica lo vuole*, se s'imprigionano senza causa e senza autorità da poterlo fare gli Ecclesiastici maggiori, la *Politica lo vuole*, Se s'aggravano i Popoli di gravetze insopportabili, la *Politica lo vuole*, Se si ruinano l'intere Famiglie, la *Politica lo vuole*, se si lascia di trattar la pace, la *Politica lo vuole*, e in somma non si fa alcun male nel Prencipato, che la *Politica* non lo canonizi per un bene, e necessario di più," *Dialoghi politici*, II, pp. 74-75.

<sup>100</sup> G. Leti, *Dialoghi politici*, I, pp. 69-70. <sup>101</sup> G. Leti, *Dialoghi politici*, I, pp. 76-77.

<sup>102</sup> Giovan Battista De Luca, *Il principe cristiano pratico*, Rome, 1680, p. 44.

rediscovery and celebration of politics, the seventeenth century was rather the witness of its decay.<sup>103</sup>

While the critics insisted that the concept of reason of state was a break with the older language, the advocates of the new politics industriously looked for illustrious predecessors among ancient philosophers. In his book *Of the reason of state and political prudence*, issued in 1623, Federico Bonaventura triumphantly announces that civil art ("*Arte Civile*") that Plato invented, the noble art of ruling the republic, is exactly what we call today reason of state.<sup>104</sup> Ludovico Zuccolo, in his *Political and moral considerations upon a hundred illustrious ancient sages*, published in Venice in 1621, goes so far as to say that what the Greeks meant by "Politics" ("*Politica*"), is every sort of reason of state.<sup>105</sup> The Romans too, assures Alberto Fabri in his *Political arcana*, knew and practiced very well reason of state under the name of "law of necessity" ("*ius necessitatis*").<sup>106</sup> Reason of state, he wrote, was born with governments, and as long as there are governments there will be reason of state.

Contemporary scholars too have accepted the idea of a substantial continuity between the modern notion of reason of state and that of *ratio publicae utilitatis* (or *ratio necessitatis*, *ratio status*, *ratio regis*, *ratio*

<sup>103</sup> See R. De Mattei, *Il pensiero politico italiano nell'età della Controriforma*, I, especially the chapters on "The dignity of political culture" and "The celebration of politics." On pp. 53-54 De Mattei writes that the seventeenth-century celebrations of politics continued a tradition dating back to Aquinas and Giles of Rome. He also maintains that at the end of the sixteenth and during the seventeenth century, politics ceased to be cultivated in private cabinets and became a human discipline largely professed and discussed both by secular and religious men. The seventeenth century should then be considered as a salutary reaction against the merely speculative attitude of Humanism on behalf of the utility and beauty of intellectual and practical participation to political life (p. 48). I find it difficult to believe that in a time in which almost all Italy was under direct or indirect foreign domination, or was ruled by princes and tyrants, politics became a widespread human concern and was regarded as a necessary completion of a truly human life. As with the contrast with Humanism, it has to be said that De Mattei's point is correct only if we exclude the "civic Humanists," who indeed praised and practiced politics as the highest human activity.

<sup>104</sup> "[Plato] intende la vera Arte Civile che noi domandiamo *Ragion di Stato*; veramente la più retta e più eccellente cosa che sia nella repubblica, come quella che è principalissima cagione di conservarle la beatitudine," R. De Mattei, *Il problema della "Ragion di Stato" nell'età della Controriforma*, p. 41.

<sup>105</sup> "Nè fa caso che gli antichi non avessero nome proprio da isprimerla, poichè non l'abbiamo ancor noi; e però la circoscriviamo con questi due termini *Ragione di Stato*, come la circoscrissero eglino con altri che pur denotavano il medesimo, valendosi quando delle voci *vis dominationis* o *arcana imperii*, quando di quel modo di dire *est, vel non est de Republica*, che però s'intende in più di un sentimento, e quando d'altri tali. Così fecero pur ancor i Greci, che denotarono con più parole quello che non seppero con una sola esprimere, o pur ampliando il significato della voce *Politica*, compresero anco con essa ogni specie di *Ragione di Stato*," Cfr. R. De Mattei, *Il problema della "Ragion di Stato"*, p. 43.

<sup>106</sup> R. De Mattei, *Il problema della "Ragion di Stato"*, pp. 45-46.

*Ecclesiae*) that the medieval legists and canonists, as well as the Scholastic philosophers, elaborated, drawing on Roman legal sources and Cicero's political philosophy.<sup>107</sup> The medieval reason of state, it was argued, was "right reason," in the sense of the right reasoning of the sovereign about the best means to be used in order to protect the people and the state, and in the sense of being a reasoning in accordance with the fundamental laws of God and nature.<sup>108</sup> Even when it was understood in the narrower sense of *ratio status regis* or *ratio status regni* (the reason of the welfare of the king or the kingdom), the medieval "reason of state" was subordinated to a higher reason of state, namely the reason of the community as a naturally existing entity that "was approved by God and the law of nature for the social and political end of man on earth."<sup>109</sup>

If we recall the words of Cosimo, that states cannot be held with *paternosters* in the hand, or Bernardo del Nero's admonition that for the preservation of the state rulers must be prepared to break with the norms of Christian religion, or Ms. Giovanni Della Casa contrasting the norms of justice with "civil reason," the view that the Renaissance reason of state was a derivation from the classical notion of right reason looks inaccurate. On the other hand, the modern notion of reason of state was understood as an antithesis of the notion of politics as the art of ruling in justice. As we have seen, it was elaborated to justify the derogation of the laws and justice on behalf of the interests of the state, represented by the public person of the prince. Medieval legalists and canonists indeed discussed cases of violation of the laws on behalf of emergency or the necessity of preserving a highest good – the welfare or the interest of the republic, the kingdom or the Church – whose moral justification rested upon natural and divine laws.<sup>110</sup> Later Renaissance writers discussed a quite different issue: the violation of natural and humane laws by princes or rulers concerned

<sup>107</sup> See G. Post, *Studies in Medieval Legal Thought*, Princeton, 1964, pp. 253–269. Cicero's most quoted passages were from *De Oratore*, Bk. 1, 46, 201: "... oratori iuris civilis scientia necessaria est: sic in causis publicis iudiciorum, concionum, Senatus, omnis haec et antiquitatis memoria, et publici iuris auctoritas, et regendae reipublicae ratio ac scientia, tanquam aliqua materies, eis oratoribus, qui versantur in republica, subiecta esse debent"; and *De Officiis*, Bk. 3, 11, 46–47: "Sed utilitatis specie in re publica saepissime peccatur, ut in Corinthi disturbance nostris." For a different interpretation see H. Münkler, *Im Namen des Staates*, Frankfurt, 1987, who stresses (pp. 165–207) that "Reason of State" was meant to be a new concept of the "Political." See also M. Stolleis, *Arcana imperii und ratio status: Bemerkungen zur politischen theorie des fruhen 17. Jahrhunderts*, Gottingen, 1980.

<sup>108</sup> G. Post, *Studies in Medieval Legal Thought*, p. 301.

<sup>109</sup> G. Post, *Studies in Medieval Legal Thought*, p. 303.

<sup>110</sup> See the examples quoted by Post, *Studies in Medieval Legal Thought*, pp. 253–290.

with the preservation of *their* states; of states whose only "legitimacy" was force, or money. Machiavelli was not at all relating "the prince's use of unlawful means to the achievement of a good State, ruled according to law and justice for the common welfare." Nor was Botero resuming the medieval principle of the duty of the prince to rule in justice. Instead, he was shaping a new interpretation of the usual practice of princes to do what they thought fit to maintain the state, regardless of its legitimacy.

As his critics denounced, Botero's definition of reason of state allowed too much room for violations of the norms of justice and religion. Botero simply spoke of "apt means" ("*mezzi atti*"), and remained quite vague on the issue of the priority of honesty over convenience. He also left unclear, objected the critics, whether by "state" he meant the authority of the prince or the territory.<sup>111</sup> For all these reasons, he was regarded as responsible for an ideological break with the traditional understanding of politics, and accused of advocating nefarious practices, just like his archenemy Machiavelli.

Hence, for half a century after the publication of *Della Ragion di Stato*, philosophers, historians, jurists and theologians applied themselves to the task of emending or rephrasing the notion of reason of state, in order to make it fully compatible with natural and divine laws and uncompromised by bad government. Scipione Ammirato, to quote one of the most influential revisionists of Botero's approach, elaborated a new definition of reason of state on the grounds of the notion of derogation, the classical legal principle allowing the infringement of a law on behalf of a higher law or rule. "Reason of state," he stressed, should be taken to mean "the derogation of ordinary law for the public good, that is to say, on behalf of a higher and more universal norm."<sup>112</sup>

The definition of reason of state in terms of derogation helped to distinguish between good and bad reason of state. Good reason of state is the derogation of the law for the common good; bad reason of state is the derogation for a particular interest. Good reason of state, Ammirato carefully explained, is precisely the opposite of a privilege, that is, the correction of the law for private purposes. Moreover, even

<sup>111</sup> See R. De Mattei, *Il problema della "Ragion di Stato" nell'età della Controriforma*, pp. 65–89.

<sup>112</sup> "Ragion di Stato altro non essere che la contravvenzione di legge ordinaria, per rispetto di publico beneficio, ovvero per rispetto di maggiore e più universale ragione," R. De Mattei, *Il problema della "Ragion di Stato" nell'età della Controriforma*, p. 92.

though reason of state may override *civil* law, it must recognize the superior authority of moral law and religion.

Even presented as the right of overriding ordinary laws for the common good, the notion of reason of state represented a substantial transformation of the classical and modern republican language of politics. The innovation was embodied in the term "state." As Ammirato himself wrote, *status* is nothing but a kingdom, or empire, or any domination ("*quia status quid est, nisi regnum, vel imperium, vel quocumque nomine dominatus noncupetur?*").<sup>113</sup> Reason of state is therefore the reason of whatever and whoever dominates and consists of hidden, secret laws and privileges ("*arcana imperii*"), designed for the security of that particular domination. Even though *arcana imperii* are to be distinguished from bad reason of state ("*dominationis flagitia*," in Tacitus' language), the crucial issue is that the prince represents the state and is therefore the ultimate interpreter on earth of those laws, exceptions and privileges which make up reason of state. Bound only by the laws of God and nature and the sole representative of the state, the prince, entitled to appeal to reason of state, had little in common with the republican political man. Although the theorists of the respectable or right reason of state wanted him to pay due respect to the laws of nature and God, they had no hesitation in recognizing in him the authority for granting those privileges and exemptions through which the Italian *signori* had built their system of partisan and private loyalties.

Whereas the civil man was bound by the laws of the city and committed not to allow privileges and exemptions, the masters of the art of the state may, and indeed should, disregard the petulant arguments of the advocates of the reasons of law and justice. Matters of state, remarked Ammirato, cannot be taught by legalists, who know only of civil and criminal litigations. The prince should rather listen to the advice of political philosophers who know about history and have studied the deeds of great princes and peoples.<sup>114</sup>

Positions like that of Ammirato's voiced the uneasiness with the

<sup>113</sup> S. Ammirato, *Dissertationes Politicae sive Discursus in C. Cornelium Tacitum*, Helenopolis (Frankfurt), 1609, Bk. 12, 1, p. 165.

<sup>114</sup> The divorce of politics and jurisprudence was on the contrary firmly opposed by the Bolognese Virgilio Malvezzi, in his *Ritratto del Privato Politico Cristiano* (1635). The law, he wrote, is politics ("*La legge è una politica*"), but nowadays few legalists are politicians ("*politici*"). In the past politics used to be the legitimate daughter of jurisprudence. Nowadays politics is a mechanical activity and the legalists have become empiricists. See B. Croce (ed.), *Politici e Moralisti del Seicento*, p. 273. See also R. De Mattei, *Il pensiero politico italiano nell'età della Controriforma*, 1, pp. 164–187.

traditional alliance between law and politics that the civilians of the fourteenth century had forged, and the Humanists had used as a basis for the notion of politics as civil philosophy. But another no less important component of civil philosophy was shaken by the rise of the notion of reason of state, namely the connection between political prudence and justice. Conventionally joined with wisdom and the other three virtues, in the writings of the scholars of reason of state, prudence assumes an independent self-sufficient role. Although none dared oppose prudence to wisdom or justice, the general thrust of the discussion was to regard prudence as the sole relevant virtue in state affairs. Wisdom, it was remarked, gives us the knowledge of universal truths and norms, but state affairs require contingent choices over particular issues in specific circumstances. To rule a state, princes then need prudence, not wisdom. They need a particular sort of prudence, one that may be called "political prudence" and which constitutes the essence of reason of state.

In spite of all learned discussions and the more or less subtle distinctions and clarifications, politics and reason of state were gradually regarded as interchangeable terms. Giovanni Antonio Palazzo, for instance, wrote as early as 1609, that the art of governing and reason of state are one and the same thing under different names. The art of government and reason of state come from God who taught men both through the scriptures and the laws.<sup>115</sup> The distinction between politics and reason of state reemerges however under the headings of true and false reason of state. The former, which corresponds to the old notion of politics, is grounded upon justice, prudence and all the other virtues and aims at the preservation of human society through the bonds of friendship. The latter, which corresponds to the art of the state, is grounded upon greed, ambition, intemperance and disordered egotism, and destroys human society.<sup>116</sup>

The most refined investigation of the relationship between politics and reason of state is to be found in Ludovico Zuccolo's seminal essay *Della ragione di stato*, composed in 1621.<sup>117</sup> To act according to reason

<sup>115</sup> Giovanni Antonio Palazzo, *Discorso del governo e della ragion vera di stato*, Venice, 1606, p. 20.

<sup>116</sup> Giovanni Antonio Palazzo, *Discorso del governo e della ragion vera di stato*, pp. 224–225.

<sup>117</sup> Zuccolo's work on reason of state was praised by Croce as the most perceptive of all the works written on the topic. See B. Croce, *Storia dell'età barocca in Italia*, Bari, 1929, p. 93. A different view in De Mattei, *Il problema della "Ragion di Stato" nell'età della Controriforma*, pp. 109–128.



of state, he remarked, means to adopt the course of action which is appropriate to preserve or to found a particular type of state. Hence, there is no such thing as a unique reason of state, but there are different ones according to the nature of each state. To act according to the reason of state for the Sultan of Turkey may well be to kill his brothers and nephews and rely upon the support of the jannissars. Given the nature of that monarchy, such odd behavior is perfectly prudent and corresponds to reason of state. Similarly it was perfectly prudent and a perfect application of reason of state for the Florentine to bar a number of citizens or families from office. It was indeed the appropriate reason of state for their popular government.

Reason of state, commented Zuccolo following Botero, is simply the knowledge of the suitable means to preserve whatever sort of regime, be it a republic or a tyranny. We may perhaps agree to call "prudence" reason of state in just regimes, and "shrewdness" (*"avvedutezza"*) reason of state in corrupt ones. Nevertheless, just as we call "justice" the shadow of justice which exists even among thieves, it is not improper to call prudence also the reason of state of the tyrant because of its resemblance to the prudence of the good ruler. Reason of state, concludes Zuccolo, is then neither good nor perverse: it may teach us to behave justly as well as unjustly, to do the right as well as the wrong. To rule according to true reason of state, and to possess political prudence, is a rare and sublime talent that allowed Pericles to excel in Athens and Lorenzo the Magnificent to become the lord of Florence while preserving the appearances of republican institutions.<sup>118</sup>

Even the tyrant's shrewdness may now be called political prudence, just like the prudence of a good ruler. The old notion of politics as the art of ruling in justice and according to reason is replaced by the idea of politics as whatever conduct is appropriate to preserve a regime. Whoever succeeds, in whatever way, within whatever type of constitution, may now claim the title of political man. Although he was perfectly aware of the differences between politics and reason of state, in the end Zuccolo aligned himself with the trend of the times and approved the identification of politics and reason of state. Politics, he argued, always pursues honesty (*"la politica mai non leva l'occhio dalla onestà"*) and has nothing to do with the institution or the preservation of corrupt republics (*"nelle prave repubbliche poi, le quali la*

<sup>118</sup> L. Zuccolo, "Della ragione di stato," in B. Croce (ed.), *Politici e Moralisti del Seicento*, p. 40.

*politica propriamente non si propone per iscopo*”).<sup>119</sup> Reason of state then is not a part of politics, not even a subordinate component. It is plainly illogical to assume that something evil (reason of state) might be subordinated to something good (politics). Only in good republics, where reason of state aims at the interests of the ruler and the subjects alike, and seeks justice and honesty, may reason of state be said to be a component of politics. In the case of tyranny it cannot be said that reason of state is a component of politics. Thus politics and reason of state share only some sort of resemblance or affinity, just as the justice of thieves resembles true justice. They are similar in the sense that reason of state justifies in a tyranny the functions of preserving the form of the regime, which is what politics does in the republics. Thus, concludes Zuccolo, it is not without justification for people to call both with the same name of politics.<sup>120</sup>

While he recognized some justification for the fusion of the notions of politics and reason of state, as far as the aims of the two arts are concerned, Zuccolo firmly stressed the different type of knowledge that they provide. An important difference between politics and reason of state, he explains, consists of the fact that politics concerns the whole body of the republic, both the public and the private good, and relies upon the laws as its ministers.<sup>121</sup> Reason of state, on the other hand, does not investigate at all the best way of instituting and preserving a republic, or a monarchy, or a tyranny, *in general*. It only deals with particular states, using whatever means are appropriate to preserving the kingdom of France or Spain, or the republics of Switzerland or Holland.

Zuccolo's views on the general nature of *political* knowledge were endorsed also by Torre, one of the last to intervene in the dispute about reason of state. Like medicine, jurisprudence and physics, wrote Torre, politics deals with general and theoretical issues; reason of state provides the particular knowledge and skill necessary in the management of state affairs. Politics discusses general problems like the nature of the states, the different forms of government, inquiries about the best form of government, the appropriate balance among

<sup>119</sup> L. Zuccolo, *Della ragione di stato*, pp. 35–36.

<sup>120</sup> L. Zuccolo, *Della ragione di stato*, p. 33.

<sup>121</sup> “Ora con grande agevolezza potremo a pieno conoscere che differenza sia tra la politica e la ragione di stato. Abbraccia la politica, come si disse fin da principio, tutto il corpo della repubblica, e in conseguenza ha l'occhio al ben publico ed al privato, valendosi in parte delle leggi, come di sue ministre, in parte adoperando ella stessa per conseguir l'intento suo.” L. Zuccolo, *Della ragione di stato*, pp. 31–32.

the different social components of the republic, or the proper education of the youth. But all that is of little use, if at all, for the statesman. What he needs is the subtle skill of reason of state.<sup>122</sup> The language of politics was then reduced to a practically useless political "science" or an uninfluential moral doctrine sermonizing upon justice and good government: it was no longer the art of the political man, but the occupation of idle moral philosophers or useless scientists of governments.

At the beginnings of the seventeenth century, the view that reason of state is not a science but a sort of prudence, seemed to be quite conventional. As Pietro Mattei wrote in an essay of 1624, science deals with permanent and demonstrable things, while prudence deals with contingent matters. The former always follows the pathway of the laws and reason; the latter sometimes violates the laws and disregards the precepts of reason. Political prudence ("*prudenza politica*") – which is one and the same with regal science ("*Scienza Regia*") and reason of state ("*Ragion di Stato*") – is the distinctive quality of the "statesman" ("*Huomo di Stato*").<sup>123</sup>

Politics and reason of state were synonymous also for Valeriano Castiglione, the author of the *Statista Regnante* of 1630. As he explains to the reader, his intention in composing his work was to teach Catholic princes the rules of a Christian reason of state to contrast the wicked reason of state taught by Machiavelli and Bodin.<sup>124</sup> This perverse reason of state, which is the dominant conception, is the source of the "political vices" ("*vitij politici*") that he believed was his duty as a religious man to contribute to eradicate.

The resistance against the hegemony of reason of state did not entirely disappear. A number of opponents to the dominant ideological mood conducted their campaign on behalf of Christian values; others by appealing to the bygone concept of politics. Father Vincenzo Sgualdi advocated in his *Repubblica di Lesbo* the necessity of tempering reason of state with the scriptures in order to make it really profitable to mankind.<sup>125</sup> Whereas empious and atheist politics instructs cruel tyrants, a well-ordered politics educates good princes

<sup>122</sup> R. De Mattei, *Il problema della "Ragion di Stato" nell'età della Controriforma*, p. 182.

<sup>123</sup> Pietro Mattei, *L'Huomo saggio nelle osservazioni di stato, e di historie: Formato sopra la vita, e negoziazioni fatte in servizio degli ultimi cinque Re di Francia dal Signor di Villeroy*, Venice, 1624, p. 6.

<sup>124</sup> Valeriano Castiglione, *Statista Regnante*, Turin, 1630, p. 3.

<sup>125</sup> Vincenzo Sgualdi, *Repubblica di Lesbo ovvero Della Ragione di Stato in un Dominio Aristocratico Libri Dieci*, Bologna, 1642, p. 5.

who will benefit and protect his subjects.<sup>126</sup> Fabio Albergati preferred instead to leave aside Christian values and the scriptures and use against the reasons of the bad politicians "political and natural reasons" ("*ragioni politiche e naturali*").<sup>127</sup> These reasons should convince all reasonable men regardless of their religious beliefs. Bad politics is in fact detrimental not only for the prince, but also for the tyrant for whom it has been invented. Against bad politics, which preaches that for the interest of the state anything is permissible, it is urgent to restore the true political principles congenial to civil life ("*veri principi politici*").<sup>128</sup>

From the same angle, Giovan Battista De Luca invoked against the principle of the wicked, tyrannical and diabolic politics taught by modern philosophers the restoration of the true and good politics. True politics, stressed De Luca, is simply the well-ordered rule of government of a wise, just, pious and prudent father. Politics, as the Greeks and the Romans teach us, is the art of government in public as well as private life. With a curious distortion of its original meaning, De Luca diligently explains that a good political government is one which benefits not only kings and princes but also the Barons, the Governors and all public magistrates in charge of the government of provinces, cities and communities, including households. In the conventional sense, however, politics means the government of public affairs of the state for the preservation, the aggrandizement and the happiness of principalities and consequently of all the components of the "mystical political body" ("*mistico, ovvero politico corpo*").<sup>129</sup>

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, the task of restoring the old conception of politics appeared to be a desperate and futile enterprise. Machiavelli and Tacitus, lamented Paolo Mattia Doria, have so firmly established their wicked doctrine of politics ("*il sistema della maliziosa politica*") that it is impossible to speak of governing men according to the principles of virtuous politics without being ridiculed as a chimeric and extravagant mind.<sup>130</sup> Politics, which was originally meant to fight corruption and sustain liberty, has turned into weakened reason of state which nourishes corruption and produces servitude.<sup>131</sup> My work, stresses Doria, intends to go back to the old

<sup>126</sup> Vincenzo Sgualdi, *Repubblica di Lesbo*, p. 6.

<sup>127</sup> Fabio Albergati, *La Repubblica Regia*, Rome, 1664, I, p. 2.

<sup>128</sup> Fabio Albergati, *La Repubblica Regia*, I, p. 3.

<sup>129</sup> Giovan Battista De Luca, *Il principe cristiano pratico*, p. 66.

<sup>130</sup> Paolo Mattia Doria, *La Vita Civile*, Naples, 1729, 3rd edn., p. 6.

<sup>131</sup> Paolo Mattia Doria, *La Vita Civile*, p. 15.

politics. Even though it is easy to foresee the beneficial effects that true politics would bring about, it is easy to predict that my *Vita Civile* will be coldly received.<sup>132</sup>

He was a good prophet. Like many other attempts to restore the language of politics as civil philosophy, his effort was in vain. Civil philosophy never regained the intellectual hegemony that it enjoyed before the “revolution” that brought reason of state to power. Since then it has been surviving only as a language of nostalgia or utopia, words that served to remember republics that had been, or to dream about republics to come. This is another story, the story of the attempts to go from reason of state to somewhere, to rebuild a language of politics that may help to overcome the sense of powerlessness that the ideological triumph of reason of state spread over modern times.

As the European political writers of the time agreed, “reason of state” was a distinct Italian product. The story ends where it began: the same country where the language of politics as civil philosophy was born, nourished also the growth of its mortal enemy and grave-digger. Another irony of history. It would be amusing to try to guess where a renaissance of a language of politics as civil philosophy might take place, if it will take place at all. Rather than prophesying, however, we can do better by trying to reconstruct a civil philosophy, as I shall try to do in the Epilogue.

<sup>132</sup> Paolo Mattia Doria, *La Vita Civile*, pp. 19–20.

## EPILOGUE

### *Politics as civil philosophy*

Stories often have morals. They may suggest what we are and what we could be. When they do, they help us not only to understand our past but also to construct our future. Morals are beliefs. No story has a single moral, just as no description or explanation of reality compels but one evaluation of it. The same story may well have different morals. The story I have told about politics conceived of as art of the city may strike some as a pathetic misunderstanding of politics, others as an ideological veil for domination and discrimination, and still others as the best idea of politics that modernity has ever forged. To draw a moral from my story of the transition from civil philosophy to reason of state would thus be misconceived. I shall, however, suggest how that story may help us to construct a language of politics that serves our beliefs and commitments better than that in which we now describe it. As I shall argue, current languages of politics leave out important dimensions of actual and possible political action. They do not help us to understand political life, nor do they permit us to prefigure possible political practices worth committing ourselves to.

The flourishing of scholarly investigations of politics and political action in recent years has brought with it no agreement about their meaning. No generally accepted view of politics exists.<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless,

<sup>1</sup> Our epoch, Rüdiger Bubner wrote, has perhaps taken politics more seriously than any other, and yet we scarcely know what politics means. ("wahrscheinlich noch keine Epoche gegeben [hat], die Politik so universal wichtig nahm, und so wenig wusste, was sie damit meint," "Das moderne Dilemma politischer Theorie," in H. Braun and A. Hahn (eds.), *Kultur im Zeitalter der Sozialwissenschaften*, Berlin, 1984, p. 145. See also W. Hennis, *Politik und praktische Philosophie. Schriften zur politischen Theorie*, Stuttgart, 1977, pp. 176-197; G. Konrad, *Antipolitik. Mitteleuropäische Meditationen*, Frankfurt, 1985 and, more recently, H. Mandt, "Antipolitik," *Zeitschrift für Politik*, 34 (1987), pp. 383-395. Dolf Sternberger, in his *Drei Wurzeln der Politik*, Frankfurt, 1978, has distinguished three types of politics: the political, the demonological and the eschatological, championed by Aristotle, Machiavelli, and Augustine respectively. For an excellent review of recent debates on the meaning of politics see Pier Paolo Portinaro, "Antipolitica o fine della politica," *Teoria Politica*, 4 (1988), pp. 121-137.

contemporary theories of politics may be fairly divided, for the purpose of my argument, into two families, the realist and the critical. The former describe or define actual political processes, the latter investigate what a true or just politics should be. Theories of the first family clearly dominate in our time. Elaborating on Weber's famous passage at the outset of *Politik als Beruf*, many scholars have been assuring us that politics is simply a struggle for power among states and among groups within the state.<sup>2</sup> The wording changes, but the substance remains the same: political action deals with power, or control, to be achieved and sustained through the machinery of government.<sup>3</sup>

However simple and persuasive, this definition of politics as the pursuit of power is astonishingly similar to that of the art of the state. The pursuit of power is the modern version of the pursuit of the *stato*, a position of preeminence with the capacity for imposing one's own will upon others or upon other communities. That modern scholars speak of groups instead of leaders changes little. The ruler may have been Cosimo or Lorenzo, but the state was the state of the Medici and their friends. It is indeed disturbing to see the word "politics" applied to practices that should be regarded as the corruption of politics. The tyrant seeks power just as citizens running for office do. But are they doing "politics" in the same way? Are they seeking the same sort of power?

To speak of politics as allocation is another, no less conventional, way of regarding it. In this view, politics is the "authoritative allocation of values," material or spiritual, for the society. Like the theory that politics is pursuit of power, this one jibes with the accepted beliefs of our times. Few would deny that politics for the most part concerns the setting of policies, that is, allocating values. Nor would they deny that this view has a general descriptive validity: any society has its own ways for authoritatively resolving conflicts, "for deciding who is to get what there is of a desirable thing." The main proponent of this view has said that the starting point of his inquiry was the "commonsense idea of politics."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> M. Weber, *Politik als Beruf*, in Johannes Winckelmann (ed.), *Gesammelte Politische Schriften*, Tübingen, 1958, p. 494.

<sup>3</sup> See for instance G. Catlin, *The Science and the Methods of Politics*, New York 1927; H. J. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations*, New York, 1948; P. H. Odegard and E. A. Holmes, *American Politics*, New York, 1947; Charles E. Lindblom, *Politics and Market*, New York, 1977.

<sup>4</sup> D. Easton, *The Political System. An Inquiry into the State of Political Science*, New York, 1953, p. 128.

This conception of politics is troublesome also. It, too, seems to derive from the art of the state. As all the theorists of the state agreed, the calculated distribution of material and symbolic goods to friends and supporters through laws and decrees (that is to say, authoritatively) is the basic skill required for the preservation of the state. Again, I find it odd to hear the word "politics" applied to such practices. Although the notion of politics as allocation does not in itself justify allocating values to serve the regime's (or the predominant group's) interest, neither does it exclude it as a proper political allocation. In contrast, I would hold that only those authoritative allocations of values that are congruent with preserving the city deserve to be regarded as truly *political* allocations. Moreover, to conform to the ideal of the city, they must satisfy appropriate criteria of justice. A ruler's decision to prefer his partisans as civil servants over those best qualified is certainly authoritative, but it is not political. It would surprise none of us to hear a candidate say "I am a politician and therefore I take care of my friends and supporters." I would respond, however, that a truly political man promotes those most entitled, and takes care of all the citizens.

The conception of politics as pursuit of power or as allocation puts us in a position like that of beginners in a new language, who have few words to express different things. We know that there must be a way of speaking that better conveys what we want to say, but we lack the right words. So, we resort to periphrasis, opposing terms like "the politics of justice" or "the politics of liberty" to "power politics" or "interest politics." Such terms help us make important distinctions, but they are artificial and strained. Dissatisfaction remains. We have to speak either with too few or too many words.

Although these theories may seem to account for a large set of practices revolving around the state, in interpreting some important political events they are much less helpful. The citizens of East Berlin and Prague, who are trying to transform their states into free republics, are not merely pursuing power. Neither do they seem particularly concerned with different allocations of values. They are engaged, rather, in reshaping their political institutions in order to live as citizens, not as subjects. They want a different status – to be recognized in a different way. They are trying to attain new political values, not to redistribute the preexisting ones. They are involved in architectural politics, since they are building a new city in which they can all live in a different way. Seen from the perspective of the



predominant theories, however, their efforts are only vaguely and incompletely political, or not political at all.

The “realist” theories of politics do not help us to understand actual or possible political practices that are concerned with a particular way of using power and the implementation of particular values, namely, the use of power and the values appropriate for life in a city. If the ideal of the city is still important for us, we cannot afford to abandon the language of civil philosophy. Politics is the only tool available to us to make cities of our communities, instead of congregations of foreigners or dominions of the powerful and the arrogant. But it has to be the politics of civil philosophy, not that of *raison d'état*.

That an impersonal structure of domination called the state is the core of politics is an idea so deeply embedded in our ways of thinking that any other conception of it appears counter-intuitive and implausible. Even scholars who have deliberately tried to define “the political” and “the state” independently have fallen into insidious linguistic traps. Carl Schmitt claims that the concept of the state presupposes the concept of the “political” and that the “political” therefore possesses its own theoretical foundation. In his view what makes the political sphere autonomous is the distinction between friend and enemy – friend and enemy in the public, not the personal, sense, as in the case in wars, both foreign and civil. As Schmitt himself explains, however, only the state, the public person, can make the supreme decision as to who is friend and who enemy. When the state loses the power of making this fundamental decision, it ceases to be a political entity.<sup>5</sup> Rather than being logically prior to the state, the distinction between friend and enemy actually presupposes it.

For Schmitt, a world without friends and enemies (and therefore the possibility of war) would be a world without politics. Of course it would be – tautologically – if we take “politics” to mean the art of preserving the state against internal and external enemies. I think that there would still be a lot of politics even in a world without war or the possibility of war. We would be very busy preserving justice inside the state. Concord and peace are the foundations of true political life, as Machiavelli himself acknowledged. They represent the triumph, not the end, of politics.

<sup>5</sup> Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, G. Schwab (ed.), New Brunswick, 1988, pp. 46–49.

Schmitt's position is the logical conclusion of assimilating politics to the state. As civil philosophers well knew, all states originated in conquest and remained at war with other states and with a part of the people. The art of preserving entities of this kind would therefore necessarily disappear with the disappearance of the possibility of war.

The ideological victory of the theorists of the state at the end of the sixteenth century was almost crushing. Nonetheless, even in our own times some thinkers have tried to recover the ideal of politics as the art of the city. One, of course, is Hannah Arendt. In a culture that denies the intrinsic value of politics and which has lost its practices, her work represents the most important recent attempt to recover the classical notion of politics as the highest form of life.<sup>6</sup> Though with varying clarity at different points in her intellectual life, Arendt took the Greek *polis* – a community of the citizens directly participating in public life as diverse equals – as her model of political life. She was not prepared to call “political” most of the activities that are normally regarded as such. For her, genuine political action is “conversation” between free equals, conversation that fosters deliberation on matters of public importance; political speech should either preserve or institute conditions that make political conversation possible; and the task of politics is the creation and preservation of rules, procedures and institutions that establish the *polis* or keep it alive. One is tempted to say that, for Arendt, to act politically is to act for the *polis*. She would probably refuse a periphrasis of her position, however, that conveys the idea that political action is instrumental. To create a constitution, the quintessence of political action, is to create a framework for future political action which may in turn modify this framework. The excellence of political action consists in the action itself, not its usefulness in reaching a goal external to it.

For Hannah Arendt, only in political action, in direct participation in political conversation, can we attain freedom, escaping from necessity, from the rigidity of social roles, from the repetitiousness of economic and domestic life. Political action permits us the chance to reveal our true selves and at the same time to assume new identities, escaping those that circumstances have imposed upon us. It allows us to be born a second time, a chance that nothing else on earth or heaven could possibly give us.

<sup>6</sup> See George Kateb, *Hannah Arendt: Politics, Conscience, Evil*, Oxford, 1983.

From the perspective of civil philosophy, Hannah Arendt's words are a sweet and familiar music. Yet, I fear that by reconstructing the classical notion of politics in the way she did, she made of it something too pure to be practiced and bound to remain only an intellectual alternative to the hegemony of reason of state. Like Arendt, I think that politics is a noble and praiseworthy activity, but I also regard it as an essentially instrumental one. It is the art of preserving the *respublica*, the good city where we can live in liberty – liberty in the sense of freedom from subjection to someone else's will, rather than freedom to participate directly in government. If we reveal our true selves and realize our greatest human capacities in politics, that fact is less important than preventing the enactment of unjust laws or violation of the common good by factional interests. Liberty means to be able to live securely, attending to one's own business without fear of being offended, harmed, outraged, humiliated, or made the tool of others. We should commit ourselves to politics in order to protect our own and our fellow citizens' liberty, not for its own sake. Political life in the real world deals with passions and interests of the less noble kind. Hannah Arendt said that in political life men take off their masks and show their true selves. That unmasking can be terrifying, however, for one will see faces marked by greed, ambition, vanity, envy, and hatred. Though grudgingly, we should be prepared to put up with ugliness in our fellow citizens because we want to protect our own liberty. Were it not for that, we could stay at home with our families, reading Hannah Arendt's books, or go to the tavern, enjoying the company of friends. I think that we should be happy also just to participate in the activities of our union without being directly involved in government. We ought to take part in politics because we know that greedy citizens might otherwise succeed in passing laws that would take away our liberty.

When we live in solitude, or work in business, or stay at home with our families, we are not living an impoverished life. Neither do we feel that we are revealing our true selves when we sit on the council or in office. If I were sure that our liberty would not be damaged, I would have no hesitation in electing the private and social over the political life.

Popular participation in public life is important both for the preservation of liberty and for the education of citizens. It should therefore be encouraged in all reasonable ways. Even so, we should

not regard it as the fundamental political value.<sup>7</sup> Rather, political participation is important for protecting liberty and raising the most virtuous and best qualified citizens to positions of leadership. To entrust the rule of the republic to truly political men is more important than giving the people a say in all public decisions. What matters most is that the common good is properly maintained: it is a poor consolation to know that the citizenry has given its active consent to a decision that fosters particular interests. Through the free discussion of diverse and equal citizens, a council may well take a position that is wrong, imprudent, or dangerous to the liberty and the good order of the republic. Such an outcome would be antipolitical, since it weakens the republic.

I would agree with Hannah Arendt that absolute Christian goodness is misplaced in political life. The ideal political man or woman is one committed to the common good, the most precious good because it is the foundation of the individual's liberty and security. Hence, to be political is to be good, to love civic equality and liberty. However, the politician unprepared to leave aside the Christian virtues, even in exceptional circumstances, is almost certainly bound to come to grief and to ruin the republic. Machiavelli's warnings on the necessity of learning how not to be good must be taken seriously, even though the argument of necessity is one of the most abused. It takes little investigation to understand that almost all appeals to political necessity are specious. A tyrant who invokes necessity to justify immoral acts perpetrated to preserve his own power or factional interests has no legitimacy whatsoever. A legitimate ruler who has to perpetrate an immoral act to protect the lives and the liberty of the women and men who have entrusted upon him political authority is justifiable and even praiseworthy. By Christian standards he cannot be absolved, but the after-life of the soul is uncertain while present life of living individuals and the life and the liberty of future generations is certain. Between country (in the sense of a community of individuals living together) and soul I would always choose the country: better to risk going to hell than seeing

<sup>7</sup> The idea that republican thinkers praise political participation only because it reinforces the citizens' socialization is a legend, though a still popular one: see Don Herzog, "Some Questions for Republicans," *Political Theory* 14 (1986), p. 486; Equally inaccurate is the view that republican notion of political liberty means political participation. See for instance Charles Taylor, "Cross-purposes: the liberal-communitarian debate," in Nancy Rosenblum (ed.), *Liberalism and the Moral Life*, Cambridge, Mass. – London, 1989, p. 171.

actual human beings killed or enslaved. This, it is worth repeating, does not imply that goodness has to be expunged from political life. A true political man or woman has to be good, but he or she must also be capable of winning against immoral enemies.

Despite its relatively secondary role in modern intellectual life, the periodic emergence of politics conceived as art of the city suggests a discontent with politics conceived as statecraft, pursuit of power, or the allocation of values.

In recent years, support for recovering and revitalizing the tradition of civic republicanism has grown among intellectuals, mainly through the work of "communitarian" philosophers. Indeed, they have identified this project as the most pressing moral and political task of our times. Against the politics of "rights," communitarian critics proclaim the need for a politics of the common good, and argue the priority of the good over the right. We can justify political institutions, so the argument runs, only by reference to common purposes and ends, and we can conceive of ourselves only by reference to our particular roles in concrete communities.<sup>8</sup>

The vocabulary of the communitarians is similar to that of the civil philosophy: the common good, civic virtue, patriotism. Yet, the civil philosopher's city has little in common with the community of the communitarians. The former is grounded on justice, not on a particular concept of the good, a culture, or a tradition. In this view, the republic is, as Cicero said, a congregation of men gathered to live in justice under law, and its aim is to protect the liberty of the citizens against the insolence of the arrogant. Justice *is* the common good. To live in a just city is good because we are protected from being enslaved. Justice is the common good because it is available to all alike. The foundation of the city is the very idea of justice, or of equal right (*aequum ius*), that the communitarian philosopher considers inadequate.

In the city there is, of course, more than justice. There is, or there should be, friendship, concord and civic virtue. Citizens regard the city (or should) as something to which their parents and grandparents contributed, and which they must preserve if their daughters and sons are to live in liberty. Every city is a particular one, with its distinctive qualities and its particular story; but it is also *a city* only so long as it is grounded upon justice. A theory of the city grounded

<sup>8</sup> M. J. Sandel, "Morality and the liberal ideal," *The New Republic*, May 7, 1984.

upon justice is consistent with legitimate communitarian claims for friendship and solidarity, but a theory that starts from culture, tradition, or "substantial" conceptions of the good cannot accommodate justice and therefore is inadequate as a theory of the republic. Justice requires, precisely, standing back from our attachments, goals, and specific conceptions of the good. We can be, of course, only more or less detached: when we sit on a jury, for instance, we will leave aside completely all our personal concerns and familial, social and religious ties. When we sit in a legislative body we should strive to accommodate the interests of our constituency to the common interest of the republic. In the first case, we dismiss all our private concerns; in the second, we moderate them. If we are incapable of thinking and acting as public persons, there can be no justice and no city. In the famous words of Cicero, the city's existence and preservation require an ability to assume its point of view: "*se gerere personam civitatis*." Taken seriously, the communitarian argument is the death of the republic, not a means of revitalizing it.<sup>9</sup>

I agree wholeheartedly with the communitarian philosopher that preserving our community is an indispensable condition if we are to understand our own story, become true moral agents, and display our human capacities.<sup>10</sup> Patriotism has always been a value cherished by civil philosophers. The patriotism of the communitarians, however, is quite different. Our country has to deserve our sacrifice, if we are to serve it. It is entitled to ask for our love and devotion only if it has been just to us. If it has not, we have no obligation to it. Our country has to be defended only if it is a just republic that protects the liberty of its citizens. If it is the dominion of a tyrant or of a privileged group, or if it pursues an aggressive policy toward other countries, we have no obligation to it.

It is true that any political community needs armed forces for its security. A soldier, argues the communitarian, cannot measure the

<sup>9</sup> The incompatibility of the republic tradition and contemporary communitarians has been aptly stressed, with particular reference to liberty, by Philip Pettit, "The freedom of the city: a republican ideal," in A. Hamlin and P. Pettit (eds.), *The Good Polity*, Oxford, 1989, pp. 141-168. On the republican notion of political liberty see Q. Skinner, "Machiavelli on the maintenance of liberty," *Politics*, 18 (1983), pp. 3-15; "The idea of negative liberty: philosophical and historical perspectives," in R. Rorty, B. Schneewind and Q. Skinner (eds.), *Philosophy in History: Essays on the Historiography of Philosophy*, Cambridge 1985, pp. 187-210; "The paradoxes of political liberty," *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values* VII, 1989, S.M. McMurrin (ed.), Cambridge and Salt Lake City, 1989, pp. 225-250.

<sup>10</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, *Is Patriotism a Virtue?*, The Lindley Lecture, University of Kansas, March 26, 1984.

rightness or wrongness of his country's cause against the standards of liberal morality. Civil philosophy's obvious reply is that the justification for the armed forces is the defense of the city's liberty and that of its citizens against internal or external aggression. In joining the militia the citizen accepts the obligation of defending the liberty and the constitution of the city. He must disobey at any cost an order that contravenes the commitment to liberty. A commander who orders suppression of the liberty of the citizens, or that of another country, is an enemy of the republic, compatriot or not. Against an enemy of the republic, we have both the right and the obligation to resist.

The essential condition for preserving a free republic is justice, not a patriotic identification based on a sense of a shared fate, as the communitarian philosopher claims.<sup>11</sup> As long as the citizens feel justly treated and protected from harm or humiliation inflicted by other citizens or by the government, it is reasonable to expect their attachment to the institutions of the republic and their friendship with each other. A widespread sense of justice and love for liberty and civic equality can sustain a good republic perfectly well, without any need to appeal to a substantive idea of the good or to a common fate. Such values can be, and have been, a serious danger to republics: they may easily encourage the pursuit of too strong a unity, one that excludes some of the citizens and makes them strangers in their own city. If some citizens fail to share the sense of a common fate or diverge from prevailing views of the good, that is what one would expect to happen. The city is then no longer a city of all, and therefore no longer a republic. The remedy is worse than the disease.

Our community enables us to understand our own stories and become moral persons only insofar as it is free and respects liberty and justice. Otherwise, it makes immoral persons of us, persons who either commit injustice or are its silent accomplices. When the city is unjust, we have to be able to distance ourselves from it and recall the words of Seneca, who well knew what it meant to live in a corrupted city: "*non sum uni angulo natus, patria mea totus hic mundus est.*"

The civil philosopher is a philosopher of his own city, but he recognizes the validity of the loyalties and the attachments of women and men who live in other cities. We should seek to deal with other cities justly and peacefully. Attachment to our own country coexists with the ideal of a republic or republics. After having pondered

<sup>11</sup> See Charles Taylor, "Cross-Purposes: The Liberal-Communitarian Debate, p. 170.

Cicero and Machiavelli, as we should always do, it is advisable also to read Kant on perpetual peace.

As for the civil philosophers of the thirteenth century, peace is the main goal of government. We should be prepared to defend our city from external aggression, but hope that dialogue and prudence will save us from the horrors of war. Unlike the Italian Humanists, however, I think that no sort of domination over other peoples and other cities can be justified. For domination is never either legitimate or necessary. It is a sheer act of force, as Guicciardini urged, and the duty of the civil philosopher is simply to unmask any pretensions of justice, or necessity, invoked to justify invading and conquering other peoples and reducing them to servitude.

It may seem strange, but I find the views of the liberal philosophers who call themselves the heirs of Kant and Mill more congenial than those of the contemporary advocates of republicanism. A city based upon a political conception of justice, like that elaborated by John Rawls, is attractive and reminiscent of the ideal republic of civil philosophy. The two theories have in common the notions of equal right and equal liberty. There is a good deal to learn from the *Theory of Justice*. Its conception of justice as fairness is, in fact, substantially richer than the civil philosopher's traditional notion of justice. Through the difference principle, Rawls' theory faces the questions of social and economic inequality more directly than the republican theories did, and thus it is a much richer theory and one more relevant to the issues of our times.

A well-ordered liberal society like the one Rawls propounds is an ideal worth working for. To have any hope of realizing this ideal, however, we need a republican conception of political justice. We need a theory of justice that tells us that it is our duty to do all we can to repeal injustices not only when they touch us, but also when they affect our fellow human beings, as Cicero stressed in the *De Officiis*. The political utopia of a liberal society grounded upon justice, like any utopia of this sort, can only be *constructed* by women and men who feel committed to justice and hate discrimination and oppression, not only when they are personally affected, but also when it affects their fellow-citizens. The foundation and the preservation of a just and liberal city needs individuals who cultivate magnanimity and generosity of soul, not merely self-interested agents prepared only to work to remedy the injustices that affect themselves. The acquisition and the development of a sense of justice is as important to



transforming our societies as it is to maintaining a well-ordered society.<sup>12</sup>

If we have a liberal society already in place, we need another fundamental piece of republican political theory. We need a doctrine of political liberty that tells us that if we want to remain free we must be prepared to serve the common good to prevent the city from falling into the hands of the powerful and the arrogant. On the other hand, the famous doctrine of negative liberty that tells us that to be free means not to be obstructed in the pursuit of our chosen aims, is incomplete and imprudent. We have to be concerned with the city as a whole, if we want to enjoy our negative liberty. It is foolish simply to wait until our own individual liberty is violated and let the city be dominated by groups or gangs. This is the way to ensure our servitude, not our liberty.

Besides justice and liberty, the civil philosopher has another suggestion for his liberal friend. This concerns the style, or the language, of political theory. If civil virtue has to be encouraged, then for the civil education of the citizens real discourse is more effective than philosophical conversation. Platonic dialogues, ideal speeches, original positions appeal to reason, but individuals act out of passion more than reason. We are more likely to commit ourselves to uphold justice because we love it, or hate its opposite, rather than because we find justice rational. It is doubtful that our commitment to justice will increase or decrease because we are persuaded that, in the appropriate situation of abstract choice, we would choose the principles of justice. In the *Republic*, Thrasymachus first blushes, then leaves the dialogue, defeated by Socrates' superior arguments, but we have never been told what he did the next day. Probably he was as insolent as before, no matter how deep his *rational* awareness that he was doing wrong.

It is true that we can enter into the "original position" as many times as we wish when we need to identify principles of justice.<sup>13</sup> Still, many will never go behind the veil. They know that if they do they will choose the principles of justice. Or, once they have drawn the veil aside, they will be as unjust as they ever were. Conversely, those who are committed to justice do not need to go behind the veil to know the principles of justice or to reinforce their commitment.

<sup>12</sup> See J. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, Part III, ch. 8.

<sup>13</sup> J. Rawls, "Justice as fairness: political not metaphysical," *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 14 (1985), pp. 238–239.

Against the powerful arrogant, the primary defenses are of course just laws and just institutions, but to establish a liberal society based upon political justice, we need women and men willing to work to introduce the institutions and the laws that support political justice. Or, if the appropriate laws and institutions already are in place, we need people willing to implement them and to be vigilant against the abuses of power.

The project of a liberal society capable of keeping its promises seems to require a moral language that sustains and fosters civic virtue, and that cultivates and voices a sense of indignation against discrimination and privilege. As Michael Walzer has remarked, all that is a matter of real, not philosophical, language.<sup>14</sup> In this respect civil philosophy may be of some help. After all, an essential component of it is the art of rhetoric. Political philosophers need not become political agitators and leave classrooms to sermonize in the marketplace, but they could contribute to a just liberal society by elaborating moral language and arguments of some use in public discussions.

The cause of a just society needs a philosophy that focuses on actual cities, on human beings in their concrete historical dimension with their passions and memories. It needs historical and empirical knowledge rather than – or at least in addition to – a philosophy indulging itself with hypothetical bodiless and emotionless rational agents speaking ideal languages and communicating through numbers and diagrams. The city of angels may certainly be attractive and may even be entertaining to speculate about, but we should be concerned only with the construction of the human city, and I believe that the task is too pressing to indulge in fancies about the city of angels. We can better help to carry out the utopia of the just city by interpreting the political values already embedded in our community and by reminding our fellow citizens of its constitutive values, taking positions, denouncing, resisting.

I think we should refrain from telling stories that foster in our fellow-citizens belief in the uniqueness and superiority of our own city. We should teach them, rather, to set aside for a while their beliefs and assumptions, and to listen to what other peoples in other times have had to say. In this way, we can help to instill the habit of

<sup>14</sup> See Michael Walzer, "A critique of philosophical conversation," *The Philosophical Forum*, 21 (1989–90), pp. 182–195. See also Walzer, *Interpretation and Social Criticism*, Cambridge, Mass., 1987.

learning from different cultures. Indeed, one of the most important tasks is precisely to denounce the chauvinism of stories that glorify the uniqueness of the city and its historic destiny. We should be equally committed, of course, to denouncing the opposite exaggerations of those who see in the history and the institutions of their city nothing but corruption and degeneration. Measured assessments should be our goal, opposing them to the exaggerations of “total” critics. In presenting stories about our own or other cities, what counts is *how* we reconstruct the past and approach the texts, the tone of our exposition, and the message we draw from the story. As the civil philosophers of the past knew very well, careful interpretation of what is foreign or past educates the humanity in us by letting other generations and other cultures speak to us through the barriers of time, space and prejudice. When we try to understand the historical meaning of an ancient author’s text, we do so for ourselves, not for them.

We should be committed to the political values of the just and free city because we know that without the city our life would be impoverished. Above all, however, a civil philosopher is one who cannot stand injustice, oppression and corruption. One could easily justify rationally the political value of the republic. Rousseau would provide us with all the arguments we need. Kant would teach us the correct republican position in international relations. Our commitment can be more than merely intellectual, however – be simply based upon the love of liberty and civic equality. And this is more than we need to work for the city, to try to persuade our fellow-citizens to commit themselves to the same ideal, standing against tyrants and oppressors.

A well-ordered republic is still the best defense for the weak and the powerless.<sup>15</sup> It may still help us face most of the fundamental political issues of our times. We do not need to invent new cities. It is enough to bring within the city’s walls those who have so far been excluded, and to allow to stay permanently and with full title those who have so far been tolerated only for limited periods and with a lesser status.

The city, even the just city, cannot promise happiness for all. It can, and should, however, try to guarantee to all the basic goods required for the pursuit of happiness. If such basic goods are available only to some, the city is not a republic.

<sup>15</sup> On this point too, the convergence with liberalism is evident: see Judith Shklar, “The liberalism of fear,” in Nancy Rosenblum (ed.), *Liberalism and the Moral Life*, p. 27.

Should a company of civil philosophers come into being, they should open a dialogue with the liberal philosophers about the best way to promote and uphold a liberal society grounded in the principles of political justice. There is room and work for both philosophic schools. In democratic societies as well as in totalitarian regimes, civil philosophers would be busy fighting the sponsors of the art of the state and the insolence and corruption they engender. The art of the state is still widely practiced and preached. The use of public institutions or resources for private purposes, the imposition of group interests, and patronage and clientage are still serious threats to democratic institutions. It would be naive to believe that democratic societies cannot degenerate into *states* – in the premodern sense of that term, namely the *state* of somebody. The primary task of the civil philosopher, then, is to help democracy resemble the true republic where every citizen, rich or poor, noble or ignoble, stupid or smart, may live his or her life protected from humiliation. The civil philosopher has no new gospels to announce, but he may help us to build a better city.

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