Machiavelli and Aristotle: The anatomies of the city

Pasquale Pasquino [a,b,*]

[a] Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Paris, France
[b] New York University, United States

For John Dunn

Fragestellung

The title of this article contains the epigrammatic answer to the question posed more than 45 years ago by the great German Machiavelli scholar, Hans Baron,[1] regarding the relationship between the Florentine thinker's two major political works: 'how could the faithful secretary of the Florentine republic, the author of the *Discourses on the First Ten Books of Titus Livy*, also be the author of *The Prince*? In the history of Machiavelli's influence, this question has not yet been definitively answered.' According to Baron this situation remained the same even as late as 1988.[2] In the same work he added that: 'The closer the comparison of the two works, the more absurd seems the idea that these should be two harmonious parts of one and the same political philosophy'.[3] I believe that the answer to this conundrum may be found largely in the political theory of Aristotle and by looking at the influence it had on Machiavelli's thought.

John Pocock suggested the link between the 'republicanism' of the civic humanists and Aristotle's political philosophy in a profound yet obscure manner in 1975, in a section of his *The Machiavellian Moment* dedicated to Aristotle, author of *The Politics*.[4] Working on the same subject some years later, I have had the immense advantage of being able to take into consideration important results presented in two monographs published after Pocock's seminal book: Wilfried Nippel's *Mischverfassungstheorie und Verfassungsrealität in Antike und früher Neuzeit* and Paolo Accattino's *L'anatomia della città nella Politica di Aristotele*.[5] This essay will therefore attempt to analyse (hopefully with greater clarity) the relation between the political theories of Aristotle and Machiavelli by building on the most recent scientific research,[6] because I believe this may help to formulate a response to the problem raised by Baron.

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* Correspondence address: Centre de Théorie et Analyse du droit, Université de Paris X, Nanterre.
  E-mail address: pasquino@ehess.fr

[1] H. Baron, Machiavelli the Republican Citizen and the Author of "The Prince", *English Historical Review* vol. 76 (1961), 217–53.

[2] Baron added the second sentence to the original text in a 'significantly revised' version of the same article published in 1988. This is now chapter 15 of volume II of his book: *In Search of Florentine Civic Humanism* (Princeton, 1988), 101–51. The sentence is on page 101.

[3] H. Baron, 'Machiavelli the Republican Citizen', 288.

[4] J. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment* (Princeton, 1975 (republished 2003)), 66–77.

[5] W. Nippel, *Mischverfassungstheorie und Verfassungsrealität in Antike und früher Neuzeit* (Stuttgart, 1980); P. Accattino, *L'anatomia della città nella Politica di Aristotele* (Turin, 1986).

[6] See also A. Lintott, 'Aristotle and the mixed constitution', *Alternatives to Athens*, Eds. R. Brock, S. Hodkinson (Oxford, 2000), 152–66. Also on the subject of mixed government: C. Carsana, *La teoria della costituzione mista nell'età imperiale romana* (Como, 1990); B. Tierney, *Religion, Law and the Growth of Constitutional Thought* (1150–650) (Cambridge, 1982); B. Tierney, 'Aristotle, Aquinas, and the Ideal Constitution', *Proceedings of the Patristic, Mediaeval and Renaissance Conference* 4 (1979), 1–11; A. Blythe, *Ideal Government and the Mixed Constitution of the Middle Age* (Princeton, 1992).
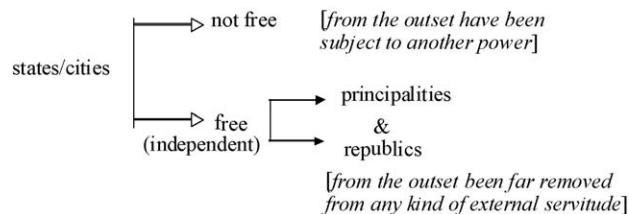
Fig. 1.

Typologies and anatomies

I wish to demonstrate that there is indeed a commonality between *The Prince* and the *Discourses*, an analytical core that I shall call *anatomy of the city*. Moreover, this *anatomy*[7] allows us to take into account the relatively original theory of the *forms of government* that Machiavelli presents without variation in *both* his works.[8]

It is therefore useful to begin by presenting the basic taxonomy of Machiavelli's political forms (Fig. 1).

In the Florentine's own language (*Discourses on the First Decade of Titus Livius*, 1.2) it is possible to refer to *independent* or *free cities* in relation to those 'at their beginning were far from all external servitude',[9] which he contrasts to 'cities that at their beginning have been subject to somebody'.[10] In this context, when talking about free cities, Machiavelli makes no distinction between republics and principalities, and in fact adds that free cities 'at once governed themselves by their own judgement, *either* as republics *or* as princedoms [my italics]'.[11] Nonetheless, it is actually this latter dichotomy that is most essential to his typology and which must be examined more closely.

It should be noted, however, that Machiavelli's use of the word *republica* is the Italian equivalent of the Latin *respublica*, used by Leonardo Bruni to convey the Greek *politeia* in his beautiful translation of Aristotle's *Politics* (as we shall see, in both senses of the term, of 'regime' in general and of 'mixed government' or 'constitution'). We know that Machiavelli could not read Greek, a fact that raises the long-running question regarding his source for Polybius' *Histories*, which had not been translated into Latin by the time he wrote the *Discourses*.[12] On the other hand, he certainly knew Aristotle's *Politics*,[13] in all probability through Bruni's Latin translation (rather than William of Moerbeke's medieval translation), which was reprinted several times in the course of Machiavelli's life, for example in Strasbourg in 1475, Rome in 1492, and Venice in 1494.[14] To shed light on Machiavelli's use of the word '*republica*' we must read carefully the beginning of Chapter 9 of *The Prince*, where he defines his terms for distinguishing between principalities and republics [=*libertà*]. Even so, at this point several preliminary observations on content and method are required, which I hope help to place this article in a wider perspective, albeit perhaps making it laborious to read.

As we have seen, in his seminal article on Machiavelli, Hans Baron rightly accentuated the difference between *The Prince* and the *Discourses*, which was certainly Machiavelli's most important political work. Unfortunately Baron did not recognise the common analytical core shared by the two works. It is precisely this common element that enables us to grasp the difference between principalities and republics!

Starting from an Aristotelian anatomy of the city, Machiavelli, as I shall attempt to demonstrate, does not conceive of the political community as an aggregate of a plurality of equal *individuals* (as we are used to thinking, at least since Thomas Hobbes). Instead, he sees it as an unstable structure built by two *groups*: the *grandi* (grandees) and the *popolo* (people) characterised by two different *humours* (or tendencies, impulses, dispositions, and natures).

Politics and threat

I believe we can say that political theory is constituted in large part by a series of thoughts on *order* and the potential *threats* against it and against the security of a community. It also appears that political theories mutate with changes in the

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[7] With this term I am referring to the doctrine of the constituent elements of the political community and, at the same time, to the conceptualisation of anything that represents a *threat* to its good order.

[8] For some interesting ideas on forms of government in Machiavelli see N. Bobbio, *La teoria delle forme di governo nella storia del pensiero politico* (Turin, 1976), ch. VI, 66–84.

[9] Citations from *The Discourses* are taken from Allan Gilbert's vol. I of Allan Gilbert's three volume *Machiavelli: The Chief Works and Others* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1989) This citation is from page 195.

[10] Machiavelli, *Discourses*, 195.

[11] Machiavelli, *Discourses*, 195.

[12] As is known, the mystery was resolved by C. Dionisotti who showed that Polybius' text on the *anacyclosis* was translated into Latin by a member of Machiavelli's social environment, Bernardo Rucellai, in his *De urbe Rome* (1504). C. Dionisotti, *Machiavellerie* (Turin, 1980), 139–40.

[13] See Vettori's letter to Machiavelli dated 15 August 1513: 'if you read the Politics *well* [!]' and N. Rubinstein, 'Le dottrine politiche nel Rinascimento', *Il Rinascimento: Interpretazioni e problemi* (Bari, 1979), 229, n. 165: '[Vettori] clearly took for granted that Machiavelli knew that work [the *Politics* by Aristotle]'.

[14] William of Moerbeke translated the Greek *politeia* with a calque: *politia*. G. Lawson in his *Politica Sacra et Civilis, 1660* (Cambridge, 1992) uses the term *politie* for mixed government, see p. 97.

understanding of the nature and origin of this threat. It might therefore be said that political theory/philosophy[15] depends on a meta-theory that attempts to explain the nature of threats to the political order. I would argue (with some simplification and exaggeration) that it is possible to distinguish between a classical or pre-Hobbesian political theory and a modern, post-Hobbesian or liberal one. The central concern of liberal political theory is that of the *limits* to place on the power of the state; this is an objective that can be realised in particular thanks to the constitutional separation of powers and a system of 'checks and balances' among state organs, and also by means of political representatives accountable to voters.

In other words, from the point of view of modern, liberal political theory, the most serious *threat* against the liberty and security of citizens derives from *excessive* power concentrated in the central organ of government: the modern sovereign state, characterised by its monopoly of military power, by its control of a professional army, by the centralisation of economic and judicial administration, and so on. This is a political institution that owes its legitimacy largely to the ability to end religious civil wars that it had demonstrated in the past. This concern – the limiting of state powers – is almost entirely absent in the tradition of classical political thought, of which Machiavelli is the last important exponent, but one with extraordinary theoretical creativity.

The central question of liberal political theory is that of *juridical* relationships between those who *govern* and those who are *governed*. In other words, the relationship between, on the one hand, the amount of power that the former are authorised to exercise,[16] and, on the other, the guarantee of the latter's rights and liberties. However, for Machiavelli, as for Aristotle, the central preoccupation was that of the relationship between two (*social*) forces, *grandi* and *popolo*. The *grandi* are not synonymous with those who govern and the *popolo* do not represent society as a whole, nor even the sum of the governed. The term *popolo* in early-16th-century Florence referred to 3000 people, in practice the members of the *arti minori*.[17] We also know (*Discourses*, 1.5) that the *grandi* have 'great longing to rule' others,[18] while the *popolo* have 'merely longing not to be ruled'.[19] In this pre-Hobbesian perspective the main *threat* to the political order of the city for Machiavelli comes from the *ambition* of the *grandi*.[20] This ambition had to be *kept in check* by the distribution of public magistracies between the two groups.[21]

Thus it seems clear that there is no space in classical political thought for any preoccupation about the limits of state powers, because neither this centralised political agency nor the individuals as such are central actors in the story.

Aristotle's taxonomy of forms of government

In Book III of *The Politics* Aristotle presents a typology of the forms of government, which has remained canonical in the West for many centuries. Two criteria allow us to define this taxonomy: (A) the number of citizens that exercise the higher magistracies (*to kyrion*), and (B) the aims of government action, whether these be in the interest of those who occupy public office or in the interest of the community as a whole; where it is clear that (B) introduces a normative element and dimension to the descriptive taxonomy (Fig. 2).

Box 3 (top right) requires further clarification. Firstly, the form of this regime carries the name common to all forms (*politeia*) and, secondly, Aristotle does not appear to believe that the many (*pletos*) can govern in the common interest (1279a39-b4). In fact, the third positive form does not occupy the space given to its counterparts, but seems to be in an intermediate position between them! However, what is more important is that he considered this classification to be unsatisfactory and ultimately incorrect as it is based, from the descriptive point of view, on the simple criterion of the number of people who govern.

In Chapter viii of Book III, following the classification of Fig. 2, Aristotle states that traditional criteria bring 'certain difficulties' (1279b11-12).[22] 'The first difficulty which arises concerns the definition just given [of democracy and oligarchy]' (1279b20-21), in reality the choice of the criteria employed in constructing the taxonomy. In this chapter (III, viii), Aristotle informs the reader that a better criterion consisted in referring to the two different groups of citizens capable of controlling the city's most important magistracies: the *demos* and the *gnorimoi* (which can accurately be translated with the Machiavellian terms *popolo* and *grandi*). Thus 'oligarchy exists where those who have property are the sovereign authority of the constitution; and conversely democracy exists where the sovereign authority is composed of the poorer classes [*aporoi*], and not of the owners of property' (1279b18-19). It is true that the poor were generally in the majority in a Greek polis, and that the rich comprised a minority, but this, in Aristotle's view, is 'an accidental attribute' (1279b36). Therefore:

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[15] I mean a theory of stable political order that is both normative and descriptive.

[16] At the beginning of his extremely famous description of the doctrine of the separation of powers in the *Federalist Papers*, James Madison wrote (in number 47): 'Having reviewed the general form of the proposed government, and the general mass of power allotted to it: I proceed to examine the particular structure of this government, and the distribution of this mass of power among its constituent parts'.

[17] See S. Battaglia, *Grande dizionario della lingua italiana*, s.v.

[18] Machiavelli, *Discourses*, 204.

[19] Machiavelli, *Discourses*, 204.

[20] 'Ambition' is an important and recurring term in Machiavelli's vocabulary. See the index in the Italian edition of the *Discourses* edited by C. Vivanti (Turin, 1983). Also R. Price, '*Ambizione* in Machiavelli's Thought', *History of Political Thought*, 3 (1982), 383–445.

[21] Machiavelli, *Discourses*, 1.3 and the constitutional doctrine outlined in the first few chapters of book 1 of the *Discourses*.

[22] The citations of Aristotle are from Ernest Barker's translation: *The Politics of Aristotle* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1948).

to kyrion magistrate	one	few	many
right the common interest	1 kingship	2 aristocracy	3 'politeia" mixed const.
wrong personal interest of the ruler	4 tyranny	5 oligarchy	democracy 6

Fig. 2. Classification of 'politeiai', Aristotle, *The Politics*, III, vi-vii

the causes originally mentioned [i.e. small and large numbers] are not in fact the real causes of the difference between oligarchies and democracies. The real ground of the difference between oligarchy and democracy is poverty and riches. It is inevitable that any constitution should be an oligarchy if the rulers under it are rulers in virtue of riches, whether they are few or many; and it is equally inevitable that a constitution under which the poor rule should be a democracy' (1279b38-1280a3).

Thus Aristotle established different and original criteria, which he used, in book IV of the *Politics*, as the basis for proposing a new typology that allows us, among other things, to understand more fully the nature of the regime that he calls *politeia, stricto sensu*, or mixed regime/constitution (*memigmene* politeia) (Fig. 3).

Here, evidently, is a different model, in which not only do the two *mere tes poleos* (parts of the city) take the place of the number of people who govern (one/few/many), but also, from a normative viewpoint, mixed (good) forms of government are contrasted with simple (bad or degenerate) forms.

In *The Politics*, IV, iii, 160–161, we read that:

The reason why there are a number of different constitutions is to be found in the fact that every state has a number of different parts [*mere tes poleos*]. [...] A constitution is an arrangement in regards to the offices of the state. By this arrangement the citizen body distributes office, either on the basis of the *power* of those who receive it, or on the basis of some sort of *equality* existing among all who receive it (i.e. the power of the rich *or* the poor [...]) There must therefore be as many constitutions as there are modes of arranging the distribution of office according to the superiorities and the differences of the parts of the state.

There is indeed a prevalent opinion that there are only two constitutions [...] so constitutions are also described as democratic or oligarchical [...] all the others will be perversions of the best.

And in IV, iv:

It is better, therefore, to say that democracy exists wherever the freeborn are sovereign, and oligarchy wherever the rich are in control. [...] The proper application of the term 'democracy' is to a constitution in which the free-born and poor control the government—being at the same time a majority' and similarly the term 'oligarchy' is properly applied to a constitution in which the rich and better-born control the government—being at the same time a minority.

Therefore we should say rather that it is a democracy whenever the free are sovereign, oligarchy when the rich are sovereign. [...] A democracy exists whenever those who are free and are not well-off, being in the majority, are in sovereign control of government, an oligarchy when control lies with the rich and better-born, these being few.

This will explain why these two classes—the rich and the poor [*euporoi/aporoi*—in Bruni's translation: *opulenti/inopes*; in Machiavelli: *grandi/popolo*] are regarded as parts of the state in a special and peculiar sense. Nor is this all. [...] they
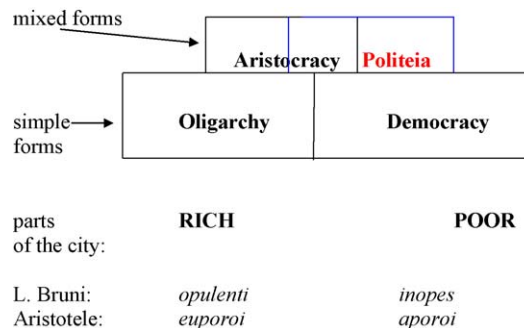
mixed forms

Aristocracy   **Politeia**

simple forms

Oligarchy   **Democracy**

parts of the city: **RICH**   **POOR**

L. Bruni: *opulenti*   *inopes*
Aristotele: *euporoi*   *aporoi*

Fig. 3.

also appear to be *opposite* parts. [. . .] It is also the reason why men think that there are only two constitutions—democracy and oligarchy.[23] [My italics].

This all helps to explain the meaning of the expression 'anatomies of the city' and also the relationship that the parts of the city have with Aristotle's original taxonomy of forms of government which, as we have seen, sets simple and bad forms in opposition to mixed and good forms. Andrew Lintott[24] is therefore perfectly right in sustaining that mixed forms 'that tend towards democracy generally take the name *politeia* while those that tend towards the oligarchic form are called *aristocracy*'.[25] One only needs to remember that starting from this classification, Aristotle, in chapters, viii, ix and xi of book IV, proposed his own theory of the best *possible* regime under the name *memigmene politeia* (mixed government), which in Bruni's translation became: '*respublica (ut simpliciter dicamus) mixtura paucorum gubernationis ac popularis*'.

In Machiavelli's *Discourses*, the 'republic' would be modelled on the mixed government of Rome as described by Polybius in book VI of the *Histories*.[26]

'Republic' and mixed constitution

The theory of mixed government (in his language, simply 'republic') that Machiavelli presents in the *Discourses* is one of the last original and innovative versions of the secular tradition of political Aristotelianism. This tradition was not an invention of Italian civic humanism, for it was very much alive as far back as the medieval rediscovery of Aristotle, 'the master of those who know' (as Dante called him), by Thomas Aquinas and his school![27]

However, after this long prologue in Greece, we must return to Chapter IX of *The Prince*:

> the people or the rich, for in every city these two opposing parties exist. [. . .] the people desire not to be bossed and oppressed by the rich; the rich desire to boss and oppress the people. As a result of these two opposed desires, one of the three effects appears in the city: princely rule or liberty [here in the sense of *republic*] or license.[28]

We find the same analytic model, which I have called *anatomy of the city*, in the *Discourses*, 1.4: 'in every republic there are two opposed factions, that of the people and that of the rich' and again in 1.5, 'dispositions, that of the populace and that of the upper class'[29]; and again in 1.5, 'in every republic there are rich men and men of the people'.[30]

In the passage of *The Prince* quoted above (ch. 9) we see *three* forms of government appearing as a result of *two* humours. How can two forces produce three effects? First of all, if we reflect on this, we realise that the three effects are in fact two, because the third does not really constitute a political form. *Licenza* in fact means *anarchy* or disorder, in other words everything that political theory and practice has to ward off,[31] as politics is the theory of the *possible* (and in some versions *just*) order of the social body. So from the political perspective and the perspective of social order the three effects are seen to be positive in two cases and negative in the third. But we must now ask ourselves: what exactly are these effects? Speaking about forms of government, as I have done up to now, is not only vague, but also to some extent misleading owing to the ambiguity of the word *government*. Let us say for the moment that these effects are two possible and relatively stable forms of human social life (or constitutions, in the Schmittian sense of *absolute Verfassung*, germane to the Aristotelian concept of *politeia* in the broad sense of the term: political regime).

We know that Machiavelli wrote at the beginning of *The Prince*, chapter 1: 'All the states, all the dominions that have had or now have authority over men have been and now are either republics or princedoms'.[32] Let us assume for the moment the equivalence of the terms *liberty* and *republic*, which seems beyond doubt in Machiavelli's language. The mere existence of two social forces (*grandi* and *popolo*, the functional equivalent of rich and poor in Aristotle's *Politics*) with their humours and

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[23] Pierre Pellegrin, in a footnote of his very good translation (Aristote, *Les Politiques*, Paris, 1990, 292, fn. 10) writes: "*Contraires* [*enantia*] signifie certainement ici *antagonistes*, mais ce terme doit aussi sans doute aussi être entendu comme signifiant la 'différence spécifique': riches et pauvres diffèrent spécifiquement dans le genre des citoyens, c'est-à-dire sont des 'espèces' de ce genre, du fait que ces 'espèces' ont des déterminations contraires".

[24] See Lintott, 'Aristotle and the Mixed Constitution', 159.

[25] See also M.H. Hansen on the Aristotelian classification of the forms of government: 'Aristotle's Alternative to the Sixfold Model of Constitutions', *Aristote et Athènes*, ed. M. Piérart (Paris, 1992), 91–101.

[26] On Polybius, from the point of view that interests us here, beyond the classic research carried out by F.W. Walbank and the volume by Nippel cited at the beginning of this article, there are the essays by Sasso in *Machiavelli e gli antichi* (see fn. 31, below) and D. Musti, 'Polibio', in *Storia delle idee politiche, economiche e sociali*, ed. L. Firpo (Turin, 1982), vol. I, 609–43. While Polybius presents a tripartite version from the institutional perspective of mixed government in order to adapt it to the division of power in Rome between the Consuls, Senate and people, Aristotle proposes, in Chapter 11 of book IV of the *Politics*, a sociologically tripartite version of his form of mixed government under the name *mese politeia*, which finds its echo in Machiavelli's *Discursus Florentinarum Rerum*, in which the dichotomy between great/people takes the tripartite form of 'big, middle and small' [*grandi, mezzani e piccoli*]. See for more details Appendix A at the end of the text.

[27] See the previously cited studies by Tierney and Blythe.

[28] Citations of *The Prince* also come from A. Gilbert's translation in *Machiavelli: The Chief Works and Others*. This passage is from p. 39.

[29] The original Italian (Machiavelli, *Discorsi*, ed. Vivanti, 30) reads as follows: "e' sono in ogni republica due umori diversi, quello del popolo e quello de'grandi". The English is from page 203.

[30] The Italian: "e perché in ogni republica sono uomini grandi e popolari", Vivanti, 32. The English is from p. 204.

[31] See: G. Sasso, 'Principato civile', in *Machiavelli e gli antichi*, vol. 2 (Milan, 1988), 367: 'Licence does not coincide, in fact only with the corrupt 'principality'; it also coincides, and certainly no less, with the corrupt 'liberty' of the republics'. Also, A.J. Parel, *The Machiavellian Cosmos* (New Haven, 1992), 140 onwards.

[32] Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 11.

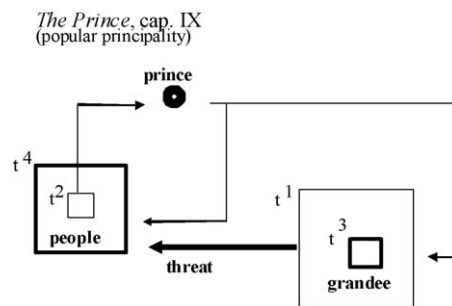Fig. 4.

appetites is only *one* element that determines the nature and form of the city's political order.[33] We require supplementary information in order to define the political state of a community and to understand why the coexistence of *grandi* and *popolo* can produce one of the three possible effects mentioned above: the principality, the republic or anarchy!

The answer to this question leads us inevitably to another concept of Machiavelli's political language, that of *corruption*. The hypothesis I wish to suggest is that the three effects are a function of three different degrees of corruption, which must be understood as grades of *socio-political inequality* between the two constitutive groups of any city (as well as function of the nature of their reciprocal relations). In order to understand this hypothesis we must recognise that in Machiavelli's political language equality and inequality are in the main sociological and psychosocial concepts, not juridical ones. In other words they have very little to do with equal rights of citizens, but instead refer to different possible relations between the *grandi* and the *popolo*. The (civil)[34] principality seems to be the only relatively stable political form when the inequality between *grandi* and *popolo* is so strong as to prevent the constitution of a stable equilibrium between them (the 'republic' or mixed government) (Figs. 4 and 5).[35]

Inequality is often connected with the reciprocal psychological behaviour of the two parties, see *The History of Florence*, 3, 1:

"Because the Roman people's desire was more reasonable, their injuries to the nobles were more endurable, so that the nobility yielded easily and without coming to arms; hence, after some debates, they agreed in making a law with which the people would be satisfied and by which the nobles would remain in their public offices. On the other hand, the Florentine people's desire was harmful and unjust, so that the nobility with greater forces prepared to defend themselves, and therefore the result was blood and exile of citizens, and the laws then made were planned not for the common profit but altogether in favor of the conqueror" (Fig. 6).[36]

There follow a number of quotations that fit with the proposed interpretation (see Figs. 5 and 6):

Discourses, 1.55: 'The would be founder, then, will establish a *republic* where there is, or has been brought about, *great equality*; on the other hand, he will organize a *princedom* where there is *great inequality*. Otherwise he will produce a state out of proportion and not durable.'[37]

Discourses, 1.55: 'To explain what this name of gentleman means, I say that they are called gentlemen who without working live in luxury on the returns from their landed possessions, without paying any attention either to agriculture or to any other occupation necessary for making a living. Such men are dangerous in every republic and in every country, but still more dangerous are they who, besides the aforesaid fortunes, command castles and have subjects

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[33] The difference between the two dichotomies rich/poor and great/people are important and merit close analysis in another context. There is, in particular, a movement away from the socio-economic perspective (and from the military, which is connected to these) towards a medical and political/sociological perspective. See, for example, Parel, *The Machiavellian Cosmos*. It is nevertheless important to underline the common binary characteristics of the anatomy of the city, the similar conceptualisation of the threat, and the common political response: mixed constitution. In the introduction to his translation of Aristotle's *Politics* (page 74, n.80) Pierre Pellegrin makes an important observation: 'La stabilité des cités est largement fondée sur leurs capacités autorégulatrices qui sont la preuve de leur bonne santé, qu'Aristote compare à la bonne santé physique qui fait que l'organisme est capable de supporter une détérioration (relative) de ses conditions d'existence: cf. VI.6.4, 1320b33sqq' ['The stability of cities is founded principally on their abilities to regulate themselves, which are proof of their good health. Aristotle compares this to physical good health which is such that it allows the organism to support a (relative) deterioration of its conditions of existence'].

[34] On this particularly significant form of the principality, see, G. Sasso, 'Principato civile e tirannide (1982–83)', *Machiavelli e gli antichi e altri saggi* (Milan-Naples, 1988), vol. 2, 351–490.

[35] Machiavelli, *The Prince*, ch 9, 39: 'Princely rule is produced either by the people or by the rich, according as one or the other of these parties has a motive for it. When the rich see that they cannot resist the people, they give their support to one of themselves and make him price so that, under his shadow, they can satisfy their desires.' The Fig. 4 schematizes, instead, the origin of the 'popular principality': in t1 the grandees are very powerful and they threaten the people (t2), then the latter gives its support to a man making him *prince* in order to reduce the power of the grandees (t3) and make its position better off (t4) [the squares represent the respective power of the two parts of the city and the arrows the actions inducing effects on the structure of the political regime.

[36] N. Machiavelli, *Istorie fiorentine*. This translation is by Gilbert in vol. 3 of *Machiavelli. The chief works and others*, 1140. See also: Parel, *The Machiavellian Cosmos*, 140 onwards.

[37] Machiavelli, *Discourses*, 310. This chapter is perhaps the most important in the whole work. L.J. Walker, *The Discourses of Niccolò Machiavelli* (New Haven, 1991), v. II, 86–7, shows the link between Machiavellian concepts and those of Aristotle. See also page 273 onwards on the Stagirite influence on Machiavelli.

Degree of inequality	Political forms
1-5	**libertà** / republic/mixed government/ [vivere libero]
6-8	**principato** / [vivere civile]
9-10	**licenza** / a narchy /disorder

Fig. 5.
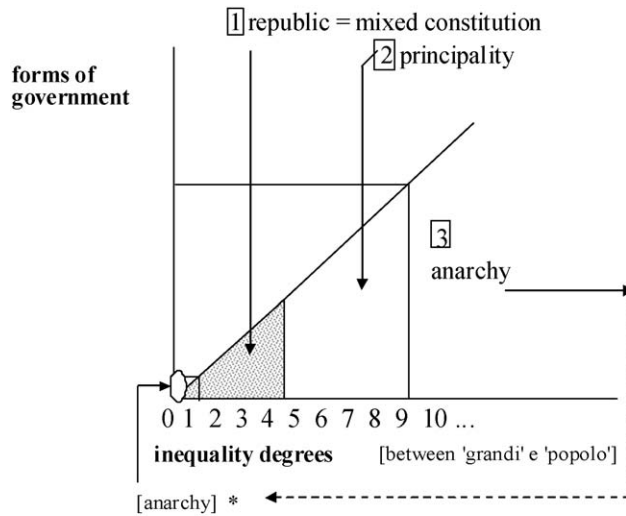
*Here it is impossible to distinguish between *grandi* and *popolo*. From extreme inequality, on the other hand, comes the chaos of civil war.

Fig. 6.

who obey them. These two kinds of men crowd the Kingdom of Naples, the City of Rome, and Lombardy. [...] *To introduce a republic into those regions would be impossible* [...] So from this discussion I draw these conclusions. He who attempts to set up a republic in a place where there are many gentlemen cannot do so unless he first wipes them out. Where there is great *equality*, he who wishes to set up a kingdom or a principality cannot do so...'[38]

Discourses, 1.17: 'Such *corruption* and slight aptitude for free life spring from *inequality* in a city'. [My italics][39]

Discourses, 1.18: 'From all the things explained above comes the difficulty or impossibility of maintaining a government in a corrupt city or of setting up a new government there. Indeed when in such a city one is to be set up or maintained, necessity demands that it be inclined more toward kingly rule [=principality] than toward popular rule [=republic]...'[40]

Discursus florentinarum rerum: 'Your Holiness needs to understand that in all cities where the citizens are accustomed to *equality*, a *princedom* cannot be set up except with the utmost difficulty, and in those cities where the citizens are accustomed to *inequality*, a *republic* cannot be set up except with the utmost difficulty.'[41] [My italics]

[38] Machiavelli, *Discourses*, 308–9. On the impossibility of creating a republican order where there are *gentiluomini* one should consider the title of chapter 55: 'Public affairs are easily managed in a city where the populace is not corrupt. Where there is equality a princedom cannot be established; where there is none, a republic cannot be established.'
[39] Machiavelli, *Discourses*, 240.
[40] Machiavelli, *Discourses*, 243.
[41] N. Machiavelli, *Discursus florentinarum rerum*. The English translation cited here is by Allen Gilbert in '*Remodelling Florentine Government', in Machiavelli: The Chief Works and Others*, vol. 1, 106.

Republic and liberty

It is impossible for this article to analyse the details of the constitutional structure of the *mixed republic* (*Discursus Florentinarum Rerum* makes for useful reading in this regard). I will limit myself to some observations on the meanings of the term 'liberty' within the political community, that is to say *liberty* as distinct from the simple independence of a political community. To begin with, it is worth repeating that Machiavelli's city is composed not of individuals as such, but of social groups (*grandi* and *popolo*)[42] and speculating on the significance that the phrase '*to be a free man*' might have held for the Florentine secretary might ultimately be a futile exercise.[43]

Secondly, when Machiavelli speaks of 'liberty' in *Discourses*, 1.16 (perhaps the most important passage regarding this term) he underlines, building on his binary anatomy of society, that only 'a small part of them [the population] wishes to be free in order to rule; but all the others, who are countless wish freedom in order to live in security.'[44] It is clear that the term 'liberty' refers to an *instrument* used to help achieve two different *ends*, or to satisfy two different *humours*/desires: *dominating* and *not being dominated*, as Machiavelli puts it in *Discourses*, 1.5.

Furthermore, it must be observed that the frustration of both these desires is the real cause and origin of *corruption*[45] (which we have called inequality), of disruptive social conflicts and in the final analysis the disintegration of the body politic (anarchy). From this it follows that a free government is one which is capable of satisfying both these *humours*, guaranteeing the realisation of a certain (moderate) number of the objectives of the two forms of liberty, namely security for the *popolo* and honour for the *grandi*. This is the reason why the satisfaction of these two liberties produces order and stability for the body politic.[46] A city is free from corruption if it is capable of satisfying, at least in part, the humours and appetites of its two constituent elements.

Here, just as in chapter 9 of *The Prince*, liberty appears in the form of the institutional/constitutional structure that realises the maximum possible satisfaction of these two humours, maintaining the balance of the political order. Marcia Colish cites *Istorie fiorentine*: 4.1, a very interesting text that confirms this interpretation:

> Vero è che quando pure avviene (che avviene rade volte) che, per buona fortuna della città, surga in quella un savio, buono e potente cittadino, da il quale si ordinino leggi per le quali questi umori de' nobili e de' popolani si quietino, o in modo si ristringhino che male operare non possino, allora è che quella città si può chiamare libera, e quello stato si può stabile e fermo giudicare.

> ["I allow that when it comes about (and it seldom does come about) that by a city's good fortune a wise, good and powerful citizen gains power, who establishes laws that repress strife between the nobles and the people or so restrain these parties that they cannot do evil, at such a time a city can be called free and her government can be considered firm and solid."][47]

To conclude and summarise the argument put forward so briefly in this essay, I believe one can contend that *republica* (the political form or regime that Machiavelli also calls *liberty*) and *principato* are the politico-institutional responses to two different degrees of inequality and the propensity for the *grandi* and *popolo* – the two essential parts (in the Aristotelean sense) of any city or political community – to descend into conflict. This dualistic *meriology* (doctrine of the parts of the city), of perfectly clear Aristotelian origin, is the common theoretical core which makes it possible to attest, beyond the doubts expressed by Baron, that the Florentine secretary is the author of both *The Prince* and the *Discourses*. Moreover, I hope that I have at least suggested the hypothesis that Machiavelli's version of this doctrine is highly original, despite its Aristotelian origin, since he went beyond a static taxonomy of the forms of government and constructed a dynamic theory which takes into account the constraints imposed on what we call, somewhat anachronistically, 'constitutional engineering'—the establishment of the *ordini*. If so, I will have shown that, irrespective of his preferences for the republican order, Machiavelli was able, as a political scientist, to understand the limits and constraints upon political possibilities. All of which would probably have led him to say, in a historical context entirely different from his own: *One cannot order a republic…* in Afghanistan!

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[42] See Parel, *The Machiavellian Cosmos*, page 102.

[43] See Q. Skinner, 'The idea of negative liberty', *Philosophy in History*, ed. R. Rorty, J.B. Schneewind, Q. Skinner (Cambridge, 1984), page 204.

[44] Machiavelli, *Discourses*, 237.

[45] *Corruption*, like *virtue* – his *antonym* – are qualities of the social body, not simply of individuals.

[46] *Discourses*, 1.7 is essential for an understanding of this aspect of the Florentine's thought: 'Therefore nothing makes a republic so firm and solid as to give her such an organization that the laws provide a way for the discharge of the partizan hatreds that agitate her', 211.

See also, 1.3: '[the nobles] began to spit out against the people the poison they had kept in their breasts, and injured them in every way that they could.', 201.

1.4: 'every city ought to have methods with which the people can express their ambition', 203.;7: 'The other effect is that it provides an outlet for the discharge of those partizan hatreds that develop in cities in various ways against various citizens. When these hatreds do not have an outlet for discharging themselves lawfully, they take unlawful ways that make the whole republic fail.', 211.

1.7: 'it is useful and necessary for republics with their laws to provide an outlet by which the masses can discharge the anger they have formed against a single citizen.', 212.

1.7: 'method by which, without unlawful measures, the malignant humours that spring up in men can find vent', 214.

[47] M. Colish, 'The idea of liberty in Machiavelli', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, XXXII (1971), 323–50 (337). The English translation can be found in Gilbert, *Machiavelli: The Chief Works and Others*, vol. III, 1187.

Appendix A. The doctrine of mixed government between Aristotle and Machiavelli

A significant difference between the two models of mixed constitution we have been considering in this article, the Aristotelian and the Machiavellian ones, is that the first gave no room to the monarchical form, but instead merely mixed up democratic and oligarchical elements. As Machiavelli prized the Roman version, he had to use Polybius' account of mixed government.

Polybius plays a crucial role in the genealogy of the mixed government since he invented the 'Roman constitution'. Arnaldo Momigliano was right when he wrote: "Polybius arrived twice in Italy [. . .he] had some difficulty in establishing his credentials when he first arrived in Italy in 167 BC; it seems that after his death he left in Italy something which probably did not exist before: a theory of the Roman Constitution".[48] More exactly we might agree with the Italian Roman legal historian, Francesco De Martino, that the Greek *libertus* "took the Aristotelian classification of mixed government[49] and transposed it to Scipios' Rome". It is even possible that De Martino, is right in claiming that "The fortune of that construction was extraordinary, even superior to its intrinsic value."[50] My purpose here cannot be to ask how far Polybius' description of the Roman constitution is faithful to the historical reality of the Roman institutions,[51] but it may be interesting to note, thinking of the old Hegel, that the republic he described was on the verge of collapse. Here I shall consider briefly his doctrine of mixed government, which had apparently such an influence on the neo-Roman Machiavelli.

A.1. Polybius' taxonomy
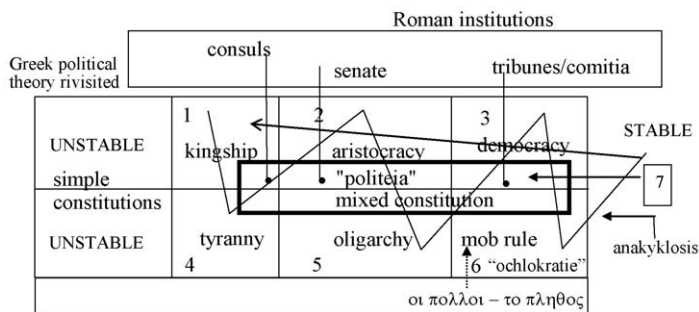
Wilfried Nippel and Domenico Musti[52] pointed out some important aspects of Polybius' doctrine, which I will sum up.

From Musti's analysis, it appears that Polybius tried to give an account of the Roman republic with its institutional tripartition of consuls, senate and popular magistracies (tribunes and comitia) using Greek political categories like that of the mixed constitution. This is why the triadic structure superimposed on the dualist model of an Aristotelian type has the consequence of obscuring it. That did not happen in Machiavelli, who also worked with the triadic structure of the Roman constitution and with the sociological dualism of patricians and plebeians. In any event both had to introduce in their model the quasi-monarchical element represented by the Roman consuls. In any case, Musti writes: "The consuls represent more a specific 'organ' than a 'part' (*méros*) of the State, a part to be considered on the same level as the two other *mére*, the senate and the people. The latter are, on the contrary, the institutional expression of distinguishable social entities: the ruling class, on one hand, and the popular classes, on the other".[53]

Up to a certain point Polybius' constitutional theory lost its sociological dimension since it focused essentially on the institutional structure of the decision making process.[54] The problem of stability and order is not, like that of the Aristotelian theory of mixed constitution, a question of integration among the parts of the city, but it depends upon the institutional architecture that has to prevent those who govern from abusing the power which has been attributed/allocated to them. The architecture had been invented by Lycurgus for Sparta and just grew up à la Edmund Burke in Rome after the end of the monarchy.

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[48] A. Momigliano, 'Polybius' reappearance in Western Europe', *Polybe. Entretiens sur l'antiquité classique*, Tome XX (Vandoeuvres-Genève: Fondation Hart, 1974), 347.

[49] See also F.W. Walbank: 'Polybius analyzes the constitution of Rome in terms of the Greek theory of the mixed constitution', in Polybius, *The Rise of the Roman Empire* (London: Penguin, 1979), 31.

[50] 'Le idee costituzionali dell'antichità classica e la nostra costituzione', *Dalla Costituente alla Costituzione* (Rome: Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 1998), 59.

[51] On this question, besides F. De Martino, *Storia della costitituzione romana*, 6 volumes (Naples: 1958–72) see C. Nicolet, *The World of the Citizen in Republican Rome* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980).

[52] D. Musti, 'Polibio', *Storia delle idee politiche, economiche, e sociali*, ed. L. Firpo (Turin: UTET, 1982), v. I, 609–43.

[53] Ivi, 619.

[54] 'Die Verfassungstheorie hat bei Polybius ihre soziologische Dimension verloren. Es geht bei ihm fast nur noch um die institutionelle Gestaltung des politischen Entscheidungssystem.' Nippel, *Mischverfassungstheorie*, 145.

The stability of the system is the end effect of a checks-and-balances equilibrium which results from mixing up institutions specific to the three basic simple constitutions. Polybius describes the Roman institutions of consuls, senate and tribunes/comitia and ends his chapter with the following words:

> Whenever one of the three elements swells in importance, becomes overambitious and tends to encroach upon the others, it becomes apparent for the reasons given above that none of the three is completely independent, but that the designs of any one can be blocked or impeded by the rest, with the result that none will unduly dominate the others or treat them with contempt. Thus the whole situation remains in equilibrium since any aggressive impulse is checked, and each estate is apprehensive from the outset of censure from the others. [p. 318, Penguin edition][55]

Here some new aspects need to be considered. First, we can speak of an endogenous self-enforcing equilibrium (the element which will reappear in the Madisonian doctrine of the separation of powers). Moreover, a very important difference if we think of the Aristotelian *memigmene politeia*, active citizenry has no significant role in this model (contrary to Pocock's misunderstanding). Thirdly, checks and balances are not connected with a normative idea of differentiation of governmental functions. Finally the Roman tribunes, as elected magistrates, act on behalf of the people, one could even say as their representatives.

From all that it is quite clear that the model was moving away from the original shape and from the context of the Greek city state to adapt itself to a larger political community and to make sense not only of stability of the mixed government but also of its "grandezza", to use a Machiavellian word.[56]

It would be interesting to devote some attention to the Ciceronian version of the Polybian model. I would simply remind readers that his *De Republica* did not play any role in the neo-Roman tradition since the book was lost and reemerged from oblivion in only 1820 thanks to the Italian Angelo Maj. It is nonetheless worth noticing that Cicero gave a moral qualification to the three parts of the republican institutional system claiming that the popular *libertas* had to be supplemented by the aristocratic *consilium* and the royal *caritas* and *imperium*. As Nippel[57] has persuasively argued, the essential role of the mixed constitution was, according to Cicero, to give some satisfaction to the popular *libertas* without questioning the aristocratic control over the government.

A.2. Thomas Aquinas and the Mosaic model of the mixed constitution

Brian Tierney and James Blythe in their recent book *Ideal Government and the Mixed Constitution in the Middle Ages* deserve credit for drawing our attention to the role that the mixed constitution played long before the Italian civic republicanism in medieval political culture.[58] It is needless to say that the starting point was the translation of Aristotle that William of Moerbeke produced on the request of his friend Thomas Aquinas. I want to quote and comment briefly on a remarkable text from his *Summa Theologiae* which in a sense represents the turning point between the classical doctrine and the modern democratic republican tradition. In section [*quaestio*] 105.1 of Prima Secundae we read:

> Although there are various species of [government], as Aristotle reports… the principal ones are the kingdom, in which one rules according to virtue; and aristocracy, that is, the power of the best, in which some few rule according to virtue. Whence the best order of rulers is in some city or kingdom, in which one is placed in authority according to his virtue, who has precedence over all, and under him are some ruling according to virtue; and nevertheless such rule pertains to all, *because they can be chosen from all and they are chosen by all*. Such is the best polity, well-mixed from kingdom, insofar as one has precedence over all, and aristocracy, insofar as many rule according to their virtue, and *from democracy, that is from the power of the people, insofar as princes can be chosen from the people, and the election of princes pertains to the people*. [My italics]

The most relevant feature of this new version of the mixed constitution is that the popular element enters in the picture not through the exercise of any magistracy but by the election of those who govern. This is an extraordinary change in political theory if one thinks that elections have only been considered since Aristotle, at least, and up to the eve of the French and the American Revolution (one can think of Montesquieu and Rousseau) a typical aristocratic procedure in order to select those who govern in opposition to the democratic selection by lotteries.

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[55] It is well known that this text had a significant influence on the young James Madison; see notably the *Federalist Papers* # 47–51.

[56] Polybius' fragment called 'E prooemio libri' starts with the words: "I remarked that the best and most useful aim of my work is to explain to my readers by what means and by virtue of what political institutions almost the whole world fell under the rule of one power, that of Rome, an event which is absolutely without parallel in earlier history" (Penguin ed., 302).

[57] *Mischverfassungstheorie*, 155; see also, E. Lepore, *Il princeps ciceroniano e gli ideali politici della tarda Repubblica* (Naples: 1954).

[58] An Italian scholar, Chiara Carsana, filled the gap between Cicero and the rediscovery of Aristotle in the Middle Ages, writing a book devoted to the doctrine of mixed constitution under the Roman empire: *La teoria della costituzione mista nell'età imperiale romana* (Como, 1990).

I have called, with Tierney, Thomas' model "mosaic" since he claims that it was established by God for the Jews at the time when Moses guided his people (Blythe, *Ideal Government,* 50–52). As usual, while claiming that he was simply explaining the Holy Writ, Thomas was in fact attributing to God an Aristotelian theory and, moreover, reinterpreting it in an original way.

I have no conclusion or moral to offer here. I tried only to present a very sketchy story of different versions of the classical doctrine of the mixed government from Aristotle to Machiavelli. With the exception of Aquinas, this does not seem to have a significant role in the genealogy of what we call nowadays representative democracy.