

Machiavelli & a Sixteenth Century Republican Theory of Liberty

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ABSTRACT

In the following thesis, I argue that to contextualize Machiavelli's republican thought in his Italian humanist heritage permits us to understand how Machiavelli reaches back not only to an Italian pre-humanist inheritance of liberty as freedom from servitude, but to a Stoic conception of agency which he inherits and shapes in that concept of liberty. While my analysis of Machiavelli and his humanist heritage is in fundamental agreement with that of Quentin Skinner in *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, it develops however the implications of two theses that Paul O. Kristeller outlines in his works on Italian humanism: the eclectic nature of humanist ideas and their rhetorical focus. From this I draw a slightly different picture of the humanist heritage and its polemics with Augustine, and from these an understanding about Stoic agency and how it is inherited and shaped in Machiavelli's conception of the citizen and civic duties.

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INTRODUCTION

The intellectual histories of Professor Quentin Skinner¹ have been lauded since 1978 for having recovered the neo-Roman theory liberty in early-modern European thought.² This neo-Roman theory, which was first recovered in the Medieval diplomatic transmission and military battles for the twelfth century independence of the *Italicum Regnum*, and in the active Roman legal document the *Digest*, conceptualizes freedom as the absence of dependency, not the absence of bodily interference or self-inner interference.³ In the legal pages of the *Digest*, a person is considered free (a “*liber homo*”) if that person is not a slave (a “*servitus*”), that is, not the subject (living “*sub potestate*”) under someone else’s jurisdiction (“*voluntas*”).⁴ An unfree person is thus a slave not because that person is being interfered with but because that person is dependent and under someone else’s private interests. The historical and conceptual explication of this neo-Roman concept however did not rely solely on the recovery of this legal definition, but also on how this conception emerged in the works and literary humanist traditions transmitted by the medieval *ars*

¹ Skinner, *The Foundations* (1978); Skinner, “The Idea of Negative Liberty: Philosophical and Historical Perspectives” (1984); Skinner, “The Republican Ideal of Political Liberty” (1990); Skinner, *Liberty Before Liberalism* (1998); Skinner, “Machiavelli on *Virtù* and the Maintenance of Liberty” (2002); Skinner, “The idea of Negative Liberty: Machiavellian and Modern Perspectives” (2002). For an extensive intellectual biography and bibliography of Quentin Skinner, see Palonen, *Quentin Skinner: History, Politics, Rhetoric* (2003).

² Skinner, *The Foundations* (1978), pp.3-189; Skinner, “Machiavelli’s *Discorsi* and the Pre-Humanist Origins of Republican Ideas” (1990), pp.121-142; Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (1975); Pocock, “The Ideal of Citizenship Since Classical Times” (1995); Pocock, “Foundations and Moments” (2006), pp.37-49; Pocock, *Political Thought and History: Essays on Theory and Method* (2009); Pettit, “Before Negative and Positive Liberty” and “Liberty as Non-Domination”, in *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government* (1997), pp.17-50; 51-80; Brett, et al. (eds.), *Rethinking the Foundations of Modern Political Thought* (2006); Viroli, *The Liberty of Servants: The Case of Berlusconi* (2012).

³ Skinner, *The Foundations* (1978); Skinner, “Machiavelli’s *Discorsi* and the Pre-Humanist Origins of Republican Ideas”, in *Machiavelli and Republicanism* (1990).

⁴ Mommsen and Krueger, *Digesta*, in *Corpus iuris civilis* (1970).

dictaminis and the professional training of the *studia humanitatis* in the Italian Renaissance.⁵ For Skinner, later authors like Machiavelli inherited and shaped themes from this Italian humanist heritage.⁶ My work shall try to further explore this humanist context and Machiavelli's conception of neo-Roman liberty. I argue that this humanist context, read alongside Paul O. Kristeller's work in Italian humanism, specifically the eclecticism and the value of the rhetorical arts which he notes of this Italian humanist movement,⁷ provides us with an intellectual background to understand the kind of agency that Machiavelli inherited, shaped, and transformed in his *Discorsi*.⁸ I have found that Machiavelli inherited and shaped a humanist conception of agency understood largely in practical and pragmatic terms specific to local Italian history and cultural pre-humanist practices. This might provide us with a more exacting understanding of not only the kind of power and responsibility a leading citizen is assumed of possessing and compelled to cultivate in order to have liberty as a reward, but also and what kinds of problems was republican theory thought to be a solution.

Using this humanist inheritance as a context for Machiavelli's republicanism is a way to try to find more philosophical resources and meaning to understand what it meant to be unfree or perhaps disempowered.⁹ My contention is that the humanist heritage, although

⁵ Kristeller, "Humanism" (1988), pp.113-137; Kristeller, "Renaissance Humanist and Classical Antiquity" (1988), pp.271-309.

⁶ Skinner, *The Foundations* (1978); Skinner, "Machiavelli's *Discorsi* and the Pre-Humanist Origins of Republican Ideas" (1990).

⁷ Kristeller, "Renaissance Humanist and Classical Antiquity" (1988)

⁸ For Machiavelli's *Discorsi*, I will use the Italian Bertelli text, Machiavelli, *Il Principe [1532] e Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Tito Livio [1518]*, Volume 1, *Opere*, 1st Edition (1960), and Gilbert's English translation *Machiavelli: The Chief Works and Others* (1958).

⁹ An alternative would be the analytical approach in Pettit, *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government* (1997). He points out that another way of understanding this concept is to see it as an intermediary and syntactical possibility of Isaiah Berlin's negative and positive liberty— a third option between freedom as non-interference and freedom as self-mastery. In this third option, I am unfree not

scattered into different time periods and contexts, transmitted an eclectic and rhetoric centered intellectual inheritance, one in which an ongoing tradition of speaking about agency in republicanism was understood in practical terms grounded in local Italian history and culture. This eclecticism (the random mixture of bits and pieces of philosophy and texts that humanists used to shape social and political questions) and value of rhetorical arts (the art that philosophy and texts needed to possess for humanists to value them and training)¹⁰ give us a slightly more diffuse and practical picture of humanism and republicanism.

The connections between Medieval pre-humanism and Medieval republicanism Skinner drew in *The Foundations* are important because these connections were able to trace a complex historical Renaissance inheritance of republicanism in a Medieval context of politics and literature. I seek in this work to build on them. For instance, the polemics Skinner engaged with Hans Baron's theses about the character of the Italian Middle Ages are vital for emphasizing an ongoing Florentine tradition of humanist political thought. What characterizes the Medieval republican inheritance is not only the different types of questions and problems that have shaped the emergence of this concept of neo-Roman liberty, but also an ongoing tradition of speaking and using political theory for professional purposes. The *dictatores* had a significant role in disseminating and teaching Roman literature, and also using Ciceronian elegance and rhetoric, with which the earliest of them had defended their *de-facto* forms of liberty or independence from the Holy Roman Empire in mid-twelfth

because someone actually interferes with me or coerces my will, but because someone is dominating my choices and life. See pp.21-22, and see also Berlin, *Two Concepts of Liberty* (1958).

¹⁰ Kristeller, "Humanism" (1988), pp.113-137; Kristeller, "Renaissance Humanism and Classical Antiquity" (1988), pp.271-309; And Kristeller's other essays in "The Philosophy of Man in the Italian Renaissance" (1969), pp.261-278; "Augustine and the Early Renaissance" (1969), pp.355-372; "Humanism and Scholasticism in the Italian Renaissance" (1969), pp.553-583; *Renaissance Philosophy and the Mediaeval Tradition* (1966); *Renaissance Thought: The Classic, Scholastic, and Humanist Strains* (1961); *Studies in Renaissance Thought and Letters* (1969); and Kristeller, et al., *Renaissance Essays* (1992).

century.¹¹ What is at stake in this debate between Baron and Skinner is not only the different contexts and type of questions that later republicans continued and refurbished, but also the local and professional focus that shaped in a dominant way the application and the thinking of morality, philosophy, and republicanism in early-modern Italy that Kristeller and Skinner highlight.¹²

This point about the unique political events of the Italian Middle Ages is well established, even if it is not always noted.¹³ For Skinner, the law schools of Medieval Italy in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries along with the advice book tradition, contributed not only to important rediscoveries of classical texts including Roman literature, but also important themes in the republican tradition.¹⁴ A conception of Roman liberty that defined liberty as a freedom from dependence or servitude of one will upon the will of another was made available in these pre-humanist literary traditions. This was claimed by the leading cities of the *Italicum Regnum* in defense of their *de facto* independence against the Holy Roman Emperor. The leading citizens of these cities introduced arguments not only in favor of freely elected *commune* or *civitas* over that of monarchical hereditary government,¹⁵ but they also introduced arguments on how the city was to maintain its liberty.¹⁶ The diplomatic transmissions and military battles continued to speak of liberty as a freedom from

¹¹ Skinner, *The Foundations* (1978)

¹² I have found Daniel Waley helpful on this point. See Waley, *The Italian City-Republics* (1961).

¹³ The sole work that recognizes this aspect of Skinner's *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought* is Marco Geuna, "Skinner, pre-humanist rhetorical culture and Machiavelli" (2006).

¹⁴ Skinner, "Machiavelli's *Discorsi* and the pre-humanist origins of republican ideas" (1990), p.124

¹⁵ The pre-humanists never assigned any distinctive name to this form of self-government and independence. I will follow the convention set by Skinner's works and use the word *res publicae* or *respublica* (republic in English) for this form of self-government as it is found in Cicero's *De Officiis*, Book II, 8.29. See Skinner, "Machiavelli's *Discorsi* and the pre-humanist origins of republican ideas" (1990), pp.125, 133; and Skinner, *The Foundations* (1978), p.xxiii

¹⁶ Skinner, "Machiavelli's *Discorsi* and the pre-humanist origins of republican ideas" (1990), p.125

dependence. And the later pre-humanist literary tradition of advice books made similar claims. This was the case with the *Oculus Pastoralis*,¹⁷ the vernacular *dictamina* of Matteo de' Libri's *Arringhe* and that of Filippo Ceffi's *Dicerie*. As new problems about internal divisions and strife emerged, later pre-humanists spoke of the external freedoms from servitude and military diplomatic battles in terms of the internal freedoms from servitude and the necessity of internal peace as well; an argument which was repudiated by later fourteenth century republicans as the chief cause of loss of virtue!¹⁸ Later Medieval pre-humanists began to think about these "encroachments of tyranny" in both external and internal terms arguing the necessity of avoiding internal division and discord within the republic.¹⁹ Many republicans turned not only to Sallust's *Bellum Iugurthinum*, such as Giovanni da Viterbo's *Liber de Regimine Civitatum*, Brunetto Latini's *Li Livres Dou Tresor*, and Matteo de' Libri's *Arringhe*, for a leading authority on the subject of greatness and the avoidance of internal discord,²⁰ but they also turned to Cicero's *De Officiis*, which became a leading authority for thinking about the *concordia ordinum* and the cultivation of civic virtue as "the one and only means" for avoiding actual factions and disunity.²¹

This pre-humanist history has been useful for understanding the traditional terms that Machiavelli was satisfied with expressing his defense of republican liberty, those of factions which he shaped and rethought, and *concordia* which he critiqued.²² My point however is

¹⁷ Anonymous, *Oculus Pastoralis*, "per quietam autem tranquillitatem et pacem ipsius, excrescit ciuitas" (1990), p.26

¹⁸ Skinner, "Machiavelli's *Discorsi* and the pre-humanist origins of republican ideas" (1990), pp.127-.128

¹⁹ Skinner, "Machiavelli's *Discorsi* and the pre-humanist origins of republican ideas" (1990), pp.128-129

²⁰ Skinner, "Machiavelli's *Discorsi* and the pre-humanist origins of republican ideas" (1990), pp.128-129

²¹ Skinner, "Machiavelli's *Discorsi* and the pre-humanist origins of republican ideas" (1990), pp.128-129

²² Skinner, *The Foundations* (1978), and Skinner, "Machiavelli's *Discorsi* and the Pre-Humanist Origins of Republican Ideas" (1990)

that this view is not the whole story. Kristeller's research in Italian pre-humanism has suggested that the Medieval Italian pre-humanists and humanists were strikingly eclectic with their intellectual sources, and were selectively interested in texts that could be highly praised for their rhetorical writing, flourishes, and contribute to the defense of style and their studies. The animating idea of the Medieval and Renaissance humanist schools and the many professional humanist activities was not only the cultivation of rhetorical practices and the study of classical authors in themselves as part of the liberal arts and humanities curriculum, but also an eclectic use of sources, which we can see demonstrated in their translations and diverse use of "Platonism, Stoicism, Epicureanism, [and] scepticism."²³ The humanists were not only teachers, and professors at universities, but also lawyers, physicians, theologians, and so forth. Their activities ranged from the revival of classical Latin and Greek, the creation of the humanist cursive script, the physical recovery of lost ancient texts along with the reproduction and dissemination throughout Renaissance society a striking set of diverse prints and manuscripts.²⁴ They influenced Medieval and Renaissance thought by valuing an eclectic range of classical works, often preferring those that embodied rhetorical style, organizing at times a random mixture of ideas under local Italian social and political problems appropriate for their professional activities.

²³ Paul O. Kristeller, "Humanism" (1988), pp.114, 120-1; Marsilio Ficino for instance translated and made available in the late-15th and early-16th century Hermetic as well as Plato's works and other authors under the patronage of the Medici's. This practice was also encouraged by Pope Nicholas the V. Here, Kristeller also emphasizes that the scholarly study of Hebrew and Arabic also progressed under humanism, benefitting the study of the Old Testament, as well as Rabbinical and cabalistic literature. Some authors have noted links between Machiavelli's pessimistic view of man and the greatness of virtue with Old Testament language. See De Grazia, *Machiavelli in Hell* (1989). It seems at least in Machiavelli's case that this humanism is eclectic rather than syncretic as it may be with other religious texts. It is possible that some Italian humanism was syncretic.

²⁴ Kristeller, "Humanism" (1988), pp.114-115, 116

I believe this shows that the sources to understand this republicanism can be diverse, eclectic, and deeply influenced by the Italian tradition of rhetoric. This might suggest that humanist identity, its defense of virtue and its curriculum in the *studia humanitatis* could have something more to show us as a context to Machiavelli's republicanism. I suggest that the focus on rhetorical practices and the eclecticism the humanists applied in their writings and readings may illuminate the way humanists criticized as well as borrowed and rethought Augustinian criticism about stoicism in the formation of that identity and confidence of a view of agency.²⁵ We may be able to not only recover the way that humanists retook the Augustinian criticism of the stoic view of *virtù vince fortuna*, but also review how the focus on that agency became defined, developed, and inherited by later Renaissance works such as Machiavelli's. I believe that this humanist eclectic stoic theme was considerably important in some humanist circles and is found in Machiavelli's discussion on individuality, corruption, and the connection of these ideas about virtue and republican liberty.

The Italian humanist heritage therefore provides a background to understand Machiavelli's republicanism, because it helps us locate and interpret aspects of a humanist agency in Machiavelli's republicanism. The context of the intellectual history of republicanism Skinner proposes in *The Foundations*, suggests two such possibilities. The

²⁵ The treatment of the Stoics in the Renaissance is undoubtedly a complex and difficult question, not only because it requires a complex answer given the different periods, schools of classical Stoicism and their disappearance and rediscovery in Medieval and Renaissance intellectual history, but also because Medieval and Renaissance literature here is eclectic and difficult to access given the many linguistic barriers (e.g., Medieval Latin and Renaissance Italian, Old Medieval French). The leading expert that I am following here (intellectually and methodologically) is Skinner in *The Foundations* (1978) who uses the term "Roman Stoic." My usage of the term "Stoic" is in part historically reflective to its Renaissance eclectic uses in particular Brunetto Latini's uses in his *Tresor*, but it is also conjuring an awareness of stoicism as I see them being transformed in Medieval and Renaissance contexts because it is the kind of stoicism that given the context and Machiavelli's sense of agency seems to get revived from Augustine's criticisms. My approach certainly calls for future methodological clarifications that I hope to pursue.

first is that humanists continued to ground their political theory on local observable and historical experiences, not theory. The second is that humanists had a complicated although immanent understanding of Christianity, the supernatural, and their faith in cyclical greatness of humanity. It also suggests two additional aspects of this agency outside of Skinner's histories. The first is the eclecticism and pragmatism humanists interpreted moral philosophies and appropriated them to social and political questions in the local Italian humanist tradition and culture. The second is that humanists continued to foster a unique local Italian culture in which they grounded their moral philosophical interpretations. These included local Italian arts (or traditions) of rhetoric and government. These interpretations of the context along with a close reading of Machiavelli's discussion of agency seems to not only to define *virtù* as a pragmatic action with humanist ideals, those of seeing our own actions as valuable, an inner born responsibility for overcoming challenges, and the source of our social and moral obligations are ourselves and our will, but also an agency that Machiavelli is using, reshaping, and refurbishing; one that he not only uses to talk about *virtù*, the assumptions and responsibilities of citizens, as well as understanding a more exacting context of how republicanism is able to deal with the corruptive effects of wealth.

I shall begin my analysis in the first two chapters by examining how this value of eclecticism and rhetorical arts redefines the humanist heritage we find in Skinner's intellectual history of republicanism. In the last two chapters, I examine how from this context we can see Machiavelli not only reaching back into an Italian humanist inheritance of speaking about freedom but also reaching back to one in which he inherits and shapes this humanism and agency. I shall first demonstrate how this is relevant for understanding Machiavelli's thesis about factions as acts of *virtù* by showing that this agency possesses not

only a humanist language about human action in local Italian terms, but also shapes humanist ideas about perfectionism. I secondly examine what these aspects have to say about the power and responsibilities citizens are to cultivate and assume to possess. Here, I conclude that the way Machiavelli writes of agency in the notion of *virtù* illuminates three kinds of dimensions: the first is a social, economic, and political dimension in overcoming threats to the liberty of the city (which include the internal and external aspects we noted earlier); the second regards more specific threats such as environmental disasters or a death of a leader; and the third dimension is introspective in the sense of the social skills and the flexibility in our actions and individuality to overcome difficult circumstances.

My argument does not seek to fundamentally rethink the concept of neo-Roman liberty inasmuch as it tries to understand its inherent focus on agency. While I do not deny that this neo-Roman liberty is what Machiavelli is indeed referring, I am however exploring it not as a legal category, but a humanist one. This is useful for two reasons: first it answers what kind of power and responsibility a leading citizen is assumed of possessing and compelled to cultivate in order to have liberty as a reward, and second, the kinds of problems was republican theory thought to be a solution and why. In a humanist perspective, the concept of liberty can be seen to have this focus on agency because it situates republican action as human action in which humanist notions of individuality, willingness, and social skill become part of republican action. This is useful because as a human action, it is decidedly a human expression of reason, and subject to criticism because while it is self-sufficient, it is also imperfect (i.e., limited to internal, external and introspective political circumstances), and so should contribute to our self-consciousness about how our own human activity and philosophy (as human expression subject to reason) can deal with

external challenges. While aspects of this theory are outdated (i.e., its focus on virtue, the sole actor being the state, etc.), the argument that this republicanism is making however is something we should seriously consider and ruminare.

CHAPTER 1

The Relevance of Pre-Humanist Republicanism

In *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought* (1978), the history of republicanism is interwoven with complex histories of the Roman *Digest*, twelfth century attempts of independence in the *Italicum Regnum*, Italian humanism and various scholastic strands of Medieval legal thought.²⁶ My interest here is to focus only on the humanist contexts that have been important for the recovery that this republicanism and how it was shaped by humanist practices and traditions. In the following chapter, I argue that by adding two theses found in Paul O. Kristeller's work on Italian humanism, those of eclecticism and a pragmatic view of the rhetorical arts, a different characterization of the humanist inheritance becomes visible. This is because these two theses recover the way classical texts were disseminated in humanism, and so illuminate this humanist tradition differently by shedding light on agency. I argue in this chapter that these two theses describe the connection between humanism and republicanism differently than what has been thought to have been inherited by Machiavelli in Skinner's work by adding alongside Skinner's analysis an understanding of the more exacting humanist dimensions of this theory of liberty, these suggest, first, the humanists were foremost rhetoricians and not merely concerned with moral and philosophical texts which gave their works an eclecticism and pragmatism, and secondly, they continued to integrate their readings and studies in terms largely relevant to their local Italian culture and appropriate for professions.

The importance of the recovery of a Medieval conception of liberty has been important for understanding Machiavelli's republicanism. Two elements have been critical to the construction of this context for Machiavelli's thought: first is the recovery of the Roman conception of liberty found in the *Digest*, and the second is the different local Italian contexts

²⁶ Skinner, *The Foundations* (1978), pp.3-12

that shaped and developed that conception. The recovery of this republicanism from the works of twelfth century German historian Otto of Freising and Italian Medieval pre-humanism has been a vital context for Machiavelli's republicanism.²⁷ It is indeed the uniqueness of Italian thought that is at the heart of this polemic that Skinner engages with Hans Baron.

For Skinner, the intellectual sources and debates that contributed to the emergence of classical ideas of freedom in the Italian early-modern period were directly inherited and shaped from the twelfth to the fourteenth century in different ways, each that is in their own context forming a part in that history. Here, the pre-humanist tradition of the Medieval *ars dictaminis* provided a key intellectual catalyst (with their rhetorical studies) that would be not only inherited by later Renaissance humanists but also intentionally shaped and critiqued. For Baron, while an aspect of Renaissance republicanism can be traced to the Middle Ages, the emergence of a truly patriotic humanism only occurs at the beginning of the *quattrocento* (1400s) of the early-Italian Renaissance in the existential threats to Florence's liberty.²⁸ It is in this period, according to Baron, that the early Italian Renaissance sheds its Medieval monarchist and "supernatural justification for hierarchical government," and for the first time produces a genuinely civic humanist ideal that embodied the cultivation of the individual, taught the necessary virtues for preserving society.²⁹

²⁷ Skinner, *The Foundations* (1978), pp.3-12, and Skinner, "Machiavelli's *Discorsi* and the pre-humanist origins of republican ideas" (1990), p.141

²⁸ Baron, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance: Civic Humanism and Republican Liberty in an Age of Classicism and Tyranny* (1966), pp.28, 453

²⁹ Hankins, "The 'Baron Thesis' After Forty Years and some Recent Studies of Leonardo Bruni", *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 56, (1995), pp.329-330

The Italian Medieval pre-humanists were never overlooked in Baron's theses. The essential argument of his book *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance* (1966), is indeed that while elements of a philosophy or an ideal of classical citizenship could begin to be traced in the writers of the Medieval *trecento* (1300s), the emergence of the civic form of humanism (which he took as a synthesis of both traditional apolitical Petrarchan humanism and Guelph patriotism) occurred only in the opening decades of the *quattrocento*, specifically in the wars between Florence, Milan and Duke Giangaleazzo Visconti.³⁰ It was in this ensuing conflict that an Aristotelian-like view of the citizen formed in the intellectual and practical syntheses of what Baron called "apolitical Petrarchan humanism" (the apolitical love of ancient texts and letters) and the Guelf political traditions of patriotic resistance to Medieval imperial aggression. Conflict with the Duke Giangaleazzo Visconti invigorated an old-humanism and political civic spirit for freedom and civic participation.³¹ The military prowess and the existential threat that of the Duke created for Florence are the beginning of a uniquely modern view of the citizen.

Is it a convincing interpretation of the conflict? As the historical records show, the conflict was rather protracted and was almost half a century long. The historical records tell us that the Duke was completely victorious in armed conflict in the 1380s and took all of Lombardy within the decade, Carraresi in 1386, Verona, Vicenza and Padua in 1388, and Pisa along with Lucca in 1399. The Duke declared war on Florence on May 1390, and effectively encircled the city after having taken Siena in 1401 and Bolognese the following year.³² While Giangaleazzo died on September 1402 shortly before he could attack Florence,

³⁰ Baron, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance* (1966), p.49

³¹ Baron, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance* (1966), pp.28, 453

³² Baron, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance* (1966), p.28

the conflict was protracted with Giangaleazzo's son, the Duke Filippo Maria Visconti of Milan until much later in 1454, and only concluded when the prominent sons of the Medici Family negotiated peace between Milan and Florence, by recognizing Florentine independence.³³ It seems the conflict was rather long and protracted, and not a shock as Baron notes. This argument that the threat motivated Florentine citizens to exalt a sense of *patria* relies on an interpretation of Medieval Italy that is hesitant in light of subsequent literature.³⁴

I contend that Baron's thesis mischaracterizes the conflict and that of *quattrocento* republicanism by overlooking the crucial uniqueness of the Medieval *Italicum Regnum* that authors like Otto of Freising noted.³⁵ As the historian Otto of Freising noted in his histories, the cities of the Medieval *Italicum Regnum* had established for themselves a form of self-government with consuls in their *de facto* independence from the Holy Roman Empire. Records show that the cities of the *Italicum Regnum* had defended not only militarily but ideologically their independence with a conception of liberty that they found in the Roman *Digest*. This observation is echoed in Jerrold E. Seigel's *Rhetoric and Philosophy in Renaissance Humanism* (1968), and notes that the attitudes of the Italian Medieval cities actually betrayed the wider European values we find in Medieval Europe.³⁶ The Italian universities fostered a practical education and a culture of rhetoric in the *Ars Dictaminis* (primarily about the arts of letter writing), and public speaking, the *Ars Arengandi* (primarily

³³ Skinner, *The Foundations* (1978), p.69

³⁴ Hankins, "The 'Baron Thesis' After Forty Years and Some Recent Studies of Leonardo Bruni", in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 56 (1995), pp. 329-30

³⁵ Skinner, *The Foundations* (1978), p.69

³⁶ Seigel, *Rhetoric and Philosophy in Renaissance Humanism* (1968), pp.207-208

about the arts of oratory).³⁷ As Seigel writes, “Italy did not wait until the fifteenth century to show its separateness from the dominant forms of Medieval life;” “the unique character of Italian society was clear much earlier.”³⁸ What is really at stake here is not a narrative or a moment that is inherited in later republican thought but a series of contexts each interpreting the aspects which Machiavelli not only inherited this specific Roman conception of liberty, but also developed and shaped it in his *Discorsi*.³⁹ I believe that the centrality of the neo-Roman conception of freedom, the *Italicum Regnum*, and the subsequent development of republican themes such as factions in the humanist literary practices are at the core of this Medieval Italian uniqueness. In what follows, I wish to review the extent to which this Medieval pre-humanism is important for understanding republican thought, and then examine how we might add to the Skinnerian vision of the humanist heritage by reading Kristeller alongside it.

Each of the following contexts (the external and internal freedom from and the humanist tradition of advice books) attempt to demonstrate not only the connection between humanism and republicanism (the way that each of these discontinuous contexts developed and shaped this Roman ideal), but also some key attributes of the uniqueness (in contrast to wide Europe) of this Medieval Italian period. I wish to not only review but make the point that the legal definition of republicanism gets transformed by these humanist traditions. What I wish to show is not only how the idea gets developed in each context, but also how the idea

³⁷ Seigel, *Rhetoric and Philosophy in Renaissance Humanism* (1968), pp.207-208

³⁸ Seigel, *Rhetoric and Philosophy in Renaissance Humanism* (1968), p.201

³⁹ I disagree with William j. Connell that, as he writes, the “drastic revision of republicanism’s chronology did not touch the larger project—we might call it a “republicanist” project—concerning the continuity of republican political language through Machiavelli and beyond”; see Connell, “The Republican Idea” (2003), pp.25-26. This seems to deny too readily the specificity and the importance of the Roman moralists for this continuity and how large of a change this actually is.

gets defined by humanist practices and traditions in important ways that I shall turn to in the conclusion of this chapter.

The first instance in showing the uniqueness of Medieval Italy, in Otto of Freising's terms, begins with the twelfth century military and ideological struggles between the *Italicum Regnum* and the Holy Roman Empire.⁴⁰ This is an important context for understanding how the concept became to be applied in external terms of freedom from foreign servitude, and for recovering the role that the pre-humanist literary tradition of advice books would come to have in defending this conception as well as for recovering the pivotal role the Roman *Digest* played in this defense. The uniqueness of the Medieval *Italicum Regnum* for Otto of Freising is marked by the emergence of a "new and remarkable form of social and political organisation" in Northern Italy, one that not only ceased to be feudal and entirely at odds with hereditary monarchy, but is also desirous of liberty, that is, a new form of political organization was governed by the *wills* of *consuls* that, according to Freising, "changed every year" by the people so as to avoid the abuses of hereditary rulers.⁴¹ These *de facto* independent cities fought not only to free themselves *de iure* from the Holy Roman Emperor, but also militarily and ideologically the *de facto* liberty they had gained.⁴² The Holy Roman Emperor, Frederick Barbarossa I, was resisted by military efforts in the Lombard league with a decisive defeat in 1176, and also again with Frederick Barbarossa II by Milan in mid-thirteenth century, and once more Henry of Luxemburg with the military victories Florence in 1312. Each of these was however also accompanied by spirit of

⁴⁰ Skinner, *The Foundations* (1978), pp.3-5

⁴¹ Otto of Freising, *The Deeds of Frederick Barbarossa*, translated and annotated with an introduction by Charles Christopher Mierow with the collaboration of Richard Emery, *Gesta Friderici I Imperatoris*, (1994), pp.129-130

⁴² Skinner, *The Foundations* (1978), p.7

liberty.⁴³ These Italian communes spoke not only of *libertas* in technical diplomatic terms but also defended them in military speeches, and in their negotiations in 1177 between the cities, the Emperor, and the Pope;⁴⁴ a defense of a concept that was embodied in the most important legal documents of the period in the Roman *Digest*.⁴⁵ They spoke of their freedom under the emperor in terms of servitude, as the *Digest* contained, that “within the law of persons... all men and women are either free or are slaves,” “some... in their own power, some... subject to the powers of others, such as slaves... in the power of their masters,”⁴⁶ they too saw themselves free, but under the power of the emperor.

The second development is in thirteenth century when Italian political thought is focused on the rise of factions between the *gente nuova* (new emerging classes) and magnate families of the Italian city republics. The Roman concept of freedom from servitude is given here not only an external dimension as in the *Italicum Regnum*, but also an internal one. It becomes vital for republican institutions to be free not only from external servitude to the Emperor but also from internal dominance of the rich nobility, and so free from the primary

⁴³ Skinner, *The Foundations* (1978), p.7

⁴⁴ Skinner, *The Foundations* (1978), p.7

⁴⁵ Skinner, *The Foundations* (1978), p.7

⁴⁶ “*Summa itaque de iure personarum division haec est, quod omnes homines aut liberi sunt aut servi.*” See Mommsen and Krueger (1970), Book I, V: 35. “*Quaedam personae sui iuris sunt, quaedam alieno iuri subiectae sunt... in potestate sunt servi dominorum.*” See Mommsen and Krueger (1970), Book I, VI: 1, 36.

This Roman definition of liberty is also found in the classical Latin Roman authors, especially the political writings of Cicero, and also the histories of Sallust, Livy and a few others including Tacitus. For instance, in Cicero’s most famous political texts, the *Philippics*, we find him accusing Marc Anthony of tyranny and domination, not only enslaving the roman people but subjecting them to his arbitrary good will. He writes,

Do you call servitude peace? Our ancestors took up arms not only to be free, but also to win power. You think that our arms should now be thrown away in order that we should become slaves. But what cause of waging war can be more just than that of repudiating slavery? For the most miserable feature of this condition is that, even if the master happens not to be oppressive, he can be so should he wish.

See Cicero, *Philippics*, (1926). See also Sallust, *Bellum Catilinae* (1921), pp.11, 13, and 15; And, Livy, *History of Rome* (1926), pp.219-221, 227

danger of internal servitude caused when one faction destroys another.⁴⁷ The problem was that the new benefactors of economic prosperity, the bourgeoisie (or *popolani* or *gente nuova*), were denied participation in government.⁴⁸ The first moves by the *popolani* were to challenge the appointment of the *podestà* chosen by the rich nobles.⁴⁹ In defiance to the traditional nomination of the magnate families, the *popolani* formed their own council and established at its head a single elected leader named the *Capitano del Popolo*.⁵⁰ This is what happened in Lucca and Florence in 1250, Siena in 1262, and the Tuscan cities shortly after.⁵¹ As Skinner writes, “the more the *popolani* fought for recognition,” “the more the older nobility and their allies fought back.”⁵² To avoid the “worsening civil strife” by the end of the thirteenth century the Italian City-Republics retreated and began to appoint a *signore*— a hereditary person in the place of “chaotic liberty.”⁵³ What followed was a shift from government in *libertà* to government in *signoria*, as the *popolani* resorted to increasingly harsher retaliatory measures against the magnate families. This occurred in Ferrara in 1264, Verona in 1277 and 1301, Mantua in the 1270s, and Treviso and Pisa, Parma, and Piacenza by the end of the 1280s.⁵⁴ Some humanists resorted to the use of Augustinian argument about

⁴⁷ Skinner, *The Foundations* (1978), p.23; See also, Najemy, *Italy in the Age of the Renaissance* (2004)

⁴⁸ Skinner, *The Foundations* (1978), p.23

⁴⁹ Skinner, *The Foundations* (1978), p.23

⁵⁰ In *The Foundations*, Skinner follows A. M. Allen in speaking about the most notorious instances during this period in Verona was between two rival factions. “The earliest recorded example of party-strife at Verona occurred in the spring of 1206, when severe fighting took place between two rival factions, the party of the Montecchi and that of the Counts of S. Bonifacio.” (p.23) This mirrors Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*, who Romeo, a Montagu or similarly the Montecchi for the region of Montecchio. See Allen, *History of Verona* (1910), p.45.

⁵¹ Skinner, *The Foundations* (1978), p.23

⁵² Skinner, *The Foundations* (1978), p.24

⁵³ Skinner, *The Foundations* (1978), pp.24-5

⁵⁴ Skinner, *The Foundations* (1978), pp.24-5

the necessity of peace, yet what emerges is a new literary tradition aimed at solving this practical political issue.⁵⁵

The rise of the *signori* brought the self-conscious development of new literary genres, one that emphasised “unity and peace” rather than liberty (the government of *signoria* not *libertà*), which was the case in Milan, Padua, and Florence. But as Skinner writes, “two distinct traditions of political analysis” were subsequently taken up by the protagonists of republicanism by the late thirteenth century which not only maintained that the danger of factions might have a solution, but that the reward of liberty might require the preservation of concord.⁵⁶ The first major exponent of the tradition of unity was Ferreto de Ferreti’s *De Scaligerorum Origine* in 1328, who wrote his book having taken hold of the city of Padua, and devoted much of his second book to the problems of “turbulence” and “lawlessness” of the city prior to della Scala’s rule.⁵⁷ Here, Ferreti insisted on “peace” as opposed to “liberty” portraying “him[self] as the true liberator of Padua, freeing it from a legacy of chaos and misrule.”⁵⁸

The third development and perhaps the most important is that the pre-humanist literary modes introduced and defended, in Skinner’s words, “an influential *form* of political ideology” that had emerged in these political experiences of the Medieval Italian *comuni*.⁵⁹ This pre-humanist view of rhetoric not only introduced a Roman *literati* that was substantially politicized with the inculcation of rhetorical rules for government and church

⁵⁵ Note here that the humanists had no difficulty abstracting and rethinking from Augustine’s theology in the humanist rhetorical traditions.

⁵⁶ Skinner, *The Foundations* (1978), p.27

⁵⁷ Ferreto de Ferreti, *De Scaligerorum Origine*, in *Le Opere di Ferreto de’ Ferreti Vicentino / a cura di Carlo Cipolla*, vol.3 (Rome, 1908-1920)

⁵⁸ Skinner, *The Foundations* (1978), p.25

⁵⁹ Skinner, *The Foundations* (1978), pp.27-8

administration, but also helped strengthen a range of political genres in this Medieval period of thought. The earliest Italian pre-humanists, the *dictatores*, provided not only to Florentine lawyers and judges the rhetorical training of the *dictamen*—the letter-writing technique in inculcating the *artes* of writing documents, in Skinner’s words, with “maximum clarity and persuasive force,” but it was also through these means that they began to “self-consciously” raise and concern their training with the “legal, social and political affairs of the Italian City Republics.”⁶⁰ By the time of Mino da Colle’s *The Arts of Letter Writing* in the 1290s, and those of Giovanni de Bonandrea’s in 1302, the *dictatores* devoted their attentions to “the special needs and problems of students, teachers, merchants, judges, priests, administrative officials and all the other leading classes of citizens in the City Republics.”⁶¹ While this first led to the creation of the city chronicle, the most noteworthy was the creation of the advice-book.

The most influential of this pre-humanist genre was the anonymous *Oculus Pastoralis* in 1222, a *dictamen* in the traditional role of the rhetorical *artes*, composed primarily of sequences of model orations and letters offered and to be imitated by a *podestà* (i.e., the elected city official with *potestas* or power).⁶² These works were influential in later republicanism because they introduced questions about the proper virtues or character dispositions that were appropriate for public office.⁶³ Most of these followed the Ciceronian

⁶⁰ Skinner, *The Foundations* (1978), pp.28-9. The first recorded *dictator* of the *ars dictaminis* was Adalbert of Samaria, *The Precepts of Letter-Writing*, who wrote his text between 1111 and 1118. Adalbert was also carried on by Boncampagno da Signa in his *The Old Rhetoric* in 1215, and his *The Newest Rhetoric of All* in 1235.

⁶¹ Skinner, *The Foundations* (1978), p.30. By the mid-thirteenth century, the *ars dictaminis* expanded in the art of formal public speeches, *ars arengendi*, in Guido Faba’s *Speeches and Epistles* in 1230s, Brunetto Latini’s *Rhetoric*, and Giovanni de Bonandrea’s *Brief Introduction* by the end of the thirteenth century.

⁶² Skinner, *The Foundations* (1978), pp.32-3

⁶³ Skinner, *The Foundations* (1978), pp.32-3

themes and at times the Senecan themes on whether it is better to be loved or hated, that is whether one should act always according to just and tempered judgment and clemency, or with severity and cruelty.⁶⁴ One of its most influential answers was that a *podestà* should never be in a position of being feared, and above all avoid any excessive and cruel punishment because these were Christian vices, and as such had no place in governance.⁶⁵ In these discussions, the *dictatores* also raised a conception of virtue that seems to have been inspired by the Roman Stoic discussions on virtue. Although, while Stoic virtue is primarily about character, it seems to have been understood by these *dictatores* as a civic duty and action that they expressed through their pre-humanist rhetorical studies (practices) and Florentine historical experiences.

The point I raise here is not only that these are histories of republicanism when each inherited and developed a neo-Roman idea differently, but they are also important because they highlight the way republicanism fits into the unique political conditions and traditions of Medieval Italy. There is a fourth context that shows not only the elements of discontinuity and uniqueness of Medieval Italy, but also the connection between this unique Medieval humanism and republicanism that proves influential for understanding Machiavelli and a sixteenth century theory of liberty. These are the advice books of the *trecento* (1300s).

These *trecento* advice books make two important changes in pre-humanism that I believe have some impact on the history and inheritance of neo-Roman idea in this humanist heritage. This is that what matters in the study and imitation of the content of classical *auctores* of antiquity and their speeches, rather than only inculcating of rules of rhetoric.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Skinner, *The Foundations* (1978), pp.33-5

⁶⁵ Skinner, *The Foundations* (1978), p.34

⁶⁶ Skinner, *The Foundations* (1978), pp.35-37

They begin to study political thought aside from the rhetorical purposes out of which the use of these authors originated. According to Skinner, they “had the effect of interrupting and transforming the prevailing conventions of the *Ars Dictaminis*,” which shifted authors from not simply “masters of various stylistic tricks, but as serious literary figures worthy of study and imitation in their own right.”⁶⁷ This introduced not only a new *literati* of the Senecean tragedies in Lovato Lovati’s works, and of Sallust and Livy inspired histories of Rome by Alberto Mussato, but it also strengthened existing political genres (such as that of the *Oculus Pastoralis*, and the *Speculum*) by emphasizing the cultivation of a Roman stoic Ciceronian sense virtue.⁶⁸ Its earliest representatives were Brunetto Latini’s *Li Livres Dou Tresor*, Dino Compagni’s *Cronica delle Cose Occorrenti ne’ Tempi Suoi* and Bonvesin della Riva’s *De Magnalibus Urbis Mediolani*.⁶⁹ Brunetto Latini’s *Tresor* in particular contains thirteenth century old-French and Italian translations not only of Cicero’s works and speeches,⁷⁰ but also of passages Latini called “The Stoics,”⁷¹ which I argue he continues to speak of in terms that were largely defined by the humanist advice book practice.

Latini’s *Tresor* drew upon texts that connected the local Italian tradition of the *ars dictaminis* and republicanism in this way continuing the uniqueness Otto of Freising noted of

⁶⁷ Skinner, *The Foundations* (1978), pp.35-37

⁶⁸ Skinner, *The Foundations* (1978), pp.37-8; For instance, Guidotto of Bologna’s *The Theory of Public Speaking*, the Bono da Lucca and Giovanni di Bonandrea’s *Brief Introduction to the Art of Letterwriting*.

⁶⁹ Latini, *Li Livres Dou Tresor* (1948); Dino Compagni, *Cronica delle Cose Occorrenti ne’ Tempi Suoi*, trans. by Else C.M. Benecke & A.G. Ferrers Howell (1906); Bonvesin della Riva, *De Magnalibus Urbis Mediolani*, in *Bullettino dell’ Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medio evo e Archivio Muratoriano*, Vol. 20 (Roma: 1898). While my work focuses on Latini, there are however no translations of the text in existence. Therefore, I will provide a transcription of the text and paraphrase its meaning in the text.

⁷⁰ Latini, *La Rettorica; testo critic a cura di Franceco Maggini* (Firenze, Galletti, 1915) provides translations of Cicero’s works.

⁷¹ Skinner, *The Foundations* (1978), pp.36-7

Medieval Italy.⁷² I shall focus my attention on three themes that Latini not only raises but can also give us insight into this unique period.

In the *Tresor*, Latini raises important humanist theses about liberty and government. The republican character of his work begins in Book II of the *Tresor* where Latini not only starts with a typology of three kinds of governments: the first of kings, the second of aristocracies, and the third of the people, but where he also clearly indicates his preference being the third which he says “is far better than the others” (“*trés millour entre ces autres*”).⁷³ It is a choice that he reiterates in the chapter “On The Government of Cities” (“*Dou Gouvernement Des Cités*”) where he argues that cities, who submit themselves to Kings and Princes, also submit themselves to government in which public offices are not only awarded by nobility, but also bought and sold on the basis of vice (a humanist position on virtue and critique of nobility). He argues that this does not beholden office holders to the good of the town’s people except that of the King a republican argument of freedom from the servitude of living under private interest of a king.⁷⁴ Latini goes on to further in describing Florence as being composed of “the citizens, the townspeople and the community” that, when they have selected and elected their own offices, the whole people and city gained the

⁷² Skinner argues on p.39 of *The Foundations* that “Latini’s book takes the traditional form of an encyclopedia, but in content it is manifestly the work of a *dictator* of the new school, combining extensive citations from Plato, Seneca, Sallust, Juvenal and especially Cicero with its more conventional information and advice.”

⁷³ Latini, *Li Livres Dou Tresor* (1948), p.211, “Seignouries 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.”

⁷⁴ Latini, *Li Livres Dou Tresor* (1948), p.392: “Et cil sont en .ii. manieres; uns ki sont en France et es autres païs, ki sont sozmis a la signorie des rois et des autres princes perpetueus, ki vendent les provostés et les baillent a ciaux ki plus l’achatent (poi gardent sa bonté ne le prouffit des borgois); “any city government based on submitting to the rule of kings and other princes is said to involve the selling of offices to those who bid the highest figure, with scant regard for the good and profit of the townspeople.”

greatest benefits because they free themselves from servitude of their leaders that are given offices.⁷⁵

His contemporaries Compagni and Bonvesin as well as himself also dedicated important parts of their works to the longstanding republican problem of factions. While they discussed this theme in the context of how best to counteract the gaining popularity of the *signori* (a term which they inherit from their own discourses) which for them continuously threatens self-government and liberty, they all contended that solving this danger was the utmost importance for republics.⁷⁶ For instance, Latini argues that if “warfare and hatred” are allowed to be “multiplied so greatly amongst the Italians” this as in the recent past “led to such divisions in almost every city between different factions of the townsfolk” such that “anyone who now succeeds in winning the love of one side automatically wins the hatred of the other.”⁷⁷

They all conclude that the main cause for factions, understood in the sense of partisanship (which they experienced), are envy and private wealth (“*covaitise de richece*”). The argument they offered is not only that wealth is inimical to virtue (which they borrow from their translations and believed they could cultivate), or that the desire of riches destroys it (“*richece abat les vertus*”), but that private wealth in particular cultivates a habit of

⁷⁵ Latini, *Li Livres Dou Tresor* (1948), p.392; “Ytaile, que li citain et li borgois et li communauté des viles eslisent lor poesté et lor signour tel comme il quident qu’il soit plus proufitables au commun preu de la vile et de tous lor subtés.”

⁷⁶ Skinner, *The Foundations* (1978), p.42

⁷⁷ Latini, *Li Livres Dou Tresor* (1948), p.394. “Mais il en sont deceu, car a ce ke guerre et haine est si mutepliee entre les ytalien au tans d’ore, et parmi le monde en maintes terres, k’il a devision en trestoutes les viles et enemistié entre les .ii. parties des borgois, certes, kiconques acquiert l’amour des uns il li covient avoir la malevoeillance de l’autre.”

ambition and dominance.⁷⁸ Preserving the liberty of republics is achieved by emphasising what Latini calls “The Stoic” belief that all men should put aside all of their personal material gains and factional interests, and cultivate virtue as a character trait and action, not based on family name, fortune, or privileges of nobility but as one’s own action.⁷⁹ Latini emphasizes this idea in Book III of the *Tresor* when he argues that not only some but all citizens must concern themselves night and day with the status of the common good and ensure that the city is governed in freedom and not in servitude.⁸⁰

For Latini, what matters is maintaining unity or harmony of the city, and this is entrusted not with the city’s institutions but with the character of its citizens. Latini and his contemporaries all argue, as Skinner notes, that “if the men who control the institutions of government are corrupt, the best possible institutions cannot be expected to shape or constrain them, where if the men are virtuous, the health of the institutions will be a matter of secondary importance.”⁸¹

The first difficulty they have is in finding this virtue in the general populace in their actual city. They start by noting that it is not found in their societies which seek wealth and

⁷⁸ Latini, *Li Livres Dou Tresor* (1948), p.299; “que covoitise de richece abat les vertus”; “de qui dist Tuilles, nule chose n’est de si petit corage comme d’amer richesce.”

⁷⁹ Latini, *Li Livres Dou Tresor* (1948), pp.291-2; “Condorde est une vertus ki lie en .i. droit et en une habitation ceaus d’une cité et d’un país. Platons dist, nous ne somes pas ne por nous solement, mais une partie en a nostre país et une autre nos amis. Et dient une maniere de philosophe ki furent apelé stoici, toutes choses sont crieas as usages des homes, et li home sont engendré li uns pour achoison de l’autre, c’est a dire li .i. valent as autres, et por ce devons nous ensivre nature et metre avant tout le commun profit, et garder les compaignies des homes par services, c’est donnant et prenant de ses mestiers et de ses ars et de sa richece et en doner et en laisser de son droit debonairement as autres; car doner dou sien aucune fois n’est solement cortoisie, mais puet estre grans proufiz. 2. Li mestres dit que pais fait maint bien et guerre le gaste. Salustes dist, par concorde croissent les petites choses et par discorde se destruisent les grandismes.”

⁸⁰ Latini, *Li Livres Dou Tresor* (1948), pp.392, 418; “Amor doit estre et en l’un et en l’autre; car li sires doit amer ses subtés de grant cuer et de clere foi, et veillier de jour et de nuit au commun proufit de la vile et de tous homes”; ‘Autresi garde k’il ne mete a son tans ne taille ne chartre de vante ne dette ne de nul liment dou commun, se ce ne fust por manifest proufit de la vile et par commun establissement dou conseil.”

⁸¹ Skinner, *The Foundations* (1978), p.45

privilege of nobility, making this claim not only on the basis of previous criticism against nobility as a vice, but they also take “The Stoic” argument that “all classes of society” must be “made eligible” for the quality. In Book II of the *Tresor*, nobility in the sense of family lineage and privilege is rejected, and Latini argues instead that nobility can only be found in virtue which is open to all.⁸² The argument is that even if a man has a great name, virtue is only what matters because it is only such virtue that gives courage in his heart.⁸³ The *podestà* should be a man of good and able character, not of fortune or privileged background beholden to some other man or someone who we have foolishly entrusted in acting in the name of freedom.⁸⁴ These pre-humanists were able to make this argument by relying not only on the Stoic argument that the only quality which makes them fit is an entirely personal and individual property but also if he upholds the republican Medieval tradition of free government.⁸⁵ It is only if the virtues are observed that the city can live in peace and freedom.⁸⁶

Here, the theme of peace becomes further analyzed through the lenses of Ciceronian *dictum* on finding social concord (“*concordia*”) in not only Latini’s *Tresor*, but perhaps none more influential and earliest in the Italian tradition than the anonymous *Oculus Pastoralis* in which the *podestà* was exhorted to “promote the welfare of the whole community” (“*pro*

⁸² Latini, *Li Livres Dou Tresor* (1948), p.296; “*mais de la droite nubilité dist Orasces qu’ele est vertus solement.*”

⁸³ Latini, *Li Livres Dou Tresor*, p.296; “*noblesce n’est autre chose se cele non ki adorne les corage a bonnes meurs.*”

⁸⁴ Latini, *Li Livres Dou Tresor* (1948), p.393

⁸⁵ It is also true that Latini turns to the virtues in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*. Far more important however, Latini turns to the Roman authors when he writes about curving vices in good government. He seems to emphasize in particular Cicero’s Stoic maxims on this question.

⁸⁶ Latini, *Li Livres Dou Tresor* (1948), p.404; “*Et die comment concorde essauce les viles et enrichist les borgois, et guerre les destruit; et ramentevoir Romme et les autres bonnes viles ki por la guerre dedens sont decheues et mal alees.*” For this point see also Mateo De’ Libri, *Arringhe*, edited by E. Vincenti (Milan, 1974); Giovanni da Viterbo, *Liber de Regimine Civitatum*, edited by C. Salvemini (Bologna, 1901)

utilitate comunitatis istius”) thus securing for their community “honour, exaltation and benefit, and a happy state” (“*ad honorem, exaltationem, et comodum, ac felicem statum*”).⁸⁷

In defense of acting for liberty which is almost synonymously used with the public good (in the sense of opposing private servitude), Latini criticizes the modes of kingship and principalities. Here, Latini translates almost word for word the Sallustian republican theses. Here, the *trecento* humanists upheld two Sallustian theses. The first thesis is about the supreme danger not only with wealth but also kingships “for kings hold the good in greater suspicion than the wicked” (“*nam regibus boni quam mali suspectiores sunt*”) and the second is how “the merit of others is always fraught with danger” (“*semperque eis aliena virtus formidulosa est*”).⁸⁸ Here, both kingship and wealth destroy the cultivation of the virtues. Latini’s republicanism is unmistakable when he goes on to claim, “still the free state, once liberty was won, waxed incredibly strong and great in a remarkably short time, such was the thirst for glory that had filled men’s minds” (“*sed civitas incredibile memoratu est adepta libertate quantum brevi creverit*”).⁸⁹ Here, Latini reiterates the same point in the chapter “On Signories,” arguing that the government by leading citizens is far better because when Kings enjoy absolute control as they do in France and other countries the people lose control quickly since Kings not only sell “offices” but they also assign “them to those who pay most for them, with little consideration for the good or benefit of the townsfolk,” whereas republics “elect, as *podestà* or *signore*, those who will act most profitably for the common good of the city and all their subjects.”⁹⁰ It is not only with virtuous leading citizens that

⁸⁷ Anonymous, *Oculus Pastoralis* (1990), p.25; Skinner, “Machiavelli’s *Discorsi* and the pre-humanist origins of republican ideas” (1990), p.130

⁸⁸ Sallust, *Bellum Catilinae*, Book vii.3 (1921), pp.13-14

⁸⁹ Sallust, *Bellum Catilinae*, Book vii.3 (1921), pp.10-15

⁹⁰ Latini, *Li Livres Dou Tresor* (1948), pp. 211, 392

“individuals [are] able to live a free way of life, unconstrained by any unjust dependence or servitude,” but also where they can live in a “*libera civitate*.”⁹¹

My argument in this chapter is that this development of republican thought is not the whole story. While the Skinnerian reading made use of Kristeller’s thesis of the republican development through primarily an Italian professional activity,⁹² it is however missing two theses that Kristeller noted in his works on Italian humanism which seems to suggest that humanism shaped republican theses than just being a vehicle for them. The first is that humanists tended to be eclectic in their writings.⁹³ Their identity stems as rhetoricians discovering and using classical thought in an eclectic way not always for their intrinsic philosophical merit. As Kristeller noted, “the humanists were not classical scholars who, for personal reasons, had a craving for eloquence, but vice versa, they were professional rhetoricians, who developed the belief, then new and modern, that the best way to achieve eloquence was to imitate classical models, and who were thus driven to study the classics and to found classical philology.”⁹⁴ The second is that they tended to prefer works that embodied the rhetorical arts over those that did not.⁹⁵ Like their Italian Medieval predecessors, they continued the arts of letter writing, rhetoric and spoken eloquence; and never betrayed the spirit of Medieval classicism in their use of diverse ideas and texts as

⁹¹ Cicero, *De Officiis* (1913, 1991), for a description of servitude and tyranny, see II.7.23-4, “Sed iis, qui vi oppressos imperio coercent, sit sane adhibenda saevitia, ut eris in famulos, si aliter teneri non possunt,” and “quamvis enim sint demersae leges alicuius opibus, quamvis timefacta libertas, emergent tamen haec aliquando aut iudiciis tacitis aut occultis de honore suffragiis;” and for a description of the free-state and liberty, see II.22.78-9, for Cicero’s view of property and the “*fundamenta rei publicae*,” “*concordiam primum, quae esse non potest, cum aliis adimuntur, aliis condonantur pecuniae, deinde aequitatem, quae tollitur omnis, si habere suum cuique non liceet. Id enim est proprium, ut supra dixi, civitatis atque urbis, ut sit libera et non sollicita suae rei cuiusque custodia.*”

⁹² Kristeller, *Studies in Renaissance Thought and Letters* (1969)

⁹³ Kristeller, “Humanism and Moral Philosophy” (1988), p.272

⁹⁴ Kristeller, *Studies in Renaissance Thought and Letters* (1969), p.560

⁹⁵ Kristeller, “Humanism and Moral Philosophy” (1988), p.272

Medieval pre-humanists like Brunetto Latini demonstrate in his *Li Livres Dou Tresor*. Many of them used and translated “Plato and the Neoplatonists, stoic authors such as Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius, Skeptics like Sextus Empiricus, and Epicureans like Lucretius,” sometimes compiling them eclectically in a single encyclopedic work,⁹⁶ a focus on authors, but one that was shaped by a Medieval tradition nonetheless.

The Italian Medieval and Renaissance humanists contributed to an explosion of moral and political sources rediscovered and put into currency for the first time in European modern thought, and they did this through their own practices. To capture their appropriate place in historical context, it is imperative that we follow the unique Italian Medieval tradition. As Kristeller advises, “if we want to do justice to these Renaissance writers we must try to understand the circumstances under which they wrote and the purposes they had in mind.”⁹⁷ First, the humanists were concerned with expressing their ideas according to local Italian literary and cultural practices. As Kristeller notes, “the humanists were professional rhetoricians, that is, writers and critics, who wished not only to say the truth, but to say it well, according to their literary taste and standards.”⁹⁸ They wrote “their moral works for their fellow scholars, for their students, and for an elite of businessmen and of urbanized noblemen who were willing to adopt their cultural and moral ideals.”⁹⁹ Secondly, the humanists expressed their ideas with an extensive eclectic willingness. They resorted, Kristeller argues, to a “constant use of specific ancient ideas or sentences or examples in the discussion of moral topics.”¹⁰⁰ “This eclectic use of ancient material,” he argues is

⁹⁶ Kristeller, “Humanism and Moral Philosophy” (1988), p.277

⁹⁷ Kristeller, “Humanism and Moral Philosophy” (1988), p.281

⁹⁸ Kristeller, “Humanism and Moral Philosophy” (1988), p.271

⁹⁹ Kristeller, “Humanism and Moral Philosophy” (1988), p.274

¹⁰⁰ Kristeller, “Humanism and Moral Philosophy” (1988), p.280

“especially characteristic of the humanists and their popular followers.”¹⁰¹ The humanists therefore emphasized moral rules for “specific ways of life that an individual might choose according to his status or profession,” and accommodated a much broader complex worldview which encompassed “the general situation in which human beings find themselves on Earth, in the chief forces determining this situation, and in the place man and his world occupy within the larger universe.”¹⁰²

I believe these offer us important keys to understand how to interpret the humanist context to further emphasize the local Italian tradition and a more exacting historical understanding of Machiavelli’s inheritance. I want to first examine how Skinner’s history of republicanism provides two interpretive principles, if we are to reinterpret this Skinnerian history in light of Kristeller’s two theses on eclecticism and rhetoric. There are two aspects that Skinner’s history, reinterpreted through Kristeller’s two theses, highlight in this humanist inheritance. The first would highlight the way that pre-humanism and humanism not only based moral and political theory on human historical experiences, but also thought about these in terms that openly contented human action. Here, virtue for instance seems to be an action that is grounded on an Italian view of human action, cultural practices (i.e. rhetorical, intellectual eclecticism), and intellectual Italian history. Virtue is an action appropriate for the Italian *vir*, the Italian man in this context, based on an understanding of how he actually was in Italian history and the problems he needed to overcome. The second would highlight the way that pre-humanists and humanists not only eclectically borrowed from Christian language but also reshape and rethought its criticism of classical antiquity.

¹⁰¹ Kristeller, “Humanism and Moral Philosophy” (1988), p.280

¹⁰² Kristeller, “Humanism and Moral Philosophy” (1988), p.298

They rethought sources and revisited their conclusions often reopening debates and questions in Italian practical terms.

While Skinner had argued that the pre-humanist tradition had revealed the proper historical material with which Machiavelli intellectually drew his republicanism, it is possible to see something more by interpreting them through Kristeller's general descriptions of the humanist heritage. Skinner notes three general pre-humanist continuities with Machiavelli's political thought to which we can add important dimensions which Machiavelli may have inherited and shaped.

First, according to Skinner, both the pre-humanist republicans and Machiavelli wrote on the importance of achieving greatness of standing power, freedom, and the dangers of wealth for republics. This shows that "Machiavelli remain[ed] content to fit his ideas into a traditional framework, a framework based on linking together the concepts of liberty, the common good and civic greatness in a largely familiar way."¹⁰³ While Machiavelli continued to argue that it was "indispensable that [the city's] administration should remain in the hands of officials whose conduct can in turn be regulated by established customs and laws" if the "city is to have any hope of attaining its highest goals,"¹⁰⁴ (continuing according to Skinner a pre-humanist republican tradition of thinking about liberty as a freedom from external servitude) it seems however that Machiavelli also continued to think here in terms that were also familiar to Italian pre-humanists in another sense. Like their interpretations of republican liberty, Machiavelli seems to have grounded his views not on a theory of human nature but on human nature as actually observed in Florentine and Italian history. When he

¹⁰³ Skinner, "Machiavelli's *Discorsi* and the pre-humanist origins of republican ideas" (1990), p.137.

¹⁰⁴ Skinner, "Machiavelli's *Discorsi* and the pre-humanist origins of republican ideas" (1990), p.125.

contrasts republics with hereditary principedoms, the source of this position seems to be on the basis of actual observations of human behaviour and history, not theory.

Second, while both pre-humanists and Machiavelli continue to put some importance on the question concerning factions, Machiavelli takes up the question in a different although with similar parameters. Machiavelli not only critiques this pre-humanist tradition, modifying factions to be in some cases an instance of *virtù* (an action that can produce the reward of liberty), he also reaches back to an Italian pre-humanist vision of the dangers of factions in the life of previous Italian republics. There are also continuities in the way he thinks about moral theory from the perspective of observable human behavior and local Italian history. Machiavelli continues and reshapes the theme of factions and the necessity of participation like his predecessors on grounds of eclectic literary sources and local Italian history. His theory of faction and the limitations of cultivating the virtues are grounded not on theory, but on a local Italian tradition of government and assumptions that he feels he can legitimately defend and make based on observable and historical human behaviour.

The first and second continuity demonstrate, as we said, the way that pre-humanism and humanism not only based moral and political theory on human historical experiences, but also thought about these in terms that openly contented human action. The third continuity consists in the longstanding task to find solutions to prevent the loss of liberty and so to prevent the complete ruin of the Italian republics. While the continuity here is the Ciceronian *dictum* of justice or virtue and *concordia*, Machiavelli rejects the Ciceronian view of justice and the necessity of *concordia*, replacing the philosophical moral content of justice with a local historical tradition of prudential and courageous action of factions in maintaining freedom. It is not these Roman articulations that he is partly concerned with rejecting, but

specifically the problem of inequality and *virtù* in that Ciceronian conception of *concordia* and justice in the local Italian Florentine tradition.¹⁰⁵ As Machiavelli continues to use Roman authors, such as Cicero and Sallust, and similar Roman notions such as *concordia* and justice, he also subverts and rejects their conclusions regarding factions as unavoidably a vice. This history however suggest that the humanists may have had a more complicated view with their optimism in human virtue and their Christian Medieval inheritances, perhaps reopening from these Christian sources questions and themes which they completely rethought for different ends and purposes. Machiavelli holds a conception of *virtù* that seems to sever the Augustinian type of limitations and education on man, but also reuses and reinterprets the stoicism that Augustine criticizes.

In addition to these two aspects of the humanist heritage, we can also reinterpret this humanist inheritance by adding two broader aspects underdeveloped in Skinner's intellectual history of republican thought. The first is the suggestion that the humanists were rhetoricians craving for eloquence which they believed was possible by imitating the classics. They cultivated not only an eclecticism in the way that humanists used philosophical and other sources, but also an affinity for texts that were well polished in the rhetorical arts. This characterizes not only the difficulty in understanding the diverse bits and pieces of philosophical insights that humanists revived, but also their pragmatism in which the humanists used philosophical and other sources to answer concrete political and social problems. The second is the suggestion that later humanists, such as Machiavelli, also continued to foster a unique Italian culture from the Medieval age; one through which they

¹⁰⁵ Eric Nelson has been particularly helpful in outlining the different ways of understanding the question of agrarian reform and how Machiavelli stood in some contrast to the Ciceronian interpretation of this history. However, his interpretation is not examined in a humanist context. See Nelson, "The Roman Agrarian Laws and Machiavelli's *Modi Privati*" (2004).

expressed and grounded their philosophical insights. These seem to include the rhetorical arts as well as their local forms of government and experiences.

The telling of this story can only be achieved in a small part here and in the following chapters. I wish to only draw some conclusions about the practices of the humanist heritage as they pertain to Machiavelli. Rethinking this historical context can indeed provide us with a guide to understand the humanist intellectual heritage to contextualize Machiavelli's republicanism. First, I would argue that this opens Machiavelli's republicanism to a wider and more specific range of intellectual sources in an eclectic and thematic fashion rather than to a systematic philosophical tradition. It certainly attests to the difficulty scholars have had in categorizing Machiavelli in one traditional philosophical tradition. Secondly, it seems to also suggest that the proper historical expression of *virtù* may be grounded not in a history of moral theory but in actual Italian history and practices. Machiavelli's ideas on human nature may in fact refer to actual observation of human nature in local Italian Florentine history rather than a theoretical or meta-ethical disposition. This may certainly explain a more exacting description of republicanism, the powers citizens are compelled to cultivate and responsibilities they must discharge. This I suggest may also be the proper context to understand the extent to which Machiavelli seems to empty the concept of *virtù* of some of its metaphysical content and give it more rational, pragmatic substance. In any of these cases, the Italian Medieval roots of the humanist heritage seems to be at the very least an important context for understanding Machiavelli's republican thought as my following work will try to show.

CHAPTER 2

The Inheritance of Medieval Pre-Humanists

In the late-1390s and early-1400s, an explosion of discoveries of classical texts in the Cathedral Library of Milan in 1392, Lodi in 1421, St-Galen in 1416, and Langres in 1417 was part of the movement that revived the flagging Medieval curriculum of the *arts dictaminis* (the arts of letter writing) which transferred into the Renaissance *Studia Humanitatis* (study of humanities).¹⁰⁶ With this historical consciousness, the leading humanists in this period, most notably Francesco Petrarca, provided the pre-humanist tradition a new vision which made use of the recovered classical Ciceronian view of education.¹⁰⁷ This is what Skinner calls Ciceronian humanism, that is, the ideal which posited that human excellence was achievable through education, more specifically the cultivation of virtue and an education that joined the Medieval study of rhetoric and moral philosophy.¹⁰⁸ In the following chapter, I want to slightly reinterpret the identity that this Ciceronian humanism imparted to humanists. While I believe that Ciceronian humanism played vital roles in disseminating as well as transforming the intellectual and cultural traditions of the Medieval *ars dictaminis*, I believe that if we slightly reinterpret it in light of Paul O. Kristeller's two theses— the eclecticism and the value of the rhetorical arts— we might possess a different understanding of not only the historical and intellectual context of humanism (its identity and the way it understood agency) but also perhaps a conception that

¹⁰⁶ The “most important development” of the *quattrocento* was that through the continued momentum of recovering new texts from “systematic searches, especially in monastic libraries”, led to the realisation of a “new attitude towards the ancient world”, indeed, an attempt to “approach the culture of the ancient world on its own terms.”; Skinner, *The Foundations* (1978), pp.85-7.

¹⁰⁷ For instance, Cicero's *Familiar Letters*, Cicero's *Making of an Orator*, Plutarch's *Lives*, Tacitus *Histories*, Thucydides *Histories*, including various orations by Quintilian, Cicero and Statius, Manlius and philosophy of Lucretius. See Murphy, *Medieval Rhetoric: A Select Bibliography* (1971); and see Skinner, *The Foundations* (1978), pp.84-85.

¹⁰⁸ It was Petrarch, as Boccaccio, Bruni and Poggio Bracciolini wrote, that “opened the way for us to show in what manner we could acquire learning”, Seigel, *Rhetoric and Philosophy in Renaissance Humanism* (1968), p.115

illuminates Machiavelli's use of neo-Roman liberty. This is because Kristeller's theses provide insights for an interpretive framework of the humanist heritage, which can illuminate the way humanists used and absorbed philosophical positions on self-sufficiency by retaking them from criticism from texts like Augustine's which they engaged polemically in their self-identity. In this chapter, I analyse how these Kristellerian theses help to slightly further define this humanist context. My argument therefore takes the Skinnerian position that Ciceronian humanism helps explain the way humanists continued to disseminate and contribute to this republican tradition of thought, but also transmitted humanist ideals of agency that we find in Machiavelli's discussion of republicanism.

The fundamental characteristic of Ciceronian humanism, according to Skinner, is a defense of not only "the proper aims and content of education," but also a vision about "the nature of man, the extent of his capacities, and the proper goals of his life,"¹⁰⁹ which the humanists with increasingly confidence defended. The humanists articulated a new self-awareness and defense of human self-sufficiency and perhaps perfectionism; a defence not saturated in moral philosophy, but one that was largely grounded and used pragmatically in relation to the politics of the city which I argue through the Italian culture and practices of rhetoric. For example, Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations* in the humanist reply of Manetti's *The Dignity of Man* was often pitted against the Augustinian values of Pope Innocent III's *The Misery of Man*,¹¹⁰ as a defense of humanist values and an immanent expression of identity.

¹⁰⁹ Skinner, *The Foundations* (1978), p.88

¹¹⁰ Skinner, *The Foundations* (1978), p.93

I argue that a much more nuanced intellectual relationship between Augustinian theology and humanist identity is at hand if we interpret humanism eclectically and valuing works that embodied the rhetorical arts.¹¹¹ These two Kristellerian theses, I would argue, provide a more nuanced view of the sources of humanist thought and identity, which helps us to explain the intellectual sources that provided humanism not only an identity, as Skinner contends humanists immanently provided in their clashes and polemics with these Augustinian ideas, but also sources and context for understanding the way humanists came to ideas of agency and self-sufficiency, perhaps even perfectionism.

In what follows, I shall review two basic passages from *De Civitate Dei* that according to Skinner are not only part of the humanist polemicization with Augustine and express their self-identity, but also I argue shows how this humanist agency comes in response that reopens and rethinks an Augustinian criticism of the stoic view of virtue, in particular a self-sufficient agency that can itself overcome worldly challenges.

The first passage, Skinner outlines, is the Augustinian thesis on the limitations of human sufficiency and perfection itself; more specifically, the theses about original sin (the innate tendency and hereditary disposition of human finiteness and deprivation of “right reason”), and the impossibility of perfection without God’s grace. In *De Civitate Dei*, original sin refers to the first and hereditary punishment that was transmitted from Adam’s fall unto all human beings.¹¹² Here, virtue understood in the classical sense as moral perfection based on reason is not only rejected, but virtue is a good only possible if one is

¹¹¹ Skinner has shown that various polemics in the late medieval and early Italian Renaissance led to supplant and even reinterpret St-Augustine. This is particular manifest in the Renaissance view of Augustine not as a Patristic father of Christianity, but as a peripheral neo-Platonic philosopher, with only peripheral value. This is a subject that will need to be covered elsewhere.

¹¹² Augustine, *De Civitate Dei* Book, XIV Ch.14-19; note here the impossibility to *will* the good without Grace, not the impossibility to *will*.

reunited with the substance of God's sanctifying grace. Augustine writes in the fifth book of *De Civitate Dei*,

whether the virtues that they have in this life be great or small, ascribe them only to the grace of God, because he has granted virtue to them according to their good will, their faith and their prayers. At the same time they understand how far they fall short of perfection [...].¹¹³

The basic internal struggle for moral excellence or *virtus* as in classical Stoicism (the self-character development based on right reason) is featured but entirely rejected by Augustine. Any imitation of classical excellence or virtue as the supreme good is exclusively reserved as long as one partakes in the substance of God. Sometimes in St-Paul's letters to the *Corinthians* and in Pope Innocent III's *On the Misery of Man* this total reunification is personified in and only by Christ.¹¹⁴ Humanity must turn toward God (*conversio ad deum*) as source of order and ultimate truth. The "decisive moment in a Christian's life" is not a

¹¹³ Augustine, *De Civitate Dei* (1966), pp.244-5; "homines virtutes suas, quantascumque in hac vita possunt habere, non tribunt nisi gratiae Dei quod eas volentibus credentibus petentibus dederit, simulque intellegunt quantum sibi desit ad perfectionem iustitiae."

¹¹⁴ Innocentius III, *De miseria humane conditionis*, (1955), p.39. This treatise was first compiled by Cardinal Loratio dei Conti di Segni in 1195. The book was widely read in the 13th century to the 16th century. The work remains lost today and exists only in Migne's *Patrologia Latini* which is said to reproduce defective printed edition of 1575; "De culpabili humane conditionis progressu. (I) Tria maxime solent homines affectare: opes, voluptates, honores. De opibus prava, de voluptatibus turpia, de honoribus vana procedunt. Hinc enim Iohannes apostolus ait: "Nolite diligere mundum, neque ea que in mundo sunt; quia quidquid est in mundo concupiscentia carnis est et concupiscentia oculorum et superbia vite. Concupiscentia carnis ad voluptates, concupiscentia oculorum ad opes, superbia vite pertinet ad honores. Opes generant cupiditates et avaritiam, voluptates pariunt gulam et luxuriam, honores nutriunt superbiam et iactantiam." Innocent III, *On the Misery of Man*, in *Two Views of Man* (1966), p.31; "The Sinful Condition of Human Existence. Men are usually desirous of possessing three things: riches, pleasures, honors. Wealth causes baseness; pleasure results in moral decay; the end of honor is vanity. This is why the Apostle John says: "Do not love the world or the things in the world. For all that is in the world is the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life." (John 2:15-16) The lust of the flesh refers to pleasure; the lust of the eyes refers to wealth; the pride of life refers to honor. Wealth brings forth cupidity; pleasure generates gluttony and lechery; honor nourishes pride and boasting."

subjective act that reason imposes on itself— that of accepting Christ— but the representation of God’s total being, this truth and its reunification in our soul.¹¹⁵

The second passage is the Augustinian theses on the topic of providence, understood as God himself, the supreme self-realization (ends) of all the events and creations which He created and orders in the universe. Providence is the emanation of God himself that directs everything to their happiness whose end is reunion with God. This is the moral order of the world.¹¹⁶ There are two points here. The first is the thesis about happiness being not a virtue but God’s unification and divine law.¹¹⁷ Hence, happiness is not fully realizable in this life, but is fully in the next.¹¹⁸ The second is the contention with the underplayed value of human action. In *De Civitate Dei*, Augustine argues that the world is not only part of God’s plan for us,¹¹⁹ but that this providence eliminates the need for the “classical dramatisations” of men’s will and their circumstances. In Book IV of the *De Civitate Dei*, Augustine ridicules the twin

¹¹⁵ Kent, “Augustine’s Ethics”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, (2001), pp.228-229

¹¹⁶ In *De Civitate Dei*, this love for earthly life explains the emergence of the two kinds of cities— the earthly city with the dispositions to self-love, and the heavenly city with dispositions to the love of God, two dispositions that are present in *saeculum*—the “realm of the temporal”, the first in egoism and the second in God’s emanation of perfection in history. Weithman, “Augustine’s Political Philosophy” (2001), p.236; Augustine, *De Civitate Dei* (1966), XV, I.I.; XIX; Markus, “The Latin Fathers” (1988), p.105; The problem with sin is the “inner corrosion” which perverts the *will* to be disposed not only toward evil habits but blind to the good. Augustine, *Confessions*, Book, xii.28; Evil is in the soul’s instability not the body and matter, Augustine, *Confessions* (1966), Book, xiv.3; An effect that goes back to the soul and body being created out of nothing which causes it to be neither inherently good nor bad in itself and so driveable off-course.

¹¹⁷ Chadwick, *Augustine* (1986), p.40

¹¹⁸ Weithman, “Augustine’s Political Philosophy” (2001), p.243; In *De Civitate Dei*, St-Augustine draws a polemic with the idea of ancient Roman greatness, and writes that great action, such as restraint, glory and honour, can only be performed when they are done in light of a higher principle of the Supreme Good, as Augustine consistently relates to the one God. Here, “law and government are necessary because of the distortion, greed, and anti-social corruption in the human heart”—a “corruption [that] goes so deep that there can be no true peace without the healing grace of God”. Markus, “The Latin Fathers” (2001), p.110 For Augustine, the purpose of government is not the “promotion of the good life, or perfection, or greatness, but a modest task of curving sin.”

¹¹⁹ Markus, “The Latin Fathers” (2001), p.111

Goddesses *Virtus* and *Fortuna* by defending the providence of God as absolute.¹²⁰ In *De Civitate Dei*, Augustine writes that the order and justice of the world is

not done rashly or at random, for he is God, not *Fortuna*, the goddess of luck. He does this in accordance with an order of things and of times which is hidden from us but very well known to him. Yet he is not in subjection, to be a slave to this order, but he rules it as Lord, and dispenses it as Master. But as for happiness, he gives it only to the good.¹²¹

The question of “carving out one’s own fate” in the classical struggle between *Fortuna* and *virtus* is rejected. Humanity achieves not only greatness as a “gift of God,” with his Grace, but also only achieves greatness to the extent that it is part of his plan. As Augustine writes, “since [*Fortuna*] is not a goddess, but the gift of God, let her be sought and won from him by whom alone she can be granted.”¹²² Freedom is never a reward out of an action that we are responsible for and the cause. As Augustine writes, freedom is only free will, and free will is equated with rationality foreseen by God.¹²³

In direct contrast to these two Augustinian theses, the humanists, in Skinner’s words, not only defended “an optimistic analysis of man’s freedom and power’s,”¹²⁴ but also took up the classical belief that the human predicament is captured by the struggle between man’s *will* and his *virtus* and *Fortuna*.¹²⁵ For Skinner, the humanists formed their “own exhilarating

¹²⁰ Augustine, *De Civitate Dei* (1966), pp.65, 71, 125, 135

¹²¹ Augustine, *De Civitate Dei* (1966), pp.124-5; “neque hoc temere et quasi fortuito, quia Deus est, non fortuna, sed pro rerum ordine ac temporum occult nobis, notissimo sibi; cui tamen ordini temporum non subditus servit, sed eum ipse tamquam dominus regit moderatorque disponit; felicitatem vero non dat nisi bonis.”

¹²² Augustine, *De Civitate Dei* (1966), Book IV, pp.70-1; “[...] et nunc quia dea non est, sed donum Dei est, ipsa ab illo impetretur a quo solo dari potest, et omnis falsorum deorum turba vanescet.”

¹²³ While the world is corrupt and unintelligible to us, it is still God’s, and here earthly government and human action are an imperfect and historical *telos* manifesting higher providence. See Chadwick, *Augustine* (1986), p.115

¹²⁴ Skinner, *The Foundations* (1978), p.94

¹²⁵ Skinner, *The Foundations* (1978), pp.94-95

account of the *vir virtutis* as a creative social force, able to shape his own destiny and remake his social world to fit his own desires”¹²⁶ by not only articulating the possibility of excellence but also valuing the classical educational programme and at times subverting the same language of “honour, glory and praise” reserved exclusively for God in the *Authorized Version of the Bible*.¹²⁷

I do not wish to offer a defense of these complex theses, but simply to note that humanists took up not only fortune’s “power over human affairs,” but also in man’s capacities to overcome it, and man’s control over his own “immortal fame and glory.”¹²⁸ However, I do not believe that most of them were intentionally renouncing fundamental Christian doctrines. While they took up these classical beliefs and fostered not only a kind of “interest in the individual personality” and believed that “man might be able to use his powers to bring about a transformation of the physical world,”¹²⁹ the humanists simultaneously “insist[ed] on the fundamental Christian doctrine that the vices are to be avoided simply because they are evil, and the virtues pursued for no other reason than they are good in themselves.”¹³⁰ My argument, in light of Kristeller’s theses, proposes that the humanists would have taken a much more nuanced view of Augustine’s text than simply a polemical, contrasting one. While I believe that the humanists indeed defined themselves in

¹²⁶ Skinner, *The Foundations* (1978), pp.93-4

¹²⁷ Skinner, *The Foundations* (1978), p.99

¹²⁸ Skinner, *The Foundations* (1978), p.95

¹²⁹ There was according to Skinner, on the one hand the emergence of the “magus”, the “benign magician” that uses the “occult arts” to control nature, and on the other hand the emergence of the importance of man’s natural activity. See Skinner, *The Foundations* (1978), p.98

¹³⁰ Skinner, *The Foundations* (1978), p.100; The humanists had put particular importance on the optimism and the sense of action in the capacity to overcome the power of *Fortuna* over the affairs of their city. For this view see, Skinner, *The Foundations* (1978), p.98; nonetheless the value of education was that “it produces the fully manly man, the true *vir virtutis* who finally comes to prize” as Petrarch proclaimed “after receiving the laurel wreath”, “the beauty of honour, the delights of fame and the divines of glory.” For this view see Skinner, *The Foundations* (1978), pp.100-101

contrast to many Augustinian ideas, I also think that they read Augustine, reopened old debates, but also rethought Augustine's criticism of the stoic view of the self-sufficiency of agency to completely different ends which they defined practically and in their Italian cultural practices of rhetoric.

A brief summary of Kristeller's research in Italian humanism reveals a guide that slightly reinterprets this connection between humanism and Augustine; a guide that I believe carries profound implications for understanding this humanist context and a context that I regard very relevant for grasping the kind of agency involved in Machiavelli's conception of agency and neo-Roman liberty.

As I have pointed elsewhere, there are two Kristellerian points that I find relevant for understanding this connection between the humanists and Augustine. The first regards the immanent character of humanist thought, by which I mean the core rhetorical pragmatic purposes of the recovery of philosophical texts that were put to use. As Kristeller notes, "the humanists were professional rhetoricians, that is, writers and critics, who wished not only to say the truth, but to say it well, according to their literary taste and standards."¹³¹ They wrote "their moral works for their fellow scholars, for their students, and for an elite of businessmen and of urbanized noblemen who were willing to adopt their cultural and moral ideals."¹³² They used classical texts which not only served the purposes of the rhetorical arts, but also to answer practical questions in Italian society giving instruction to the professional elite as well as to the "young."¹³³

¹³¹ Kristeller, "Humanism and Moral Philosophy" (1988), p.271

¹³² Kristeller, "Humanism and Moral Philosophy" (1988), p.274

¹³³ Kristeller, "Humanism and Moral Philosophy" (1988), p.275

The second Kristellerian thesis is the eclectic character of Italian Medieval and Renaissance humanism, by which I mean the bits and pieces of philosophy which the humanists used to use for their rhetorical instruction and provide answers for the kind of social, moral and political problems that were prominent in Italian culture and politics. The humanists rediscovered and disseminated a myriad of new sources from Plato and the Neoplatonists, to Stoics such as Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus, to Epicureans such as Lucretius, to Skeptics such as Sextus Empiricus.¹³⁴ As Kristeller notes, “the influence of ancient ethics on the Renaissance is not limited to an acceptance of the main systematic theories of antiquity.”¹³⁵ The humanist practices resorted to a “constant use of specific ancient ideas or sentences or examples in the discussion of moral topics.”¹³⁶ “This eclectic use of ancient material,” Kristeller argues, is “especially characteristic of the humanists and their popular followers.”¹³⁷

The humanists emphasized moral rules, as Kristeller notes, for “specific ways of life that an individual might choose according to his status or profession.”¹³⁸ However, they also accommodated a much broader complex worldview which encompassed “the general situation in which human beings find themselves on Earth, in the chief forces determining this situation, and in the place man and his world occupy within the larger universe.”¹³⁹ Their articulation of man’s powers and the pursuit of greatness incorporated “the miseries and ills

¹³⁴ Kristeller, “Humanism and Moral Philosophy” (1988), p.277

¹³⁵ Kristeller, “Humanism and Moral Philosophy” (1988), p.280

¹³⁶ Kristeller, “Humanism and Moral Philosophy” (1988), p.280

¹³⁷ Kristeller, “Humanism and Moral Philosophy” (1988), p.280

¹³⁸ Kristeller, “Humanism and Moral Philosophy” (1988), p.298

¹³⁹ Kristeller, “Humanism and Moral Philosophy” (1988), p.298

of our earthly existence.”¹⁴⁰ The humanists were aware that they had in this life “many vicissitudes.”¹⁴¹ They stressed, like the theologians, “divine providence,” but “never denied” it by writing about “the notions of fortune and fate” to think of the ills and vicissitudes of political life.¹⁴² In this, some humanists resorted to ancient Stoicism and “more widespread” beliefs in astrology and the influence and chance the stars had on human life.¹⁴³ While many humanists had rejected the Aristotelian view that “man may attain his *ultimate* end during the present life,” such as Petrarch, Facio and others, most “writers identified the goal of life with the knowledge and enjoyment of God but thought that this goal could be attained during the present life, at least by *some* people and for *some* time”.¹⁴⁴ Most humanists emphasized, if at times eclectically and inconsistently, the power of man versus the chance events of their political life.¹⁴⁵

This agency is the idea that is taken out of Augustine’s text and rethought; that is, this stoic *virtù vince fortuna*. I believe that the humanists appropriated it and rejected Augustine’s criticisms of its stoic forms, using it eclectically and pragmatically in various local Italian political contexts which gave it different meanings and uses. They seem however not to have rethought the cosmological place of God but rather accepted it, incorporating a stoic view of the agent which increasingly became creative in what was possible in this Christian world.

¹⁴⁰ Kristeller, “Humanism and Moral Philosophy” (1988), p.298

¹⁴¹ Kristeller, “Humanism and Moral Philosophy” (1988), p.299

¹⁴² Kristeller, “Humanism and Moral Philosophy” (1988), p.299

¹⁴³ Kristeller, “Humanism and Moral Philosophy” (1988), p.299

¹⁴⁴ Kristeller, “Humanism and Moral Philosophy” (1988), p.285; This was a view articulated by Marsilio Ficino’s Stoic treatment of strength and wisdom, Pietro Pomponazzi’s Stoicism, and Lorenzo Valla’s Christian Epicureanism.

¹⁴⁵ Kristeller, “Humanism and Moral Philosophy” (1988), p.300

Every indication from Kristeller is that this may have varied according to the author and intention. However, this may also not have been the case. One way of thinking about this more clearly, which I am not chiefly interested in pursuing, would be to build upon the debate between ‘*Will*’ and ‘*Intellect*’— the inherited Christian Augustinian view which Medieval thought in general inherited and to which Thomas Aquinas, John Duns Scotus replied to in differing ways.¹⁴⁶ According to Kristeller, the humanists such as Petrarch and Salutati firmly favored the superiority of the will, and humanist Platonists in Florence such as Ficino debated the question heavily; an important element of humanist moral philosophy despite its original scholastic molds.¹⁴⁷ This is one possibility to see how the development of this agency may not have been completely idiosyncratic, as Kristeller might suggest.

This view however seems too theoretical considering the context itself. I believe that in light of Kristeller’s previous comments above, this humanist heritage provides a tradition that is grounded more in Italian humanist practices and culture. In this context, *virtù* seems to be understood as an action which is not simply conducive to the liberty of the city, but action which is effective in the various challenges presented to it and its citizens. In continuity with the humanist’s exhilarating and empowering account of human powers and the eclectic pragmatic way this was taken from philosophical texts, broadly construed, effective republican action then is action that tackles the relevant social, political, economic and historical problems that threaten the liberty of the city. This consists not only of the problems that emerge regarding internal class structures of rich and poor, but also external problems of finding allies, reliance on the people for the safety and the security of the republic, and actions required to maintain and sustain liberty in relation to outside threats and tyranny.

¹⁴⁶ Kristeller, “Humanism and Moral Philosophy” (1988), p.297

¹⁴⁷ Kristeller, “Humanism and Moral Philosophy” (1988), pp.297-298

More narrowly, *virtù* is also action that succeeds in preparing the republic for specific problems that it cannot do anything about, such as environmental disasters and the death of a leader. This is what we certainly find in Machiavelli's *Discorsi*.

Appropriate action is not only devoted to meeting internal and external challenges to the city, a sort of flexibility in our actions toward social and political circumstances that threaten liberty (understood here in the neo-Roman sense of freedom from servitude), but it is also an introspective sense ensuring that each person's individual character fits the *Fortuna* (or the circumstances); not only on how this might be simultaneously a problem that can threaten liberty if one does not fit effectively, and vice versa if one can save the city's liberty. There seems to be an element of introspection about how the character of the citizen can fail to meet the *fortuna* that threatens the liberty of the city, as well as one that can save it. In Machiavelli's discussion, this highlights not only the necessary character that leaders must possess in order to be successful, but it also reveals how *virtù* is less, although still in some sense, about moral excellence, and more about the excellence in those techniques and social skills that one needs to devote to the protection of the liberty of one's city. Here, these might be a universal view of *virtù* but it is expressed according to one's individuality.¹⁴⁸

In conclusion, the humanists created a different understanding and use of the classical past, often doing so in an eclectic manner, borrowing from a diversity of sources and rethinking their conclusions and purposes, as well as valuing rhetorical arts in works. When they did this with Augustine, they defended a very specific, yet complicated, view of agency as self-sufficient in some sense that remains not entirely clear to me. I believe my argument

¹⁴⁸ Perhaps this is an indication of Burckhardt's subjectivism that he found characteristic of the Renaissance. I would however be hesitant of the extent to which it is specific to the Italian Renaissance given the uniqueness of Medieval Italy.

however has shown that the humanists understood virtuous actions as actions that are required for liberty not only in terms of servitude, but expressed by this action against servitude in terms found in agency, *virtù* against the challenges of *fortuna* in all the broad, narrow and introspective ways that I have identified. This context holds the key for understanding the way philosophical works were used in these historical periods, and also for understanding possible ways agency was conceived in the way Machiavelli writes about neo-Roman liberty and the social and political problems that republicanism may have thought to be a solution. As I shall explore in the following chapters, this approach to the historical and philosophical understanding of neo-Roman thought and its agency can provide us a more exacting context to understand the power that citizens are compelled to cultivate and responsibilities they must discharge.

CHAPTER 3

The Early Sixteenth Century Italian Republican Tradition and Factions in the *Discorsi*

In his essay “Machiavelli’s *Discorsi* and the Pre-Humanist Origins of Republican Ideas,” Quentin Skinner argues that by understanding Machiavelli’s theory of factions in the context of Italian Medieval pre-humanist republicanism, we can better examine the extent to which, in Skinner’s words, “Machiavelli remains content to fit his ideas into a traditional framework, a framework based on linking together the concepts of liberty, the common good and civic greatness in a largely familiar way.”¹⁴⁹ While I agree with this position, in the following chapter, I suggest that by rethinking these pre-humanist contexts in light of Paul O. Kristeller’s theses on the eclectic and value of rhetoric of Italian humanism, we can explain the way Machiavelli inherits and shapes a humanist conception of agency in his republican thought. I suggest that Machiavelli is reaching back and shaping a Medieval Italian humanist tradition of talking about agency. I conclude that this pre-humanist context illuminates a conception of agency that in Machiavelli’s *Discorsi* continues to be written in practical and Italian cultural terms.

My argument relies chiefly on two moves that I have coined Kristellerian (for their origins in Kristeller’s work). The first of these is emphasizing humanist eclecticism in the dissemination of texts (the sheer diverse random mixture of bit and pieces of philosophy and texts that were used to shape social and political questions) and the second is the emphasis of the value of rhetorical arts (the art that philosophy and texts needed to possess for humanists to value them) that shaped humanist curriculum.¹⁵⁰ These seem important to me because they

¹⁴⁹ Skinner, “Machiavelli’s *Discorsi* and the Pre-Humanist Origins of Republican Ideas” (1990), p.137.

¹⁵⁰ Kristeller, “Humanism” (1988), pp.113-137; Kristeller, “Renaissance Humanist and Classical Antiquity” (1988), pp.271-309; Kristeller “The Philosophy of Man in the Italian Renaissance” (1969), pp.261-278; Kristeller, “Augustine and the Early Renaissance”, (1969), pp.355-372; Kristeller, et al., *Renaissance Essays* (1992); Kristeller, “Humanism and Scholasticism in the Italian Renaissance” (1969), pp.553-583; Kristeller, *Studies in Renaissance Thought and Letters* (1969); Kristeller, *Renaissance*

allow us more insight into the pre-humanist and humanist heritage, in particular the defining attributes of Italian humanism that I shall use to develop a more exact understanding of Machiavelli.

I have used these two Kristellerian theses to argue that the humanists defended an eclectic and practical self-understanding of their studies.¹⁵¹ Humanists were not merely “professional teachers and exponents of the rhetorical arts,” they were also, claims Kristeller, “concerned with an aspect of Italian civic culture which was neither novel nor essentially philosophical in character.”¹⁵² These humanists were concerned with social political problems and used a wide diversity of works and resources to advise how to address challenges in a language not only borrowed from a variety of literary, historical, and philosophical sources, but that also addressed these sources to a professional elite in an appropriately non-syncretic philosophical, plain style.

That is, a slightly more specific picture of Italian humanism is what we find in Kristeller’s 1961 essay republished in 1988 titled “Humanism and Moral Philosophy.” There, Kristeller writes that while the Italian pre-humanists and humanists rediscovered and commented on some works of classical antiquity for the first time in early-European modernity, they also explored and translated an astonishing amount of writings ranging from “Plato and Neoplatonists, Stoic authors such as Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius, Skeptics like Sextus Empiricus, and Epicureans like Lucretius.”¹⁵³ More importantly, they also were interested in writing about moral rules specific to the ways of life that “an individual might

Philosophy and the Mediaeval Tradition (1966); Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought: The Classic, Scholastic, and Humanist Strains* (1961).

¹⁵¹ Skinner, *The Foundations* (1978), p.105

¹⁵² Skinner, *The Foundations* (1978), p.102

¹⁵³ Kristeller, “Humanism and Moral Philosophy” (1988), p.277

choose according to his status or profession,” and how these related to “the general situation in which human beings find themselves on Earth.”¹⁵⁴ As Kristeller’s research suggests, they read and favored works that practiced the rhetorical arts, used the rediscovered classics and their moral content eclectically and answered pressing political and ethical concerns in an appropriate, professional style.

The medieval Italian pre-humanist and early-Italian Renaissance humanist tradition produced, according to Kristeller, a complex eclecticism. They used “specific ancient ideas or sentences or examples in the discussion of moral topics” compiled and used in an “eclectic” manner to talk about professional moral rules or appropriate conduct.¹⁵⁵ Their approach seemed to have been more creative and resourceful than rigorous. When they emphasized both the powers and recognized the “miseries” of “earthly existence” for citizens, they not only used ancient philosophy eclectically to this end, “frequently play[ing] with the notions of fortune and fate,” they however never denied the place of God, and wrote often about the ancient goddess *Tyche* or *Fortuna* as the instrument of Him, while simultaneously emphasizing mankind’s powers from various eclectic rhetorical classical sources, including I believe Augustine’s *De Civitate Dei* for a reformed idea of Augustine’s critique of stoic self-sufficiency or perhaps perfectionism.¹⁵⁶

In my research, I have concluded that Italian pre-humanists and humanists drew upon a much wider and complicated range of intellectual and literary sources in writing their political works. More specifically, I have found that some of them have not only continuously spoke of moral philosophy in practical and local Italian terms, but also

¹⁵⁴ Kristeller, “Humanism and Moral Philosophy” (1988), p.298

¹⁵⁵ Kristeller, “Humanism and Moral Philosophy” (1988), pp.280-281

¹⁵⁶ Kristeller, “Humanism and Moral Philosophy” (1988), p.299

contributed through this humanist heritage new concepts that had considerable currency in subsequent republican thought, in particular the core idea of agency, self-worth and human action as a universal quality grounded on human reason and the desire to make their curriculum a social skill for the increasingly large citizenry.¹⁵⁷

My argument is that Machiavelli not only spoke of factions and *virtù* in the way Skinner argues by appealing to the elements of *concordia* in the Ciceronian Italian tradition he was subverting and reshaping, but Machiavelli also spoke of factions by continuing and reshaping a Medieval Italian humanist language about human action and agency—one that emphasized a tradition carried by the local Italian cultures as a battle between *virtus* and *fortuna* which emphasized humanity's power and capacities to respond to challenges in secular life.

In what follows, I wish to focus on how Machiavelli writes about agency when he argues that factions as instances of *virtù*. More specifically, that is, I wish to examine the way that Machiavelli inherits, shapes, and changes this humanist conception of agency in this humanist context. I wish to begin by noting that what is characteristically Machiavellian in this discussion is his emphasis on corruption. Whenever Machiavelli writes about factions, he seems to write about them against the backdrop of what he sees as the degenerative mutability of political life. Life, or human life at least, in Florence and in Italian history is almost always observed by Machiavelli in a state of flux and in danger of degeneration.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁷ Although, while the role of women is very limited in this context, this seems to be an aspect of history that needs more study. For instance, in Book 1, Chapter 12 of the *Discorsi*, Machiavelli seems to speak favorably of a female leader.

¹⁵⁸ It is known that Machiavelli translated himself a manuscript from epicurean thought. This however would have to show the emphasis on civic duty and that of human action that Machiavelli stresses so strongly.

Polybius' *Histories* hold the key to understand this connection between *virtù* as an action and liberty as a reward against this assumption.

The *Histories* was a very well-known and widely disseminated text in the Medieval and Italian Renaissance. In this text, Polybius proposed an influential thesis and interpretation of Rome's success as a mixed republic. According to Polybius, history is an ongoing cycle of degeneration through which each ideal form of government degenerates into its opposite. He hypothesized that it was because of the mixture of all the best features of these ideal forms of government that kept the natural tendency toward corruption and degeneration of Rome checked.¹⁵⁹ It is doubtful that this work provided much of the foundations for Machiavelli's republican thought because it does not have anything to say about freedom or *virtù* or agency which I find central to much detail in Machiavelli's *Discorsi*. It does however help us understand a key point about checking abuses in order to prevent degeneration, and this is a point that Machiavelli speaks in a familiar Medieval way.

To demonstrate this point on *virtù* (as an action that provides the reward of liberty) and corruption (as a degeneration), Machiavelli turns to Livy's *Histories of Rome* and other events in recent Florentine history. What causes states to rarely survive the good fortunes that first propelled them and gave them their fortune, Machiavelli claims, is that Italian citizens have not only failed to heed the prudence that ancient writers compelled them or learn this lesson themselves in their studies of history, but that Italians also acted in ways opposed to this. The problem for Machiavelli is not with a theory or a form of government, but agency (i.e., not only action, but actual actions of historical Italian leaders).

¹⁵⁹ Schofield, "Social and Political Thought" (2007), pp.744-748

As he writes in the *Discorsi*, it is because there is no allowance made for the evil within Italian society. Without this realistic assessment, the city risks servitude because it fails to become sensitive to the ways ambition and private interests might enslave it. The lesson is not only that we must presume the corruptibility of the society, but also that faction can become a vigorous means to perfect and keep it free.

As is demonstrated by all those who discuss life in a well-ordered state—and history is full of examples—it is necessary for him who lays out a state and arranges laws for it to presuppose that all men are evil and that they are always going to act according to the wickedness of their spirits whenever they have free scope... that men never do anything good except by necessity, but where there is plenty of choice and excessive freedom is possible, everything is at once filled with confusion and disorder.¹⁶⁰

Factions can offer a chance for stability by ensuring that each class resists another attempting to dominate it so completely that it threatens all with servitude. For Machiavelli, *virtù* can and must generate a practical and pragmatic constitutional framework which is not only based on the actions of citizens but is also always sensitive to new kinds of ambition, excess and private interest from taking over the city. Here, virtues are good because they oppose any element from being “pulled back by another” and “tip the scales” so completely. As we shall see, factions can become an expression of *virtù* because they can become means for maintaining the liberty of the city by ensuring freedom from the dependence of servitude.

Some may say here that there are two problems with my interpretation of this conception of *virtù* and corruption. The first is that Machiavelli seems hardly republican at

¹⁶⁰ Gilbert, *Discourses* (1958), p.201; Machiavelli, *Discorsi* (1960), Book I.3, p.135; “Come dimostrano tutti coloro che ragionano del vivere civile, e come ne è piena di esempi ogni istoria, è necessario a chi dispone una repubblica ed ordina leggi in quella, presupporre tutti gli uomini rei, e che li abbiano sempre a usare la malignità dello animo loro qualunque volta ne abbiano libera occasione [...] gli uomini non operano mai nulla bene se non per necessità; ma dove la elezione abonda, e che vi si può usare licenza, si riempie subito ogni cosa di confusione e di disordine.”

all if his presumption of the human is a pessimistic one. The second is that this pessimistic view not only seems anti-ethical to the cultivation of the virtues characteristic of the humanist defense of republicanism, but also seems to follow or perhaps fall into the Medieval defense of *signoria* rather than *libertà*. It is difficult to see the extent to which any of these two claims could be devastating. While Machiavelli seems at his most anti-republican when he advises that in some circumstances it will be necessary to rely on one founder—one that is not only a “prudent organizer” with “authority all to himself,”— it is after all a founder that possesses the republican intention “to advance not his own interests but the general good, not his own posterity but the common fatherland.”¹⁶¹ The problem at issue even here is not merely a theory of monarchy but agency: humanity is not naturally disposed to act as it ought to in order to give itself its own freedom. Humanity is not by nature free, as Machiavelli knows from his own time and lessons in Italian history because it is not by nature sociable. At the earliest instance, claims Machiavelli, any good man can become corrupt and risks tearing the social and political fabric that holds not only sociability, but also the benefits of a free way of life. The argument in the way Machiavelli sets it up is a defense of republican government. As Machiavelli so famously states: the problem is not to transform human nature, but to not “censure anyone for any unlawful action used in organizing a kingdom or setting up a republic,” because while “the deed accuses him, the result should excuse him; and when it is good... it will always excuse him.”¹⁶² It can only be truly good when it is republican.

¹⁶¹ Gilbert, *Discourses* (1958), p.218; Machiavelli, *Discorsi* (1960), Book I.9, pp.153; “Però uno prudente ordinatore d’una repubblica, e che abbia questo animo, di volere giovare non a sé ma al bene comune, non alla sua propria successione ma alla comune patria debbe ingegnarsi di avere l’autorità solo [...]”

¹⁶² Gilbert, *Discourses* (1958), p.218; Machiavelli, *Discorsi* (1960), Book I.9, pp.153-154; “Debbi bene in tanto essere prudente e virtuoso, che quella autorità che si ha presa non la lasci ereditaria a un altro: perché sendo

I grant, however, that there are two further clarifications needed here. First, there is a detectable optimism in the way Machiavelli uses the concept of *virtù* as a higher action some are capable in opposition not only to human vice or ambition, but also against the foreseeable and unforeseeable challenges in political life. This human vigour which is written in the style and tradition of Italian humanism as a capability of every person, in contrast to nobility, is found in chapter 41 of the third discourse when Machiavelli analyzes the extent to which citizens can act and preserve their city's freedom. In examining the case of when Lentulus was facing necessity, Machiavelli concludes that we ought not to be too quick to condemn acts that save the liberty of city. While Lentulus' actions were at first face disgraceful, and not virtuous, they still saved the liberty and Rome's greatness and so they were in the end honorable. This is what I understand when Machiavelli writes, that

one's country is properly defended in whatever way she is defended, whether with disgrace or with glory [...] This idea deserves to be noted and acted upon by any citizen who has occasion to advise his country, because when it is absolutely a question of the safety of one's country, there must be no consideration of just or unjust, of merciful or cruel, of praiseworthy or disgraceful; instead, setting aside every scruple, one must follow to the utmost any plan that will save her life and keep her liberty.¹⁶³

This passage seems to define a secular character to Machiavelli's republican thought. But this need not be what is only occurring here, because while it is undoubtedly Machiavelli's attempt to renovate a theory of republicanism around a theory of agency, it

gli uomini più proni al male che al bene, potrebbe il suo successore usare ambiziosamente quello che virtuosamente da lui fusse stato usato [...] né mai uno ingegno savio riprenderà alcuno di alcuna azione straordinaria, che, per ordinare un regno o costituire una repubblica usasse. Conviene bene, che accusandolo il fatto, lo effetto lo scusi; e quando sia buono come quello di Romolo sempre lo scuserà.”

¹⁶³ Gilbert, *Discourses* (1958), p.519; Machiavelli, *Discorsi* (1960), Book III.41, pp.494-495; “[E] che la patria è bene difesa in qualunque modo la si difende, o con ignominia o con gloria [...]La quale cosa merita di essere notata ed osservata da qualunque cittadino si truova a consigliare la patria sua: perché dove si delibera al tutto della salute della patria, non vi debbe cadere alcuna considerazione né di giusto né d’ingiusto, né di piatoso né di crudele, né di laudabile né d’ignominioso; anzi, posposto ogni altro rispetto, seguire al tutto quel partito che le salvi la vita e mantenghile la libertà.”

almost seems like Machiavelli is in fact redefining the virtue of prudence in a local Italian humanist tradition.¹⁶⁴ The effective use of factions can be an expression of the *virtù* and liberty of citizens which it itself expresses by re-establishing a tense equilibrium of forces in the city whenever corruption threatens freedom. Whenever citizens cultivate this prudence, factions will be virtuous, and if not, they will be vices. There is here an optimism in the sense that Machiavelli believes citizens have in them the reason and capacity to bring out or find the qualities of prudence in their personality. It is however an optimism that is not grounded on a moral theory but on a humanist view of agency that recognizes both the capabilities and the weaknesses of people in the face of great *fortuna*. It is also an optimism that I believe is grounded on an Italian humanist tradition of politics because it assumes very much the position that vices undo an important social fabric. It is this free way of life or this social fabric that the virtues retrieve as a reward for their good actions or equilibrium.

Machiavelli not only writes that if there is no virtue about how the destructive desires of ambition and tyranny rise inside a person and a society, but also writes that if there is no virtue in the actions of the citizens the social fabric will be torn apart. Machiavelli speaks of this when the absence of law courts as forums (understood in an almost factional kind) of action leave room for slander, inaction and then ruin.¹⁶⁵

And chief among the things that a citizen is likely to employ in becoming great, are these slanders. When directed against powerful citizens who oppose themselves to his thirst for

¹⁶⁴ There seems to be two kinds of tones in the *Discorsi*: The first is serious and critical about the use of factions and the necessity of prudence in ensuring that no precedent is available for future misuse of government; and the second is comedic about any bad action ending up unintentionally doing good for the republic. This second is more in line with the Italian tradition of Petrarca, Dante, and Boccaccio.

¹⁶⁵ Gilbert, *Discourses* (1958), p.216; Machiavelli, *Discorsi* (1960), Book I.8, p.151; “Di che ne nasceva che da ogni parte ne surgeva odio: donde si veniva alla divisione, dalla divisione alle sette, dalle sette alla rovina.”

power, they are much to his advantage, because, by taking the side of the popular party and confirming its low opinion of its opponents, he makes it friendly to himself.¹⁶⁶

And Chapter 3 of the first discourse,

This thing bears testimony to what I have said above, that men never do anything good except by necessity, but where there is plenty of choice and excessive freedom is possible, everything is at once filled with confusion and disorder. Hence it is said that hunger and poverty make men industrious, and the laws make them good.¹⁶⁷

We may want to ask here, why should it be *virtù* and not primarily good laws, as Machiavelli seems to say at times, that give us the reward of liberty? First, liberty is a reward of an action, not a possession that we can rely on by the laws or someone that has mastery over us.¹⁶⁸ This kind of action is predicated on agency, unfortunately not on a common good that a law can define and legislate. Should a city with great fortune come to have a wise prince that does everything to maintain the common good, the problem is not merely that of having a successive hereditary line of wise virtuous princes. In either a monarchical or republican case, the problem is with agency. Human behaviour is corruptible. Here, factions are not only a human action, but also a necessary kind because of a human tendency toward corruption. While like a law or a procedure, it can be a reasonable expression of *virtù* that ensures corruption is dealt with, and that above all, new challenges facing the life of the city can be effectively addressed. What makes it good is the agency behind it.

¹⁶⁶ Gilbert, *Discourses* (1958), pp.216-217; Machiavelli, *Discorsi* (1960), Book I.8, p.152; “Ed intra l’altre cose di che si è valuto alcun cittadino per venire alla grandezza sua, sono state queste calunnie: le quali venendo contro a cittadini potenti che all’appetito suo si opponevano, facevano assai per quello; perché pigliando la parte del Popolo, e confermandolo nella mala opinione ch’egli aveva di loro, se lo fece amico.”

¹⁶⁷ Gilbert, *Discourses* (1958), pp.201-202; Machiavelli, *Discorsi* (1960), Book I.3, p.136; “La quale cosa fa testimonianza a quello che di sopra ho detto, che gli uomini non operano mai nulla bene se non per necessità; ma, dove la elezione abonda, e che vi si può usare licenza, si riempie subito ogni cosa di confusione e di disordine. Però si dice che la fame e la povertà fa gli uomini industriosi, e le leggi gli fanno buoni.”

¹⁶⁸ Viroli, *The Liberty of Servants* (2012), pp.8, 23-24.

Second, it is important to note that *virtù* is not written only in the tradition of classical morality because this concept also contains ideas of persuasion and aesthetics that seems deeply influenced by a humanist tradition of the rhetorical arts, and Roman stoic agency. While the idea that liberty as a reward of *virtù* fits classical Stoicism (especially on the topic of suicide), liberty is a reward because *virtù* has this persuasive and rhetorical aspect of being able to convince large assemblies. It is a social skill as well as an ethical one that seems grounded in a Medieval pre-humanist tradition of the rhetorical arts and character development appropriate for a professional elite. It is largely humanists because it uses both the Medieval humanist tradition of rhetoric and a Medieval Roman republican critique of kingships. However, unlike them, republics rely on large assemblies, and the larger these assemblies the more capable they are of understanding the truth as a whole not only because citizens possess the skills of rhetoric but unlike rich nobility or king and princes, they are mostly open and not afraid of the *virtù* of a good citizen to outshine them.

As I have shown in the introduction to this chapter, I believe that I have found a way to understand this agency by situating it in a context of Italian humanism defined by two Kristellerian theses: Italian humanist eclecticism and the value of the rhetorical arts. By reinterpreting the humanist dissemination of texts and the vision of *virtù* and identity that this articulated, I have been able to see how humanists not only drew from a complicated eclectic range of intellectual sources but also sought to reopen debates and rethink certain conclusions to defend their increasing optimism in a human role in secular and political affairs. While I agree with Skinner that humanists engaged with Augustinian ideas in their polemics and the defense of their identity which was critical to their self-definition, we discover however that the humanists did this with a striking eclecticism, sympathy, and a

willingness to rethink and reopen the conclusions that Augustine had drawn on classical thought, in particular, I argue, with the Stoics and their conception of virtue and fortune in Augustine's *De Civitate Dei*. My hypothesis suggests that the humanists did not revive here a strong classical understanding of stoicism at all, but that they focused on appropriating a weak stoicism by rethinking Augustine's criticisms of this classical school in ways that answers local Italian political problems and social needs.

This humanist context shows that Machiavelli inherited, shaped, and modified a conception of agency largely defined by this humanist optimism in human capacities in his republicanism. While Machiavelli shared this with his humanist republican predecessors, his innovation however lies almost entirely in arguing that factions can be acts of *virtù* in certain cases and under certain reasoned limitations. It is here that I find that Machiavelli offers a practical and pragmatic defense of our civic duties which form a profound critique of an inherited idea of *concordia* (civic unity thesis).¹⁶⁹

The argument that Machiavelli shapes and forms is in large part, I think, a locally inherited one. The key work that may give us insight into this Ciceronian theory of concord is perhaps the thirteenth century *Li Livres Dou Tresor* of Brunetto Latini. The *Tresor* is an encyclopaedia containing three books that borrow much from the Italian advice book genre and other sources. The books include many sections on a myriad of topics, but what I am particularly concerned with is its section on political science and concord found in book 1. The main argument Latini provides in that section is that if a ruler wished to uphold the greatness of his city, in Latini's words, he must "ensure that his government embraces all

¹⁶⁹ See Machiavelli's correspondences with his closest friend, Francesco Vettori and Machiavelli's attendance at the Orti Oricellari, for the link between humanism and republicanism and the Orti Oricellari. See, Skinner, "The Theorist of Liberty" (2000), pp.54-55; Gilbert, "The Composition and Structure of Machiavelli's *Discorsi*" (1953), p.150

these virtues and avoids all the vices,” because this is, as Latini states in the Sallustian *dictum*, “how concord brings greatness to cities and enriches their citizens, while war destroys them,” and how “Rome and other great cities ruined themselves by internal strife.”¹⁷⁰ Latini as well in the later works of Matteo de’ Libri and also Giovanni da Viterbo¹⁷¹ converge on this point. As Viterbo and Libri each respectively write, “cities that are ruled and maintained in a state of peace are able to grow, to become great, and to receive the greatest possible increase,”¹⁷² and not only that “concord and unity cause everything to advance and grow great,”¹⁷³ but that according to Latini “small things, through concord, are able to grow great and in discord, even the greatest things are destroyed.”¹⁷⁴ Following not only Sallust as an authority, Latini argues that the key to greatness is the maintaining of concord, and for this position, Latini turns also to his Roman authority Cicero in the *De Officiis*.

As Cicero had written, “now, those who care for the interests of a part of the citizens and neglect another part, introduce into the civil service a dangerous element—dissension and party strife.”¹⁷⁵ To preserve civic concord, Latini, as well as Matteo de’ Libri and Giovanni da Viterbo, turn to this ideal giving overriding precedence to the common good of

¹⁷⁰ Latini, *Li Livres Dou Tresor* (1942), p.404; “Et die comment concorde essauce les viles et enrichist les borgois, et guerre les destruit; et ramentevoir Romme et les autres bonnes viles ki por la guerre dedens sont decheues et mal alees.”

¹⁷¹ Skinner, “Machiavelli’s *Discorsi* and the pre-humanist origins of republican ideas” (1990), p.129

¹⁷² Skinner, “Machiavelli’s *Discorsi* and the pre-humanist origins of republican ideas” (1990), p.129; Giovanni da Viterbo, *Liber de Regimine Civitatum*, edited by C. Salvemini (Bologna, 1901), p.231

¹⁷³ Skinner, “Machiavelli’s *Discorsi* and the pre-humanist origins of republican ideas” (1990), p.130; Libri, *Arringhe* (Milan, 1974), p.18

¹⁷⁴ Latini, *Li Livres Dou Tresor* (1948), pp.291-292; “*Salustes dist, par concorde croissent les petites choses et par discorde se destruisent les grandismes.*”

¹⁷⁵ Cicero, *De Officiis* (1913), Book I.25.85; “qui autem parti civium consulunt partem neglegunt, rem perniciosissimam in civitatem inducunt, seditionem atque discordiam.”

the city, which is understood by opposing that of factional or private interest.¹⁷⁶ The Ciceronian *dictum* was upheld not only by these pre-humanists but perhaps none more influential than the anonymous *Oculus Pastoralis*, in which, the *podestà* was exhorted to “promote the welfare of the whole community” and secure for it “honour, exaltation and benefit, and a happy state.”¹⁷⁷

In order to put this into practice, Latini writes that “we must follow nature and place the common good above all other values.”¹⁷⁸ This is what leading citizens must cultivate as part of their character. To secure this public rather than this private good, these Italian writers all agree with the Ciceronian precept of cultivating the virtues, in particular that of *iustitia* (justice). They argue that if our leaders observe this particular virtue above all else, no leader would unfairly neglect the public good and impose his own.¹⁷⁹ The Italian *dictatores* spoke of the need for education in the arts of rhetoric according to the classic texts not only agreeing with Cicero’s *dictum* that justice was by far a “*splendor maximus*” (“the highest good”), the *only* and *chief* means “by which society and what we may call its “common bonds” are maintained,”¹⁸⁰ but “to render to each person his due, in order that the city may be governed in justice and equity.”¹⁸¹ It is only if our civic leaders demonstrate this virtue that

¹⁷⁶ Cicero, *De Officiis* (1913), Book I.25.85, “Omnino qui rei publicae praefuturi sunt civium sic tueantur, ut, quaecumque agunt, ad eam totum corpus rei publicae current, ne, dum partem aliquam tumentur, reliquas deserant. Ut enim tutela, commissi sunt, non ad eorum, quibus commissa est, gerenda est. Qui autem parti civium consulunt partem neglegunt, rem perniciosissimam in civitatem inducunt, seditionem atque discordiam; ex quo evenit, ut alii populares, alii studiosi optimi cuiusque videantur, pauci universorum.”

¹⁷⁷ Anonymous, *Oculus Pastoralis* (1990), p.25; “pro utilitate comunitatis istius”; “ad honorem, exaltationem, et comodum, ac felicem statum.”

¹⁷⁸ Latini, *Li Livres Dou Tresor* (1948), p.291; “devons nous ensivre nature et metre avant tout le commun profit”; see also Viterbo, *Liber de Regimine Civitatum* (1901), p.268

¹⁷⁹ Skinner, “Machiavelli’s *Discorsi* and the pre-humanist origins of republican ideas” (1990), p.131

¹⁸⁰ Cicero, *De Officiis* (1913), Book I.7.20; “qua societas hominum inter ipsos et vitae quasi communitas continetur.”

¹⁸¹ Viterbo, *Liber de Regimine Civitatum* (1901), p.220

“cities are ruled by these bonds of justice grow to greatness, become enriched and receive the greatest possible increase.”¹⁸² This means governing, in Latini’s words, “according to right and truth” so “that everyone has what he ought to have.”¹⁸³ The primary “check” is internal and self-imposed.

Latini concludes that concord, justice and *libertà* are preserved only in an elected and independent city governed by these citizens of virtue. The argument is again a classical one largely based on the authority of Sallust. The latter argued that the supreme danger with kingships was that “to kings, good men are objects of even greater suspicion than the wicked, the good qualities of others are invariably seen as a threat.”¹⁸⁴ “It was only when the city of Rome managed to become liberated from its kings that it was able, in such a short space of time, to rise to such greatness.”¹⁸⁵ Latini reiterates the same point in his *Tresor* as he writes that when Kings enjoy absolute control, as they do in France, the people lose control quickly as Kings sell “offices” and assign “them to those who pay most for them, with little consideration for the good or benefit of the townsfolk,” where “they are able to elect, as *podestà* or *signore*, those who will act most profitably for the common good of the city and all their subjects.”¹⁸⁶ He argues that it is only if citizens maintain a republic that “individuals

¹⁸² Viterbo, *Liber de Regimine Civitatum* (1901), pp.231, 234

¹⁸³ Latini, *Li Livres Dou Tresor* (1948), p.403; “La cites ki est governee selonc droit et selonc verité, si ke chascuns ait ce k’il doit avoir, et ke li maufetour soient li .i. chacié hors, li autre livrés a paine : certes, ele croist et mouteplie des gens et d’avoir et dure tousjours en bone pais a l’onour de lui et de ses amis.”

¹⁸⁴ Sallust, *Bellum Catilinae* (1921), p.vvii.3; “nam regibus boni quam mali suspectiores sunt”; “semperque eis aliena virtus formidulosa est.”

¹⁸⁵ Sallust, *Bellum Catilinae* (1921), p.vvii.3; “nam regibus boni quam mali suspectiores sunt”; “semperque eis aliena virtus formidulosa est”.

¹⁸⁶ Latini, *Li Livres Dou Tresor* (1948), pp. 211, 392

[are] able to live a free way of life, unconstrained by any unjust dependence or servitude.”¹⁸⁷

In other words, it is only in a republic that individuals can be citizens because it is only if they are free from servitude to dominating, private interests that they live a free way of life.

This view of *concordia* raises a powerful defense of not only the classical virtues (understood primarily through humanism as a social skill) but also of freedom as a theory of non-dependence to servitude. This is, I argue, the theory that Machiavelli takes issue with in his *Discorsi*. First, there are some similarities between the Medieval pre-humanist view and Machiavelli’s in the *Discorsi*. From this perspective, both pre-humanists and later Italian humanists like Machiavelli speak of the classical moral virtues as practical virtues because civic leaders who possess them become good (enough) to counter a myriad of forms of *fortuna* in political life. What matters in both cases is not whether everyone can live in accordance to a higher moral view of justice, but whether the leading citizens can be effective in checking corruption and ambitions. Freedom is not a possession but a reward or a result of an action of someone who is virtuous. While Machiavelli actually shares this with his predecessors, his innovation is much more focused on arguing that factions can be acts of *virtù* in certain cases and under certain reasoned limitations. Virtuous citizens will use this political mechanism to preserve liberty. Unlike morality or religion, the outcomes of politics cannot be determined beforehand. Secondly, while Machiavelli continued to speak of *virtù* as an element that is based on our actions, not our fortunate family name or what fortunate privileges gives us, *virtù* is however a willingness that we must cultivate in light of the limitations of our individual characteristics and natural pre-dispositions stems from a notion

¹⁸⁷ Cicero, *De Officiis* (1913), Book II.7.23-4; also taken by Giovanni da Viterbo, Bonsevin della Riva, Albertino Mussato, and Filippo Ceffi. See, Skinner, “Machiavelli’s *Discorsi* and the pre-humanist origins of Republican Ideas” (1990), p.134

of agency that is stoic self-sufficiency. We must presume that corruption is a possibility for any of us. This moral failure has for Machiavelli serious political consequences when we consider the freedom of our republic.

The idea that not only the possibility but the tendency of any of us to become too ambitious and excessive in a certain circumstance (and in particular when no one possesses any means and willingness to stop us, or when this relies on our inability to overcome a specific challenge or internal fault) lies at the heart of Machiavelli's criticism of *concordia*. For Machiavelli, the Medieval pre-humanist argument against faction is incomplete because while it recognizes *virtù* as an answer to check corruption, it fails to realize its own local Italian history and expressions of *virtù* that occurred in the form of factions, and to gain self-conscious insight from this into the limitations of human action. In other words, it fails to recognize the natural tendency for all men, including our best leaders, unless by gift of fortune, become corruptible, and the corollary republican thesis of universality of virtue.

What matters for Machiavelli is the willingness by those able to act when necessity and *Fortuna* is present to preserve freedom, whereas for this Ciceronian tradition, it is merely an inflective preparation of the self to be just so as to preserve human sociability. While for Cicero, without virtue, civility and good-faith are forfeited, the solution is different for Machiavelli because human sociability or civility is preserved not only by justice or moral transformation of our self, but it is also and perhaps most importantly with conflict and institutional checks driven by effective actors given the *fortuna* and individuality that freedom is achieved.

This suggests that the concept of *virtù* for Machiavelli does not possess all of its inherited pre-Socratic and Greek traditions of philosophy and the same metaphysical and

philosophical connotations that Cicero and the classical Greek moral theorists had infused it. For the Greek classics, the idea of the good and virtue was immutable and an appropriate moral action according to nature. For the Romans, it was an ideal immutable good that Rome had brought about in its history. This is not so for the pre-humanists for whom *virtù* was a mutable good that had been and still is being brought about in Italian history, attainable not only by anyone but also only if they can will it given their circumstances, natural dispositions and the limitations of earthly life. *Virtù* here is a willingness to act and struggle to achieve a concrete higher interest: that if we do not act effectively and immediately when necessity emerges, we will lose our free way of life. For Machiavelli, it is an ideal expressed by Italian history but that we should never want to become desensitized to all its forms and assume it a given.

This would seem to suggest that the core of this conception of freedom contains an idea of agency. Freedom is after all a reward because agency provided that action itself, not a possession given by any institutional forms such as laws or government. This may suggest that Machiavelli's republicanism is not a strong consequentialism, that is, that it is all about the effective calculation and weighing results or practical reasoning in order to judge the merit of human actions, but it is about the spirit of leaders and the effective use of their abilities in the calculation and discharge of their political duties to secure liberty. Here, the appropriate use of factions in government depends entirely on citizens of *virtù*, because without them liberty and government are never achieved. The difficulty for Machiavelli is not to show that any leader is corruptible, but that this corruptibility (of our actions and those of others) should motivate us to ever vigilantly seek a balance and check. What occurs in Machiavelli's *Discorsi* is that the theoretical foundations of moral and social thought are

collapsed into the world of corruption on the one hand and Italian practices on the other. What matters is whether one has *virtù* or willingness and social intellectual ability to be effective in a never ending quest for the liberty of the city against unforeseeable challenges be them internal, external, and introspective. What is encouraging, however, is that while corruption lies at the heart of every matter, we still have reasons and higher interests that require sacrifice of us. Machiavelli's theory is indeed more than a strong consequentialist analysis of how to evaluate two conflicting expedient and advantageous goods, but a defense of republicanism even though there is a slightly pessimistic assumption in the humanist vision of agency.

Nor is Machiavelli's account here a strong classical one. What I mean here is that the Italian humanist idea of perfectionism encapsulated in the saying *virtù vince fortuna*, is not a moral classical one because it highlights parameters of a modern ideal agency that contains dimensions of good private interests with civic duties that Machiavelli undoubtedly employs in use of Italian republican thought. In summary, there are two specific instances in the *Discorsi* where this use is understood in a humanist context.¹⁸⁸ The first that I wish to highlight is found in Machiavelli's insistence on the danger of corruption in all quarters of political life, in particular, the endowments of our individuality that makes us incapable of effectively handling challenges and causes an ineffectiveness that lies at the heart of corruption and private ambition, and our blindness toward effective and prudent action in the name of our freedom. The second is the capacity of men of *virtù* to compel the people, and other groups, toward their civic duties by appealing to action or fear through rhetoric in

¹⁸⁸ The philosophical problem that differentiates Machiavelli from his Ciceronian inheritance is found in the extent to which men still have civic duties even though the classical assumptions of and for preserving sociability and classical Greek morality are sometimes dismissed as imprudent.

public speeches or by equipping with procedures to provide a watchful eye or vent on political ambition and corruption.

In this second case, Machiavelli seems to indicate that he believes that if leadership is accompanied with civil and rhetorical arts of humanism, agency can begin to set itself free. This is not only if corruption is kept in check, but only if we realize that by *nature* or *Fortuna* good citizens can fall into corruption. We must never forget that once any person has been raised to office or possess private economic resources, they too are subject to *ambizione* or *ozio*. While we have already discussed the means for checking corruption, Machiavelli notes one unique detail about the people in general. He writes that unlike a king or person with private wealth, the people possess an ineliminable openness to the aesthetics aspect of truth in speech. Although, it is difficult to see if the ability to unjealously listen to an orator and statesman is a *virtù*, the upside danger is that the people can listen to a corrupt one and be misled by ambition of leaders that they had elevated to high offices. Likewise, a people closed minded to a bad statesman is virtuous. *Virtù* cannot be consequentialist nor classical. For Machiavelli, law and freely elected government cannot in themselves secure the reward of freedom; it is rather only the spirit of our leaders and the agency that they exercise.¹⁸⁹ It is only if we are willing to recognize and prudently act against corruption that we will ever be free and have the opportunity to know ourselves as free. *Virtù* is not determined on consequences because it loses all of this meaning. While the people, according to Machiavelli, may or may not be always capable of knowing or seeing that they are free, we are free only if they are free from the arbitrary will or anxiety caused by

¹⁸⁹ Erica Benner seems to explore this kind of idea through a revised Straussian approach. See Benner, *Machiavelli's Ethics* (2009).

dominating interest. However, they are also, it seems, always open to an elegant and persuasive case in the right circumstance.

In short, my interpretation highlights an ongoing way of speaking of and shaping agency in Machiavelli's *Discorsi*. The first is in Machiavelli's discourses on the danger of corruption in all quarters of public and political life, in particular, on meeting challenges that lies at the heart of corruption and inhibitions that stand in the way of effective and prudent action for freedom. The second is in Machiavelli's discourses on the capacity of men of *virtù* to compel the people, and other classes, to be good by appealing to their inner strength or fear either through rhetoric and public speech or action in the form of factions.

CHAPTER 4

A Sixteenth Century Republican Theory of Liberty

The historical and intellectual contexts of Medieval and Renaissance Italian humanism have been important for trying to understand Machiavelli's inheritance of republican thought and the ways in which he attempted to shape and modify some of its core concepts. As I have shown in Chapter 3, this context helps us get at the philosophical attitude and assumptions involved in thinking about republican liberty because it may outline a conception of agency that Machiavelli inherited and continued to shape as part of his republicanism. I have suggested that based on the eclecticism and the focus on rhetorical arts in this humanist inheritance, Machiavelli may have inherited a way of thinking about agency and *virtù* largely spoken of in practical terms as an action grounded in local Italian history and culture. The aim in this chapter is to analyse the way Machiavelli talks about agency and what kind of powers citizens are assumed to possess and responsibilities citizens are compelled to cultivate and why. By determining the cultural humanist value of one's own actions, responsibility of overcoming challenges or *fortuna*, and the humanist view that each of us is responsible for our own actions, a certain value of agency (although limited by its tendency to corruption) emerges in Machiavelli's republicanism. I conclude my reflections by suggesting that this may be a vision of sixteenth century republicanism that shifts the terrain away from republican theories on government understood as primarily about republican institutions and republican structures toward theories on human action and citizenship.

My understanding of the republican character of Machiavelli's text is defined not only by the conception of neo-Roman liberty that he uses, but more specifically by an understanding of the individual and how that individual is a fundamental part of providing liberty as a reward. According to Machiavelli, citizens must realize that they have a personal stake in their government, because as the classical theorists in Polybius and Florentine

history tell us, all that exists is corruptible. Citizens must, in light of this corruption, see the necessity of discharging their civic duties to keep check over each other's actions and protect their way of life as best they can. Here, liberty is a reward achieved by an action; not a possession that can be interfered. For Machiavelli this action does not merely preserve a common good, but opens up a common good by fighting private interest. Thus citizens only express their individual interests by discharging their civic duties.

This Roman conception of republican liberty is convincing because it is, after all, one that defines citizens as possessing not only a higher order of interests (civic freedom) that need to be met if a lower individual set of interests is to be secured (personal freedom). If each citizen is to be free in a personal sense, each needs to be free in a civic sense. At numerous points Machiavelli recognized that while a *vivere libero* opens up a range of individual interests and practices, what makes this free way of life appealing is that no one is dependent or limited to the interests of someone else. While it is easy to forget one's civic duties, liberty is only a reward of our civic duties. In Chapter 16, Book 1, Machiavelli seems to suggest that this civic duty is expressed in the laws of the city. Here, the laws liberate rather than constrain us. Machiavelli writes,

[b]eside this, the common benefit gained from a free community is recognized by nobody while he possesses it: namely, the power of enjoying freely his possessions without any anxiety, of feeling no fear for the honor of his women and his children, of not being afraid for himself, because no one will ever admit that he has any obligation to a government which does not harm him. [...] the state that is free and that is newly established comes to have partisan enemies and not partisan friends.¹⁹⁰

¹⁹⁰ Gilbert, *Discourses* (1958), p.236; Machiavelli, *Discorsi* (1960), Book I.16, p.174; “Non si acquista, come ho detto, partigiani amici; perché il vivere libero prepone onori e premii, mediante alcune oneste e determinate cagioni, e fuora di quelle non premia né onora alcuno, e quando uno ha quegli onori e quegli

The danger with the *vivere libero* is not only that all men have the tendency to confuse themselves and blindly convince others of their private aims as the city's true interests, and use the laws for their own interests, so that a great many will never see that what is more important than their compliance is their vigilance that gave them their freedom, but that their freedom is also incompatible with individual ambitions and excessiveness, be it those of the rich or the poor. What citizens fail to realize is that if they neglect their civic duties, despite the good and freedom of their city, private friendships turn into partisan battles for reputation, if these are confused with private aims rather than public ones. Those with the most wealth or by those who employ the city's power with too much licentiousness do not serve the good of the city but master and enslave it by subverting the common good with their own private interests.

Machiavelli's republicanism holds a conception of agency in at least two ways. First, civic duties are actions which are expressed in terms of adversity, strength and social rhetorical skills. And second, that this individual social political skill or *virtù* is not only appropriate but necessary for the challenges that a flourishing civilized society faces in its lifetime. Here, agency is understood not only in concrete and collective terms but it is also capable of action that gives itself that freedom (understood in terms of being free from arbitrary power). It is concrete in the sense that each individual must see his or her own civic action as inherently necessary and valuable in politics. The difficulty for Machiavelli is not merely in the suggestion that once corruption emerges we must stop it or either find it difficult, i.e., that conflict and factions in political life are part of political reality—something that both republican and monarchical theory of the day could in theory share —

utili che gli pare meritare, non confessa avere obligo con coloro che lo remunerano. Oltre a di questo, quella comune utilità che del vivere libero si trae, non è da alcuno, mentre che ella si possiede conosciuta.”

but rather to show that the responsibility for opposing corruption as well as its causes lie within each of us, and change in different circumstances.

This individual responsibility seems quite important to understand because it emphasizes on the one hand a perspective on an actual human nature in history, and on the other a plea to see the problem and its solution as entirely of our own making, that is, the problem is our own corruption and inaction. In the *Discorsi*, Machiavelli writes that the source of our duties is not merely moral perfectionism, but the source is grounded in the almost certainty that we and others will fail at one point in our duties to our city. The source of our obligations is ourselves because that action and responsibility lies within our powers and our will. The harm of corruption is not merely corruption itself but the harm is self-inflicted; it is ourselves that fail to act.¹⁹¹ This is what Machiavelli means when he writes that the first evil committed is never the worst, but only the second in not acting deserves to be censored because it is that failure which invites the risk of servitude, and our own subjection to conditions in which we begin to forfeit our liberties and invite a life in which we live in anxiety of arbitrary seizures and self-censure, not the original harm. For Machiavelli, it is critical that as citizens we immediately recognize the provisional rather than the idealist character of political life, that none of our rights and privileges are immune from annihilation (actual or historical awareness of our rights), and if we do not actively defend them in our actions, these rewards will be ruined by our own failures. Freedom is spoken here not only in terms of freedom from servitude, but also in terms of self-awareness of our limitations and broader character and capacities that we need to possess as citizens versus the fortunes of political life. This analysis of corruption and persuasion seems to be grounded in Italian

¹⁹¹ This theme is found in Dante's works, consequently following this *virtù vince fortuna* paradigm.

culture rather than motivated by any theoretical view of human nature that we might find in Stoics like Epictetus or Cicero's stoicism on universal capacity of human reason.

Here, we are concerned with what this skill has to say about agency, and if we hypothesize this as the tradition of the *dictatores*, we see Machiavelli making a profoundly Italian plea to cultivate the ideal of Ciceronian *vir virtutis*—the ideal of rhetorical arts that Cicero had advocated in his works including the *De Officiis* and were revived by humanists like Petrarca in the *Studia Humanitatis*. This emerges in a number of instances in the *Discorsi*, such as Chapter 4 in the first discourse, where Machiavelli's argues that despite the discord between the Roman people and the Senate, and despite the laziness of the people who fail to be involved in important civic affairs, the people always remained open to the persuasion of a great orator.

The aspirations of free peoples are seldom harmful to liberty, because they result either from oppression or from fear that there is going to be oppression. And whenever their beliefs are mistaken, there is the remedy of assemblies, in which some man of influence gets up and makes a speech showing them how they are deceiving themselves. And as Cicero says, the people, though they are ignorant, can grasp the truth, and yield easily when by a man worthy of trust they are told what is true.¹⁹²

The *Discorsi* requires political leaders to undertake humanist training in effective political argumentation and rhetoric as a critical social and intellectual skill necessary in government. When *virtù* is possessed by the people, this becomes the quality of listening and organization. Machiavelli seems to believe that the people have this capacity not in virtue of

¹⁹² Gilbert, *Discourses* (1958), p.203; Machiavelli, *Discorsi* (1960), Book I.4, p.138; “E i desiderii de’ popoli liberi rade volte sono perniziosi alla libertà, perché e’ nascono, o da essere oppressi,, o da suspizione di avere ad essere oppressi. E quando queste opinioni fossero false e’ vi è il rimedio delle concioni, che surga qualche uomo da bene, che orando, dimostri loro come ei s’ingannano: e li popoli, come dice Tullio, benché siano ignoranti, sono capaci della verità, e facilmente cedano quando da uomo degno di fede è detto loro il vero.”

a Stoic view of universal reason, but in light of a similar but largely humanist view of the rhetorical arts to persuade and teach effectively. This seems not to suggest a deeper art of government, but I think it instead suggests a much deeper and local Italian humanist practice that argues that citizens ought to cultivate and in assembly possess.

This asks citizens to value the efficiency and practicality of their own human actions rather than those of an ideal good; not merely what we would call the instrumental value of their actions, but the intrinsic humanist value of Italian culture and liberty. Machiavelli seems to be entirely satisfied to describe the foundations of agency in these Italian cultural terms. What underpins this theory is a belief in agency, that everything can change because a fundamental aspect of political life is human action, be it speech (i.e., conceptual change and historical conceptual eradication), or indeed historical, political and social action. Perhaps Machiavelli's innovation is also in his defense of this exclusive humanist belief.

The second of the two ideas that I had drawn from the above analysis is the will and its inner/outer limitations; an aspect that I have taken in a deeply introspective sense, not only in our individual character or as Machiavelli writes our "Natural endowment" which cannot be changed, but also our willingness to act, something that Machiavelli like Roman authors believes is transformed or weakened in situations of domination or dependency. There are two aspects to this idea. The first is the ineliminable character or the citizen's natural endowments that have been naturally given and cannot change fast enough in some situations. The second contains a range of aspects that are attributable to whether we live in freedom or in fear. I want to focus on the first for now and then turn to the second, because there is something in the individuality of each person that bars them from full effective use

of *virtù* in most political circumstances. This gets at the idea of corruptibility that I was just discussing above.

Machiavelli writes that while some are wise, they always turn out to lack something, that is, they turn out to be wise but not courageous and so forth, and this is true to such an extent that for Machiavelli, to find a person with a completely well rounded character that meets all sorts of *Fortuna* can be never counted upon. In Chapter 9 of the third discourse, Machiavelli writes of these unchangeable aspects of our character, or as he says, ways in which our nature inclines us. He writes,

Many times I have observed that the cause of the bad and of the good fortune of men is the way in which their method of working fits the times, since in their actions some men proceed with haste, some with heed and caution. Because in both of these methods men cross the proper boundaries, since they cannot follow the true road, in both of them they make errors. Yet a man succeeds in erring less and in having prosperous fortune if time fits his ways, for you always act as Nature inclines you. [...] We are unable to change for two reasons: one, that we cannot counteract that to which Nature inclines us; the other, when with one way of doing a man has prospered greatly, he cannot be persuaded that he can profit by doing otherwise. That is why Fortune varies for the same man; she varies the times, but he does not vary his ways.¹⁹³

It is not the only idea Machiavelli insists on when he writes of how nature endows citizens. While this negative aspect is turned to be a positive foundation of republicanism that ought to motivate instead of discourage us, we also get in the *Discorsi* the idea of strength in a

¹⁹³ Gilbert, *Discourses* (1958), p.452; Machiavelli, *Discorsi* (1960), Book III.9, p.416-417; “Io ho considerato più volte come la cagione della trista e della buona fortuna degli uomini è riscontrare il modo del procedere suo con i tempi: perché e’ si vede che gli uomini nelle opere loro procedono, alcuni con impeto, alcuni con rispetto e con cauzione. E perché nell’uno e nell’altro di questi modi si passano e’ termini convenienti, non si potendo osservare la vera via, nell’uno e nell’altro si erra. Ma quello viene ad errare meno ed avere la fortuna prospera, che riscontra, come ho detto, con il suo modo il tempo, e sempre mai si procede secondo ti sforza la natura.” And also, Gilbert, *Discourses* (1958), p.453; Machiavelli, *Discorsi* (1960), Book III.9, p.418; “E che noi non ci possiamo mutare, ne sono cagioni due cose: l’una, che noi non ci possiamo opporre a quello a che c’inclina la natura; l’altra, che, avendo uno con uno modo di procedere prosperato assai, non è possibile persuadergli che possa fare bene a procedere altrimenti.”

diversity of characters. That is, the humanist optimism and the argument that posits republics as superior in *virtù* to princedoms because in the absence of a great, virtuous man in bad fortunes, the diversity of character and individual endowments that republics are collectively cause them to be much fitter to survive and bring greatness to the city than the difficulty of having a long hereditary line of virtuous princes. This is the idea that Machiavelli expresses in Chapter 9 in the third discourse,

thence it comes that a republic, being able to adapt herself, by means of the diversity among her body of citizens, to a diversity of temporal conditions better than a prince can, is of greater duration than a princedom and has good fortune longer. Because a man accustomed to acting in one way never changes, as I have said. So of necessity when the times as they change get out of harmony with that way of his, he falls.¹⁹⁴

This aspect is central to his republicanism because it argues that for any city to be effective it must be a mixed republic and willing to empower and follow those individuals whose character fit with the times, taking consolation only in that they are checked should they become corrupt. The main idea here is that corruption is something that needs to be checked. Machiavelli associates this notion of corruption in terms that are tied closely to the character of citizens and their effectiveness in defending freedom.

This also brings about the ruin of cities, because republics do not vary their methods with the times, as we explained at length above, but they are slower, since it is more trouble for them to vary, because variation must result from times that agitate the entire state. To make the state vary, one man alone who varies his own mode of action is not enough.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁴ Gilbert, *Discourses* (1958), p.453; Machiavelli, *Discorsi* (1960), Book III.9, pp.417-418; “Quinci nasce che una republica ha maggiore vita ed ha più lungamente buona fortuna, che uno principato, perché la può meglio accomodarsi alla diversità de’ temporali, per la diversità de’ cittadini che sono in quella, che non può uno principe. Perché un uomo che sia consueto a procedere in uno modo, non si muta mai, come è detto; e conviene di necessità che quando e’ si mutano i tempi disformi a quel suo modo che rovinati.”

¹⁹⁵ Gilbert, *Discourses* (1958), p.453; Machiavelli, *Discorsi* (1960), Book III.9, p.418; “Nascene ancora le rovine delle cittadi, per non si variare gli ordini delle repubbliche co’ tempi; come lungamente di sopra

For Machiavelli, “men in their activities should consider the qualities of the time and proceed according to them.”¹⁹⁶ It is however always a discussion that runs into supernatural forces which humanity cannot free themselves from or control. In Chapter 29 of the second discourse, he writes,

If we observe carefully how human affairs go on, many times we see that things come up and events take place against which the Heavens do not wish any provision to be made. [...] I assert, indeed, once more that it is very true, according to what we see in all the histories, that men are able to assist Fortune but not to thwart her. They can weave her designs but cannot destroy them. They ought, then, never to give up as beaten, because, since they do not know her purpose and she goes through crooked and unknown roads, they can always hope, and hoping are not to give up, in whatever fortune and whatever affliction they may be.¹⁹⁷

There is in this last passage an intriguing stoic tone that while men cannot change their nature or that of fortune, they must hold fast to their own capacities to withstand *Fortuna* and wait until she whimsically comes around with opportunity, they must wait and persevere. This optimism is striking but fits with my previous discussions on individuality and limitations. The dilemma is that individuality enables *virtù* in some circumstances while it does not in others. The solution is not entirely Stoic because it is not about cultivating virtue in an inner moral sense but in an active one that can save the republic and change the world. Nor do we have here the classical view of republican homogeneity based on moral virtue,

discorremo: ma sono più tarde, perché le penono più a variare; perché bisogna che venghino tempi che commuovino tutta la republica; a che uno solo col variare il modo del procedere, non basta.”

¹⁹⁶ Gilbert, *Discourses* (1958), p.451; Machiavelli, *Discorsi* (1960), Book III.8, p.418; “[...] uomini nell’operare debbono considerare le qualità de’ tempi e procedere secondo quegli [...]”

¹⁹⁷ Gilbert, *Discourses* (1958), pp.406, 408; Machiavelli, *Discorsi* (1960), Book II.29, p.367; “Se e’ si considererà bene come procedono le cose umane, si vedrà molte volte nascere cose e venire accidenti a’ quali i cieli al tutto non hanno voluto che si provvegga. [...] Affermo bene di nuovo questo essere verissimo, secondo che per tutte le istorie si vede, che gli uomini possono secondare la fortuna e non opporlegli; possono tessere gli orditi suoi, e non rompergli. Debbono bene non si abbandonare mai; perché, non sappiendo il fine suo, e andando quella per vie traverse ed incognite, hanno sempre a sperare e sperando non si abbandonare in qualunque fortuna ed in qualunque travaglio si truovino.”

because diversity here is fully embraced in order to maintain freedom from arbitrary mastery. What matters is the character of men and their willingness to take on conflict and adversity. As Machiavelli writes, “offices do not renown men; men renown offices.”¹⁹⁸ I believe that this agency in Machiavelli’s *Discorsi* helps support the idea of freedom. As we have seen, it is necessary for Machiavelli that men of *virtù* occupy offices, and that despite good laws, without these men *virtù* effectiveness cannot be recognized and employed in government.

I want to focus here on two possible answers to the question of how these two ideas might impose demands, responsibilities and obligations on citizenships and how it might indicate to us what is involved in thinking of liberty. The first demand is found in Machiavelli’s insistence that civic leaders are to be well aware and possess a strong sense of republican history, in particular history with real instances of *virtù*. The second demand is an unwavering stoic optimism for their individuality and circumstances. What makes these leading citizens *virtuous* is that they recognize the wisdom of antiquity, that they are, as Machiavelli writes, “lovers of antiquity” such that they follow not merely morality but above all the necessity and prudence of historical example.

At other times we have indicated how useful to human actions necessity is and to what renown it has brought them, and that some moral philosophers have written that the hands and the tongue of man, two most noble instruments for making him noble, would not have worked perfectly or brought human actions to the height they have reached if they had not been urged on by necessity.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁸ Gilbert, *Discourses* (1958), p.515; Machiavelli, *Discorsi* (1960), Book III.38, p.490; “[...] perché non i titoli illustrano gli uomini, ma gli uomini i titoli.”

¹⁹⁹ Gilbert, *Discourses* (1958), p.459; Machiavelli, *Discorsi* (1960), Book III.12, p.425; “Altre volte abbiamo discorso quanto sia utile alle umane azioni la necessità, ed a quale gloria siano state condotte da quella e come da alcuni morali filosofi è stato scritto, le mani e la lingua degli uomini, duoi nobilissimi instrumenti a nobilitarlo, non avrebbero operato perfettamente né condotte le opere umane a quella altezza si veggono condotte, se dalla necessità non fussoro spinte.”

But before this last victory, he who will consider well the order of these wars and the way in which the Romans proceeded, will see mixed with their fortune the utmost ability and prudence. Hence he who looks for the cause of this fortune will find it easily, because it is a very sure thing that, when a prince—or a people—attains such a high reputation that every prince or people near at hand is afraid to attack him alone and fears him.²⁰⁰

Leading citizens are also asked to be optimistic and never give up on whether their individuality fits with their time or not, and to continue to act according to necessity, in whatever circumstance, and act against whatever internal or external fortune their city faces.

Among the splendid things that our historian makes Camillus say and do, in order to show what an excellent man is, he puts in his mouth these words: “As for me, the dictatorship did not exalt my spirits nor exile depress me”. From this we learn that great men are always in every sort of fortune just the same; if that varies, now raising them, now putting them down, they do not vary, but always keep their courage firm and so closely united with their way of life that we easily see that Fortune does not have power over a single one of them. Quite different is the conduct of weak men, because they grow vain and are made drunk with good fortune, assigning all their prosperity to an ability which they have not displayed at any time. As a result, they become unbearable and hateful to all around them. From this situation, then, issues some sudden change in their lot, and when they look that in the face, they fall at once into the other defect and become despicable and abject. Consequently princes of that sort, when in adversity, think more about running away than about defending themselves, since, having used good fortune badly, they are unprepared for any defense.²⁰¹

²⁰⁰ Gilbert, *Discourses* (1958), pp.326, 408; Machiavelli, *Discorsi* (1960), Book II.1, p.277; “Ma innanzi a quella ultima vittoria, chi considererà bene l’ordine di queste guerre, ed il modo del procedere loro, vi vedrà dentro mescolate con la fortuna una virtù e prudenza grandissima. Talché chi esaminassi la cagione di tale fortuna, la ritroverebbe facilmente: perché gli è cosa certissima, che come uno principe e uno popolo viene in tanta riputazione che ciascuno principe e popolo vicino abbia di per sé paura ad assaltarlo e ne tema.”

²⁰¹ Gilbert, *Discourses* (1958), p.498; Machiavelli, *Discorsi* (1960), Book III.31, pp.469-470; “Intra l’altre magnifiche cose che il nostro istorico fa dire e fare a Cammillo, per mostrare come debbe essere fatto un uomo eccellente, gli mette in bocca queste parole: “Nec mihi dictatura animos fecit, nec exilium ademit”. Per le quali si vede come gli uomini grandi sono sempre in ogni fortuna quelli medesimi; e se la varia, ora con esaltarli, ora con opprimerli, quegli non variano, ma tengono sempre lo animo fermo ed in tale modo congiunto con il modo del vivere loro, che facilmente si conosce per ciascuno la fortuna non avere potenza sopra di loro. Altrimenti si governano gli uomini deboli: perché invaniscono ed inebriano nella buona fortuna, attribuendo tutto il bene che gli hanno a quella virtù che non conobbono mai. Donde nasce che

What this suggests is that agency is thought to have a non-malleable dimension. It is because of this lack of change or inflexibility that corruption emerges because some men are not equipped to resist certain fortunes where corruption emerges. What matters is to empower citizens to check rather than hope to eliminate private ambition and licentiousness. The problem is more complicated for republics, as Machiavelli writes numerous times, because one of these dangers is the perennial presence of partisanship which imposes barriers to *virtù*; barriers that are not only in an internal sense self-censorship caused by great reputation, riches and power of great men, but also barriers in the external sense of offices being awarded through favours and privilege. What this means for Machiavelli is that we must always deploy the necessary energy, in his words, to “bridle human appetites and to take from them every hope of erring without punishment,” to ensure that no one imposes on you their own private interests.²⁰²

The agent here is self-sufficient because he is the agent that made the city, or part of some identifiable community that speaks Italian. Here too, freedom is never a power that one possesses, but a political condition that requires action and in particular action against corruption in the state. Leading citizens are good only when they are fully capable of acting when necessity requires them. They are free however only because they gave themselves the reward through their actions. It is critical here to remember that for Machiavelli law and government do not give agency freedom as if it were a possession. Agency is understood as

diventano insopportabili ed odiosi a tutti coloro che gli hanno intorno. Da che poi dipende la subita variazione della sorte; la quale come veggono in viso, caggiono subito nell'altro difetto, e diventano vili ed abietti. Di qui nasce che i principi così fatti pensano nelle avversità più a fuggirsi che a difendersi, come quelli che per avere male usato la buona fortuna, sono ad ogni difesa impreparati.”

²⁰² Gilbert, *Discourses* (1958), p.285; Machiavelli, *Discorsi* (1960), Book I.42, pp.230-231; “Il che esaminato bene, farà tanto più pronti i latori di leggi delle repubbliche o de’ regni a frenare gli appetiti umani, e tórre loro ogni speranza di potere impune errare.”

requiring an action; therefore, there is no tension between our civic interests and our personal interests because this presumes activity and its limitations that human agency requires if it is to be free.

Machiavelli seems to uphold a classical model of virtues as intrinsically valuable, but subjects them to a concrete notion of human corruption and a humanist sense of agency and Italian history, not an ideal notion of common good. Machiavelli still speaks of them as intrinsically valuable, but he inserts the observation that based on Italian history and a humanist view of action and morality as an education for a professional elite, we are all corruptible or incapable of truly changing our inner nature or character to eliminate this otherwise ineliminable human trait. The virtues are still the classical virtues, however they are not only actions but they are here for Machiavelli inhibited by corruption defined as the human limitation (along perhaps with nature). The virtues are thus not instrumental to liberty, but intrinsically valuable (and limited because of corruption) which is at the center of Machiavelli's analysis of why liberty as a possession is impossible for humans. It must and can only be at its best a constant action by someone that is able to act in a given circumstance. His account of the virtues then is more than a mere instrumental one because individuals do not justify their accounts by giving instrumental types of reasoning, but by giving an intrinsic reason for valuing liberty. In fact, the *Discorsi* seems to be a discussion of liberty and greatness as intrinsically conflicting types of values.

It seems to be a profoundly difficult text to understand fully. While individuals must be willing to discharge their civic duties they do so not because of a metaphysical or moral view of mankind and society, but because they value liberty as an intrinsically valuable concept. Civic duties for Machiavelli, as for the humanists, do not possess any theoretical or

philosophical moral foundations but concrete ones founded in Italian culture and humanist values. Machiavelli continues here to speak of the necessity of civic leaders have a grasp of history of *virtù*, have an optimism about their capacities, and introduces his own on the necessity of being able to change as the winds turn.

By determining the cultural humanist value of one's own actions, responsibility of overcoming challenges or *fortuna*, and the humanist view that each of us is responsible for our own actions (an almost re-sacralisation of human action), a certain value of agency (although limited by its tendency to corruption) emerges in Machiavelli's republicanism, one in which we can attest is part of Machiavelli's stinging criticisms of the Ciceronian view of justice. It seems in this perspective that the aim of Machiavelli's republicanism is not necessarily to increase participation of the people in government but to fully exploit their diversity through their diverse individualities so as to protect their freedom.

All cities and provinces that live in freedom anywhere in the world, as I said above, make very great gains. They do so because their populations are larger, since marriages are freer and more attractive to men, and each man gladly begets those children he thinks he can bring up, without fear that his patrimony will be taken from him; he knows not merely that they are born free and not slaves but that by means of their abilities they can become prominent men. Riches multiply in a free country to a greater extent, both those that come from agriculture and those that come from industry, for each man gladly increases such things and seeks to gain such goods as he believes, when gained, he can enjoy. Thence it comes that men in emulation give thought to private and public advantages; and both kinds keep marvelous increasing.²⁰³

²⁰³ Gilbert, *Discourses* (1958), pp.332-333; Machiavelli, *Discorsi* (1960), Book II.2, p.284; "Perché tutte le terre e le provincie che vivono libere in ogni parte, come di sopra dissi, fanno profitti grandissimi. Perché quivi si vede maggiori popoli, per essere e' connubi più liberi, più desiderabili dagli uomini: perché ciascuno procrea volentieri quegli figliuoli che crede potere nutrire, non dubitando che il patrimonio gli sia tolto; e ch'ei conosce non solamente che nascono liberi e non schiavi, ma ch'ei possono mediante la virtù loro diventare principi. Veggonvisi le ricchezze moltiplicare in maggiore numero, e quelle che vengono dalla cultura e quelle che vengono dalle arti. Perché ciascuno volentieri moltiplica in quella cosa e cerca di

The reason why republican government is preferred is not because it provides a freedom to citizens to do as they please, but rather because it does not assume that liberty can be a possession but a constant condition that requires citizens to discharge their own actions to receive or preserve the reward of liberty. As Machiavelli writes, in fact “the opposite of all these things happens in those countries that live as slaves; and more they fall away from their wanted good, the harder their slavery is.”²⁰⁴ The basic argument is that without this republicanism, we risk becoming slaves to the rich and ambitious amongst us. The chief danger amongst these is the gaining of reputation by private means rather than public institutions. Machiavelli makes this argument by criticizing his inheritance for the problem of wealth and the Ciceronian solution on cultivating the virtue of justice.

The first part of Machiavelli’s criticisms of private means features one of the stinging criticisms against his Ciceronian humanist inheritance. Machiavelli’s criticism is that these private means throw the republic into ruin because they introduce partisanship and corruption. Machiavelli demonstrates that this partisanship and ruin too can emerge even when Ciceronian “good faith” is observed between two parties or classes.²⁰⁵ In Chapter 46 of the first discourse, Machiavelli argues that it is fundamentally mistaken to believe that justice can provide any basis to quell the possibility of factions in any city, as Machiavelli writes, “every day new quarrels and new discords arose [in Rome],” and

acquistare quei beni che crede acquistati potersi godere. Onde ne nasce che gli uomini a gara pensono a’ privati e pubblici commodi, e l’uno e l’altro viene maravigliosamente a crescere.”

²⁰⁴ Gilbert, *Discourses* (1958), p.332; Machiavelli, *Discorsi* (1960), Book II.2, p.284; “Il contrario di tutte queste cose segue in quegli paesi che vivono servi: e tanto più scemono dal consueto bene, quanto più è dura la servitù.”

²⁰⁵ This was as Griffin and Atkins show in their introduction an important Roman legal concept Cicero used in the *De Officiis*. I believe even with its full Roman meaning, Machiavelli’s critique still applies. See M.T. Griffin and E.M. Atkins’ translation of Cicero, *On Duties* (1991).

[t]hus desire for defending its liberty made each party try to become strong enough to tyrannize over the other. For the law of these matters is that when men try to escape fear, they make others fear, and the injury they push away from themselves they lay on others, as if it were necessary either to harm or to be harmed.²⁰⁶

Machiavelli writes that the instant when men are simply allowed to “climb from one ambition to another,” it almost always happens that “republics go to pieces.” With too much ambition citizens seek to strive above others by making “friendships”, and because “this conduct seems honorable, it easily deceives everybody; hence [why] no one uses any remedy against it.” And so “without hindrance” this “ambitious man becomes so powerful” that people become “afraid of him” and the magistrates treat him with “deference,” such that any “attempt to oppose him is very dangerous.”

Because if it comes to the aforesaid pass, when the citizens and the magistrates are afraid of offending the ambitious man and his friends, he then does not have to take much trouble to make them pronounce judgment and do injury at his will.²⁰⁷

Liberty does not find proper protection in the Ciceronian view of justice, as Machiavelli famously writes, not because justice is not a virtue but because the Ciceronian theory accounts for the ambition possible of the wealthy citizens and their tendency to dominate others because of their private wealth. The private means for access to political offices and reputation are not only inimical to freedom but are also inimical to the humanist ideal of humanity and the universality of virtue. Our freedom is not secured through the most

²⁰⁶ Gilbert, *Discourses* (1958), p.290; Machiavelli, *Discorsi* (1960), Book I.46, pp.235-236; “E così il disiderio di difendere la libertà faceva che ciascuno tanto si prevaleva ch’egli oppressava l’altro. E l’ordine di questi accidenti è, che mentre che gli uomini cercano di non temere, cominciano a fare temere altrui; e quella ingiuria che gli scacciano da loro, la pongono sopra un altro; come se fusse necessario offendere o essere offeso.”

²⁰⁷ Gilbert, *Discourses* (1958), p.291; Machiavelli, *Discorsi* (1960), Book I.46, p.236; “Perché venuto a’ soprascritti termini, che i cittadini e magistrati abbino paura a offendere lui e gli amici suoi, non dura dipoi molta fatica a fare che giudichino ed offendino a suo modo.”

intelligent or just, but through those who are willing to act to achieve and preserve it, and can with their words persuade the people to act.²⁰⁸ While this agency relies largely on a legal apparatus (which it itself built and maintained), I have shown that the chief value of Machiavelli's republican government is not necessarily the possession of a *vivere libero*, but a form of action and liberty that allows men to achieve their own freedom.²⁰⁹

I wish to conclude by noting that my analysis suggests that republican government preserves a *vivere libero* because it is empowered to address inherited and unforeseen historical social problems that threaten the freedom of its citizens. Among the many problems that Machiavelli tends to focus on in the *Discorsi* is wealth.²¹⁰ Like the leading Medieval republicans and contemporaries, Machiavelli defended republican government as a solution to this social and historical problem, arguing that it made possible "glorious victories, [by] giving public office to men of good reputation and conduct, making it easy to punish the crimes of anyone who follows evil paths" would all make "the rich" "less esteemed."²¹¹ This is possible because republican government made public offices open to anyone who demonstrated *virtù*. Machiavelli writes of his preference for the Roman practice rather than the Spartan and its 'Lycurgen knife', because what matters most is not establishing a stern equality, since as he says in numerous places is impractical and subject to

²⁰⁸ This argument is made on the ground of a philosophical humanist view of humanity, its capacity to improve its condition, and its universalism and understanding of its own history.

²⁰⁹ Machiavelli seems also to hold this true for what we would call international relations, because as he states in the *Preface* to the third discourse, Machiavelli speaks as well about the *laws of nations* in these terms.

²¹⁰ This position is in part not unique to Machiavelli. *Cinquecento* republicans led by Francesco Guicciardini expressed a deeply held skepticism regarding the Ciceronian defence of riches in public and private life. In his *Discorso di Logrognò*, Guicciardini "developed a significantly different attitude toward property", challenging the inherited *Quattrocento* view by arguing that it not only caused the loss of *virtù*, but also eroded "the desire for true glory", and caused "countless seizures of what belongs to others, as well as many other dishonourable actions". See Nelson, "The Roman Agrarian Laws and Machiavelli's *Modi Privati*" (2006), pp.68, 71

²¹¹ Nelson, "The Roman Agrarian Laws and Machiavelli's *Modi Privati*" (2006), p.72

Fortuna, but also because it is not immune to corruption.²¹² For Machiavelli, republicanism is not a remedy to wealth, but a remedy to its effects of being destructive to freedom.

The agency we read in this passage suggests that for Machiavelli agency lies at the heart of his republicanism. This may be sufficient to allow us to theorize about republicanism as a theory on human action and citizenship. By analyzing the way Machiavelli talks about agency and what kind of powers citizens are assumed to possess and responsibilities they are compelled to cultivate (i.e., the necessity of civic leaders possessing a grasp of history of *virtù*, of possessing an optimism about their capacities, and his own on the necessity of being able to change as the winds turn) in order to counter our ineliminable tendency toward corruption and circumstances, we find that Machiavelli puts the problem as well as his faith on a humanist tradition of agency. Machiavelli continues to speak of the humanist value of one's own actions, responsibility of overcoming challenges or *fortuna*, and the humanist view that each of us is responsible for our own actions, and almost re-sacralisation of human action. While he emphasizes the central humanist ideas in *virtù vince fortuna*, he shapes that agency in new ways by not only defining the limitations of individual moral development because of our tendency toward corruption but also incorporates these ideas into a defense of humanist optimism and republican theory. More than his contemporaries and predecessors, Machiavelli emphasizes the challenge facing cities, wealth and the challenges that *fortuna* throws at it. He nevertheless believes that ongoing social and historical political problems such as these can not only be properly and effectively dealt with by the right action by the right person at the right time, but absolutely need to be dealt with if we value liberty as a theory of freedom from servitude.

²¹² Machiavelli's pragmatism is not accounted if we see him making a plea for violent equality.

CONCLUSION

The following work examines Machiavelli's neo-Roman concept of liberty in the context of its intellectual humanist heritage. My argument is that this humanist heritage provides us with a context to understand how Machiavelli inherited and shaped a humanist view of agency in his use of neo-Roman liberty. I have proposed that Quentin Skinner's intellectual history of republican thought, read alongside Paul O. Kristeller's work in Italian humanism, specifically the eclecticism and the value of the rhetorical arts which Kristeller notes in this Italian humanist movement, have provided, in concert, a background to understand the kind of humanist agency that Machiavelli inherited, shaped, and transformed in his republicanism in the *Discorsi*.²¹³ I have determined that Machiavelli inherited and shaped a self-sufficient view of human action that he inherited from a local Italian humanist context and a humanist-Augustinian polemic— one which inadvertently rethought stoic views on agency that Augustinian had rejected.²¹⁴

Determining the character of this agency has been achieved by retrieving a slightly different view of the humanist context than is elaborated in *The Foundations*. While rethinking this republican intellectual history in light of Kristeller's two theses has only been achieved in a small part here, I have been able however to find the key broad dimensions of this humanist heritage that have been critical to interpreting a part of the agency in Machiavelli's neo-Roman conception of freedom. In my work, I have been able to outline four of these dimensions. The first of these are the practical and pragmatic grounds, rather than theoretical ones, that the humanists interpreted their moral classicists. We might think

²¹³ The polemics and work of Kristeller, Skinner and Baron reveal the brilliance as well as the kind of interdisciplinary and philological work that is still needed with regards to the links between humanist astrology, codicology for book culture, paleography for correspondences, and greater need for Latin and the vernacular Italian for understanding debates and availability of political texts.

²¹⁴ Recent recognition of Skinner's research in Italian humanism and stoicism has been Long in "Greek Ethics after MacIntyre and the Stoic Community of Reason" (1996), p.177

here of the way that Machiavelli continued this when he contrasts republics with hereditary princedoms. The source of this position seems to be on the basis of actual observations of Italian behaviour and history, not a theory of human nature and government. The second is the complex relationship humanists have with their Christian Medieval inheritances, suggesting that they often, if not only at important moments, reopened and rethought Christian ideas and criticisms to different ends and purposes. We might think here of the way Machiavelli holds a conception of *virtù* that seems to sever the Augustinian type of limitations and education on man, and reopens as well as reinterprets the stoic self-sufficiency in the citizens power to overcome challenges in political life.²¹⁵

The third is the rhetorical traditions through which humanists expressed their philosophical writings and ideas. The humanists not only cultivated an eclecticism but also an affinity for texts that contained were well polished in the rhetorical arts. This characterizes not only the difficulty in understanding the diverse bits and pieces of philosophical insights that humanists revived, but also their pragmatism which the humanists used philosophically and other sources to answer concrete political and social problems. The fourth is the suggestion that later humanists such as Machiavelli also continued to foster a unique Italian culture from the Medieval age, one through which they attempted to express and had inherited their philosophical insights. These seem to include the rhetorical arts as well as their unique Italian histories of government and experiences.

These descriptions help us understand the important events of humanism in the *quattrocento*, in particular their polemics with Augustinian theses on human action and the

²¹⁵ While the works of De Grazia seem to interpret Machiavelli's political thought as having a reformist attitude to Christian theology, I believe that it cannot be as cut dry as De Grazia makes it seem. De Grazia, *Machiavelli in Hell* (1989)

kind of self-identity the humanists took on from these exchanges. In this thesis, I agreed with Skinner that in defending their studies, the humanists developed a conception of self-identity in terms that were largely opposed to core Augustinian theses. The humanist context also suggested that they were willing to reopen and rethink Augustinian criticisms of stoic self-sufficiency or perhaps perfectionism without denying (nor perhaps explicitly engaging) a strong Christian cosmological view.²¹⁶ While the key theme the humanists reopened and rethought was the stoic idea of *virtù vince fortuna* (the idea that virtue is necessary, and perfectionism to some limited extent is possible to overcome challenges and receive the reward of freedom), the Italian humanists however revived this and expressed it in local Italian culture and in terms appropriate for a professional elite—discursive terms that I believe Machiavelli continued to inherit and shape.

A reading of Machiavelli's pre-humanist inheritances supported and elaborated my conclusions. I found that Machiavelli had inherited, and reshaped a conception of agency in his discourses on neo-Roman liberty in three senses. The first is concerned with human action in the sense of overcoming not only the problems that emerge regarding internal class structures between the rich and poor, but also external problems of finding allies, reliance on the people for the safety of the republic, and military actions required to maintain and sustain liberty in relation to outside threats and dangers. The second is in the sense of preparing the republic and one's self for specific problems that it cannot do anything about, such as environmental disasters. The third is in the introspective sense ensuring that each person's individual character fits the *Fortuna* (or the circumstances); not only on how this might be

²¹⁶ The view I hold is nuance because I also recognize some points on Machiavelli and Christianity in De Grazia, *Machiavelli in Hell* (1989).

simultaneously a problem that can threaten liberty if one does not fit effectively, and vice versa if one can save the city's liberty.

This helps illuminate the kind of power a citizen is assumed to possess by his/her nature and the responsibility the citizen is to discharge in order to have liberty as a reward, but also the kinds of problems republican theory was thought to be a solution and why. First, the humanist heritage or context is able to do this because it opens Machiavelli's republicanism to a wider and more specific range of intellectual sources in an eclectic and thematic fashion rather than to a systematic philosophical tradition, and suggests that the proper historical expression of *virtù* may be grounded not in a philosophy of moral theory but in actual Italian history and practices. Machiavelli's ideas on human nature may in fact refer to an assumption based on an actual observation of human nature in local Italian Florentine history rather than a theoretical or meta-ethical disposition. This, I suggest, may be the proper context to understand the extent to which Machiavelli seems to empty the concept of *virtù* of some of its metaphysical content and give it more rational, pragmatic substance, an idea that emerges from Italian humanist tradition of rhetoric training and that Machiavelli intellectually inherits and shapes in his *Discorsi*. Secondly, because it sheds light on agency and its ineliminable potential for corruption, we can contextualize Machiavelli's discussion of the problem and danger of wealth in any society as a problem that cannot be eliminated but simply contained and kept in check by a vigilant citizenry.

My argument is that we can see Machiavelli not only reaching back into an Italian humanist inheritance of speaking about freedom, but also the way in which he inherits and shapes this humanism and agency. In chapter 3, I explored this in the context of Machiavelli's discourses on factions as instances of *virtù* by illuminating the humanist

language and meaning about human action and overcoming worldly challenges in local Italian terms, and also the humanist ideas about perfectionism. Based on my analysis of agency, I concluded that Machiavelli highlights two kinds of responsibilities for citizens. The first is in Machiavelli's discourses on the danger of corruption in all quarters of public and political life, in particular, on meeting challenges that lies at the heart of corruption and inhibitions that stand in the way of effective and prudent action for freedom. And, the second is in Machiavelli's discourses on the capacity of men of *virtù* to compel the people, and other classes, to be good by appealing to their inner strength or fear either through rhetoric and public speech or action in the form of factions, if necessary.

By analyzing, in chapter 4, the way Machiavelli talks about agency and what kind of powers citizens are assumed to possess and responsibilities they are compelled to cultivate (i.e., the necessity of civic leaders possessing a grasp of history of *virtù*, of possessing an optimism about their capacities, and his own on the necessity of being able to change as the winds turn) to counter our ineliminable tendency toward corruption and circumstances, we find that Machiavelli puts the problem as well as his defense of republicanism on the foundations of a humanist tradition of agency.²¹⁷ Machiavelli continues to speak of the humanist value of one's own actions, responsibility of overcoming challenges or *fortuna*, and the humanist view that each of us is responsible for our own actions. While he emphasizes

²¹⁷ For the main texts that I rely for this approach, see the series of Peter Laslett, W.G. Runciman and Quentin Skinner, *Philosophy, Politics, and Society* (1972). For helpful additional deeper material, See Tully (ed.), *Meaning & Context: Quentin Skinner and His Critics* (1988); and, Rorty, et al., (eds.), *Philosophy in History* (1984). These also include methodology in the following works by Skinner. See Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought* (1978); Skinner "The Idea of Negative Liberty: Philosophical and Historical Perspectives" (1984); Skinner, "The Republican Ideal of Political Liberty" (1990); Skinner, *Liberty Before Liberalism* (1998); Skinner, "Machiavelli on *Virtù* and the Maintenance of Liberty" (2002); Skinner, "The idea of Negative Liberty: Machiavellian and Modern Perspectives" (2002). For an extensive intellectual biography and bibliography on Quentin Skinner, see Palonen, *Quentin Skinner: History, Politics, Rhetoric* (2003).

the central humanist ideas in *virtù vince fortuna*, he shapes that agency in new ways by not only defining the limitations of individual moral development because of our tendency toward corruption, but also incorporates these ideas into a defense of humanist optimism and republican theory. More than his contemporaries and predecessors, Machiavelli emphasizes the challenge facing cities and the challenges that *fortuna* (unpredictability of life) throws at them. He nevertheless believes that ongoing social and historical political problems such as these can be properly and effectively dealt with not only by the right action by the right person at the right time, but absolutely needed to be dealt with if we valued liberty as a theory of freedom from servitude. This is useful because as a human action, it is decidedly a human expression of reason, and subject to criticism because while agency is self-sufficient, it is also imperfect (i.e., limited to internal, external political circumstances and introspective character traits), and so should contribute to our self-consciousness about how our own human activity and philosophy (as human expression subject to reason) can deal with external challenges that we and our communities face and that might make us “slaves.” While aspects of this theory are outdated (i.e., its focus on virtue, the sole actor being the state, etc.),²¹⁸ the argument that this republicanism is making about human action however is something we should seriously consider and ruminat²¹⁹.

²¹⁸ I share Maurizio Viroli’s position here. See Viroli, *The Liberty of Servants* (2012)

²¹⁹ I am using this in the sense Skinner outlines in *Liberty before Liberalism* (1998).

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