Republican virtues in an age of princes

When in chapter 2 I focused on the Regnum Italicum in the thirteenth century, I concentrated on two connected arguments that were central to the burgeoning republican literature of that formative period. One was the belief that our chief aspiration in public life should be to uphold civic peace and unity, thereby enabling our community to attain its highest goals of gloria and grandezza. The other was the connected belief that, if these goals are to be realised, it is indispensable that we should institute and uphold an elective system of republican government.

By the end of the thirteenth century these assumptions were beginning to be widely questioned, not least because it appeared to so many commentators that self-government had simply proved a recipe for endless civil strife. If our aim is to live in peace and unity, it began to be urged, it will always be safer to entrust our community to the strong government of a single signore or hereditary prince. These sentiments served at once to legitimise and encourage the widespread shift during this period del' comunale al principe, from traditional systems of elective government to the acceptance of the rule of princes. Such changes took place at Mantua and Verona in the 1270s, at Treviso, Pisa, Piacenza and Parma by the end of the 1280s and at Ravenna, Rimini and elsewhere before the end of the century. Dante was therefore speaking with only mild hyperbole — although his phrasing was undoubtedly tendentious — when he observed in the Purgatorio that 'all the cities of Italy had become 'full of tyrants'.

This transition, however, was by no means universal nor uncontested. Florence and Venice managed to cling onto their status as independent city-republics throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and in the course of that period they engendered a political literature in which the values and practices of republican regimes were powerfully carried over into the age of princes. The outcome was a debate of unparalleled historical significance about the rival merits of self-government and princely rule. It is with the nature and evolution of that debate that the present chapter will be concerned.

It was already clear before the end of the thirteenth century that the city-republics of the Regnum Italicum had fallen into a state of crisis. Giovanni da Vignano in his Filo de Patre de c.1290 was only one of many who expressed despair at their deepening difficulties. Remember and think', he exhorts his readers, 'how Pisa, how Arezzo, how Florence, how Modena, how Milan have already been 'broken and destroyed and undone by their internal divisions and quarrelling'.

Reflecting on the implications of this crisis, the political writers of the early fourteenth century tended to respond in one of two ways. Some reverted to the age-old claim that the surest means of bringing concord to the Regnum Italicum would be to accept the overlordship of the Holy Roman Emperor after all. Dino Compagni supports this solution in his Civita of Florence, but the most eloquent statement of the Ghibelline case is undoubtedly the one put forward by Dante in his De Monarchia. Dante begins with the familiar contention that our highest earthly ambition should be to live 'in the calm and tranquillity of peace, since universal peace is the finest of all the gifts that have been ordained for our happiness'. He then devotes the whole of his opening Book to defending

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This chapter has been developed from the central sections of my contribution entitled 'Political Philosophy' in The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy, ed. Charles B. Schmitt and Quentin Skinner (Cambridge, 1988), p. 307 - 352.

1 See Hyde 1972 for contemporary discussions of this claim. For a magisterial account of faction and the transition to the rule of signori see Jones 1972, pp. 55-115, 168, 304-42.

2 Enco 1972, pp. 279, 281, 306-14 showed that the signori generally assumed power with the consent of the relevant body of citizens. The point is still worth stressing, if only because of the influential contrast developed in Baron 1906 between republicanism 'liberty' and the 'tyranny' of princely regimes. For a helpful corrective see Robey 1972, pp. 4-10 and references there.

3 Waley 1938, pp. 165-72.

4 Dante 1967a, VI, lines 123-4, p. 106: 'Chi è la città d'Italia tutte piene/son di tiranni.'

5 Vignano 1274, p. 343: 'recenti e pensati come Pisa, come Arezzo, come Firenze, come Modena, come Milano...sono quante e destrutte e dolse per le divisioni e per le briglie.' See also Libri 1274, pp. 147-8 and Caffi 1924, p. 46.


7 For the date of composition (between 1334 and Dante's death in 1321) see Shaw 1966, pp. 338-339.

8 Dante 1965, IV, 2, p. 142: 'in quies, sic tranquillitate, pacis...equidpatrick universalis est optimum cum quod ad nostram beatitudinem ordinatur'.
the suggestion that, if the disorders of Italy are ever to be resolved, complete trust must be placed in the emperor as the sole authority capable of ending the prevailing strife.

Among Italian political writers of the early fourteenth century, however, the most usual proposal was that the numerous local signori who had begun to seize power in the cities ought simply to be accepted with gratitude as bringers of a more stable and stronger form of government. With this development, the genre of advice-books for city magistrates that we examined in chapter 2 went into steep decline, and a new preoccupation with the virtues of princely government began to declare itself. Padua emerged as one of the leading centres of this new political literature, just as it had earlier provided the context for Marsilius’s great statement of the opposing case. Ferretto de’ Ferretti, a member of Albertino Mussato’s early humanist circle, composed a verse panegyric De Sceligorum Origen soon after the accession of Cangrande Della Scala as signore of Padua in 1328. The principal hope he expresses in his eulogy is that Cangrande’s descendants ‘will continue to hold their sceptres for long years to come’. Pier Paolo Vergerio, who lived in Padua between 1390 and 1415, wrote his De Monarchia during those years, addressing it to the Carrara lords who were ruling the city by that time. Giovanni da Ravenna, Chancellor of Padua during the 1390s, further celebrated the Carrara family in his Dragnetologia de Eligibilitate Vitae Generis of 1404. And Petrarch, who spent the closing years of his life in the city, likewise dedicated his treatise De Republica Optima Administrata to Francesco da Carrara in 1373.

According to all these writers, the highest aim of government should be to ensure that, as Petrarch puts it, ‘each citizen can live their life in freedom and security, with no innocent blood being spilled’. If this framework for living the good life is to be held in place, everyone in authority ‘must be concerned above all else with public peace’. But peace can never be secured under Italy’s traditional systems of republican rule. Vergerio treats this as obvious, while Giovanni da Ravenna points to the history of ancient Rome as conclusive evidence of this general truth. The moral is said to be obvious, and all these writers duly point it out: if there is to be any prospect of peace, we must cleave to princely government. As Petrarch triumphantly assures the Carrara family, it is wholly due to their standing as hereditary signori that they have ‘ruled for so many years over a flourishing community in serene tranquillity and constant peace’.

To these familiar claims a more high-flown argument was sometimes added, an argument stemming from a fundamentally Augustinian vision of the well-lived life. Such a life, Petrarch affirms, will be one of withdrawal from mundane affairs – vita solitaria, as he describes it in the title of one of his most famous books. This alone affords us the leisure or olim needed for great literary labours, as well as the tranquillity needed for contemplation and prayer. The same commitment underlies Giovanni da Ravenna’s Dragnetologia, which culminates in a bitter denunciation of the evils and hypocrisies inevitable in politics and a heartfelt defence of the good life as one of rustic retreat. To both writers this suggests a further reason for concluding that, as Giovanni puts it, ‘the rule of a single man is always to be preferred, even if the man in question is only of moderate worthiness’. Where one man rules, ‘the rest of us are left completely free of public business, and are able to pursue our own affairs’. This is a highly desirable arrangement, indispensable for the completion of any important task, but ‘it is one that has rarely existed under a government of the people, though often under the rule of a king’.

These celebrations of princely rule brought with them a number of related changes in the political literature of the period. As we saw in chapter 2, those who had written in favour of the self-governing communities had always thought of peace and its preservation as necessary for the attainment of yet higher goals, the highest of these being the achievement of gloria et grandezza by the community as a whole. By contrast, the theorists of princely government lay all their emphasis on the glory and greatness of rulers themselves, thereby converting a traditional interest

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12. Ravenna 1510, p. 124: ‘per reges Romanum fuit aeternum imperium, deinde, ubi regius superbus superbus civis parvi contempserat, popularis rerum actus est, quanto hactenusetur civitatis’.
18. Ravenna 1510, p. 143: ‘quod monscha dominante regno, politia raro, contingere’.
in the values of communities into a preoccupation with a series of purely personal qualities.

This preoccupation with princely glory stood in even starker contrast with the values that the scholastic philosophers of the period wished to see propagated. It is altogether inappropriate, Giles of Rome retorted, 'for a holder of regal power to seek his own fulfillment either in the attainment of glory or even of fame.'

St Thomas Aquinas had earlier raised the same objection yet more forcefully in his De Regno. 'The desire for human glory,' he had warned, 'destroys any magnanimity of character.' To which he had added that 'to hold out such a reward to princes is at the same time very harmful to the people, since the duty of a good man is to show contempt for glory and all such temporal goods.'

Among the many contrasts between the schoolmen and the humanists, one of the most revealing is that the latter never exhibit any such guilt or anxiety about worldly glory and its pursuit. On the contrary, we find Petrarch declaring that his whole purpose in offering advice to Francesco da Carrara is 'to lead you to immediate fame and future glory in the best possible way.'

Petrarch accepts that rulers ought to cultivate those qualities 'which serve not merely as a means to glory but as ladders to heaven at the same time.' But this concession represents his sole acknowledgment of the deeply rooted Christian suspicion of gloria mundi and those who aspire to it. The rest of his letter to Francesco is filled with exhortations to undertake such tasks 'as will bring you a share of glory that your ancestors never attained.' You must never hesitate, he concludes, 'to lose after a form of greediness that is generous and beyond reproach: a greediness to obtain the outstanding attribute of fame.'

By focusing on the figure of the prince, the humanists at the same time introduced a number of other changes into the political literature of the fourteenth century. Concentrating on the attributes that rulers need to cultivate, they began to lay an overriding emphasis on the ideal of virtus generalis, the quality regarded by the ancient Roman moralists as the key to glory and greatness. As Cicero had promised in his Tusculanae Disputationes, where there is a passion for virtus, the attainment of glory will necessarily follow, even if it is not your objective.

Petrarch was to give renewed expression to this belief when he assured Francesco da Carrara that 'true virtus brings us glory even when it may not be desired.' By the end of the fourteenth century this assumption had become firmly entrenched as the leading tenet almost the defining characteristic of humanist political thought. The image in which the ideal eventually became encapsulated was that of Hercules at the crossroads. Xenophon in his Memorabilia recounts the story of the youthful Hercules and his meeting with Virtue and Vice, each of whom offers to show him a pathway through life. The heroic Hercules naturally chooses the more rugged direction pointed out to him by the figure of Virtue, rightly seeing it as his route to glory and immortal fame.

Placing all their emphasis on the virtus of the prince meant that the early humanists found little to say about two issues on which the schoolmen always supposed it vital to pronounce. The latter generally recognized that the peace and security of a community will often depend on a ruler's willingness to act with vis as well as virtus, with military power as well as moral force. As a result, Aquinas and his disciples were much preoccupied with the concept of the Just War, seeking to specify the nature of the conditions that make it morally justifiable to declare war and to wage it.

By contrast, the early humanists are apt to stigmatize any appeal to vis at the expense of virtus as a sign of mere brutishness, endorsing the Stoic and Ciceronian proposition that the virtus we must cherish is an eponymous characteristic of the vir, the man of truly manly as opposed to brutish or beastly qualities. As a result, they not only place a question mark, if only implicitly, against the doctrine of the Just
the product of force, of cruel or brutal treatment.\textsuperscript{38} It follows that the two corresponding and indispensable requirements of justice must be \textit{fides}, the willingness to treat one’s word as one’s bond,\textsuperscript{39} and \textit{clementia}, the avoidance of cruelty and violence.\textsuperscript{40} A leader who possesses these attributes will always be loved and admired; and the capacity to inspire love rather than fear is the key to pricely glory and fame.\textsuperscript{41}

Holding, as Cicero does, that the virtue of \textit{iustitia} is enough in itself to entitle a \textit{vir} to be regarded as a good man,\textsuperscript{42} he in turn emphasises that any vices tending to undermine justice — above all the vices of force and fraud — must be stigmatised as beastly as opposed to manly qualities:

It is possible to behave unjustly in one of two ways. One is by acting with brute force, the other by acting fraudulently. Both are completely alien to humankind, fraud because it resembles the act of a fox, brute force because it resembles the act of a lion. But of the two, fraud is worthy of the greater contempt.\textsuperscript{43}

Cicero’s sternly minatory observations helped to give rise to a long-enduring construction of masculinity according to which the \textit{vir virilis}, the man of true manliness, will always be recognisable by his anxiety to avoid behaving in brutal or beastly ways.

Petrarch and his humanist successors follow this Ciceronian analysis almost word for word. Justice is indeed a matter of rendering to each their due, Petrarahc agrees, and this requires not merely the observance of good faith but the exercise of clemency and generosity at all times. If we ask what motives a prince may be said to have for behaving with justice, Petrarahc simply refers us to Cicero’s account. We are told above all to read, mark and learn Cicero’s crucial chain of reasoning — endlessly cited by later humanists — to the effect that justice is the sole guarantee of popular affection, while the love of the people is in turn the sole guarantee of governmental security and the prince’s own glory and fame.\textsuperscript{44}

If \textit{virtus} is the eponymous quality of the \textit{vir}, the man of true manliness, what becomes of women in this moral scheme of things?\textsuperscript{45} Given that \textit{virtus} is imagined not merely as a specifically masculine quality, but also as the indispensable means of obtaining public glory and posthumous

\textsuperscript{38} Cicero 1913, I. V. 15, p. 16. \textsuperscript{39} Cicero 1913, I. XII. 41, pp. 44.

\textsuperscript{40} Cicero 1913, I. XIII. 41, pp. 44-16. \textsuperscript{41} Cicero 1913, I. VII. 23, p. 24.

\textsuperscript{42} Cicero 1913, I. XI. 33, p. 38. \textsuperscript{43} Cicero 1913, I. XII. 41, pp. 44-16; Cicero 1913, I. VII. 23, p. 24.

\textsuperscript{44} Cicero 1913, I. VII. 20, p. 20.

\textsuperscript{45} The question is perhaps most influentially raised in Kelly 1999.
fame, one consequence is that women are excluded almost by definition from taking part in public or political life.\textsuperscript{36} This is not to say that women in quattrocento Italy invariably succumbed to the power of this image. Some achieved fame as humanist writers, such as Laura Cerata and especially Isotta Nogarola.\textsuperscript{37} Some even seized power as rulers in their own right, such as the formidable Caterina Sforza, whom Machiavelli mentions with great respect in his Discorsi and Istorie Fiorentine.\textsuperscript{38} Nor did male humanists refuse to recognise that women might in a certain sense be capable of attaining virtù in a high degree. But the virtues typically assigned to women reflect the basic assumption that the proper arena for their talents should be private and domestic as opposed to public in character.\textsuperscript{39} These assumptions can be seen at their clearest in a work such as Leon Battista Alberti’s Della Famiglia, written in Florence in the 1430s. The men of the family are exhorted to seek fama and gloria by cultivating the qualities of manly virtù and deploying them virtuose in an honourable life of public service.\textsuperscript{40} By contrast, the women are expected to be beautiful, good at bearing children and ready to devote themselves prudently and industriously to the management of domestic life.\textsuperscript{41} The virtues they are required to cultivate centre on modesty, constancy, obedience and above all fidelity.\textsuperscript{42} For a woman to lose her virtue was simply to be unchaste. Although the humanists liked to boast that they spoke for humanity, the qualities they most of all valued and celebrated were associated in their own minds with only one half of humankind.\textsuperscript{43}

Although the system of government by signori had spread through most of the Regnum Italica by the end of the fourteenth century, there were two exceptions to this rule, both of the utmost significance. Florence and Venice succeeded in fighting off the threat of internal ‘tyranny’ as well as external conquest, and in the course of doing so became increasingly hostile to the signori and their usurpations of traditional liberties. As a result, a new genre of political literature began to emerge in both these surviving republics in the early years of the fifteenth century. It was a genre devoted at once to celebrating their civic greatness in the highest humanist style, and at the same time to explaining it in terms of their uninterrupted loyalty to their long-established systems of ‘free’ government.

As we saw in Chapter 2, Henry of Rimini had already sought to account for Venice’s achievements by reference to her unique constitution in his treatise of c.1400 on the cardinal virtues. His analysis remained well known throughout the fourteenth century,\textsuperscript{44} and it seems to have exercised a direct influence on Pier Paolo Vergerio, whose De Republica Veneta of c.1400 took a further step towards the definitive articulation of the myth of Venice.\textsuperscript{45} Vergerio agrees with Henry that the Venetians have proved uniquely successful in combining civic greatness with the preservation of peace. The explanation, he further adds, lies in the nature of their constitution. The city ‘is ruled by an administration of her optimates, and is thus a form of polity which it is appropriate to call, in Greek terminology, an aristocracy, this being the mean between monarchical and popular forms of rule’.\textsuperscript{46} However, the government of Venice is far more admirable than a conventional aristocracy, for it contains monarchical and popular elements as well, ‘and is thus a mixture of all the praiseworthy forms of politics’.\textsuperscript{47} It is because of this mixed constitution, Vergerio concludes, and in particular because of its stretto or strictly limited access to government, that the Venetians have been able to scale the heights of glory without endangering their free institutions or the cause of civic peace.\textsuperscript{48}

By the middle of the fifteenth century, Vergerio’s basic insight had been embroidered by a number of other humanists, most notably George of Trebizond in the Preface to his translation of Plato’s Laws in the early 1450s.\textsuperscript{49} Discussing the constitution of Sparta in Books 3 and 4 of the Laws, Plato had formulated the earliest theoretical defence of the mixed constitution as the best and stabllest form of government. George takes up these remarks and applies them directly to Venice, claiming that the

\textsuperscript{36} Grafton and Jardine 1986, esp. pp. 29–37.
\textsuperscript{37} King 1980, pp. 71–5; Kristeller 1960, pp. 36–8. For examples of their writing see King and Kajff 1985, pp. 57–9, 78–86.
\textsuperscript{38} Machiavelli 1960, III, 6, pp. 10–9; Machiavelli 1961, VIII, 34, pp. 574–9.
\textsuperscript{39} For similar assumptions in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century England see Hull 1982.
\textsuperscript{40} Alberti 1971, pp. 125–6, 154–53.
\textsuperscript{42} For a classic analysis of this ‘double standard’ see Thomas 1955.
\textsuperscript{43} For the impact of the Renaissance and Reformation on the status of women see Sunnerville 1965.
\textsuperscript{44} On this point see Robin 1973, pp. 8–9.
\textsuperscript{45} For the date see Robin and Law 1973, p. 29. For a partial translation see Vergerio 1977.
\textsuperscript{46} Vergerio 1975, pp. 30–1; ‘Veternum respublica optimum administraionem regnumque civilitati graece vocatam aristocrati inustus appetentes, qui inter regionem popularem et principatum media est’.
\textsuperscript{47} Vergerio 1975, p. 305: ‘ext omni genera haereditatis politic simili commissa est’.
\textsuperscript{48} For Vergerio’s survey of the three elements in the Venetian constitution see Vergerio 1975, pp. 39–46. See also Gilbert 1977, p. 464.
\textsuperscript{49} For a discussion see Monticelli 1990.
city's aristocratic and 'directed' republicanism constitutes a realisation of Plato's ideal in practice. 66 Dedicating his translation to the Doge, George dely received a handsome remuneration for this flattering explanation of his adopted city's pre-eminence in the art of government. 67

By the end of the century the image of Venice as the serenissima had become definitively fixed. Domenico Morosini draws heavily on it in his De Beve Institutia Republica of c.1500, although he concedes that Venice's constitution stands in need of some reformation if the city's admirable peacefulness is to be sustained. 68 Gasparo Contarini provides a classic summary of the entire argument, together with much empirical detail, in his De Magistratus Venetorum, a work largely written in the 1520s and posthumously published in 1543. His conclusion is unambiguously celebratory in tone:

There has never been a polity capable of rivalling Venice in the suitability of its constitution and laws for living a good and happy life. The outcome of these arrangements is there for all to see in the long continuity of our city in this flourishing state. And when I reflect on this fact, I always find myself amazed at the wisdom of our ancestors, their industriousness, their excellent virtus and their incredible love of their country. 69

No breath of criticism disturbs the placid surface of Contarini's analysis.

During the first half of the fifteenth century, a no less strident note of patriotism began to resound through the political writings of the Florentine humanists. The tone was set by Leonardo Bruni's Laudatio Florentinorum Urbis, 70 a celebration of the city's glory and greatness that took its form from Aristotle's oration in praise of Athens, but took its main political arguments from the historians and moral philosophers of republican Rome. 71 Bruni opens with a fulsome description of Florence's civic grandeur: the greatness of her wealth, the splendour of her architecture, the immensity of her power. The rest of the panegyric is given over to explaining how Florence has managed to acquire so many glories.

Bruni concentrates on expounding a single and highly influential theme: Florence's greatness is held to be the fruit of her libertas, the outcome of her enjoyment of 'a free way of life'.

When Bruni describes Florence as a free city, what he means is that the community is free in the sense of not living in dependence on the goodwill of anyone else, and is consequently free to act according to its own civic will. His meaning becomes plain as soon as he asks what forces need to be held at bay if liberty is to be preserved. The most obvious is said to be the danger of foreign conquest. To speak of Florence as a free city is thus to say that her citizens have managed to fight off such external threats to their autonomy, especially and most recently the threat posed by Visconti Milan. 72 The other and more insidious danger is said to arise when a powerful individual or faction within a city reduces it to servitude by seizing power and ruling in their selfish interests instead of promoting the common good. To predicate freedom of a city is thus to say in addition that its citizens have managed to forestall any such internal threats to their independence of action. 73

Two institutions above all have enabled the Florentines to maintain their free way of life. To stave off foreign conquest they have evolved a formidable military machine, constantly performing 'outstanding deeds of martial prowess' and 'more than once liberating the whole of Italy from the peril of servitude'. 74 To meet the threat of internal subversion, they have held fast to their mixed republican constitution, thereby protecting the well-being of their community and in consequence the liberty of each individual citizen at the same time.

This degree of emphasis on republican libertas constitutes a major development in humanist political thought. It is true that, as we saw in chapter 2, a number of pre-humanist writers on city government had already associated the ideal of libertas with the maintenance of self-governing regimes. It is also true that, in the generation before Bruni, a number of humanist writers — including Bruni's own mentor Coluccio Salutati — had argued that the laws of a community must aim at the common good if liberty is to be preserved. Salutati had been content to assume, however, that this desideratum can be realised under a prudent

64 67 68 69 70 71 72 73 74
and law-abiding signum no less than under a republic.\textsuperscript{50} By contrast, Bruni and his successors take from the Roman historiasts – especially Sallust and Livy – a much stricter account of the relations between liberty, the common good and the achievement of civic glory. Sallust had argued in his Bellum Catilinae that 'because good men are objects of even greater suspicion to kings than the wicked', the city of Rome 'was only able to rise so suddenly to her incredible level of greatness once she gained her liberty' with the expulsion of her kings.\textsuperscript{76} It was this perspective that Bruni and his heirs adopted. They not only argued that, if greatness is to be achieved, liberty must be upheld. They also insisted that, if liberty is to be kept as safe as possible, it is indispensable to maintain a mixed form of republican government.

There is also a contrast to be drawn between Leonardo Bruni's republicanism and the similar enthusiasm for mixed constitutions displayed by the admirers of Venice. Pier Paolo Vergerio and his Venetian followers argue that, to protect civic peace as well as liberty, the government of a republic must always be narrow or stretto in its social base. Leonardo Bruni by contrast devotes the final section of his Landalio to commending a far more inclusive or largo type of regime. 'It is because Florence has recognised that what concerns the body of the people ought not to be decided except by the will of that body itself that liberty flourishes and justice is preserved in the city in such an exceptionally pure way.'\textsuperscript{77}

Although Bruni stresses the importance of military and constitutional machinery, he only reaches the bedrock of his argument when he asks what animates these institutions and enables them to flourish. A good Cicernian, he answers that the key lies in the possession of virtus. By means of this quality, he asserts that the starting point of section 2, the Romans maintained their liberty and rose to dominate the world. By means of the same quality, he adds in a carefully contrived parallel at the start of section 3, Florence promises to attain a comparable level of glory and greatness.\textsuperscript{78}

As we have seen, the previous generation of humanists had likewise emphasised the centrality of virtus. But here too Bruni's argument differs in significant ways. Petrarch and his admirers had maintained that the best way of life for ordinary citizens will always be one of alius, of contemplation and withdrawal from public affairs. Among the humanists of Bruni's generation this commitment is decisively reversed. Adopting Cicero's slogan that 'what is praiseworthy about virtus is always to be seen in action',\textsuperscript{79} they equate alius with the mere delection of duty and insist that the life of political involvement, the vita activa centring on public negotiation, must always be preferred. Even before Bruni's commendation of the Florentines for adopting these values, Pier Paolo Vergerio had furnished a classic statement of the same point of view. He had done so in a letter composed in 1394 in the form of a response to Petrarch in the name of Cicero, in which Cicero is made to take Petrarch to task for celebrating the life of alius or contemplative withdrawal.\textsuperscript{80} 'It has always seemed to me', Cicero retorts, 'that the man who surpasses all others in his nature and way of life is the one who bestows his efforts on the government of the body politic and in working for the benefit of all.'\textsuperscript{81} This means that 'the most mature and valuable philosophy must be the one that dwells in cities, shuns solitude and concerns itself with the good of the community as a whole.'\textsuperscript{82}

Discussing the nature of this essentially civic virtus, Bruni's treatment again differs from that of Petrarch and his disciples. As we have seen, they had generally confined themselves to considering the virtus of princes. By contrast, Bruni and his admirers insist that, if liberty is to be protected and civic greatness attained, it is essential that the quality of virtus should be cultivated by each and every citizen. A further contrast derives from the fact that the earlier humanists had usually remained faithful to the traditional image of the ruler as a just judge, and had therefore placed all their emphasis on the virtue of justice. By contrast, Bruni develops a more complex and authentically Cicernian account. He agrees about the centrality of justice, and continues to link it with beneficentia and the avoidance of inuria.\textsuperscript{83} But he places no less emphasis on the other three 'cardinal' virtues. First he mentions prudence, although only to observe that this is so widely agreed to be a leading attribute of the Florentines as to require no further comment.\textsuperscript{84} Next he turns to courage, one of the

\textsuperscript{50} De Ruo 1450, p. 144.
\textsuperscript{51} Sallust 1934, VII, 2-3, pp. 12-14: 'nam rebus boni quam multi suspiciones sunt...civitas increpabilis memoratu est adepta libertate quantum liuet reverentia.'
\textsuperscript{52} Bruni 1960, p. 266: 'quod enim ad melan annectit, id non aliis quam melius omnibus sententia deversa...indicatam, hic modo et libertas vigit et instita sanctitiae in civicite servatur.'
\textsuperscript{53} Bruni 1960, pp. 244, 248.

\textsuperscript{76} Cicero 1954, I, 6, 19, p. 290: "virtus enim bas omnis in actu consistit."

\textsuperscript{77} For this dating see Kiley 1972, p. 6.

\textsuperscript{78} Vergerio 1934, pp. 439-40: 'in semper virtus est praeest oratio vel generis vel vita quomodo ad administrandum reipublicam impleturque sedet omnium laboribus se accommodaret.'

\textsuperscript{79} Vergerio 1934, p. 144: "omnibus in multitudine semper superbant philosophia vivit, quia in urbis habitatione et solitudine nescit, quae cum sit in omnibus communde commodes.".

\textsuperscript{80} See Bruni 1968, pp. 251-2 on beneficentia, liberitas, and fides.

\textsuperscript{81} Bruni 1968, p. 252: "nam si prudentiam preeminam, quod omnium judicio haud unum civitatem maxima conceperit."
major themes of his section explaining Florence’s military victories. Finally he discusses temperance, the importance of which underlies the whole of the _Laudatio_’s concluding section on the constitution of Florence. If a city is to remain at liberty, her citizens must avoid all forms of disorderliness, thereby maintaining a ‘well-tempered’ government. Florence’s constitution serves to enthrone precisely this virtue in the hearts of all her citizens, thereby producing ‘an unparalleled orderliness, elegance and unity in all her affairs’. On this rousing note Bruni brings his panegyric to a close.

The moral of Bruni’s story is that, if the highest goals of our community are to be realised, we must serve it with the full range of the civic virtues. This in turn leads him to allude to two further themes of Roman republican thought. One is the question of what constitutes the _optinibus status_ or best state of a Commonwealth. The other is the question of what qualities may be said to distinguish a truly noble or praiseworthy citizen, a citizen of _vera nobilitas_ whose conduct deserves to be honoured and admired. Bruni only mentions these issues in passing, but they form the essence of a closely related genre of Florentine political writing that emerged in the course of the fifteenth century. Buonaccorso da Montemagno in his _Oratio de Ver Ne Nobilitate_ of 1428 was perhaps the first to write specifically about these themes, and his _dialogue_ was in turn one of the earliest works of Italian humanism to be translated into English. Later the same topic was taken up by Poggio Bracciolini in his _De Nobilitate_ of c.1440, by Bartolomeo Sacchi in his _De Vera Nobilitate_ of c.1475 and by a number of leading humanists of the next generation. Among these later writers, by far the most original and influential was Sir Thomas More. As I shall seek to show in chapter 8, one way of reading More’s _Utopia_ of 1516 is as yet another meditation on the implications of the claim that _virtus_ alone constitutes true nobility.

These were by no means the first writers to argue that _virtus vera nobilitas est_. The proposition had been defended by some of the most celebrated Roman poets and moralists — notably by Horace, Seneca and Juvenal — and had never been wholly lost to sight. Brunetto Latini revives it in his _Livres dou tresor_ in the 1260s, declaring in his analysis of the virtues in Book 2 that ‘virtus alone, as Horace says, is the only true nobility,

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78 See Bruni 1968, p. 293 on the need for ‘courage and contempt of danger’ (‘magnitudinis minimum periculorumque contemptus’) if foreign aggression is to be forestalled.
philosophers', but the question is not what Aristotle says ‘but what appears to be closest to the truth’. 57 If we want the truth, he sweeps on, we must turn instead to Seneca, Juvenal, ‘our own Cicero’ and above all to the Platonic sources of their thought. We shall then recognize that ‘noblemente is born of virtus alone’. 58 Whether we hope to attain glory for ourselves or for our community, as philosophers or as leaders of civic affairs, the indispensable quality we must cultivate is virtus, ‘which alone confers nobility on those who possess it, making them worthy of dignity and praise’. 59

IV

Leonardo Bruni’s vision in the Laudatio — a vision of the cardinal virtues as the key to liberty, and liberty as the key to civic greatness — exercised a profound influence over the development of Florentine political theory in the first half of the fifteenth century. Within a decade of the Laudatio’s appearance, we find Cino Rinuccini reiterating essentially the same arguments in his fiercely patriotic Respuesta addressed to Antonio Locci. 60 During the 1420s, the same scale of values recurs in the writings of Giannozzo Manetti and Donato Acciaiuoli, 61 as well as in Leonardo Bruni’s own Oratio of 1428. 62 And in the course of the 1430s the same concern with the role of virtus in the maintenance of a civic libera — now expressed in the vernacular — can be found in Leon Battista Alberti’s Della Famiglia 63 and in the almost slavishly Ciceronian pages of Matteo Palmieri’s Della Vita Civile. 64

As the century progressed, however, these preoccupations came to seem less and less relevant to the political realities of the Regnum Italicum as a whole. Except in Florence and Venice, the signori everywhere continued to extend and consolidate their hold, with the result that a majority of humanists came to view their role as political advisers in a rather different light. Increasingly they took their task, as Petrarch had earlier done, to be that of furnishing the new princes of quadratura Italy with manuals of advice on how best to maintain their distinctive forms of personal government. 65

Among the earliest recipients of such advice-books were the Visconti dukes of Milan. Uberto Decembrio addressed his De Republica to Duke Filippo Maria in the 1420s, 66 while his son Pier Candido continued in similar vein in his Vita of Filippo Maria and his De Laudibus Mediolanensis Urbis Pangræus of c.1435. The former work figures the duke as an ideal prince whose modesty, piety and benevolence won him widespread honour and fame. 67 Later in the century, such pæneegries and advice-books became legion, with many of the most celebrated humanists of the age contributing to the debate. Bartolomeo Sacchi (known as Platina) dedicated his De Principe Vita to the Duke of Mantua’s heir in 1471, 68 while Francesco Patrizi of Siena addressed his De Regno to Alfonso of Aragon later in the 1470s. 69 Finally, a group of humanists from the kingdom of Naples issued similar treatises towards the end of the century, 70 including Giannino Maio, Diomede Carali, Antonio de Ferraris and Giovanni Pontano, whose De Principe of 1468 is at once a typical and an outstanding example of the genre. 71

For the most part these mirror-for-princes manuals are simply an outgrowth of the Ciceronian and Petrarchian traditions we have already examined. It is true that some new elements are added, largely in acknowledgement of the increasing stability and self-confidence of princely regimes. One important development arose in connection with the shift of political discussion away from the piazzas and palazzi pubblici towards the more private spaces of the prince’s court. 72 We begin to encounter a corresponding awareness of the need to offer counsel not merely to rulers but also — in Pontano’s words — to those who are nowadays called

58 Bracciolini 1561-63, vol. 1, p. 79: ‘nobilissimam ex sola nati virtutem’.
59 Bracciolini 1561-63, vol. 1, p. 82: ‘cuiusque sedes est nobilissimus virtutum officium sedem administratarum et dignitatis’.
60 Witt 1976.
62 Skinner 1978a, pp. 76-79.
63 Alberti 1971.
64 On this generation see Skinner 1978a, pp. 69-84. For a partial translation of the Vita Civile see Palmieri 1997.
65 As Kristeller 1965, pp. 116, 163 stresses, the prominence of this genre reflects a general disposition in the period to present moral thinking in the form of advice-books.
66 Boccone 1560, pp. 127-75.
67 Decembrio 1573, pp. 906-1020.
68 Decembrio 1573, p. 1045: ‘de principes ministri, nobiles, vontur, populi concepicens’, For the dedication see Zacarria 1566, p. 21.
69 For the dedication see Sacchi 1603, pp. 21-48. For a partial translation see Sacchi 1997. On the relations between this treatise and Sacchi’s De Opinio Civis see Rabinstein 1985.
70 For the dedication see Patrizi 1591, pp. 1-10.
71 On Naples as a centre of humanism see Brinkley 1967.
72 On Maio see Ricciardi 1968 and for a partial translation of his Di Maistria see Maio 1967. For a translation of Pontano’s De Principe see Pontano 1967.
73 For a discussion of the ‘politics of place’ in the sacchi see Milner 2000.
courtiers'. As early as the 1470s Diomede Carafa produced just such an advice-book, Della Optima Cortesana, specifically addressed to these new and potentially influential figures in the political landscape. Within a generation the new genre had given rise to a masterpiece, Baldassare Castiglione's Il Libro del Cortegiano, drafted in the early years of the new century and first published in 1528.

We also find a related and much-expanded interest in the more ritualistic aspects of princely government. Giuniano Maio's treatise, dedicated to King Ferrante of Naples in 1492, is actually entitled De Maestate, and ends with a chapter on how a ruler should present himself as a suitable figure of grandeur and magnificence. The same is true of Giovanni Pontano's De Principe, which includes a detailed discussion of the Ciceronian ideal of decorum, offering advice on how a prince should dress, speak and generally comport himself in order to proclaim the majesty of his office to the best effect. We are already close to Machiavelli's assurance in Il Principe that rulers can always hope to protect themselves against intrusive questioning if they learn to exploit la maestà dello stato, the majesty of their princely state.

For the most part, however, the humanists of the later quattrocento sketch a portrait of the ideal prince that scarcely differs from the one offered by Petrarch and his disciples. Such a ruler must aim, as Pontano puts it, 'to uphold peace among his subjects and a well-balanced government'. He must also aspire to the highest goals of princely leadership, remembering that 'fame and majesty go perfectly together' and accordingly seeking 'to rise to greater glory every day'. Nor do these writers differ from the earlier humanists in describing the measures that a ruler needs to adopt if he is to succeed in overcoming the malignity of fortune and thereby scaling the heights of honour, glory and fame. The only sure method, they agree, is to cultivate the quality of virtus in the highest degree. This quality, as Pontano proclaims, is the most splendid thing in the world, 'far more splendid even than the sun', for the blind cannot see the sun, 'whereas even they can recognise virtus as plainly as possible'.

The account of virtus to be found in these writers is again a largely familiar one. The prince is counselled to cultivate various personal virtues, in particular those clustering around the ideal of temperance and centering on such attributes as modesty, continence and affability. But the most important element of virtus, the one that (as Pontano states at the outset) 'makes everyone accept a prince's rule with a glad heart when he possesses it', is held to be justice. This attribute Pontano treats in wholly Ciceroian terms. Good princes must always administer something more than strict justice, for they must recognise that there are two further qualities that ought above all to be cultivated by those who wish to rule, the first being liberality, the other, clemency. But they must ensure above all that justice is upheld, and thus that fides or good faith is maintained at all times. They must keep faith with God, treating justice in that context as equivalent to piety or righteousness. They must likewise keep their promises to their fellow-men, honouring their word as their bond even when dealing with their enemies.

To summarise, Pontano remarks, we may say that the ideal prince must exercise 'justice, piety, liberality and clemency'. This will ensure him the love of his people; and by winning their love rather than making himself an object of fear he will also ensure his own glory and fame. To put the moral the other way round – as Pontano also does – the goal of princely glory must be reached virtute non viæ by the virtus of the vir, the truly manly man, and never by means of viæ or sheer brute force. The ideal prince will be a prince of peace, and Pontano ends by assuring us that 'when he is beloved of all, he will not even need to maintain an army, since everyone will want him to live for ever'.

During the second half of the fifteenth century, we find something akin to this literature beginning to burgeon even in the previously

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87 Pontano 1532, p. 1024: 'multo ergo splendidior est virtus quam sedem... quam etiam coeci appetiunti videant.'
88 For example: Pontano 1532, pp. 1018-1022; Maio 1516, pp. 52-60, 69-72 and 165-174; Sacchi 1606, B. X, pp. 134-180 (Contrà Avariciam), B. XII, pp. 174-181 (De Modestia).
89 Pontano 1532, p. 1024: 'justitias enim in quo fuerit, eius imperium accepere omnes animo patientur.'
90 Pontano 1532, p. 1015: 'qui imperare cupiunt, duo aliis propinerea in primum debent: numin, ut Elia et alii, sive, ut clementias.'
91 Pontano 1532, p. 1016: 'nulla considerandis sunt, et ille maxime, quod nihil minus quam fides non servaret, cum tanta vita est, ut etiam hominum, si dato sit, servaret tamquam eam opus est.'
inhospitable atmosphere of Florence. With the rise of the Medici to positions of informal but decisive control over the affairs of the republic, a gradual retreat can be observed from the earlier and more stridently republican traditions of Florentine political thought. This is not to say that the republicans went down without a fight. After Cosimo de' Medici's death in 1464, energetic debates in the *Pretile* bore witness to the continuing efforts of leading citizens to re-establish a more broadly based and genuinely elective form of regime. The debate was renewed once more in 1479, the year before Lorenzo de' Medici set up his new ruling Council of Seventy drawn from the ranks of his own partisans. His increasingly 'tyrannical' policies were subjected to a violent attack by his own erstwhile supporter, Alamanno Rinuccini, whose *De Libertate* contains an eloquent restatement of the traditional Florentine ideal of 'free' government.

For the most part, however, the humanists were content to serve the times, and began to explore new lines of argument designed to fortify and celebrate Florence's increasingly oligarchic regime. This change of outlook first found expression in the form of a growing enthusiasm for markedly *stretto* as opposed to *largo* styles of republican government. In particular, the humanists begin to write in praise of Venice, commending its Dogeship and the aristocratic bias of its constitution, and thereby initiating a powerful movement in favour of reforming Florence's nominally more populist arrangements along Venetian lines.

One of the earliest statements of this point of view can be found in Poggio Bracciolini's *In Laudem Rei Publicae Venetoriae*. This appeared in 1459, the year after Cosimo de' Medici succeeded in establishing a new and more restricted ruling council in addition to the much larger assemblies praised in Leonardo Bruni's *Laudatio*. The standpoint Poggio adopts is that of an unashamed oligarch. Suppose, he begins, you wish to maintain a polity in which the very best men have charge of civic affairs, in which they are in turn controlled by the laws, and are dedicated above all to the promotion of the public interest, with all private concerns being treated as of secondary importance. If that is your aim, then it is essential to establish an aristocratic form of government. 'And in my judgement', Poggio adds, 'such a government has never been established in practice in the best possible manner except among the people of Venice."

Poggio goes on to explain that the key to Venice's achievement lies in the fact that the city is ruled 'by many ancient and noble families, into whose hands the entire conduct of the government is placed'. The constitution is such that 'no role is assigned to the body of the people; rather the system is one in which all public offices are entrusted exclusively to persons of outstanding capacities within the ranks of the nobility'. This means that 'no internal discord mars the administration of the city's government, no dissension, no quarrels among the citizens'. As a result, the Venetians have duly reaped the reward of civic glory. 'Not only have they succeeded in conserving their republic, they have also expanded their power by land and sea, day by day, to the point where their fame and virtù have become celebrated throughout the whole world.'

Such expressions of admiration for Venice soon became widespread. Poggio's argument received strong endorsement, for example, from Francesco Patrizi's *De Institutione Republicae* in 1469, as well as from his own son Gianfrancesco's later and very similar eulogy on Venice. During the last quarter of the century, however, these developments were supplemented and even supplanted by an even more striking shift of political allegiances. After Lorenzo de' Medici's accession to power in 1469, a growing number of humanists responded by offering him their direct support. Turning their backs on the concept of the *vita activa civilis*, they reverted to the contention that monarchy must after all be accounted the best form of government, and that this consideration must be given its due weight even in Florence.

The intellectual resources from which the Florentines gained the confidence to repudiate their republican heritage were largely Platonic in

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163 Bracciolini 1464–65, vol. 2, p. 1475: "nulli utique aliis... eae viris praestantioribus publica demandantur officia..."


165 Patrizi 1494, III, 2, pp. 117–18.

166 For the younger Poggio's eulogy of Venice see Gilbert 1977, p. 413.
must turn to Giovanni Pico della Mirandola’s Oratio of 1486 on the dignity of man, in which we encounter an authentically Platonist scorn for ‘those whose whole life is dedicated to the pursuit of profit or ambition’ in the public realm. Pico’s proudest boast is that ‘I myself have given up all interest in private as well as public business in order to devote myself entirely to a life of contemplative *vitium*, this being an indispensable condition of all the noblest human pursuits, above all the pursuit of truth.

As well as furnishing a renewed defence of the *vita contemplativa*, Plato’s authority enabled Lorenzo’s humanist supporters to mount a more direct attack on the participative ideals of Florentine republicanism. This they accomplished by invoking the concept of the philosopher-king, a doctrine ingeniously connects with a further defence of *vitium* against the demands of active citizenship in Book 1 of his *Disputations Camaldulenses in the early 1470s. If the noblest way of life is one of contemplative retreat, as Landino again affirms, ‘the best state of a commonwealth’ must be the one in which the citizens feel confident in placing their affairs in the hands of a wise guardian, thereby freeing themselves to pursue their own higher ends. It follows that monarchy must be the best form of government, a monarchy in which a prudent and philosophical ruler – such as Lorenzo himself – carries the burdens of the *vita activa* on behalf of everyone else.

If we turn finally to the treatise *De Legibus et Judicis* composed in 1483 by Lorenzo’s own chancellor Bartolomeo Scala, we meet with an even more fulsome defence of the despoticism of the wise. Scala’s treatise takes the form of a debate between himself and Bernardo Machiavelli, the father of Florence’s most celebrated writer on statecraft. Scala contends that the nature of government is such that, ‘with so many different problems arising from day to day, it is highly desirable to be able to resolve them with a free hand and wide-ranging powers’. The best solution is therefore to recognise that ‘it is far better to live under the guidance of a good man and a wise judge than under the kind of dictates that men impose upon themselves’. He ends his speech by coupling his proposal with a dire warning: ‘If you fail to put one person in charge of

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character. One of the ways in which Platonism contributed to the destabilising of republican values was by undermining the claim – also put forward in the closing pages of Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* – that the highest and noblest way of life must be one of *vitium* or contemplative leisure. Cristoforo Landino’s *De Vita Nobilitate* constitutes one of the most revealing documents in this transformation of Florentine humanism, Composed in the 1480s and dedicated to Lorenzo de’ Medici, it is couched in the form of a dialogue between Aretophilus, the lover of virtue, and Philotimus, the admirer of the rich. At first they merely rehearse a familiar set of arguments about true nobility. Philotimus defends the position – which he describes as ‘that of Aristotle, the prince of philosophers’ – according to which ‘nobility is a matter of *virtus* in conjunction with ancient lineage and wealth’. Aretophilus retorts that ‘the one and only source of true nobility lies in the possession of *virtus*, a quality he equates with the four cardinal virtues. So far there is nothing in the discussion to which Bruni or Poggio could have taken exception. The tone suddenly alters, however, with the introduction of the topic of religious belief. Marsilio Ficino’s writings are cited with reverence, and a note of genuine Platonism begins to be audible. The noblest and most praiseworthy way of life, we are now assured, consists in rising above the mundane obligations of the *vita activa* by ascending to the heights of philosophy and finally to the realm of beatitude. Both participants endorse this rejection of *negotium* in favour of the pure life of the mind, and Aretophilus summarises their almost mystical conclusion in tones of suitable intensity. ‘This, this I say is the only true nobility: it consists solely in this one excellence of the mind, a form of excellence which is not naturally produced by our own faculties, but is due to the infinite wisdom of God omnipotent himself.’

Landino’s treatise gave expression to an outlook shared by growing numbers of humanists in the closing decades of the fifteenth century. We find the same Platonist elements, for example, in Antonio de Ferrari’s *Epistola de Nobilitate* in 1488. For the best-known example, however, we
the full range of public affairs, there is nothing in the whole list of things that men have learnt to fear and avoid that you will not have cause to dread, expect and contemplate."^{144}

Bernardo Machiavelli counters with a traditional defence of the rule of law, a defence later echoed by his famous son in his Discorsi on Livy's history of Rome. "We see all too frequently", Bernardo replies, "that evil desires are characteristic of those who serve as leaders of men and have control of affairs in their hands."^{145} The only safe course of action is therefore to place our trust in a structure of laws rather than in the wisdom of a prince, "this being the only rational way to live our lives". But Scala repudiates this conclusion outright, thereby turning his back on the most distinctive contribution of Florentine humanism to the political literature of the age. Instead he holds out the image of the wise guardian, the pater patriae, as the perfect ruler of Florence, and offers the figure of Cosimo de' Medici as a complete realisation of this Platonic ideal within the recent history of Florentine public life.^{147}

By the time of Lorenzo de' Medici's death in 1519, an observer might well have concluded that Florentine republicanism, both in theory and practice, was likewise about to expire. Within two years, however, the French invasion of Italy changed everything.\textsuperscript{146} The Medici were forced into exile, and under the ascendancy of Savonarola the institutions of the Florentine republic were restored and augmented. The Medici regained power in 1521, but their position at that stage remained far from secure. In 1527 they were obliged to go into exile once more, and it was not until after their return in 1530 that they finally began to convert the Florentine republic into a Medicean principate. During the intervening period, the debate between their supporters and their republican opponents gave rise to a further and extensive literature about the best means of governing Florence. It was a debate in which the venerable issues of liberty versus princely rule were yet again rehearsed, but on this occasion with an unexampled brilliance and depth that left an indelible mark on the history of modern political thought.

When the Medici were first restored in 1519, a number of writers at once concluded that Florence would be well advised to accept a framework of princely government. One such writer was Paolo Vettori, who addressed some Ricordi on the subject to Cardinal de' Medici at the end of 1519.\textsuperscript{150} Another was Lodovico Alamanni, whose Discorso of 1516 frankly acknowledges the desirability of stabilising the government of Florence under the Medici, and advises them on how to tighten their grip over the city's affairs.\textsuperscript{150} But by far the most prescient observer to adopt this perspective was Niccolò Machiavelli in Il Principe, the draft of which he completed at the end of 1513.\textsuperscript{151}

Machiavelli's masterpiece was thus conceived as a contribution to a familiar and well-worked genre, that of humanist advice-books for princes on the proper ends of government and how best to attain them. If we turn to Machiavelli's specific suggestions, moreover, we find that these too are at first sight almost equally familiar. The prince's basic aim, he learns in a phrase that echoes throughout Il Principe, must be mantenere la stato, to maintain his power and existing frame of government.\textsuperscript{152} As well as keeping the peace, however, a true prince must at the same time seek "to establish such a form of government as will bring honour to himself and benefit the whole body of his subjects".\textsuperscript{153} This explains why Machiavelli admires Ferdinand of Aragon above all other contemporary rulers. His actions have been so great that "he has become, for fame and glory, the greatest king in all Christendom".\textsuperscript{154} By contrast, this is why he expresses such contempt for Agathocles of Sicily, in spite of his astonishing achievements. His criminal methods 'were such as to win him power but not glory', whereas a true prince will always put honour and glory above everything else.\textsuperscript{155}

\textsuperscript{144} Scala 1930, p. 270: "si disceret rerum omnium actionumque humanarum negotiorum... nihil est omnino eorum que tione et fugerit mecum homines, quorum semper non formalisidem, non expectationem, non ferendum."

\textsuperscript{145} Scala 1930, p. 277: "quod tamen quis praestare cupit tibi ab his frequentissime vindici, qui praebunt homines, et habent verum gubernaculum in manibus."

\textsuperscript{146} Scala 1930, p. 277: "et est unica nova cives fuiuram non."

\textsuperscript{147} See Scala 1930 p. 259 on "Cosimo Medici pater patriae mores sapientissimae civis", Or, also Bonzi 1971, pp. 205-6.

\textsuperscript{148} On the re-establishment of the Florentine republic see Butteri 1985. On Florentine humanism in the generation after 1500 see Godman 1988. For the constitutional discussions following the end of 1512 see Albertini 1955.

\textsuperscript{149} Vettori 1955, pp. 315-7. For a translation see Vettori 1997.

\textsuperscript{150} Alamanni 1965, pp. 314-7.


\textsuperscript{152} For the importance of a contented populace see Machiavelli 1960, ch. 10, pp. 75-6.

\textsuperscript{153} See Machiavelli 1960, ch. 10, pp. 75-140 on the need 'di introdurre forma che faccia onore a lui e bene alla universita del mondo'.

\textsuperscript{154} Machiavelli 1960, ch. 25, p. 369, describes Ferdinand's actions as "ma grandissime", such that "è diventato per fama et per gloria il primo re de' Christiani."

\textsuperscript{155} Machiavelli 1960, ch. 36, p. 42 says of Agathocles's violent methods that 'possono fare acquistare imperio, ma non gloria'.

\textsuperscript{156} Scala 1930, p. 271: "si disceret rerum omnium actionumque humanarum negotiorum... nihil est omnino eorum que tione et fugerit mecum homines, quorum semper non formalisidem, non expectationem, non ferendum."
Turning to the means by which a prince can hope to win power and glory, Machiavelli again discloses his essentially humanist allegiance. He places an overwhelming emphasis on the need for rulers to cultivate the quality of virtù. The possession of virtù is indispensable in the first place if you wish mantenere lo stato, to maintain your princely state. As chapter 6 summarises, ‘a new prince will always find it more or less easy to keep himself in power, depending on whether he possesses the qualities of a virtuoso in a greater or lesser degree’. The possession of virtù is likewise said to be crucial to the yet higher end of achieving princely glory. As the concluding Exhortation to the Medici insists, it is only by being prudente e virtuoso that a new ruler can hope ‘to act in such a way as to bring honour to himself’ and thereby scale the heights of glory and fame.

There are two moments, however, at which Machiavelli dramatically diverges from the normal assumptions of advice-books for princes. As we have seen, the early humanists had often drawn a strong contrast between virtù and re, between manly qualities and brutal force. By contrast, Machiavelli treats the willingness to exercise sheer brute force as an absolutely indispensable feature of good princely government. It is entirely due to the neglect of this factor, he insists, that the Italian princes of his own day have found themselves overwhelmed. He even adds, in a moment of dramatic exaggeration, that ‘a prince should have no other thought or object, nor should he occupy himself with anything else, than war and its laws and discipline’. His closing Exhortation repeats the same advice. ‘Before all else’, he instructs the Medici, ‘you must raise an army of your own, this being the one foundation for everything else you undertake.

But what of Cicero’s contention in De Officiis that a good leader will be distinguished above all by his willing to avoid brute force? As we have seen, Cicero had bequeathed to the humanist the belief that virtù is the eponymous quality of the vir, and thus that good leaders must always cultivate manly as opposed to beastly qualities, taking care above all to avoid the sheer brutality of the lion and the cunning guile of the fox. Machiavelli retorts that there are indeed two ways of acting, ‘one of which is proper to humankind while the other is proper to beasts’. But since we live in a dark world in which no one can be relied upon to behave decently, manliness will never be enough. The ancients understood statescraft much better when they figured the prince as a centaur, half man and half beast. Not only does Machiavelli warn us that ‘for a prince it is necessary to have a good understanding of how to use beastly methods’. He also ridicules Cicero’s earnest imagery by adding that those who fare best will be those who learn ‘to imitate both the fox and the lion’. The moral is underlined in chapter 19, in which Machiavelli discusses one of his favourite historical characters, the Roman emperor Septimius Severus. We are first assured that ‘in Severus there were outstanding qualities of virtù’. To which Machiavelli adds that Septimius’s greatness lay in the fact that ‘he well knew how to adopt the character of the fox as well as the lion’, as a result of which he was feared and respected by everyone.

The other moment at which Machiavelli challenges the prevailing assumptions of humanism is in explaining what it means to say that virtù is indispensable to a ruler’s attainment of his goals. He raises the question immediately after his three central chapters on military power, introducing the topic in chapter 15 in a passage specifically calling attention to his own originality. Although it is true, he observes, that many others have discussed how a virtuoso prince should behave, his own analysis ‘will depart very radically from the rules drawn up by those who have already examined these issues’.

Machiavelli’s first departure occurs when he mentions the personal virtues and vices, as opposed to those which help or hinder a ruler in discharging his public role. As we have seen, most earlier humanists had
addressed themselves to this topic in stern and even puritanical tones. They had called on good princes to exhibit an exemplary standard of personal morality, and in particular to cultivate such qualities as sobriety, continence and affability. For Machiavelli, by contrast, the only question is whether a lack of these amiable attributes is likely to have the effect of undermining a prince’s government. If not, then a wise prince, he suggests, ‘ought to guard himself against such vices if he can, but if he finds that he cannot, then he should continue to indulge in them without giving the matter another thought’.  

Far more radical is the way in which Machiavelli targets the assumption lying at the heart of the entire humanist tradition of advice-books for princes. As we have seen, they had always insisted that the key to maintaining one’s state and rising to the heights of princely glory lies in following as strictly as possible the dictates of justice. Machiavelli begins by recalling the usual humanist analysis of the elements that go to make up this cardinal virtue. He considers in turn liberality (chapter 16), clemency (chapter 17), the associated need to be loved rather than feared (chapter 17) and finally the paramount need to keep faith and honour one’s word (chapter 18). He acknowledges that ‘it would be a most admirable thing if a ruler could display all these qualities’, but he vehemently rejects the fundamental humanist belief that these are the qualities a ruler must be sure to cultivate if he wishes to attain his highest ends. On the contrary, Machiavelli retorts, we must face the fact that ‘because there is such a great distance between how people live and how they ought to live, anyone who gives up doing what people in general do in favour of doing what they ought to do will find that he ruins rather than preserves himself’.  

Machiavelli’s main advice to princes is to reconsider the traditional image of just government in the light of this melancholy truth. You will then be forced, he insists, to acknowledge a number of hard truths that humanists seek to evade. One is that princes will always have good reasons to avoid the supposed virtue of liberality. A second is that ‘you cannot escape being called cruel’, especially if you are a new prince, A third is that, whatever Cicero may say to the contrary, ‘it is much safer for a prince to be feared than to be loved’. And finally, it is necessary to place a question-mark against the supposed virtue of fides, the virtue that princes had always been urged to treat as the foundation of justice and to cultivate above all. The problem with this advice, Machiavelli replies, is that ‘we see from experience in our own times that those princes who have done great things have been those who have set little store by the keeping of faith’. The qualities he is recommending, he confesses, may indeed be vices, but they are vices by which you are able to rule.  

The truly virtuous prince can therefore be recognised, according to Machiavelli, neither by his willingness to follow the traditional requirements of good government at all times, nor by his readiness (as in the case of Agathocles) to discount those requirements altogether. Rather a truly virtuous prince will be characterised by an uncaring sense of when to acknowledge the dictates of justice and when to ignore them. He will be guided, in short, by necessity rather than by justice. A wise prince ‘never departs from the ways of good government as long as he is able to follow them, but he knows how to enter upon the paths of wickedness whenever this is dictated by necessity’.  

What is revolutionary about Machiavelli’s Il Principe is thus that it offers, in effect, a new analysis of what should count as virtuous behaviour in a prince. Machiavelli agrees that the term denotes those qualities which enable a prince to overcome the vagaries of fortune and to rise to honour, glory and fame. But he denies that the qualities in question can in turn be equated with the traditional list of the princely virtues. A prince of true virtù will rather be someone who, in the proverbial phrase, makes a virtue of necessity. He will be ready at all times ‘to turn and turn about as the winds and variations of fortune dictate’.  

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