

Knowing the Occasion

Rome and Fortune in Machiavelli

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This paper attempts to articulate a series of fundamental points in Machiavelli's thought: (1) the many results of the relation between fortune and virtue; (2) the encounter of the occasion and, more generally, the development of a form of knowledge understood as encounter; and (3) the functions of references to fortune in Machiavelli's analysis of the strength of Rome. The aim is to construct from this base a few points that will allow for the development of a thought on correlation and suitability [*convenance*]¹ that will be discussed in the final section.

1. Fortune and Virtue

Appeals to fortune are extremely contrasted in the Machiavellian corpus, *a fortiori* when it is considered in its relation to virtue. Indeed, fortune and virtue seem to maintain a relation of mutual composition and annulment, which appears as doubly contradictory: first, because each has this power of annulment over the other, and then secondly, because this annulment "passes" through their relation, through a relation that is maintained and pursued.

Occasionally, as is the case in chapter 1 of book II of the *Discorsi*, or in chapter 25 of the *Principe*,² fortune seems to follow almost naturally from virtue. Indeed, Machiavelli sketches the possibility of a mastery of fortune out of an ideal of adaptation to events: "if one changed one's nature with the times and with things, one would not change one's fortune."³ Thus, Machiavelli puts forth an ethics of impetuosity (*impetuoso*), of ferocity (*feroci*), and of audacity (*audacia*), which would

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allow "his method of proceeding to meet with the quality of the times," to the detriment of prudence or circumspection (*respettivo*), which, on the contrary, make "the times discord."⁴ Thenceforth, the action of fortune, which consists of the non-coincidence between time and human action (or the nature or habits that justify it), could just as well be humanly reduced to nothingness if these two could meet each other perfectly.⁵ Of course, this adaptation to the quality of the times can sketch no definitive victory: time remains the victor, even of the most Roman virtue. In this sense, it is precisely the possibility of a definitive victory over fortune that must be set aside in order to think the possibility of its actual mastery.

Yet, in opposition to this virtue of adaptation, we can just as well say that the force of time is such that it only leaves man with the possibility of following fortune. Thus, chapter 29 of book 2 of the *Discorsi* affirms, "if one considers carefully how human affairs are proceeding, one would often see things appearing and events occurring of which the skies radically refuse that one should watch."⁶ In these moments of "great adversity," men can be "pushed to greatness" by "the sky, which gives them the occasion . . . to be able to act with virtue,"⁷ to the point where such acts almost do not deserve to be granted! And, at the same time, Machiavelli specifies *a contrario* that living in situations of prosperity removes the possibility of acting with virtue and pushes one towards ruin, without really being to blame. The space thus reserved for a true action, through which the agent would have the possibility to freely reveal his own image or his own value, seems extremely tenuous, or could even reduce him to nothingness. Men, Machiavelli concluded, "can aid fortune yet they cannot oppose themselves to it."⁸ In this way, virtue can now only depend on a "resistance" maintained in, and despite, the absence of a grasp on the events: Not knowing the ends of fortune that proceeds by obscure and unknown paths, men "must always hope, and, hoping, not slacken, whatever may be their [own] fortune and their torment."⁹ Virtue "marries" the offer of an occasion to such a degree that it tends almost to erase itself; in this extreme passage, it is not even a matter of seizing the occasion in a "proactive" manner, but simply of being there, of continuing to be there, whatever may be the overlap of individual and collective fortunes. Virtue approached in this way, that is, diminished *and* concentrated in this way, can no longer be understood as an accomplishment of the individual, but only as the exigency to be there in a collective becoming. *Non si abbandonare*, "do not slacken," "do not let oneself go!"¹⁰ The imperative formulates itself in a negative manner, for the horizon is one of an absence of grasp: resistance is imperative from the first establishment of an abandonment. As such, man *intrinsically* bears no hope at all.

If one must combine these two extreme tendencies of the Machiavellian text, it may seem that the pseudo-logic of virtue and fortune must replay itself continually such that it opens each time onto the possibility of its annulment: fortune annuls the freedom to show proof of virtue beyond an active availability; virtue annuls the action of fortune by adapting itself to it. Nonetheless, a few points remain to be addressed. In every case, it is a matter of relation and agreement, never of mastery: fortune is good because virtue is good and virtue is good because it adapts itself to fortune. Or inversely: one comes under the influence of fortune because one is not virtuous, that is, because one does not adapt oneself to fortune. Accordingly, virtue's entire grasp on fortune is essentially non-definitive, or as yet momentary, since it remains in the order of the relation. As such, belief in a definitive victory of virtue is its very defeat, that is, the return of fortune. Thenceforth, it is also on the very point of the relation between fortune and virtue that Machiavelli focuses his attention (in this sense, fortune is not simply approached in a forward manner). Fortune and virtue only have meaning from this point in which they tie their relation, that is, the *occasion*; but the occasion inasmuch as it is non-determinable, inasmuch as it cannot properly be said to be an object of knowledge, under pain of reinstating the perspective of a definitive victory, which, as we said, transforms automatically into defeat. The essential point on which I will focus here is this opening up onto a questioning of that which can be *knowledge of the occasion*.

2. Knowing the Occasion

Indeed, fortune offers to the "most excellent" among the virtuous founders nothing more than the occasion that their virtue should encounter, which allows "this occasion to be known."¹² There is a fundamental doubt residing in the Machiavellian text concerning the meaning of this "knowledge": *la eccellente virtù loro fece quella occasione essere conosciuta*, "the excellence of their virtue allows this occasion to be known."¹³ Is this knowledge in the proper sense, or knowledge in the sense of an encounter?¹⁴ One finds the same doubt in *Capitolo dell'Occasione*, where it is *a pochi nota*, "known by few," turning, running, slinking away, dazzling to the point of being able to say: "one does not [re]cognize me when I pass by."¹⁵ Given this incapacity of man to know it, the occasion is only expressed from the point of regret, from the repentance of those who let it pass by: for he who lets the occasion pass by is above all the very one who questions it in this superb *Capitolo*, and who, "occupied by many futile thoughts" (to define the occasion), can only let it flee.¹⁶ In short, we let the occasion flee pre-

cisely when we hope to master it through our knowledge. The encounter of it will necessarily depend on another sort of knowledge.

Can we still indeed understand this knowledge as the possibility of discerning the occasion, and thus of encountering it by way of a "pro-active" knowledge? Or rather, does this knowledge reside entirely in the purely conjunctive, simple 'encounter' of the occasion through virtue, which makes the latter thenceforth known or recognized as such? It seems to me that the whole of Machiavelli's thought can find its meaning in proposing, or at least in questioning the possibility of a form of knowledge that is not an objectifying mastery of a thing (or of a situation), and thus which does not presume its determination, but which resides entirely in its encounter—that is, in the encounter of its effects, of its "content of possibilities,"¹⁷ of the potential that is linked to it.

We should insist, meanwhile, that it would altogether have to do with a form of knowledge that, in Machiavelli's account, calls for building his discourse beyond the simple exposition of the singularity of each occasion. And one of the roles that can be found from here on out in the argument of fortune in the Machiavellian corpus would be that of giving rise to this kind of knowledge, that is, of delimiting the discourse in such a way that only this kind of knowledge imposes itself. To further understand this kind of knowledge that builds on the horizon of fortune, I would like to analyze the appeal to the argument of fortune in a few passages of Machiavelli's text that bear on a more collective history. Beyond the general consideration according to which the resistance of virtue by a people allows them to "collectively resist fortune" or its overly devastating effects,¹⁸ what should focus our attention here is Machiavelli's account of the role of fortune in bringing the designation, the knowledge, the encounter of what is for him a collective political construction.

3. Weighing the Fortune of Rome

We shall follow step by step the mentions made of fortune (and of certain neighboring notions such as chance, the sky, etc.) in the first six chapters of the *Discorsi*, in which Machiavelli distinguishes in a very global manner among different types of states, of which the origins are free and which have acquired mixed forms of constitution. Machiavelli distinguishes among these states by the function of *how* they have acquired or encountered this constitution. These chapters are among the most famous of the Florentine works, among the most theoretical, the most rigorous, and even the most determinist, and yet the vocabulary of fortune continually floats therein, further complicating the

already very nuanced panorama that Machiavelli sketches there. The somewhat slanted aim of this article is therefore to analyze these very diverse mentions of fortune in a context that does not seem to reclaim them.

We shall distinguish among three moments:

(1) In certain cities, such as Lycurgus' Sparta,

laws have been given by one single (legislator) from the beginning and all at once. . . . So well that this republic can be called *happy* to which *befalls* such a prudent man that he gives it laws organized in such a manner that it can live in peace without needing to correct them.¹⁹

This element does not as yet appear essential to Machiavelli's reasoning, but in his view it is nonetheless a matter of a happiness that expresses itself as a first chance. Machiavelli does indeed say that this city *sortisce* such a legislator: it "comes out" with the good legislator! On the contrary, a city such as Rome, which has not benefited from such an opportunity, and which therefore does not definitively recede from the "good path" (*diritto cammino*), is taxed with *infelicità* to the degree that it would not be *abbattuta*, it would not have "fallen" on a prudent legislator and therefore has to organize its own self, that is, in the function of, or even thanks to, the "course of events" (*la occorienza degli accidenti*). This city will receive its laws "by chance [*a caso*], in many installments, and according to events."²⁰

Rome has not had its Lycurgus, but

nonetheless, so many events are born therein, fruits of this disunion of the Plebs and the Senate, that that which was not accomplished by the legislator, was accomplished by *chance* [*il caso*]. For if the first *fortune* did not *befall* Rome, the second one did.²¹

In addition, this *fortune* maintained itself ("*tanto le fu favorevole la fortune*") to the point that the internal dissensions never degenerated, in such a way that the different forces that sketched these dissensions added up rather than mutually ruling each other out.²²

Machiavelli opens and thus constructs his reasoning, so defining the most fundamental and determining distinctions of his work, raising one chance against another, a collective chance against an individual chance. In so doing, as we will see later on, it is above all a matter of reducing the logos to the accidental, to history, that is, to giving it the same nature as "the course of events" ("*la occorienza degli accidenti*") from which the logos nonetheless is distinguished by definition and tradition. These two first causes—logos and the course of events—are henceforth of the same nature and can thus be weighed and evaluated

in one and the same manner, from their respective tenor in possibilities. This first step, simple and still insufficient, is fundamental.

(2) Let us pursue our analysis of the many mentions made of fortune, which seem to taint an otherwise extremely structured discourse. We know the main point of Machiavelli's principal thesis is directly inspired by Polybius,²³ and is also similar to certain passages from Cicero's *Republic*.²⁴ Behind these two works, one must also infer the influence of Cato's *Origins*, the lost Roman history written without a proper name to testify to its collective character, as Cicero reminds us. For these three authors, it was a matter of drawing a contrast between states that are built all at once, from the outside and in a definitive manner; states that are built through reason (logos, according to Polybius' text) by a single "philosopher-legislator"; and states that are built over the natural course of history, lacking a unique and definitive (philosophical) determination, and thus in a collective manner, anonymous, non-assignable, and perhaps irreversible: that is, through the course of events, and more particularly, owing to dissensions.²⁵ Indeed, in chapter 3 of book I of the *Discorsi*, Machiavelli brings out these "events" in Roman history more precisely, to the point of being able to assert in the following chapter that they were the origin of the freedom and strength of the republic. Yet, to follow these authors' steps very carefully, and thus to work within the framework of these defenders of a republican Roman model according to which politics and virtue are not a technique and resist all philosophical determinations, Machiavelli must exclude the idea that fortune would be the only cause of the greatness of Rome, a cause that would simply compensate for its lack of political determination.

Machiavelli's tone thus becomes explicitly polemical. He rejects the arguments of those who say that Rome owes its greatness only to "good fortune and military virtue" (*la buona fortuna e la virtù militare*), seeing as it was permeated by so much tumult and confusion. In the face of such a reduction of Roman history, Machiavelli replies that he cannot deny this role of fortune and of militia in the construction of this *imperio*. Yet this good fortune, as much as this good militia, are themselves linked to the good institutions of the city. In fact, these latter, along with Roman freedom, are themselves linked to the tumults ascribed by those who attribute the greatness of Rome solely to its good fortune combined with its military force. In sum, Rome cannot be considered "disorganized" (*inordinata*) because virtue, education, laws, and tumults come together therein, allowing for the justification of the good fortune of this *imperio*. Good fortune is not an exterior cause that compensates for a lack of order; rather, it articulates a gathering of dynamic

relations that one must encounter, and of which Machiavelli can unveil the content of possibilities.

In fact, one must realize that what is thus at stake here is the very definition of the political, that is, the statute of Rome, which either renders it a political city or does not. From Augustine onwards, a critique of Rome and of Roman history has regularly been expressed in the name of the exclusively military terms of its qualities, in the name of its lack of constitution, and above all in the name of the dissensions that undermined it incessantly, which themselves revealed its impure origin (e.g., the fratricide of Romulus, the fact that Romulus populated the city by opening it to ruffians and kidnapping Sabine women). The ultimate point of this critique, which strongly links different expressions of the division, rests in the fact that, according to its terms, Rome would not be considered a city, that is, it would not have a political identity, it would only testify to an absence: explaining its greatness purely through fortune precisely comes back to reveal this absence.

Since the beginning of the fifteenth century, this classic critique of Roman history has been revived, to the point of becoming a real political wager, by the defenders of a Venetian and aristocratic political model, who impose an equation of the warrior character of Rome, its violent origins, and the struggles that divided it, with the conclusion that it is not truly a city. It is as such that, in the second decade of the fifteenth century, Lorenzo de Monacis, in the beginning of his *Chronicon de rebus venetis*, opposes the freedom of Venice to the absence of freedom in Rome, a city corrupted and torn by civil wars and owing its empire solely to the benevolence of God. In the beginning of the sixteenth century, Galateo (De Ferrariis Galateo) also published several texts in honor of Venice, which was called the unique heiress of the Roman model, and which, even further, was said to clearly surpass it, since Rome "had an origin as little clear as it was honest, and experimented with Kings and Tyrants, frequent changes of regime, civil wars, armies and barbarian fires."²⁶ A third example: in the preface to his translation of Plato's *Laws*, Georges de Trébizonde wrote a eulogy for Venice, which he compared to Rome:

The Roman Republic, to be sure, was of vast extent; but its liberty did not last long because the government never stayed the same, nor did it ever stand firm in itself. Instead, in the manner of a chameleon, the Roman Republic changed from one thing to another on a daily basis. As a result, its empire was unified not because of the unity of the state [*civitas*], but rather because it had been founded by one city, which occupied one place.²⁷ Transmuting itself from one day to the next and always divided, it was never one state [*civitas*]. For this reason, I myself doubt if it ought even to be called a state [*civitas*]. No one could live quietly in his own home. The city

was racked so continually by internecine wars and seditions that it often undertook external wars as a substitute for peace. Many Romans entered the military simply to enjoy a more peaceful life.²⁸

In *Comparationes philosophorum Aristotelis et Platonis*,²⁹ Trébizonde pursued the opposition between Venice and Rome with strikingly similar words, comparing the latter to a "hydra," a monster with several heads that could not help but collapse, since power was exercised there by entities that were always discrepant and rivaling.³⁰

Deprived of consistency, unity, and even identity (one could add: deprived of a constitution, of a theoretical foundation), Rome thus should owe its greatness purely to fortune. Such is the reasoning that Machiavelli must overturn, precisely by making all that his contemporaries critique in Roman history the source, or rather the stakes for the benevolence of its fortune and thus for its greatness: Where fratricide, division, war, and political construction through the course of events had signaled an absence of identity and mastery and had implied the appeal to fortune, Machiavelli inverts and converts them into positive signs of a political construction that justifies fortune. The overturn is complete: That which was considered to be a lack and thus the sign of an absence on the political level becomes the sign of a positive specificity and the very expression of power. As a result, fortune, which designated a first and exterior, although aleatory, cause, thenceforth is endowed with, if not cause, at least consistency, at least immanent explications.

(3) In chapters 5 and 6 of this same book I of the *Discorsi*, Machiavelli pursues his radical contrasting of the two kinds of republic (so setting down the essential foundations of his conception of the political). On the one hand, we have the *open* city, such as Rome: divided at heart, tumultuous, perpetually constituent, historical in the organization of its institutions and finding its motor and ultimate guarantor in the plebs. On the other hand, we have the *closed* city, such as Sparta or Venice, that is, closed to foreigners and/or in which the institutions are closed to the people, definitively constituted, strictly limited from the point of view of the population and the territory, peaceful and aristocratic. As for knowing which of these two cities is preferable, Machiavelli claims at first that it depends on the final aim of each city, whether it is to build an *imperio* or to maintain the city as it is.³¹ The *open* city is necessarily expansive; the *balanced* or *closed* city can only maintain itself. The choice between these two possibilities, with all that they signify, would thus depend strictly on the final goal. And between the two cities and the two dynamics thus described, there is no half-measure: "one can never erase one disadvantage without another one propping

up."³² One cannot seek to eliminate the tumults in Rome (thus considering them purely negatively) without Rome losing its expansive power, and Venice can thus only ruin itself in expansion.

Is it thus a perfectly balanced choice, in terms of the ends aimed at, that paves the way for the departure of the "doubt" in which Machiavelli claimed he found himself, when faced with these two purely dichotomous possibilities of the republic?³³ This is without counting on the return of fortune. In fact, if the problem of the *closed* city is that it would not be able to face a situation of war, Machiavelli imagines, in a kind of Socratic dialogue, that it could forbid itself all temptation of amplification and attend to its defense, in short, be sufficiently and perfectly average, so as to attract neither the fear nor the envy of other states. "If such a balance could be maintained, this would be the true *vivere politico*."³⁴ Machiavelli very precisely repeats here the reasoning of those who glorify Venice in denying any political essence to Rome: the true *vivere politico* would consist in the choice of rational balance, in the refusal of change. Yet, he does so in order to exclude this possibility with all the more vehemence in the name of fortune: "with all things human being in movement and not being able to remain stable," such a balance can never maintain itself, and "necessity" may demand that which "reason" did not want to.³⁵ The mere rationally organized preservation of a republic does not equip such a city to face situations of war that the "sky" (*il cielo*) would not fail to put on its path. And even when the "sky" would be so propitious to this city as to save it from these war situations it cannot face, idleness would ruin it. The expansive Roman model thus imposes itself for Machiavelli, after having imagined a real *vivere politico* founded on balance, for "one cannot, on this subject, establish a balance nor maintain a middle ground."³⁶

4. Thinking That Which Suits

The fortune argument is thus still maintained even though it has acquired an immanent meaning: it is maintained, inasmuch as it allows one to reject any position based on rational mastery—balanced, middle road, half-measure—that would be considered the hope of a retreat with respect to the course of events. It is maintained because there is never a question in Machiavelli's work of sketching out a middle road between the two types of cities, and even less of saving the Roman city by re-determining it, by reunifying it, that is, by distancing it from fortune. On the contrary, it is a matter of fully assuming that which justifies this relation to fortune, and to make fortune's encounter a properly political project.

We may now approach the role and the effects of the fortune "argument" more precisely, this argument which, as I said, seemed to taint a very logically structured and determinist discourse, this argument whose structure, it seems, is henceforth made in the most pragmatic manner and which is essential to the expression of Machiavelli's most political and radical theses.

First of all, fortune allows for a leveling and thus a comparison of the different possibilities for thinking the political, that is, through reason or through history. On the one hand, reason loses the privilege of exteriority in relation to the course of events, which means not only that it is debased by the course of events, but also that this hope of an exteriority can be transformed from privilege into weakness. On the other hand, that which appeared conceivable only in a passive relation to the course of events can now be understood actively or positively. This is thus conveyed through a broadening of that which depends on fortune (not only that which depends on the course of events, but also on the mastery of history by reason), but also through a broadening of the field of that which may depend on the political by including what was traditionally considered negative, passive, heteronomous, suffered. Thus, not only are order and concord political, but so too are disorder, expansion, tumults, and divisions. Thereupon, these latter no longer have to be compensated by fortune in order for the greatness of Rome to be justified. Thus, that which had called to fortune in order to be compensated explains it thenceforth by rendering it immanent to the political.

This fortune argument also allows us to systematically reject the hope of reestablishing a balanced position, of any solution that would impose itself as the objective and reasoned mastery of the course of things. And this "rejection" is not for the benefit of the aleatory quality of the course of events, but for the strong correlations Machiavelli draws between the different dynamics which compose this course of events: strength, division, institutions open to the people, absence of original determination of the constitution. Going beyond the alternatives of rational mastery and submission to the aleatory, Machiavelli thus presents the strong option of engagement in compounded dynamics, the strong option of the encounter of a correlated and expansive multiplicity.

This sort of correlation is produced precisely through a discourse that makes fortune the horizon of the political. First, this is because the horizon of fortune globally gives rise to a logic of the encounter, of the relation, of the concordance. From there on out, the political is conceived in the content of possibilities inherent to certain situations, contents of possibility that are strictly carried by these relations of suitability between elements that must come together, and which must

therefore be encountered. Next, this is because, very concretely, each time that fortune rejects the possibility of a position defined by the half-measure, by balance, this always grounds and reinforces these correlations further, always in a more impermeable way, to the point of giving rise to the extremely dichotomous discourse that we have exposed (for example, the preservation or expansion of the Republic, with all that "suits" and "comes with" each of these two alternatives).³⁷ This logic of the relation, of suitability, of the compounded dynamic, inherent to the maintained horizon of fortune, is one of the forms that can be given to a knowledge understood as an encounter of the occasion.

Translated by Anna Strelis

NOTES

1. [In French, the word *convenance* carries a notion of coming-with, from the Latin *con* (with) and the French *venir* (to come), as in coming together and/or at the right moment.—Trans.]
2. I cite the Machiavellian texts from my own extremely literal translation, based on Niccolò Machiavelli, *Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Tito Livio*, and *Il Principe*, in *Tutte le opere*, ed. Mario Martelli (Firenze: Sansoni editore, 1971).
3. "[S]e si mutassi di natura con li tempi e con le cose, non si mutarebbe fortuna" (*Principe*, chap. XXV, p. 296).
4. "[C]he riscontra el modo del procedere suo con le qualità de' tempi"; "si discordano e' tempi" (*Principe*, chap. XXV, pp. 295-6).
5. And virtue, which as of yet only exists in variations, is defined in opposition to man's nature (or habit in other places, since Machiavelli conceives of the political from the place of origination or of the extraordinary, that is, from that which is contrary not only to nature but also to this second nature, which is habit). It is in this sense that one must also understand *Discorsi*, bk. III, chap. 31, in which, at the risk of seeming to contradict himself, Machiavelli affirms that great men always remain who they are, through their constancy or the solidity of their soul, whatever be their fortune—as long as it does not have a hold on them. Their constancy is also a way of working with change, with a fortune that has become adverse.
6. "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" (*Discorsi*, bk. II, chap. 29, p. 188). And this is so, even though the chapters on either side of this one, especially chapter 30, insist on the valor and strength of Roman citizens and thus on their

- capacity not to come under the influence of fortune, justifying this, among other things, by the fact that the people there were armed.
7. "[N]elle grandi avversità" (*Discorsi*, bk. II, chap. 29, p. 189).
 8. "[A] una grandezza essere stati conviti"; "i cieli, dandogli occasione . . . di potere operare virtuosamente" (*ibid.*).
 9. "[P]ossono secondare la fortuna e non opporsegli" (*Discorsi*, bk. II, chap. 29, p. 190).
 10. "[H]anno sempre a sperare, e sperando, non si abbandonare, in qualunque fortuna ed in qualunque travaglio si truovino" (*ibid.*).
 11. Filippo De Lucchese also bases his analyses of Machiavelli on this radical foundation of hope. See his *Tumulti e indignatio: Conflitti, diritto e moltitudine in Machiavelli e Spinoza* (Milan: Edizioni Ghilbi, 2004), pp. 32ff.
 12. *Principe*, chap. VI, pp. 264-5.
 13. *Ibid.*
 14. In French, one says, for example: "avoir connu une femme ou un homme" (having known a man or a woman), used *par excellence* in a sexual sense, or also "avoir connu des difficultés" (having known difficulties), which is always used in the past tense. I thank Anne Gérard for having brought to my attention this diversity in kinds of knowledge.
 15. "[N]on mi conosca quando io vengo" (Niccolò Machiavelli, *Capitolo dell'Occasione*, in *Tutte le opere*, p. 987).
 16. "[O]ccupato da molti pensier vani" (*ibid.*).
 17. In the sense in which Deleuze, situating himself in the tradition of Spinoza, Nietzsche, and Foucault, speaks of the "content of 'possibilities,'" and the "liberty or creativity" of a *dispositif* (or a mode of existence) in order to express the possibility of weighing it "without any appeal to transcendental values" (Gilles Deleuze, "What is a *dispositif*?" in *Michel Foucault Philosopher*, trans. Timothy J. Armstrong [New York: Routledge, 1992], p. 163).
 18. "[O]pporsi alla fortuna, in universali" (*Principe*, chap. XXV, p. 295).
 19. "[N]el principio d'esse . . . sono state date da uno sono le leggi, e ad un tratto. . . Talché, felice si può chiamare quella republica, la quale sortisce uno uomo sì prudente, che gli dia leggi ordinate in modo che, senza avere bisogno di ricorreggerle, possa vivere sicuramente sotto quelle" (*Discorsi*, bk. I, chap. 2, p. 79; my emphasis).
 20. "[A] caso, ed in più volte, e secondo li accidenti" (*ibid.*; my emphasis).
 21. "[N]ondimeno, furo tanti gli accidenti che in quella nacquero, per la disunione che era intra la Plebe ed il Senato, che quello che non aveva fatto uno ordinatore, lo fece il caso. Perché, se Roma non sortì la prima fortuna, sortì la seconda" (*Discorsi*, bk. I, chap. 2, p. 81; my emphasis).
 22. *Discorsi*, bk. I, chap. 2, p. 80.
 23. See Polybius, *The Histories* VI.10, 12-4.
 24. Cicero, *Republic* I.1-2; II.1, 21.
 25. For a more complete presentation of this republican Roman tradition, see my "Absence de la philosophie à Rome et présence de Rome à la philosophie (Canton, Polybe et Cicéron)," *Revue de philosophie ancienne* 22:1 (2004), pp. 107-20.
 26. Antonio De Ferrariis Galateo, *De laudibus Venetiarum*, 1501, quoted in Gennaro Sasso, *Machiavelli e gli antichi, e altri saggi*, vol. 1 (Milan-Naples: Ricciardi editore, 1987), p. 507; translation mine.
 27. And thus in an aleatory manner.
 28. Georges de Trébizonde, *Preface to Plato's Laws*, cited in "Political Philosophy," trans. John Monfasani, in vol. 2 of *Translations of Renaissance Philosophical Texts*, ed. Jill Kraye (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 131-2. Original text found in Georges de Trébizonde, Ms. Vat. Lat. 2926, or *Préface* 11-2, in *Collectanea Trapezuntiana: Texts, Documents, and Bibliographies of George of Trebizond*, vol. 25 of *Medieval & Renaissance Studies*, ed. John Monfasani (Binghamton: Center for Medieval & Early Renaissance Studies, SUNY, in conjunction with the Renaissance Society of America, 1984), pp. 199-203. On Trébizonde, see my "Construire un idéal vénitien de la constitution mixte à la Renaissance: L'enseignement de Platon par Trébizonde," in *Le gouvernement mixte: De l'idéale politique au monstre constitutionnel en Europe*, ed. Marie Nikodimov (Saint-Étienne: Presses Universitaires de Saint-Étienne, 2005), pp. 25-38.
 29. Georges de Trébizonde, "Quod divinitus illud platonis dictum est, optiman rem publicam non esse simplicem, quodeque id solis Venetis contigit," in *Comparationes philosophorum Aristotelis et Platonis* (Venice, 1523; reprint Frankfurt am Main: Minerva, 1965).
 30. Hobbes also compares mixed monarchy to a monstrous figure with several heads in chapter 29 of *Leviathan*.
 31. *Discorsi*, bk. I, chap. 5, p. 84.
 32. "[N]on si può mai cancellare uno inconveniente, che non ne surga un altro" (*Discorsi*, bk. I, chap. 6, p. 85).
 33. "[S]tare dubbio" (*Discorsi*, bk. I, chap. 5, p. 84).
 34. "[P]otendosi tenere la cosa bilanciata in questo modo, che e' sarebbe il vero vivere politico" (*Discorsi*, bk. I, chap. 6, p. 86).
 35. "[S]endo tutte le cose degli uomini in moto, e non potendo stare salde"; "a molte cose che la ragione non t'induce, t'induce la necessità" (*ibid.*).
 36. "[N]on si potendo . . . bilanciare questa cosa, né mantenere questa via del mezzo" (*ibid.*).
 37. One would have to develop further here on the particularity of these relations of suitability that put the Machiavellian text in rhythm, in showing, for example, that they are also built from the impossibility of organizing

the different related elements in simple relations of cause and effect. All appearance of causality plunges into circular relations, whether they be beneficial or vicious, thus postponing all hope of mastery, all possibility of discerning guarantees. On this subject, see the analyses I propose on the question of originary violence, of conflict or corruption, in the first part of my *Violence de la loi à la Renaissance: L'originare du politique chez Machiavel et Montaigne* (Paris: Kimé, 2000); as well as in my *Souveraineté, droit et gouvernementalité: Lectures du politique à partir de Bodin* (Paris: Léo Scheer, 2005), pp. 55-68.