Machiavelli, Aristotle and the Scholastics. The Origins of Human Society and the Status of Prudence

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Abstract: This paper assesses the complex debt of Machiavelli's moral and political thought to Aristotle and the Aristotelian tradition, especially in its Scholastic variant. My claim is that Machiavelli's attitude *vis-à-vis* Aristotle is two-fold because it reflects two different aspects of Aristotle's moral and political theory that are closely intertwined and that were selectively developed by subsequent Aristotelian Scholastic commentators: a teleological and a realist aspect. On one hand, Machiavelli provides a model that dramatically breaks with Aristotle on, for example, the question of the origin of human society and the moral prudence of rulers. On the other hand, Machiavelli's engagement with Aristotle amounts to something more complex than a simple rejection. The Florentine appears to read Aristotle rather selectively, and emphasizes the realist dimension of certain Aristotelian ideas that suit his own original overturning of classical moral and political ideas. I use two paradigmatic themes in which the Aristotelian teleological-realist divide is most evident, i.e., the account of the origin of human society and the case of prudence, in order to prove the dual relationship of Machiavelli's thought with Aristotelianism.

Keywords: [Aristotle, Machiavelli, Scholasticism, Aristotelianism, Prudence, Human Society]

While Machiavelli's debt to Aristotle and the language of Aristotelianism has been a topic of intense scrutiny in the literature,[1] his relation to Aristotelianism in its Scholastic variant is an intriguing, but relatively unexplored, topic in the scholarship on the Florentine secretary.[2] This is especially evident if we compare the very few scholarly contributions that link Machiavelli to Scholastic sources to those that are devoted to Machiavelli and other Greek or Latin sources. One reason for scholars' disinterest on this topic might be the obvious fact that Machiavelli's main sources were Roman, that he was unlikely to have access to university treatises and that he did not read Greek.[3] Moreover, Machiavelli only rarely mentions Aristotle and never refers to any of his Scholastic interpreters, including Albert the Great, Walter Burley, John of Jandun, Thomas Aquinas, and others. However, we know that Scholastic ideas were widespread in the civil and humanist culture in which Machiavelli was trained and worked.[4] Several sources with which Machiavelli was certainly acquainted reported the ideas of Aristotle or of his Scholastic commentators, which had been transmitted to late Medieval and early modern authors. As will be shown below, it is often very difficult, if not impossible, to separate the influence of ideas that come directly from Aristotelian texts from the way those ideas were analyzed and reported in the humanistic and Scholastic texts that drew upon Aristotle's ideas.

In the scholarly literature devoted to this topic, two opposing views have prevailed. On one hand, some studies suggest that Machiavelli's political thought, especially in the *Prince*, consistently and systematically rejects most of the key assumptions of Aristotle's ethical and political theories, including those reinstated by Scholastic authors.[5] Others have found confirmation of a rupture between Machiavelli and the Scholastic Aristotle in the *Discourses* in which Machiavelli's description of the origins of human society and many other key topics are utterly incompatible with the main principles of Aristotelian naturalism.[6] On the other hand, some scholars emphasize the continuity between Machiavelli and Aristotelian ethical and political thought in the *Prince* as well as in the *Discourses*.[7] Indeed, as we will see, Machiavelli mentions some Aristotelian ideas in several passages of the *Prince* and the *Discourses* when these suit his own political thought. The most typical example of this can be found in the *Prince* where Machiavelli relies upon Aristotle's arguments from Book V of his *Politics* on the question of how to preserve power in a degenerated regime like tyranny.

This paper pursues a third interpretation that goes beyond the two proposed above. Rather than asking the question of whether or not there is continuity or rupture between the Scholastic Aristotle and

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Machiavelli, the present analysis contends that Machiavelli's relation to Scholasticism includes elements of both continuity and rupture. As it will be demonstrated, re-opening the question of Machiavelli's Aristotelianism means showing the complex debt of Machiavelli's moral and political thought to Aristotle and his medieval and early modern followers. My claim is that Machiavelli's attitude *vis-à-vis* Aristotle and the Aristotelians is based on two different, though closely intertwined, aspects of Aristotle's ethical and political language: a teleological and realist approach.[8] In order to elucidate the flexible role that these two aspects play in Machiavelli's initial re-appropriation of Aristotelian language, I take two themes in which this debate between Aristotle the "teleologist" and Aristotle the "realist" are most evident: the question of the origin of human society and the notion of prudence. On one hand, Machiavelli rejects some core ideas of Aristotle's ethical and political thought. Several Scholastic thinkers reasserted the importance of this dimension of Aristotle's moral and political theory from the thirteenth century onwards by trying to make them compatible with Christian political thought. This is a naturalist understanding of the common good, the moral characterisation of virtue as well as of politics' dependence on the latter. On the other hand, Machiavelli's engagement with Aristotle amounts to something more complex than a simple rejection. Machiavelli reads Aristotle rather selectively, emphasizing the instrumental dimension of certain Aristotelian ideas that suit his own notions of morality and politics. This highlights a convergence between Machiavelli and some aspects of Aristotelian philosophy that the Scholastics tended to develop into a more "realist", rather than "teleological", position.

This paper is divided as follows. Part 1 tries to reconstruct the scarce evidence on Machiavelli's Aristotelian sources. Part 2 focuses on Machiavelli's account of the origins of human society and the complex debate about its relation to Aristotle's ideas. Part 3 provides a similar analysis on Machiavelli's theory of prudence and its Aristotelian roots. Part 4 draws some general conclusions on the relationship between Machiavelli, Aristotle and the Scholastics.

Machiavelli and Aristotle

In a letter to his friend, Francesco Vettori, Machiavelli explicitly dismisses Aristotle's teaching on republics. In this letter, Machiavelli responds to Vettori's claim that in order to understand the situation of the Helvetic confederation, one has to consider Aristotle's writing on divided republics. Machiavelli answers authoritatively on 26 August 1513 by writing the following: "I don't know what Aristotle says about divided [i.e., confederate] republics; but I do think carefully about what reasonably could be, what is and what has been". The Florentine justifies his position by referring to himself as someone who "does not want to be prompted by any authority but reason".[9] He then makes two claims. First, he says that he does not know Aristotle on divided republics and, second, that he prefers to think of what follows according to reason ("what could reasonably be") rather than what follows from authority. As I will try to show, Machiavelli's dismissal of Aristotle in this letter to Vettori is perhaps an overstatement. Therefore, we should take Machiavelli's words *cum grano salis*.

As for Machiavelli's first claim, Aristotle deals with divided republics in Book V of his *Politics*.[10] We have some evidence that Machiavelli knew of Aristotle's *Politics* by the time that he wrote this sentence to Vettori.[11] Therefore, Machiavelli's claim that he does not know what Aristotle says on divided republics does not necessarily mean that he did not know Aristotle's *Politics* at all. We might speculate that Machiavelli knew the *Nicomachean Ethics* by the date of the letter, 1513, because his father Bernardo Machiavelli borrowed a copy of this text in 1479 when Machiavelli was just 10 years old.[12] Moreover, in 1513, Machiavelli was in the process of writing the *Prince* (whose first composition was finally announced to Vettori in the famous letter of December 1513). Some authors have noted that Machiavelli overturns several important principles of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* in many chapters of the *Prince*,[13] suggesting that he did have some knowledge of Aristotle's ethical text while writing the *Prince*. The evidence that we have on this point, however, is inconclusive.

Machiavelli's second claim in which he rejects Aristotle's authority in favour of "reason" is more important for our analysis. One way to make sense of Machiavelli's self-professed rejection of Aristotle might be to think that "what reasonably could be" is just another name for a descriptive analysis that is based on empirical observation. So, the Florentine may simply want to suggest that experience is much more important than authority when one has to determine the reasons why republics are divided. Two points must be made on this matter.

First, Machiavelli's preference for reason in political matters against Aristotle's authority is particularly original. With this preference, Machiavelli appears to put himself at odds with a large part of the traditions of both Scholasticism and civic humanism.[14] Since the time of the rediscovery of his works in the late Middle Ages, Aristotle had been a powerful authority on ethical and political matters for most political writers. It is true that unlike the Scholastics, most civic humanists, who followed the path that was first set out by Francesco Petrarca, had a very negative opinion of Aristotle's natural philosophy because Aristotle, in the imagination of civic humanists anyway, was the symbol of the useless and abstract speculations of Medieval Scholasticism.[15] In this respect, the portrayal of Plato's natural philosophy was much more positive among humanists than Aristotle's. However, most of them separated Aristotle's ethical and political reflections,, from his physical and metaphysical thought. On this basis, they agreed with the medieval Scholastics about the importance of studying Aristotle's ethical and political works in order to understand morality and the good society.[16] Several examples of this tendency exist. For instance, in the preface to his translations of the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Politics*, Leonardo Bruni expresses a clear preference for moral and civic Aristotelian thought which he argues is much more useful and important than the vain, Aristotelian natural philosophy that characterized Scholasticism. In his *De institutione reipublicae* (completed between 1465 and 1471), Francesco Patrizi considers the best studies on civil society to be found in Plato, Xenophon, Cicero and, of course, Aristotle.[17] Likewise, in his *Vita civile*, fifteenth-century Italian humanist Matteo Palmieri writes that philosophy is the most important of all human acts and doctrines and he divides it into "the investigation of the secrets of nature", which is sublime and excellent, and a discipline that manages customs and recognizes good living among virtuous men. The latter for Palmieri is much more useful for our lives and is why he declares that he will pursue the second line of research in his text.[18] Finally, in the Introduction to his *De re publica* (c. 1449), Lauro Quirini explains that philosophy is divided into "the contemplation and knowledge of truth" and in the "adoption of the good and the honourable".[19] Among the disciplines that are devoted to the latter, Quirini writes that politics "is more excellent and noble" than any other practical science, i.e., economics and ethics.

Unlike these authors, Machiavelli's words to Vettori indicate that he opposes the cult of the ethical and political Aristotle that many humanists, including Vettori, clearly endorsed. Second, despite professing his rejection of Aristotle as an authority in political affairs, Machiavelli seems to exaggerate the distance between Aristotle's claims and what follows from reason or experience. Aristotle's thought is a rejection of Plato's[20] ethical intellectualism and idealistic theory, making his perspective on ethical and political matters potentially much closer to Machiavelli's than that of many of the other Greek thinkers with which he could have been familiar with. Medieval and early modern Scholastics sometimes placed special emphasis on this concrete dimension of Aristotle's ethical and political thought. As we will see, when Aristotelian ideas support concrete experience or "reasonable" claims, Machiavelli does not hesitate to endorse them.

If we have some clues that Machiavelli might have known the *Politics* by the time that he wrote this letter in 1513,[21] we can be sure that he had acquired knowledge of this text at some point during his writing of the *Discourses*. However since the dating of the composition of the *Discourses* is still a matter of considerable dispute among Machiavelli scholars,[22] it is difficult to determine exactly when Machiavelli became familiar with Aristotle's *Politics*, apart from determining March 1513 as the *terminem ante quem* he would have read this text. This is due to the fact that Machiavelli directly quotes Aristotle in the *Discourses* on what appears to be, a rather trivial subject: "Among the first causes Aristotle puts down of the ruin of tyrants", he writes, "is having injured someone on account of women, by raping them or by violating them or by breaking off marriages".[23] Walker has also pinpointed several other parts of the *Discourses* where Machiavelli appropriates Aristotle's arguments.[24] For example, as previously mentioned, in his *Discourses*, Machiavelli's arguments on how to preserve tyranny closely resemble Aristotle's arguments on the same topic in his *Politics*. If we cannot take Machiavelli's claim that he did not know Aristotle's remarks on divided republics as proof that he did not know the *Politics* by the time that he wrote this letter, it is likely that this statement might be valid for a later undetermined date, namely, the time when he was writing the *Discourses*.

All in all, it seems that in order to reconstruct Machiavelli's attitude towards Aristotle and Scholasticism, we have to consider two different matters. On one hand, Machiavelli explicitly dismisses Aristotle's authority, claiming that he prefers to draw on experience and reason instead. On the other hand, he seems to agree with some of Aristotle's, or at least Aristotelian, ideas that might be useful for

his specific political theoretical agenda. At this point, we have to raise the following question. How should one interpret Machiavelli's self-proclaimed rejection of Aristotle as an authority on political affairs? Since it is impossible to faithfully reconstruct Machiavelli's Aristotelian sources or to have a clear idea of which Scholastic texts or ideas he was acquainted with, we can only draw a conceptual comparison between Aristotle and Machiavelli on two different aspects of their political theory: the question of the origin of human society and the idea of prudence.

The Origin of Human Society

As is known, in the first book of his *Politics*, Aristotle presents a genealogy of the different stages of the development of human society starting from the basic union between a man and a woman (the family) until the formation of the most important human community: the *polis*. Aristotle believes that the city "belongs to the class of things that exist by nature" and that "man is by nature a political animal".[25] As several scholars have noted, Aristotle's naturalism has a "teleological" component, i.e., it is aimed at fulfilling certain natural ends because, in his words, "nature does nothing in vain". As he puts it, "what each thing is when its growth is completed we call the nature of that thing, whether it be a man or a horse or a family". Therefore, Aristotle's teleology consists in the realization of the final cause of someone or something's nature, which is also its realization at its best. The final and best end of the city is self-sufficiency, which Aristotle in *Nicomachean Ethics* 1, 7 defines as "that which on its own makes life worthy of choice and lacking in nothing".[26] The concept of self-sufficiency is essential for understanding Aristotle's naturalism in the first book of the *Politics* because the city reaches "the height of self-sufficiency". Here, Aristotle makes an interesting distinction in the ways that the city can achieve self-sufficiency. He says, first, that the "city comes into existence for the sake of mere life",[27] which means that the primary reason why men associate by forming families, villages, or the city at their best is to provide the basic needs and necessities that are required for living. Second, Aristotle says that the city "exists for the sake of a good life".[28] Of course, the distinction between life (*zein*) and the good life (*eu zein*) should not be exaggerated because the two accounts go hand-in-hand in Aristotle's political theory. However it is useful for the present analysis to separate the two perspectives of *zein* and *eu zein* as two analytically distinct aspects of his political theory because, as most studies on late medieval and early modern Aristotelianism have shown, interpreters of Aristotle tended to have a very selective approach to those parts which they selected for their own exegetical purposes.[29]

Aristotle's presentation of his conception of the origin of human society as a way of fulfilling *zein* bears a very concrete purpose because it shows that men are social beings by nature and are led to form a political community which allows them to fulfil some basic needs that they could never optimally fulfil on their own in the city. According to this first naturalistic perspective, which we could identify as the "realist" account, natural sociability is common to both men and animals. It is because of this natural sociability that men are better able to survive, thereby demonstrating the self-sufficiency of the political community in its most basic sense. However, Aristotle's second goal of human society, *eu zein*, shows that men realize their specific nature as living beings apart from animals because they have speech and rationality. According to this second perspective, which we could call the "teleological" account, the city realizes the main goal of men's nature in the best and most perfect way by building a community in which men can exercise speech and rationality, which distinguishes them from animals. Some Thomists made use of this "teleological" account in order to assimilate it with the basic principles of Christian morality. One rather typical re-interpretation of Aristotelian teleology in this manner can be found in the writings of Girolamo Savonarola, an author that Machiavelli knew very well.[30] In his *Trattato circa il reggimento della città di Firenze*, Savonarola stresses two things about the origins of political communities. First, following Thomas Aquinas, Savonarola claims that God gave men intellect and in so doing, he wanted them to associate with each other in order to provide the things that are sufficient for men's life.[31] The need to live together comes from the way that God created virtue in both men and animals.[32] The virtue that God provided men allows them to govern themselves unlike other animals. This is why, closely following Aristotle, Savonarola can claim that man is a political animal and that those men who do not join the political community are either gods or beasts. Second, Savonarola argues that human government is conceived and developed for the sake of the common good so that men may not only live peacefully but also attain heavenly happiness. This is accomplished by cultivating religious practice among men and teaching them that divine worship is a way of

improving their virtues.[33] In other words, the fact that men naturally associate with one another is necessitated by a higher goal that aims to realize an already established common good and cultivate that which distinguishes men from other animals, namely, the worship of God.

Machiavelli's relationship to these two principles of Aristotelian politics is based on a rather selective reading. On one hand, Machiavelli fully rejects Aristotle's "teleological" account.[34] He does not think that man is a political animal and that human beings are led to association by nature. At the beginning of time, men were dispersed like beasts and they only "gathered together to better defend themselves.[35] In *Discourses* 1, 1, he writes that political communities have two different origins, either when some people decide to gather by fear of a foreign enemy and live safely (*vivere securi*) or when they are founded as a colony by an already established state. Fear, safety and common defence are the main reasons why men associate.[36] In neither of these two cases is there anything natural about the origin and development of political societies, if by natural we mean the Aristotelian idea of nature as someone or something fulfilling its *telos*. Insofar as there is something natural in Machiavelli's account of the origin of society, it pertains to men's natural inclination to self-defence and preservation. In the process of creating the city, Machiavelli attaches primary importance to men's capacity to choose an appropriate site whereupon to found a city. He wonders whether choosing an infertile site can help men to be active and unify to fight poverty and improve the land. However, he also argues that it is much better to choose highly fertile land to found a city because men are willing to have power over others and this can be more easily achieved if they have a stable and fertile location.

Machiavelli's account of how knowledge of right and wrong arose among men is even more anti-Aristotelian:

> They began to look to whoever among them was more robust and of greater heart, and they made him a head, as it were, and obeyed him. From this arose the knowledge of things honest and good, differing from the pernicious and bad. For, seeing that if one individual hurt his benefactor, hatred and compassion among men came from it, and as they blamed the ungrateful and honored those who were grateful, and thought too that those same injuries could be done to them, to escape the evil they were reduced to.[37]

To fulfil their main aim of self-defence, men decided to rely on the strongest and most courageous of those among them. However after seeing that men were cruel to this benefactor, they started to make laws to avoid the possibility of similarly unfair injuries being done to them. Eventually, men understood that they had to choose the wisest and the most prudent, and not the most convenient, to be prince. As several scholars have emphasized, this account reflects a combination of Cicero and Lucretius's analysis of the origins of human societies in *De Rerum Natura*.[38] What is important for us is that, unlike Aristotle, Machiavelli believes that the principles of right and wrong cannot be determined according to a specific idea of human nature, making nothing about their realization automatic. Rather, Machiavelli suggests that they arise from a very concrete problem, which is that of finding the best way for men to seek security and to assure their self-defence.

However, Machiavelli's engagement with Aristotle's account of the origin of human society does not end here. In other parts of the *Discourses*, Machiavelli definitely shows some sympathy for the "realist" aspect of the Aristotelian account. In one instance, Machiavelli refers to his dependence on Aristotelian ideas, here emphasizing the plural. In *Discourses* 3, 12, the Florentine talks about the need for a captain to give orders to his soldiers during combat. At the very beginning of the paragraph, Machiavelli states:

> At other points we have discoursed of how useful is necessity to human actions and to what glory they have been led by it. As it has been written by certain moral philosophers, the hands and the tongue of men-two very noble instrument for ennobling him-would not have worked perfectly nor led human works to the height they are seen to be led to had they not been driven by necessity.[39]

The ideas reported here closely echo Aristotle's characterization of the uniqueness of men among animals in the first book of the *Politics*. We saw that for Aristotle, one of the reasons why men have to gather and associate is to fulfill their *zein*, because they cannot deal with their material needs in isolation. The need for acquiring the basic necessities for life is one of the reasons why men form

societies in the first place. In this case, it is plausible to suppose, as many other authors have, that the "moral philosophers" to which Machiavelli refers are Aristotle or some Aristotelian thinkers. Machiavelli's source could be Thomas Aquinas's *De regimine principum*[40] or, most likely, one of the most widely spread Aristotelian treatises that circulated in Machiavelli's context, *Del reggimento de' Principi,* the vernacular translation of Giles of Rome's treatise *De regimine principum.*[41] Giles is a typical representative of those medieval Aristotelians who, like Aquinas and Albert the Great, attempted to perfectly assimilate Aristotle's thought to Christian Revelation. The ideas that Machiavelli mentions here, i.e., that necessity is crucial for men to achieve glory, that the difference between men and animals lies in the fact that God has given them language and hands and that this is what makes men noble, have precise parallels in Giles' text.[42]

Like Thomas, Giles attaches great importance to the teleological aspect of the Aristotelian account. At the same time, however, he also emphasizes the "realist" aspect of Aristotle's account of the origin of society. We saw that Aristotle not only emphasizes the importance of association for the sake of providing for men's material needs. He also claims that men must associate in order to realize their humanity as such because speech and rationality distinguishes them from animals. Thomas adds that another reason why men must associate and form a common life is that while animals have teeth, horns, claws and other characteristics that help them find food or build shelter from the cold, man must fashion such things for himself. To achieve this goal, man must prepare the things that he needs to feed and shelter himself by means of his hands (*officio manuum*).[43] For Thomas, hands are essential to fulfill man's basic needs in ways that he cannot accomplish like other animals.

In the vernacular translation of *De regimine principum* (*Del reggimento dei principi*),[44] Giles of Rome even more strongly emphasizes the role of "hands" in distinguishing man from other animals. Echoing Aquinas, he also claims that animals have nails and horns, but he then adds that what is specific to man is God's having given him "hands" so that "man can form his weapons and make instruments that are appropriate for him to defend himself against adversities".[45] Machiavelli's reliance on these passages reveals his complex appropriation of certain aspects of Aristotelian language. His agreement with those "moral philosophers" who have mentioned the importance of necessity for human actions and glory prompts a very practical question: what role must necessity have in guiding the choices of a good captain? Machiavelli clearly says that what distinguishes man from animals is the former's possession of a tongue and hands. He then chooses not to mention speech and rationality but the physical human feature associated with speech, namely, the tongue. That one of these texts is most likely the source of Machiavelli's passage is confirmed by the fact that, in the original formulation of this idea in Aristotle's *Politics*, there is no trace of the term "hands", which appears both in Aquinas and Giles's treatise. Machiavelli extracts this idea from the broader context in which Aristotle discusses it in the first book of his *Politics* and applies it to a very practical, almost trivial, problem, namely, that captains must give orders to their soldiers. For someone like Machiavelli, who had a very pragmatic view of political affairs, the anti-Platonic dimension of Aristotle's "realist" perspective on *zein* must certainly have been appealing in this respect.

Prudence

We can observe a similar pattern in Machiavelli's treatment of the notion of prudence. Aristotle argues that prudence is first and foremost an intellectual virtue, which pertains to the calculative part of the human soul.[46] Prudence always goes hand-in-hand with moral virtues, although the two are clearly distinct. As he explains in book VI of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, "it is not possible to be good in the strict sense without moral prudence, or practically wise without moral virtues".[47] In other words, without prudence, moral action or the enactment of moral virtues is simply impossible. In helping to determine the conditions for the definition of the mean, prudence is also a moral indicator of the ideas of right and wrong. For some authors, this form of prudence already has a certain instrumental dimension to it because prudence is necessary for directing someone's action towards the mean amidst a world of contingency.[48] However, Aristotle's primary definition of prudence entails a "teleological" account that was quite often emphasized by subsequent Aristotelian interpreters.[49]

In the same two texts of Thomas Aquinas and Giles of Rome already mentioned above, the two authors take up the "teleological" characterisation of prudence as an intellectual virtue and carry it even further than Aristotle by claiming that prudence is both a moral and an intellectual virtue. In his *On the*

Government of the Rulers, Giles of Rome unequivocally states that men who carry out prudent actions must also be good and just. For Giles, the king must be wise and must also enact certain behaviors that tend toward being wise such as, for example, drawing on the virtuous behavior of previous rulers or exemplary men.[50] There are certain moral characteristics through which the Prince becomes wise.[51] Many authors who draw on the Aristotelian notion of prudence prior to Machiavelli take this moral perspective on the prince. In his commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics*, which, as we have seen, was in the library of Machiavelli's father, Donato Acciaiuoli follows Aquinas and Giles in considering prudence both a moral and an intellectual virtue because it interacts with two different parts of the rational soul. A typical example of this moral stance on prudence as applied to the figure of the ruler can also be found in *On the Prince* by Giovanni Pontano, an author mentioned in a letter by Vettori, who was himself one of Machiavelli's friends.[52] Pontano explains that the "prudent" prince must be wise. As a good Aristotelian, he follows Giles and claims that the prince must be liberal and merciful and that this is what makes the ruler similar to God himself.[53] This also means that the Prince is forbidden from enacting any kind of violence.[54] Needless to say, if there is no prudence without wisdom, for both Giles and Pontano,[55] the prince must always keep his word. In emphasizing Pontano's and Giles of Rome's descriptions of the ruler we can identify an important principle of Aristotelian ethics. This is the idea that political conduct depends upon a well-defined, extra-political normative code.

However, Aristotle's treatment of prudence also isolates an eminently political meaning of this concept, which does not completely overlap with the moral notion of prudence. At the beginning of *Nicomachean Ethics* VI.8, the Greek philosopher says that prudence and politics are the same dispositions but that their essence is different.[56] Aristotle explains this claim by saying that while prudence is concerned with individuals, politics is concerned with society. Within politics, Aristotle distinguishes between several other types of prudence that are not identical with moral prudence but that lead to the achievement of different and more practical goals. Among the other forms of prudence, Aristotle legislative prudence, which legislators need in order to make good laws. So it is the prudence of the rulers *par excellence*, household prudence and political prudence, which pertains only to particulars. Aristotle attributes the latter form of prudence, namely, political prudence, to citizens and says that "it is only people exhibiting this kind of prudence who are said to participate in politics".[57] He also draws an interesting comparison between citizens and craftsmen. In his view, people who have political prudence "are the only ones who practice politics in the way that craftsmen practice".[58] Aristotle seems to draw a parallel between political prudence, or the model of prudence that is held by citizens, and skill (*techne*), which he previously described as a different intellectual virtue from moral prudence.

To understand how to make sense of Aristotle's distinction between moral and other forms of prudence (especially political prudence) and of his comparison of political prudence to skill, we have to read *Nicomachean Ethics* VI.8, together with *Politics* III.4. In the latter , Aristotle's discussion of the citizen suggests that there could be a form of political prudence that does not require moral prudence and can thereby stand on its own. Here, Aristotle discusses the relationship between the virtuous man and the virtuous citizen. For him, we can determine who a virtuous man is based upon whether or not he possesses moral prudence. This does not necessarily apply, however, to the virtuous citizen. The problem is that for Aristotle, the criterion upon which we can draw in order to assess if someone is a virtuous citizen is always relative to different constitutions and, since constitutions can degenerate, Aristotle admits that in a degenerated constitution, it is possible to consider a virtuous citizen someone who would not qualify as a virtuous man. To understand Aristotle's justification of the claim that citizens can be virtuous even if they are not virtuous men, we also have to account for the fact that Aristotle distinguishes the virtues of the ruler from those of the ruled, i.e. the citizen. In his words, "a good ruler is a good man and possesses moral prudence, while the citizen does not need to have moral prudence".[59] Here, Aristotle also clarifies what he means when he says in the *Nicomachean Ethics* VI.8 that political prudence mainly belongs to the citizens, making them similar to craftsmen. As he says:

> Moral prudence is the only form of excellence which is peculiar to the ruler. The other forms must, it would seem, belong equally to rulers and subjects. The excellence of subjects cannot be moral prudence, and may be defined as "right opinion". The ruled may be compared to a flute-maker: the ruler is like a flute-player who uses what the flute-maker makes.[60]

In this passage, Aristotle first says that not all citizens need to be morally prudent. So, we have many cases of good citizens who are not virtuous. Aristotle's characterisation of the distinction between the virtue of citizens and man potentially puts the former, at least in part, outside the domain of moral prudence. The actions of citizens' would then be better characterized as actions that are typical of people who practice another disposition of the human soul, namely, skill (*techne*). As Aristotle explains in *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI.8, the main difference between skill and prudence, and the corresponding ideas of human actions (*prattein* and *poiein*), is that in the first case, an action must be done for the sake of itself, whereas in the second case, an action should be done for the sake of producing something beyond the limits of the practical action as such. It seems that political prudence resembles the latter and that citizens are like craftsmen who produce certain goods and who obey their rulers.

Obviously, Aristotle's distinction between moral or legislative prudence, on one hand, and political prudence, on the other, should not lead us to think that, for him, there is an idea of political prudence completely independent of moral prudence (after all, Aristotle still describes citizens as having moral virtues and we know that, for Aristotle, moral virtues always go along with moral prudence). However, as we observed in his view on the origin of human societies, we can distinguish between two different dimensions of Aristotle's theory of prudence and label them differently. Aristotle's account of moral prudence points to a "teleological" understanding of this virtue, which is intellectual and always needed to exercise moral virtues. Aristotle's understanding of political prudence involves a "realist" interpretation of prudence that sees the latter as a means of reaching contingent goals. Of course, the importance of Aristotle's notion of political virtue should not be overestimated in his thought because, for him, it does not make any sense to talk about a form of prudence that is fully independent of morality. However, as we observed in the case of the origin of human society, Aristotle's double characterisation of prudence allows us to distinguish between two different aspects of his account of prudence which subsequent Scholastic interpreters would later emphasize in their respective accounts.

As for the case of the origin of human society, Machiavelli draws selectively from the Aristotelian treatment of the topic of prudence. He rejects the political application of moral prudence that Aristotle extends to rulers. Machiavelli accepts that there is an eminently moral form of prudence which echoes the Aristotelian characterization of moral prudence. In his *Golden Ass*, Machiavelli argues that prudence "is an excellent virtue for which men can enhance their excellence".[61] Moreover, we can find the term "prudent" associated with some behaviors that are traditionally considered moral in the Aristotelian sense. For example, in the famous chapter 26 of the *Prince* that many scholars have found so difficult to fit into the context of the rest of the work, Machiavelli characterizes the new prince and "redeemer" (*redentore*) as virtuous and prudent.[62] Therefore, we could make sense of the figure of the redeemer by interpreting him as the quintessential model of the Aristotelian sense of the wise and virtuous ruler, to whom Giles or Pontano refer in their respective works. However, Machiavelli thinks that while this account of prudence is helpful for defining a moral person, it carries little weight in politics and might even lead to some unintended, negative political consequences, i.e., losing power and political ruin. This skepticism towards the relevance of moral prudence in political affairs leads Machiavelli to eventually dismiss its political relevance altogether. A typical example of this can be found in chapter 16 of the *Prince*, where he says that even if it would be praiseworthy for a prince to keep his word and honour pacts, we have seen many princes do great things without keeping their word.[63] With these ideas, Machiavelli strongly rejects the "teleological" account of moral prudence that he found in Aristotle and that was developed by Scholastic and humanist commentators who stressed the moral components of prudence as an intellectual virtue.

Machiavelli is much more interested in praising the "realist" aspect of Aristotle's account of prudence and stressing the other forms of prudence that we found in Aristotle. We certainly find Machiavelli associating the idea of prudence with good legislation and good legislators, echoing Aristotle's legislative prudence. In the *Discourses*, Machiavelli very often talks about the wisest legislators (*prudentissimi legislatori*) or the wisest founders of republics (*prudentissimi ordinatori di repubbliche*).[64] While we do not find any examples of Aristotelian household prudence, we definitely find a pronounced use of the notion of prudence as a form of military skill. Throughout almost all of his works, i.e., the *Prince*, the *Discourses* and the *Art of War*, Machiavelli uses the idea of prudence to refer to captains and military skills.[65] This kind of prudence, military skill, is very similar to political prudence because, as the title of Machiavelli's famous work on the subject proves, war is an art.

However, Machiavelli most frequently uses the Aristotelian idea of political prudence in his works.

The idea that political prudence, or the prudence of the citizen, is like a skill (*techne*) was extremely important in the development of Machiavelli's perspective, and which is implicit in Aristotle's "realist" view of prudence as well. He uses this notion of prudence extensively. In *Discourses*, III.2, Machiavelli calls Brutus, the founder of the Roman Republic, prudent even when he mentions that Brutus pretended to be insane.[66] Similarly, in chapter 7 of the *Prince*, Machiavelli identifies Cesare Borgia as virtuous and prudent.[67] In chapter 15, Machiavelli writes that if we want to leave aside imaginary republics and stick to reality, we have to acknowledge that a prince "must be prudent enough to know how to escape the infamy of those vices that would take the state away from him".[68] In this sentence, "prudent" refers to the ruler's capacity to escape vices not because he should strive for virtue but in order to maintain power. Moreover the prince "need not worry about incurring the infamy of those vices without which it would be difficult to save the state".[69] In chapter 16, he says that a prince "being unable to use this virtue of generosity in a manner that will not harm himself if he is known for it, should, if he is wise, not concern himself about the reputation of being miserly".[70] In chapter 18, he writes that "a wise ruler, therefore, cannot and should not keep his word when such an observance would be to his disadvantage".[71]

Scholars usually assume that in Machiavelli's context, the concept of prudence was used with two fundamentally different meanings. One was the typical, Scholastic reinstatement of the Aristotelian meaning of moral prudence as *recta ratio agibilium*, which can be found in most late medieval and early modern authors.[72] Machiavelli was clearly familiar with this concept because in a letter to Riccardo Becchi, in which he reported on Savonarola's speeches in Florence, he quotes the preacher who defines prudence as *recta cognitio agibilium*.[73] A second concept of prudence, which was widespread in Machiavelli's context, bore a more instrumental understanding of prudence as the art of achieving a goal in politics, disregarding the moral components of human action. This second meaning is usually seen as a precursor of the tradition known as "reason of state" (*ragione del stato*).[74] While scholars tend to link the first meaning of prudence to the Thomist-Aristotelian understanding of this concept,[75] they usually tend to find only the second in the treatises on politics from Machiavelli's time, which explicitly disregard, and actually oppose, the Aristotelian-Thomist understanding of prudence.[76]

However, as the analysis of Aristotle has shown, the roots of this second instrumental concept of prudence can also be found in the Aristotelian tradition. As Cappelli claims, in his *de prudentia* Pontano – a humanist who was well acquainted with Aristotelian ethics – claimed that prudence was neither an art nor a science but a skill that is necessary for reason to manage both the passions as well as unexpected circumstances in nature. Pontano even pushed himself to praise the utility of honest dissimulation.[77]

However, this tendency among humanists such as Pontano had important antecedents among the medieval and early modern Scholastic interpreters of Aristotle and it is not by chance that Pontano himself built many of his arguments on the basis of prudence, especially on the authority of Scholastic thinkers and, in particular, Thomas Aquinas.[78] Indeed, many medieval Scholastic authors developed, what we have called, the "realist" dimension of Aristotle's analysis of prudence, devoting their attention to the political idea of this concept. Echoes of these debates can also be detected in what is usually taken to be a typical representative of Scholasticism in Machiavelli's context: Savonarola. As Lines shows, in his early work on moral philosophy entitled *Compendium philosophiae moralis*, Savonarola tends to avoid all of the theological components of Aquinas's discussion of prudence, thereby separating the philosophical from the theological implications of the virtues. Likewise, in his commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Acciaiuoli writes explicitly that prudence is neither a science nor an art but a disposition to act on human goods ("habitus agendi circa humana bona").[79]

Aquinas's comment on Aristotle's passage 1141b 23-28 at the beginning of *Nicomachean Ethics* VI.8[80] is paradigmatic of the complex attitudes that Scholastics show towards the "realist" dimension of Aristotle's account of prudence. Aquinas's analysis consists of distinguishing between *prudentia simpliciter* and *prudentia secundum quid*. In the first case, Aquinas means prudence as an intellectual virtue and, as we already suggested, he modifies Aristotle's treatment of this subject by defining prudence as a moral virtue as well.[81] In the second case, prudence can be defined as a different disposition (*habitus*) "according to the difference of object considered in its formal aspect". Since "the species of habits differ by their relation to different ends", Aquinas explains that there must be different kinds (*species*) of prudence. Therefore he distinguishes one form of prudence, *simpliciter dicta* and "which is directed to one's own good", from all other forms of prudence that Aristotle discusses in

Nicomachean Ethics VI.8 (legislative, military, domestic, political) and that are directed to different forms of the good in different settings (the kingdom, the house etc.).[82]

Based on this distinction, Thomas distinguished between the prudence of the ruler from the prudence of the ruled; the first referring to the ruler who legislates and the second to the subjects and the slaves. He argues that there is a kind of prudence for the rulers, which is a sort of architectonic art, and a prudence for the ruled, which is a manual art and which corresponds to political prudence.[83] For him, political prudence, which is typical of the citizens/subjects, is concerned with particulars. It is true that he attempts to add that royal prudence (the first) should not contradict political prudence because since "every man, for as much as he is rational, has a share in ruling according to the judgment of reason, he is proportionately competent to have prudence".[84] This is because both for the ruler and for the ruled, prudence is aimed at "the common good" but the latter can be distinguished from "private and particular good".[85]

However there is an instrumental aspect to Aquinas's' characterization of political prudence that, perhaps unintentionally, escapes his attempt to reconcile moral and political prudence.[86] Indeed, in the subsequent *quaestio*, Aquinas asks whether sinners can be prudent as well. Here, he distinguishes between three kinds of prudence: false prudence (which, despite bearing some likeness to prudence, "places its ultimate end in the pleasures of the flesh"[87]), true but imperfect prudence and true and perfect prudence. Perfect prudence is only prudence *simpliciter*, or Aristotle's moral prudence, which for Aquinas becomes both an intellectual and a moral virtue and which judges and commands aright with respect to "the good end of man's whole life".[88] The first kind is merely the appearance of prudence, which can only be enacted by sinners and, thereby, can only be called prudence based on a very superficial analogy with true prudence. The second form of prudence is the most interesting because Aquinas argues that even though it is true, it is also imperfect. This means that it is "common to good and wicked men" and allows one to devise "fitting ways of obtaining a good end".[89] Aquinas implies that this form of prudence corresponds to, what he had referred to earlier as, prudence *secundum quid*, i.e., all those forms of prudence as a habit that differs in relation to their different particular ends, which are of course not the "common end of all human life but of some particular affair".[90] Such examples of this form of prudence are those of the prudent businessman or the prudent sailor, which are also like a prudent manager of the household or a prudent military leader (two examples that he explicitly related to prudence *secundum quid* previously) or the doubtful prudence of the ruled or slaves. Peter of Auvergne, who completed Aquinas's commentary on the *Politics* in a version that might have been available to Machiavelli,[91] strongly emphasized the conception of prudence *secundum quid* that we have identified here in Aquinas. He argued that even the tyrant can be prudent, because degenerate constitutions, of which tyrants are rulers, also have an end.[92] The idea that the mere political idea of prudence, or prudence *secundum quid*, could also be the prerogative of the unjust ruler has been shown to be present in several Aristotelian commentaries on the *Politics*.[93] Political prudence, the function of which is relatively marginal in Aristotle's ethical and political theory, replaces Aristotelian moral prudence when assessing the prudence of the political actor in Machiavelli.

Conclusion

Was Machiavelli an Aristotelian? Drawing on the late Medieval and early modern tradition of Aristotelianism, especially in its Scholastic version, I have tried to show in this article that the answer to this question is two-fold. On one hand, Machiavelli strongly rejects several key assumptions of Aristotle's ethical and political theories as reinstated by several Scholastic thinkers from the thirteenth century onwards. Regarding ideas on the origins of society and the relationship between moral and political prudence, Machiavelli provides a model that dramatically but subtly breaks with Aristotle and such Scholastic thinkers as Aquinas and Giles of Rome. On the other hand, Machiavelli's debt to Aristotle amounts to more than a simple rejection. We have tried to show that in certain key aspects of his thought, Machiavelli appropriates Aristotelian language and incorporates it into his own political agenda. There is an anti-Platonic, "realist" aspect of Aristotelian moral and political theory that many Scholastic Aristotelians developed in depth and that Machiavelli found extremely appealing. The answer to the question of whether Machiavelli is an Aristotelian, then, can be answered both positively and negatively. As with many other authors, Machiavelli accepts and rejects those aspects of Aristotle that are most useful for his political theory.

With this revaluation of Machiavelli's debt to Aristotle, we are invited to reconsider his place within the history of political thought. Machiavelli is usually described as someone who breaks with classical political thought but the precise nature of this "break" remains controversial. A study that begins to address Machiavelli's relationship with Aristotle and the Scholastic tradition on the two themes proposed in this paper, the notion of the origin of society and the concept of prudence, suggests that Machiavelli's relationship with Aristotle and Aristotelian language does not amount to a simple rejection. In his work on Thomas Hobbes, Leo Strauss famously shows that Hobbes's originality as the founder of political modernity owed more to his' arch-enemy, Aristotle, than the English philosopher and most modern scholars would have ever acknowledged.[94] A similar case can perhaps be made for Machiavelli's relationship to Aristotle and the Aristotelians.

Notes

[1] Useful general studies on the influence of Aristotelianism in Renaissance philosophy can be found in Schmitt, *Aristotle and the Renaissance*; Kristeller, *Renaissance Aristotelianism* and Bianchi, "Continuity and Change," esp. 54 and 60. For important studies that deal more specifically with the influence of Aristotle's ethical and political works in the *Renaissance*, see Garin, "La fortuna dell'etica aristotelica nel Quattrocento;" Lines, *Aristotle's 'Ethics' in the Italian Renaissance* and "The Commentary Literature." Important hints about the influence of Aristotelianism on Machiavelli's *corpus* can be found in Walker, *The Discourses of Niccolo Machiavelli*, vol. 1, 86–9 and 273–7; Sasso, *Machiavelli e gli antichi*; Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*; Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*. See also the more recent Pasquino, "Machiavelli and Aristotle: The Anatomies of the City;" Ginzburg, "Diventare Machiavelli. Per una nuova lettura dei 'Ghiribizzi al Soderini'," and "Intricate readings: Machiavelli, Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas;" Hörnqvist, *Machiavelli and Empire*, 172-179; Perrone Compagni, "Machiavelli metafisico;" Fischer, "Machiavelli's Political Psychology;" Mansfield, *Machiavelli's Virtue*, esp. 11-22; Pedullà, *Machiavelli in Tumult*, who analyzes many new analogies between Machiavelli and Aristotle in considerable depth; Pedullà, "Introduzione," 182-184 and 260-264; Viroli, *From Politics to Reason of State*; E. Benner, *Machiavelli's Ethics* and, from a different more realist perspective, Giorgini, Giovanni. "The place of the tyrant in Machiavelli's political thought and the literary genre of the prince", 252-53.

[2] The literature on this topic is significantly less than that on the importance of Aristotelianism in the humanist tradition. See Singleton, "The Perspective of Art;" Ginzburg, "Intricate Readings: Machiavelli, Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas;" Nederman, "Amazing Grace;" Sasso, *Machiavelli e gli antichi*; Dewender, "Il *Principe* di Machiavelli e la tradizione medievale;" Senellaert, *Les arts de gouverner*; Perrone Compagni, "Machiavelli metafisico."

[3] Machiavelli's inability to read Greek would have meant that he was unaware of all those debates between the humanists and university scholars (a lot of whom were well acquainted with Scholastic auhors) on the technicalities of translating several texts. A typical example of this was the harsh dispute that followed Leonardo Bruni's translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics* from Greek into Latin. On this see Hankins, "En traduisant l'*Ethique* d'Aristote."

[4] A comprehensive reconstruction of such sources can be found in Sasso, *Machiavelli e gli antichi*. Hankins ("En traduisant l'*Ethique* d'Aristote," esp. 147-8) shows how profoundly intertwined humanistic and Scholastic sources in the realm of studies on ethical and political Aristotelianism were and he warns against drawing on an outdated opposition between humanism and Scholasticism. Along the same line, see Lines, "Humanistic and Scholastic Ethics," esp. 7 and "Sources and Authority for Moral Philosophy," 7: "The facile distinction between a Bible- and Aristotle-loving scholasticism, on the one hand, and a Plato- and Cicero-loving humanism, on the other, is now generally regarded, by serious scholars, as little more than a crude caricature." As will be explained later in the paper, humanists mainly targeted the Scholastic naturalist Aristotle and, in reading the ethical and political works of Aristotle, very often took advantage of the commentaries of Scholastic authors.

[5] Among others, see Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 208, 221-2, 225, 237-8; Mansfield, *Machiavelli's Virtue*, 12-13: "Machiavelli's departure from the notion of virtue in the tradition of moral philosophy will become apparent only in comparison with its classic presentation in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*," and *Machiavelli's New Modes*, 151 and 318; Fischer, "Machiavelli's Political Psychology," 791: "Although Machiavelli borrowed several terms from the Aristotelian tradition […] the content he gave to these concepts is decidedly anti-Aristotelian;" Del Lucchese, *Political Philosophy*, 27, and *Tumulti e* indignatio, esp. 70, on Machiavelli's break with Aristotle's theory of passions; Vatter, *Between Form and Event*, 27-33 and 45-53; McCormick, *Machiavellian democracy*, 25 and 66, among others.

[6] On this matter, see Brown, *The Return of Lucretius to Renaissance Florence*, and Rahe "In the Shadow of Lucretius: The Epicurean Foundations of Machiavelli's Political Thought."

[7] Scholars from the Cambridge School have been particularly emphatic in highlighting the elements of continuity between Machiavelli, Aquinas and other Scholastic authors. See Skinner, *The Foundations*, and Viroli, *From Politics to Reason of State*. For a similar argument see Ginzburg, "Diventare Machiavelli. Per una nuova lettura dei 'Ghiribizzi al Soderini'," and "Intricate readings: Machiavelli, Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas;" Nederman, "Amazing Grace." For a more recent study, see, E. Benner, *Machiavelli's Ethics*.

[8] A good study on the influence of ethical and political Aristotelianism in the Middle Ages is Nederman, "The Meaning of Aristotelianism," esp. 165. Here, Nederman claims that "Aristotelianism of medieval moral and political thought ought not to be defined in relation to a body of texts or a substantive doctrine or a mode of discourse, but instead as a structure which frames the manner in which questions about political and moral issues are raised and answered (however they are answered)." The distinction between a teleological and a realist dimension of Aristotelianism is well founded in this description. More recently, Briguglia in Il pensiero politico medievale, 91-96, proposes to replace the convtroversial notion of "political Aristotelianism" with "post-Aristotelianism" to refer to the various usages of Aristotle's political thought especially in the Latte Middle Ages.

[9] Niccolò Machiavelli to Francesco Vettori, 29 April, 1523. eng. trans. in Najemy, *Machiavelli and His Friends*, 233. Machiavelli replies to Vettori who wrote: "Because, if you read the book on Politics attentively and [look at] the republics of the past, you will find that a divided republic, like that one [the Swiss], cannot expand itself."

[10] In Book 5 of his *Politics*, Aristotle does not properly deal with divided republics but with the causes of why constitutions are formed and dissolved in a political community.

[11] See Landi, p. 186-7, esp. fn. 18. On another possible interpretations of this passage, see De Robertis, "Pontano e Machiavelli," esp. 95-6.

[12] In his *Libro di ricordi*, Machiavelli's father, Bernardo, mentions the *Nicomachean Ethics* twice. First, he says that in 1479 he returned the *Ethics* with Cicero's *On Duties* to a person named "ser Giovanni di Francesco" (B. Machiavelli, *Libro di ricordi*, 88). Second, he says that in 1481 he received a copy of Aristotle's *Ethics* (along with Donato Acciaiuoli's commentary from two persons to see and decide whether to buy it or not (Ibid,, 141, "io ebbi […] il Commento di Donato Acciaiuoli sopra l'Etica di Aris[stotele] in forma e sciolto, a vedere e comprarlo se mi piacesse"). Ginzburg ("Diventare Machiavelli", 158) refers to the idea that Machiavelli could have read Acciaiuoli's commentary as a "seductive hypothesis." A good study of this commentary and the influence of Argyropoulos' commentary on it is Bianchi, "Un commento umanistico ad Aristotele."

[13] See esp. Hörnqvist, *Machiavelli and Empire*, 170-173; Mansfield, *Machiavelli's Virtue*, esp. 11-22;

[14] Here I am using the category of "civic humanism" in the most traditional sense as can be found in Baron, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance: Civic Humanism and Republican Liberty in an Age of Classicism and Tyranny*.

[15] Petrarca also extended his negative idea of Scholastic Aristotelianism to Aristotle's ethics and politics. However, most humanists do not follow him in this respect. See Bianchi, "Continuity and Change," 62.

[16] In his many studies on the influence of the *Nicomachean Ethics* in the Italian *Renaissance*, Lines shows that if there is something on which both the Scholastics and the humanists agreed, this was the necessity of studying Aristotle's text to understand the good man. See for example Lines, "Humanistic and Scholastic Ethics," esp. beginning of 305 and Cappelli, *L'umanesimo italiano*, esp. 86 and 96. As explained by Hankins, "Introduction," 18: "Fourteenth- and fifteenth century Italy witnessed a decline in Thomist influence and a rise in humanist impact on the *Ethics* […] Florence emerged as the leading centre of *Ethics* study in the fifteenth century." Good studies on the influence of Ethics in Renaissance Florenze are Bianchi, "Un commento 'umanistico' ad Aristotele" and Lines, "Faciliter Edoceri: Niccolò Tignosi and the Audience of Aristotle's *Ethics*," among others. The reading and study of Aristotle's ethical and political works was also widespread among the participants to the *Orti Oricellari*, which Machiavelli regularly attended from 1516 and 1522. See Von Albertini, *Firenze dalla repubblica al principato*, 75 and Del Lucchese, *Political Philosophy*, 46.

[17] See Bruni, "Epistula super translationem Politicorum Aristotelis," in Baron, *Leonardo Bruni Aretino*, 70-74 but also, among others, Bruni's *Isagogicon moralis discipline*, 144 and *Vita Aristotelis* in which Bruni puts special emphasis on Aristotle's rhetorical, moral and political reflections vis-à-vis his reflection on the philosophy of nature. On Patrizi, see *de institutione reipublicae*, I, *titulus secundus*, 11-12.

[18] Palmieri, *Vita civile*, 29 (the translation is mine). Palmieri's assessment of the nobility but inutility of natural philosophy is also shared by Bruni, *Isagogicon moralis discipline*, 144.

[19] Lauro Quirini, *De re publica*, 123.

[20] For a different perspective that characterizes Plato as more similar to Aristotle, see Irwin, "Prudence and morality in Greek ethics," esp. 285.

[21] See fn. 11.

[22] For a good overview of this debate see Bausi, *Machiavelli*, 165-181.

[23] This most likely comes from Aristotle, *Politics*, 1314b27, see Machiavelli, *Discourses*, 273.

[24] Walker, *The Discourses of Niccolo Machiavelli*, vol. 1, 86–9 and 273–7.

[25] Aristotle, *Politics*, 10, (1253a 2).

[26] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 11. (1097b 17-18). In most cases, I rely on Crisp's translation, thoughwith occasional, slight modifications. In particular, I translate *phronesis* as "moral prudence," not as "practical wisdom" as he does.

[27] Aristotle, *Politics*, 10 (1252b 31-32).

[28] Ibid.

[29] Nederman shows the flexible influence of Aristotelianism in the Late Middle Ages, which could lead to emphasizing very different, and, sometimes even opposing, ethical and political agendas. See his article "The Meaning of Aristotelianism."

[30] In the *Discourses*, 93 (I, 45), Machiavelli praises Savonarola's writings for their prudence, learnedness and spirit.

[31] Savonarola, *Trattato primo*, 439.

[32] Ibid., 438.

[33] Ibid., 441-442.

[34] However, note that Machiavelli's rejection of Aristotelian teleology does not mean that he does not think that there are regular and constant processes and effects that make it possible to have a rational assessment of men's actions. This point is rightly emphasized by Perrone Compagni in "Machiavelli metafisico," esp. 232-3.

[35] Ibid., 7.

[36] For more on Lucretius' possible influence on the topic of how fear can help preserve republics, see Pedullà, *Machiavelli in Tumult*, 96.

[37] Ibid., 11.

[38] On Cicero's influence see *On Duties*, 1, 107 and *De inventione*, I 2-3. On the Lucretian influence see Brown, *The Return of Lucretius to Renaissance Florence*, 85; Rahe "In the Shadow of Lucretius: The Epicurean Foundations of Machiavelli's Political Thought," 45. On this matter, see also Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 201–3, 279–80, 291–2, and Sasso, "Machiavelli e i detrattori, antichi e nuovi, di Roma," in Sasso, *Machiavelli e gli antichi e altri saggi*, esp. 467–79. On the complex interplay between Machiavelli, Lucretius and Aristotle's *accidenti* with respect to the question of the origins of associative life, see Pedullà, *Machiavelli in Tumult*, 166. On the question of *necessità* in the origins of human societies and the concept of law, see Berns, *Violence de la loi à la Renaissance*, esp. 71-84.

[39] Machiavelli, *Discourses*, 246.

[40] For example, see Mansfield at Machiavelli, *Discourses*, 246, fn. 2.

[41] Giles of Rome's (Egidio Romano) treatise *On the Government of Rulers* was translated from Latin into the vernacular. It was one of the most widely read texts in the Middle Ages and circulated considerably in Machiavelli's day. See Aegidii Romani, *Opera Omnia*, I.1/11, Catalogo dei manoscritti (1001-1075). The number of surviving manuscripts in all of Europe amounts to more than 350 (Ibid., prefazione, p. V). On the *De regimine*'s textual history, see Briggs, *Giles of Rome's De regimine principum*, 13-19.

[42] Egidio Romano, *Del reggimento de' principi*, 128-9.

[43] Aquinas, *Political Writings*, 2-3.

[44] Egidio Romano, *Del reggimento de' principi*, 128-9.

[45] Egidio Romano, *Del reggimento de' principi*, 128-9 (my translation).

[46] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, book VI. See Hariman, "Prudence/performance," 28-29.

[47] Ibid., *Nicomachean Ethics,* 117

[48] See Aubenque, *La prudence chez Aristote* and Irwin, "Prudence and morality in Greek ethics," esp. 289.

[49] See Senellaert, *Les arts de gouverner*, 176-179 and esp. 178; Aubenque, *La prudence chez Aristote*,

[50] Egidio Romano, *Del reggimento de' principi*, 33.

[51] Ibid., 34-35.

[52] Letter of Vettori to Machiavelli, 15 December 1514, see Machiavelli, *Lettere a Francesco Vettori e a Francesco Guicciardini*, 270. On Acciaiuoli's view on prudence as both a moral and an intellectual virtue, see the *Expositio*, 485.

[53] Pontano, *De principe*, 9-11.

[54] Ibid., 69.

[55] Ibid., 13.

[56] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 110, (1141b 23-28).

[57] Aristotle, Ibid.

[58] Aristotle, Ibid.

[59] Aristotle, *Politics*, 92 (1277a 15-19).

[60] Aristotle, *Politics*, 94 (1277 25-31).

[61] Machiavelli, *The Golden Ass*, in Machiavelli, *The Chief Works and Others*, 770.

[62] Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 87-88. On Machiavelli's prince as a "redeemer" see Maurizio Viroli, *Redeeming "The Prince": The Meaning of Machiavelli's Masterpiece* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 23-65.

[63] Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 87-88..

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[64] See Machiavelli, *Discourses*, 31.

[65] See Machiavelli, *Discourses*, 58: "virtuous captains" or 149: "prudent captains."

[66] Machiavelli, *Discourses*, 213.

[67] Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 24.

[68] Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 54.

[69] Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 73

[70] Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 55.

[71] Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 60.

[72] See footnote 74.

[73] It can be found in the letter to Becchi from 9 March 1498 in which Machiavelli reports the actions of Savonarola to the Florentine ambassador in Rome, Riccardo Becchi. Machiavelli also adds that, for Savonarola, the real act of prudence as Christians is to preserve the honor of Christ. Prudence is translated as "straight thinking in practical matters" in Najemy, *Between Friends*, 86.

[74] A clear interpretation in this respect can be found in Viroli, *From Politics to Reason of State*, esp. 4 and 126-178.

[75] Savonarola's definition, as reported by Machiavelli, echoes Thomas Aquinas' definition of prudence as *recta ratio agibilium* in *Summa Theologiae*, IIa IIae, qu. 47 art. 2, English translation, 1851, where the phrase is translated as "right reason applied to action." The same definition can also be found in the *Florilegium* entitled *Auctoritates Aristotelis*, which circulated widely up until the end of the 16th century. See Hamesse, *Les Auctoritates Aristotelis*, 240: "(112) prudentia est recta ratio agibilium." Following Argyropoulos, Acciaiuoli's commentary somehow provides a similar definition of prudentia as "habitus […] agendi, vera cum ratione, circa ea quae sunt bona homini atquae mala," see Acciaiuoli, *Expositio*, 475.

[76] On this matter, see Mattei, "dal primato della sapienza al primato della prudenza," 116 and following; Lazzeri, "Prudence, ethique et politique," 102-4 and also Irwin, "Prudence and morality in Greek ethics," 289, for whom there is a stark contrast between Thomas' moralistic and Machiavelli's instrumental understanding of prudence. In "Politics proper," 375, Nichols and White insist that there is "a good deal of common ground" among classical and modern authors" that range from Aristotle to Machiavelli to Burke. On this idea of the continuity see also Garver, *Machiavelli and the History*, 164-7.

[77] See Cappelli, "Dalla *Maiestas* alla *Prudentia*," esp. 37-8 and De Robertis, "Pontano e Machiavelli," 90. According to Ginzburg, "Pontano, Machiavelli and prudence", 125, Machiavelli had knowledge of Pontano's *de prudentia*. The text circulated widely in Florence and was published by Giovanni Corsi in Florence in 1508 for the publisher Giunta. Corsi regularly attended the Orti Oricellari during their early period of activity, see Gilbert, "Bernardo Rucellai and the Orti Oricellari", 118; Silvano, "'Vivere civile' e 'governo misto'", 156. However we have no conclusive evidence that Machiavelli read it.

[78] Zembrino, "La concezione aristotelica di phrónesis," shows Pontano's heavy dependence on Aquinas in his formulation of prudence.

[79] A comprehensive reconstruction of this can be found in Toste, "Virtue and the City" and Lambertini, "Political Prudence In Some Medieval Commentaries." The interest that many Scholastic interpreters showed for the most "realist" or "instrumental" aspects of Aristotle's ethical and political works counters the idea that the humanists were those who de-idealized Aristotle and made it more realist. Pedullà mentions a similar example when he focuses on the greater interest that Scholastics showed towards the problem of conflict *vis-à-vis* the more moralistic stances that were taken by the humanists, see Pedullà, *Machiavelli in Tumult*, 24-5. On Savonarola, see Lines, "Savonarola and Valenza," esp. 434-5 and 438. On Acciaiuoli, see *Expositio*, 475-6.

[80] For example, following a longstanding tradition that dates back to Eustratius and most Greek and Latin interpreters of the *Nicomachean Ethics* VI, 8, see Lambertini, "Political Prudence in Some Medieval Commentaries". However many medieval commentators on the *Nicomachean Ethics* mistakenly interpreted the Greek word *politiké* as a referring to political science whereas Aristotle is not talking about the relation between prudence and political science here but about the relation between prudence and the realm of politics *lato sensu*.

[81] "Hence prudence has the nature of virtue not only as the other intellectual virtues have it, but also as the moral virtues have it, among which virtues it is enumerated." (Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, IIa-IIae, q. 47, a. 4, r).

[82] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, IIa-IIae, q. 47, a. 11, r.;

[83] Wherefore it is manifest that prudence is in the ruler "after the manner of a mastercraft" (Ethic. vi, 8), but in the subjects, "after the manner of a handicraft." (1861)

[84] *Summa Theologiae*, IIa-IIae, q. 47, a. 12, r.

[85] Ibid.

[86] In his *Les arts de gouverner*, Senellaert insists on this aspect. Giles of Rome also distinguishes between 5 different types of prudence that are not immediately moral. See Lazzeri, 102-3, who claims that Machiavelli could found a completely instrumental account of prudence that entirely broke with the Thomist's attempt to reconcile normative and instrumental ideas of prudence in the Neapolitan Academy of Giovanni Pontano (for which, if prudence does not break with the ethical Aristotelian account, it certainly does without any transcendent reference

or source) and in the literature of the Florentine writers traders between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, for whom prudence loses all ethical connotation and becomes an instrumental principle to achieve mundane goals.

[87] *Summa Theologiae*, IIa-IIae, q. 47, a. 13, r.

[88] Ibid.

[89] Ibid.

[90] Ibid.

[91] Ginzburg recalls that Leonardo Bruni's translation of Aristotle's *Politics*, which was widely circulated in Machiavelli's context and which, according to Ginzburg, might have been the version of this text which Machiavelli read, also included Peter of Auvergne's literal commentary on Aristotle's *Politics*, which completed Thomas's unfinished commentary of Thomas, see Ginzburg, "Intricate Readings," esp. 164.

[92] Toste, "Virtue and the City," 96.

[93] Toste, "Virtue and the City."

[94] Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes: its Basis and its Genesis*.

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