Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory/Revue canadienne de théorie politique et sociale, Vol. 2, No. 3 (Fall/Automne 1978).

MACHIAVELLI AND GUICCIARDINI: ANCIENTS AND MODERNS

J. G. A. Pocock

This essay's aim[1] is to examine the contention, put forward by such diverse scholars as Friedrich Meinecke, Leo Strauss and Felix Gilbert, that Machiavelli's thought and that of other Florentines such as Bernardo Rucellai, marked the start of thinking about "modern" politics and history. It also attempts to consider the paired terms "ancient" and "modern" — what they may mean and have meant, and how far it has been or may be useful to examine the two Florentines in the context of the relation between antiquity and modernity.

Leo Strauss held that we were living in times when modernity had itself become a problem. One might say that the word has always been used to denote a consciously problematical view of the human condition; but doubtless it was some highly self-confident brand of progressivist or dialectical modernism that Strauss had chiefly in mind. At a much simpler level, we can agree that the concept of modernity always presents a rather obvious problem, that of definition. Must we always mean the same thing? It would not be hard to show that the word *modern* is what we make of it; its meaning depends largely upon what we choose to place before it.

If we ask whether there is a sense in which Machiavelli and Guicciardini have been, or may be, said to mark the beginnings of *modern* political thinking, the elementary thought should soon occur to us that what preceded them ought to be termed not *ancient* but medieval. The discussion as to whether their thinking was in fact modern usually becomes a discussion of whether it can be effectively characterised as a breakaway from modes of thinking which can be characterised as *medieval.* This is a great deal more than a difference of terminology. Machiavelli and Guicciardini lived in a culture intellectually dominated by the ideas of the Renaissance humanists, and although these scholars did not use such words as *medieval*, they did have a vividly generalised notion of a period in time which separated them from

those whom they called *the ancients*. This period seemed to them one of barbarism and scholasticism, and they aimed to annul it and escape from it by returning to the ancients, reading their works and imitating their actions. The humanists were *ancients*, as this term was to be used later on, in the days of the "quarrel between the ancients and the moderns", when it denoted those who thought direct imitation of the Greeks and Romans possible and necessary. The point is that we have now a three-part instead of a two-part division of Western cultural history, and *ancient* is being used as the antithesis, not of *modern*, but of something which will soon be known as *medieval*. The Christian civilisation of post-Roman Latinity (or the Latin civilisation of post-Roman Christianity) is seen as occupying the interval between the ancients and the return to them, and the nearest thing to being modern that has so far appeared is being an ancient in the sense of one who would return to the ancients and imitate them. Machiavelli and Guicciardini differed as to how far this imitation was possible in politics, and we shall return to their debate; but they were discussing the governing assumption of their culture, namely that it was possible.

It is implicit in all this that the humanists understood the Christian Latinity which they called barbarous, the medieval, as a radical denial of ancient values, and so it had been. But equating the Christian with the barbarous was a dangerous game, not to be played to a finish until the time of the *philosophes*; and given that with some exceptions — of whom Machiavelli may have been one — the humanists did not wish to break with Christian values and beliefs, there was a formidable tension between retention of these beliefs and direct imitation of the pagan authors. All that the humanists were bringing about was a sharp increase in the risks of a game as old as the Fathers of the Church, and even the neo-pagans among them were ancients, not moderns.

Strauss was certainly not ignorant of the meaning of the word *medieval*, and he knew that among its many meanings it denoted a period during which the values of ancient political philosophy had in some ways been denied and set aside in favour of those of monotheist religion. He rightly held, however, that in so far as there had continued to be political philosophy, it had been the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle, and he held — with considerable justification — that the gulf between this and the revealed religions had in many ways been bridged, so that there continued to be a grand tradition of ancient philosophy throughout the medieval centuries. He pointed out that for Plato and Aristotle, political philosophy culminated in the knowledge of a God, and he believed (correctly) that there had always been minds at work in the monotheist systems labouring to reconcile the God of revelation with the God of philosophy. His insistence that this could only be done with the aid of esoteric teaching might have got him into trouble in the medieval University of

Paris, where such problems were notoriously open to public disputation; but it was in Christian Paris, more than in Muslim Spain which perhaps Strauss better understood, that the justification of philosophy in a monotheist setting became the justification of Aristotelian political society in the setting of the monotheist universe, that the city was presented as leading to the knowledge of God. Here Strauss' highly individual interpretation joins hands with many far more simplistic accounts of Machiavelli as *modern* in the sense of *not medieval.*

It is with the Christianised Aristotelianism of the schoolmen that these accounts all begin, and from this Aristotelianism that they see Machiavelli as departing. The textbooks of historical political philosophy all do this, with or without an interlude on the subject of Marsilius of Padua; and Strauss's *Thoughts on Machiavelli* is essentially an immensely elaborate account of how Machiavelli *intended* to break with *ancient* political philosophy, and *intended* to say many things which Strauss considered the necessary consequences of this breach.

Now one may doubt that this is a correct interpretation of Machiavelli's intentions, or of the ideas which he communicated to other people. This does not mean that if you compare his doctrines with those of the Aristotelian tradition, important implications will not appear; but one may doubt whether it was his intention to express these implications, or whether he or his readers considered assent or dissent from the Aristotelian tradition the most important question before them. One might say merely that Strauss and others like him are historically wrong but may be philosophically right: that the contrast between Aquinas and Machiavelli is there even if the latter did not mean to express it; but in fact the problem does not stop there. Strauss's view of political philosophy does entail a view of its history — a movement from *ancient* (meaning Aristotelian) to *modern* (meaning the negation of *ancient*) — and if you reject this as the historical scheme in which Machiavelli is to be located, it does follow that you read him as expressing other political, if not philosophical, meanings than those read into him by Strauss.

If we locate Machiavelli and Guicciardini among the Florentine civic humanists, the case for characterising them as dissenters from the Aristotelian tradition is weakened. The humanist line of thought, prevalent for over a century, was the work of writers who had been trained in humanist studies and in the Florentine chancellery and other public offices, not in any school where philosophical disputation was a principal means of communication. As Hans Baron and his critics[2] point out, Florentine intellectual culture was more rhetorical than philosophical, and the problems debated in universities were not necessarily those which gave rise to its political ideas. A thinker in the tradition of Platonic philosophy may reply that it is a grave error to discuss politics rhetorically rather than philosophically, and may succeed in showing

that Florentine political thought has characteristics which are the result of this error. To do so, however, will be philosophical criticism rather than an historical account of what those thinkers meant to say or were understood to say by others. In fact, Machiavelli had nothing whatever to say about the Aristotelian political tradition, but it is not a necessary consequence — as Strauss and many after him have attempted to infer — that he meant by his silence to convey the message that it was not worth thinking about. He may simply not have been thinking about it.

This is not to say there are no traces in Florentine thought of the great syntheses of medieval Aristotelianism. In the sermons of Girolamo Savonarola, some of which Machiavelli may have heard, the teachings of St. Thomas Aquinas are unquestionably present, even though when Savonarola thinks he is quoting Aquinas he is sometimes quoting Tolomeo da Lucca's continuation of the *De Regimine Principum*[3]. Savonarola, however, was a Dominican friar, and Dominicans studied Aquinas for obvious reasons; we have to beware of constructing a succession of major philosophers and supposing that this necessarily supplies us with the historical context in which men did their thinking. The first critic so far known to have observed that Machiavelli's thought can be related to the Aristotelian tradition was Tommaso Campanella — another Dominican — about a hundred years later, and he wrote that the study of Aristotle could lead directly to the errors of Machiavelli[4]. This makes sense only by supposing that when Campanella said "Aristotle" he meant Aristotle as studied at Padua, or elsewhere in the late scholastic scene where syntheses such as St. Thomas's were generally accepted, and secular philosophy and politics were much more likely to exist in defiance of their conformity with the Christian faith. The late scholastic scene disintegrates as we look at it; the synthesis of religion and philosophy was not universal, and it was possible to construct schemes of political thought without reference to Aristotelian philosophy at all. The presumption that Machiavelli must be viewed as *modern* because he departs from a *medieval* or *ancient* mainstream or "great tradition" — the last phrase was a favourite with Strauss — is not historically self-evident.

Hans Baron demonstrates that the civic humanist mode of political thought had been autonomous for rather more than a century before Machiavelli's time; and the doctrines against which it contended were not those of Thomas Aquinas. It is not clear that Strauss maintained they were, but for this very reason it may be held that his account of pre-Machiavellian thought is less than satisfactory. When he approached the great question of the relation between political philosophy and revealed religion, his eye was very often upon medieval Jewish rather than Christian thought, and for this reason it was fixed more upon prophecy than upon grace. The Christian challenge to the primacy of political philosophy was expressed for all time by St.

Augustine; and what Augustine desired to say was that souls were brought to salvation by the freely operating grace of God, and that this grace operated through the sacramental institutions of the Church and not through the political institutions of secular justice. The *civitas terrena* was very seldom just, and when it was, its justice did not lead to salvation. Secular time, in which the political city had its being, had very little to do with the processes of salvation and redemption, and the specifically political virtues — grouped by Augustine under the Sallustian title of *libido dominandi* — might not be virtues at all. Now it simply cannot be maintained that the vindication of politics as a thing natural to man — which scholastic theologians attempted during and after the thirteenth century — healed up the breach between *civitas terrena* and *civitas Dei* as if it had never been. The eve of that great Augustinian revolt which we call the Protestant Reformation, was the era of Machiavelli and Guicciardini. However superb we may find the great attempts to articulate it, the medieval synthesis was not even in ruins; it had never been achieved, and one of the consequences is that Florentine political thought is not an attempt at a new political philosophy, but an attempt to constitute political thought on a new basis which, since it did not address itself to the relations of philosophy and grace, had better not be called philosophy at all. It was rhetoric, the attempt to use language as a means of action; and the values to which it appealed were those of the *vita activa.*

The Florentine humanists saw themselves as rhetoricians, as thinkers in action aiming to speak and write so as to reconstitute a world of civic action, and in so speaking they reiterated one of the cardinal phrases of the Hellenic and European tradition: that man is by nature a political animal, incomplete unless enacting and declaring himself within a scheme of civic relationships. Now although this is one of the fundamental premises of political philosophy, it had been insisted on by Plato, and in his own way by Aristotle, that political existence is imperfect unless completed by philosophy. The humanist emphasis on the *vita activa* can be read as a return to the world of Pericles and Alcibiades, to action as it had been before it was questioned by Socrates. True, and very important; but (1) such a return was radically ancient and not modern; (2) we further misinterpret the whole problem of antiquity if we do not realise that the ancients sought after by the humanists were not pre-Socratic Greeks but middle-Stoic Romans; (3) the doctrine that citizenship must be completed by philosophy had been drastically altered by Augustine and other Fathers, who had created a universe in which philosophy was transformed into grace. Strauss saw in history the unremitting struggle of the philosophers to reconquer grace for themselves, but he seems to have thought that the philosophers had usually won. There would not have been a Protestant Reformation if they had won, and there might not have been a humanist revival in politics either.

Given a world in which grace — however much degraded and corrupted by the Church — held against the competition of philosophy the role of completing and perfecting political nature, there could be only two — but overlapping — outcomes for the humanist revival of the assertion that man was by nature political and that the city perfected his nature. Either citizenship must be seen as doing the work of grace — as is proclaimed in the sermons of Savonarola[5] — or it must do its own work in some indifference to the work of grace, as seems to be the message of Machiavelli. We do not understand the sixteenth century if we suppose that ancient philosophy held the field intact against the onslaughts of grace; and to treat the history of philosophy by itself, and organize it into *ancient* and *modern*, may well encourage us to do so.

If we look at the history of what some call civic humanism and others classical republicanism[6], we may see the following. Certain Florentine humanists revived the doctrine that the republic or polis contained all that was necessary to the completion of human life on earth; and they did so in a Christian context where the *civitas terrena* of politics was set over against the *civitas Dei* of grace. For reasons connected with the sharpness of this antithesis, they described the republic in terms of the *vita activa* instead of the *vita contemplativa*, and it is correct to point out that this was likely to entail some abandonment of the Athenian postulate that action must be completed by philosophy; but we mistake the historical context if we suppose that Augustinian grace had been re-absorbed by Thomist or Aristotelian philosophy. These Florentines depicted their own republic as an inheritor or revival of the ancient republic typified by Rome, and in so doing reiterated the humanist vision of an interval of barbarism — which was also an interval of Christianity — separating antiquity and themselves: an interval, in this case, of Christian empire and papacy. They had now raised for themselves a two-sided problem in historical understanding, such as neither ancient philosophers nor ancient historians had confronted. How had this interlude of empire, papacy and (if they thought about it) feudalism come to exist? If the republic was the norm of political life, what explained its decline and replacement by empire in the Roman case, its revival and all too evident instability in the Florentine case, its apparent serenity and unalterability in the case of Venice? These were historical problems, to which philosophy suggested some answers, but by no means all that might be put forward. The experiment in recovering antiquity produced a great gulf in the humanist understanding of time, which must be filled by adducing sacred or secular ideas about history; and there was the further difficulty that the republic had seldom been depicted as a sacred entity, linked with the fulfilment of the Christian redemption.

It may next be argued that history — the succession of events in secular time — could be depicted either as the work of grace, or with the aid of a sharply

limited secular vocabulary. The republic could — although traditions to this effect were somewhat lacking — be said to do the work of grace, bringing human life nearer to salvation by perfecting its political form and earthly justice. This is going on in the sermons of Savonarola, who found means of expressing this doctrine in ways not incompatible with the language of orthodox Thomism: *gratia non tollit naturam, sed perficit.* The republic, however, because of its secular character and its historical instability, must be thought of as existing at specific and separated moments of secular time; and the only way to say that it perfected human life, or restored human life to its original nature — which must be the work of grace — was to say that these were the moments at which grace operated in secular time to do its work of redemption. This in turn could only be said by recourse to the prophetic and apocalyptic, eschatological and millenarian, terminologies of the Christian vocabulary, and Savonarola was neither the first nor the last to find that to be a republican was also to be a prophet. In pursuit of the logic of the prophetic vocabulary, he came to denounce the Pope as Antichrist, and found that this was too much even for the Florentines, who were accustomed to treating the Pope with disrespect, but never forgot to count the political costs of doing so.

Machiavelli and Guicciardini may be brought back into the story here. They both felt considerable respect for Savonarola, both for his role in restoring popular government and for the astonishing effect which his prophecies had upon the Florentine mind; but they did not believe that his prophecies were genuine, and they had noted his ultimate failure — connected like his rise with the French invasion of 1494, which had rendered republican survival more precarious than ever. They therefore concluded that the survival of republics was a secular problem, to be understood if not mastered by mobilising that sharply limited vocabulary for the understanding of secular events described a moment ago. This was organised around the key concepts of custom and fortune. If a secular political structure could be anchored deeply enough in remembered experience and custom, it might acquire a stability which fortune — the symbol of instability in secular and political affairs — would find hard to overthrow. If not, however, every political action was itself the product of this same fortune, its apparent success in achieving stability occurring as fortune's wheel swung upwards, its ultimate failure and downfall occurring as the wheel swung down. In so far as human actions were not rewarded by grace, they were all governed by the wheel of fortune. There were moral qualities and political skills which it was appropriate for men to display in the confrontation with fortune; there was civic and heroic virtue, there was prudence and caution, there was understanding of how a polity might be balanced and rendered just and stable. These were not non-moral qualities, but if one thought of them as existing apart from the operation of grace, they were unlikely to enjoy ultimate

political success — especially on the presumption that only grace could save a city — and they were unlikely to lead to the salvation of souls. Any Christian moralist must say that to save souls was more important than to save the city; but the reply had always been possible that if it was good to save the city, this end must be sought by means other than those which led to the salvation of souls. As early as 1420 — and in a time of conflict with the Papacy — Gino di Neri Capponi had written that Florence needed men who cared more for the good of the city than for the good of their own souls[7]; a phrase Machiavelli was to repeat. Savonarola had seemed to show that only if Florence were a holy city governed in the fulfilment of prophecy were these two ends the same, and he had not brought holiness and Florence together.

In the wake of his failure — and also because they saw that a republic must always be something more than a customary community — Machiavelli and Guicciardini, together with other Florentine writers, set out to see what might be done for a city by those virtues defined by the contention with fortune rather than by the expectation of grace. Since they did not expect to save souls by what they envisaged doing, they accepted that their means would be imperfectly moral; they aimed at achieving stability and success, but they did not expect final success in the contention with fortune either. They might therefore have been orthodox and pious Augustinians, who held that the first priority was to save the *civitas terrena* even though action in this field could never be action in the *civitas Dei.* They were not, however; expressions of Christian faith are lacking in their works, and Machiavelli is prepared to judge the faith severely by the standards of the *civitas terrena.* The paradox is that all this had come about because the civic humanists had repeated the Aristotelian doctrine that man is by nature a political animal in the Augustinian context of a sharp separation between the world of politics and the world of grace. Given the Christian conviction that the only intelligible history is the history of grace, but that grace does not need history in order to be effective — given also the brutal experience of instability that beset the Florentine republic in every generation — the effect had been to make the republic's chief problem that of existence in a history that neither grace nor philosophy could explain. There was a republican rhetoric that could do much towards explaining it; but since only grace (and perhaps philosophy) could furnish final explanations, the theory and practice of republican existence would never bring moral, or political, or historical completeness. To adhere to natural politics in an Augustinian universe must lead to ambivalence and ultimately to historicism. When Guicciardini asks himself why a republic is necessary for Florence, he does not answer in terms of the nature of politics nor the nature of man, but of the nature of the Florentines. They are that way, he says; their history has made them such that they will never be content without a republic, but they are most unlikely ever to achieve one[8]. The only nature here is second nature,

that which is produced by history; but the point is less that Guicciardini has abandoned the philosophical principle that men are by nature political and need philosophy in order to perfect their politics, than that to assert human politicality in an Augustinian universe was to leave it ultimately intelligible only in a history which must be either sacred or secular. Augustine had told the Florentines this would happen; but political animals they were, and they went ahead, between 1494 and 1530, to face the choices expressed in the writings of Savonarola and Machiavelli.

Machiavelli's drastic innovation was to isolate and apply the Roman notion of *virtù*, that dominant and ruling quality by which men confronted fortune and overcame it insofar as it was ever possible to do so. In *Il Principe* he developed this notion in connection with the figure of the "new prince", who — unlike the "born prince", who was so far legitimised by custom that he had little to fear from fortune and little need of *virtù* — had made himself ruler by means that disturbed the customs of his subjects and left him exposed to fortune and needing all the *virtù* he could display. This kind of adventurer was no longer common even in Italy, and in later centuries only Napoleon Bonaparte exemplified the combination of *condottiere* and legislator which Machiavelli sketched in his portrait. We have to remember how carefully the new prince was defined by the abnormality of his situation before leaping to the conclusion that he is intended to be a type of political actor as such. It is true that *virtù* is defined as not only that which he needs as a consequence of his usurpation, but that which moved him to perform the usurpation in the first place. This is linked with a study of innovation as destroying the conditions which might have made it legitimate; but *Il Principe* may be intended as a study and typology of innovation rather than of political action. Once again, when Machiavelli explains how the "new prince" must and should behave immorally in order to maintain his position, we should not let our indignation at the suggestion that *any* political being should behave like this lead us into supposing that we are being told that *all* political beings should. The new prince is living in a world of disorder which is often of his own creating, and it does not seem that he is going to find a way out of it. He cannot change the nature of his subjects by teaching them new customs, and he cannot alter his own nature as fact as his circumstances will alter; this is why fortune will always have power over him[9]. He is not the author of a new political order, but a successful rider on the wheel of fortune in a politics permanently disordered by his own act. In consequence, though he is constantly adjured to study and imitate the lessons of anitiquity, this does not mean that there is any classical type — certainly not Cesare Borgia — on whom he can permanently model himself. The new princes of the past, like those of the present, lived in disordered, not in patterned circumstances; none of their actions could be proof against fortune, and every situation in which the

prince might find himself had the uniqueness of irrationality. We shall have to ask the question: is this or is this not modernity?

In his greater work the *Discorsi*, Machiavelli turned his attention from the prince to the citizen and considered the political structure of republics. For reasons which need not be considered in detail here, he resolved that the most interesting republic to study was the armed and expansive city, like republican Rome, which alone would give arms to its non-noble citizens and in consequence admit them to political rights. There was an intrinsic relationship between expansion of the city and the extension of citizenship, or between imperialism and democracy. The nobles gave the people arms because they were needed in the legions, and the people employed their arms in claiming their political rights. There would always be tension between the two but this would make the city more warlike and more free; a belief which Guicciardini found he could not accept, since there could be neither rule nor law without order, even if this must be imposed by authority. Leo Strauss' *Thoughts on Machiavelli* consists largely of a series of arguments to the effect that this creative tension between nobles and people is a deception, and that the *Discorsi* consists of a series of covert instructions to the rulers on how the ruled may be manipulated and deceived. The arguments are tortured and the conclusions exaggerated. The relation between nobles and people is ambiguous; it is assumed that the nobles will try to deceive, as the people will try not to be deceived, and that the victory of either may be occasionally desirable, just as the tension between the two will be permanently valuable. Every reader of Machiavelli's age and the next who considered the matter, seemed to see clearly that he was a *popolano* who advocated non-noble participation in government, and in grounding this in popular possession of arms, ensured in his theory that the people's role would be more than a merely deferential one. A central theme is that possession of arms and possession of political capacity are one and the same, and that *virtù* rests upon both. Unlike the *virtù* of the new prince, that of the citizen entails law and liberty, obedience and equality; it has a complex moral code. Because its end is the expansiveness of the city, without which it cannot exist, it is not identical with Christian morality, and the historical world which *virtù* creates is incompatible with that created by Christian redemption. A city's *virtù* grows by destroying the *virtù* of others; when one city rules the whole world, its *virtù* will corrode and degenerate; there will be a collapse, a cataclysm, and the process will begin again[10]. This vision of history is not modern; it is Roman and pre-Christian, though it flourished for a while in early modern history.

Guicciardini liked to consider himself a more cautious thinker than Machiavelli, and was more closely aligned with the Florentine political aristocracy, although these were not nobility. He held prudence rather than *virtù* to be the quality with which men sought to guide themselves through

disordered political and moral situations, although this quality too was imperfectly moral. The difference is that through *virtù* one can hope to impose one's own pattern on these situations, whereas through prudence one aims only to diagnose situations which one cannot control and guide oneself accordingly. For this reason Guicciardini held that Machiavelli had overestimated the extent to which it was possible to imitate the actions of antiquity; not only did the situations which had existed in the past not recur in identical form in the present — Machiavelli knew this well enough — but one could not, so to speak, make them recur by the imposition of *virtù* on the present. If we look closely at Guicciardini's criticisms of Machiavelli one finds him repeatedly saying that we cannot imitate the actions of the early Romans unless we command legions of armed citizens[11]. It is a cardinal fact about his own times that Florence did not command a citizen militia — although he agrees that it would be a very good thing, morally as well as politically, if there were one. There is need of the sagacity of a wise and prudent few, who can guide the city's policy in situations which arms cannot command. So far there is little disagreement with Machiavelli in principle or theory, but Guiccciardini does go on to express doubt whether there ever existed the intimate relationship between arms and citizenship which Machiavelli had detected at Rome. The plebians were not good citizens because their arms made them so; military discipline was an independent variable, founded by the kings rather than the consuls, which held Rome together when the dissensions of nobles and people, inherent in the republic's political structure, would otherwise have torn the city apart[12].

What seems to be happening here is that Guicciardini's rejection of the *virtù* which can control the present is increasing his scepticism as to the extent to which we can guide ourselves by knowing the past, and consequently his awareness of the incoherence and elusiveness of all historical situations past and present. In addition to his *Considerations on Machiavelli's Discourses*, his *Ricordi* — a collection of political maxims — developed a series of warnings about the extreme difficulty of applying prudence itself to the understanding of history and politics, and how easy it is to let one's sensitivity to the complexity of things betray one into believing that one has comprehended them, whereas it is the contrary lesson that one ought to be learning[13]. In his last and greatest work, the *History of Italy*, we seem to see him in retirement from active politics, moving towards the belief that nothing is left but to write the history of events, seeking less to understand the forces which made them happen than the forces which made men — including the author himself — constantly mislead themselves as they tried to understand and control them[14]. This pessimism and historicism present the extreme outcome of the civic humanists' discovery that the life of political societies took place in secular time, and that secular time was controlled by neither

philosophy nor grace. The further discovery that secular action could be assured of neither morality nor success was common to both Machiavelli and Guicciardini, and had nothing whatever that was new about it. What was new — or at least un-medieval — about them was their belief that men were morally and politically obliged to undertake action whose morality could not be assured. The polis had its morality, which was not the morality of the *civitas Dei*, and consequently neither morality was complete. Machiavelli expressed this in the image of the centaur, half man and half beast; and the secular time in which the centaur had his being can be appropriately termed history.

There seems a sound case, then, for the view that the Florentines arrived at a position of historicism, of insisting that the crucial characteristic of moral and political life is that it is lived in history. Historicism sounds very modern, in the sense that it is neither ancient nor medieval, yet the variety of historicism we have been looking at was compounded wholly out of the tension between ancient and medieval materials. The civic humanists sought to imitate the actions of antiquity, and to assert the primacy of political values, which is an ancient ideal; they did so in the context of Augustine's radical separation between the values of citizenship and those of redemption, between the secular history which contained the former and the sacred history which led to the latter, and these are postulates of medieval thought. Out of this tension emerged the Florentine variety of historicism; but is this historicism to be termed modern? It depends what one means by the word, and one needs some canons for its use.

I have challenged the idea of a transition from ancient to modern, on the grounds that the medieval world was profoundly divided between Athenian, Roman and Christian values. Leo Strauss' vision of history, although he might not have owned to having one[15], was focussed on the history of political philosophy, and on the assumption that Aristotelians had bridged the gap between political philosophy and redemptive grace. There may be a case for continuing to organise the history of political philosophy into ancient and modern, but the Augustinian position involved a denial that there could be such a thing as political philosophy at all, and I have been advancing the paradox that the Florentine predicament had more in common with that. They were trying to act and to imitate in a world where secular and sacred were so sharply divided that imitation proved destructive of all except history. Negating philosophy was a philosophical act for Strauss, and had philosophical consequences; this is an intelligible position, but he tells us he first considered Hobbes the founder of modern political philosophy, and later came to think it was Machiavelli. There is an important crux here. We know that Hobbes aimed to set up a modern political philosophy because he tells us so himself; he says that for two thousand years Western thought has been dominated by

Athenian philosophy; the political and philosophical consequences have been disastrous, and that there is need for something else[16]. He proceeds to set up what is certainly a philosophy and certainly political; this is certainly modern in the sense that it differs radically from the ancient and medieval. Now the trouble about Machiavelli, and Guicciardini too, is that they do not say anything about philosophy or philosophers at all; or if some limited transitory allusions consider political philosophy, they signal the author's intentions of doing something so different that it will not be a different kind of philosophy, but something else altogether. This is what they proceed to do; they explore the idea of imitation so radically that doing so becomes an exploration of the idea of history. This is open to philosophical criticism; it has consequences in the historical world with which the philosopher may have to reckon as he tries to express his philosophy as a denizen of that world, but it is not philosophy, but something else. Strauss' attempts to show that Machiavelli was trying to create a new philosophy in the same way that Thomas Hobbes was are unbelievably complicated and indirect, and they end with nothing more than the contention that he was covertly preaching a pseudo-normative doctrine of amoral individualism, which many have found in his writings and equated it with Hobbes, as did Strauss. Machiavelli's explorations of the problem of history, on which Guicciardini commented, are altogether subordinated. I suggest the attempt was misconceived, Machiavelli was not a political philosopher, and the historical context which makes him intelligible is not one in which political philosophy is the dominant presence.

The idea of basing action upon imitation is, in a sense, pre-philosophcal. Socrates and Plato set out to show that it was not enough, and the latter might well have said that the humanists of the Renaissance were making the same mistake as those Athenians who tried to base action upon imitation of the heroes of epic poetry. The Florentines developed an independent enquiry into the moral and political imperfection — which was at the same time a moral and political necessity — of imitating the actions of ancient history. The ancients did not conduct such an enquiry, but discovering how difficult it is to imitate the actions of antiquity is not enough to make you a modern if you go on trying to do it and do not discover any alternative principles on which action can be based. The discovery which Machiavelli and Guicciardini made of the enormous difficulty and imperfection of action in historic time is based on the discovery that secular time is not controlled by grace or rendered intelligible by philosophy; it is not based on the discovery that secular processes in history are perpetually producing objective conditions which have not existed before, and this is the essential condition of anything we can call a consciousness of modernity. Hobbes may have intended to produce a philosophy unlike any that had existed previously, but I doubt if this means he had any modern sense of historical process. His historical scheme remains

prophetic and eschatological[17]; but Machiavelli had no such intention. When he talks of the need for "new modes and orders", he means that such modes and orders must be securely founded on the practice of antiquity and will be new in the normal pre-modern sense that they will be renewed, "the world's great age begins anew, the golden years return." Since all such imitation is carried out in a world subject to fortune, there is a probability that such a *renovatio* will turn out to be an *innovatio*, that self-destructive mode of action which removes the conditions on which it was founded. The Machiavellian doctrine of action, then is neither ancient nor modern in any simple sense; but the paradigm remains that of imitating antiquity in the knowledge that this is not altogether possible. Guicciardini, who thinks that Machiavelli over-simplifies the case, does not differ from him as to the paradigm; while Hobbes is a modern who has not become a historicist.

Towards the end of Hobbes' lifetime — and more than a century after the end of Machiavelli's and Guicciardini's — there raged that "quarrel of the ancients and moderns" from which our usage of the last term is largely derived. An *ancient* was one who still thought it of paramount importance to imitate antiquity; a *modern* was one who did not; but there were two distinguishable if overlapping reasons for being a modern. One might believe that one had succeeded in something which the Greeks and Romans had attempted but failed to do; or one might believe that one had discovered how to do something which they had never attempted, and shown that they had been on the wrong track or that their enterprise was now unnecessary. The frame of mind which holds that imitation of antiquity is highly desirable but almost impossibly difficult will not supply modernity in the former sense, and will supply it in the latter only if, as the result of the tension between theory and practice, "modes and orders" which are in fact new have been discovered and exploited. Had anything of the kind occurred in the wake of Machiavelli and Guicciardini? It seems unlikely. There had been a widespread investigation of *raison d'état*, which owed a great deal to them both[18]; but for the most part this was a further development of the casuistical problems[19] which arose when it was admitted that the morality of state action differed from the morality of private action, and the consequent attempt to identify the "interest of states", and show how these determined action of the former kind, had not yet shown that the modern state differed in character or purpose from the ancient. Furthermore, when we encounter the "quarrel of ancients and moderns" in a strictly political form, and it is asked for the first time whether the modern political individual is a different sort of being from the ancient, we find, regularly employed to define the ancient and criticise the modern, Machiavelli's equation between arms-bearer and citizen. He insists that it is the possession of arms which endows the individual with political autonomy and the capacity for virtue in either a classical or a Machiavellian sense.

Strauss contended that Machiavelli, like Hobbes, was the author of a radical individualism which depicted men as seeking private good first and public good second; but what we find, towards the year 1700, is a persistent contrast between the ancient or medieval warrior whose arms permitted him to engage in his own government, and the individual of commercial and cultivated society who preferred to purchase the goods which commerce made possible, while paying others to defend him, govern him and represent him[20]. The latter is the archetype of modernity and is only very indirectly the heir of Hobbes. If this is so, Machiavelli and even Guiciardini rank among the ancients in the great quarrel, both because they knew no positive alternative to imitation of the ancients and because they tended — Machiavelli less equivocally, on the whole, than his friend and critic — to depict the political individual in the shape of classical citizen.

In conclusion, the Florentines rank as ancients rather than moderns; and if it be objected that an *ancient* in this sense is still a modern phenomenon, both because to imitate antiquity is not to be an antique man and because the imitation of antiquity is a post-medieval ideal, I reply that modernity appears only when there are secular means of knowing oneself to be a different sort of secular being from an antique man. The struggle for imitation and revival produced an acute awareness of history and a pre-modern species of historicism; but there is a profound difference between an historicism which presents history as a secular flux ruled by fortune, and one which presents it as a secular process and transformation. It was the advent of commercial society which convinced theorists after 1700 that the world had changed and the classical ideal of citizenship ceased to be viable[21]. Their historicism consisted in visualising, with Rousseau, the historical process which had rendered man civilised as one and the same with that which had deprived him of his political virtue. From there the path lay towards Kant, Hegel and Marx, towards the attempt to identify consciousness of self with consciousness of the contradictions of the historical process. To all of this the Florentines' contribution seems to have consisted less in the architecture of modernity than in the neo-classical antithesis against which it was shaped. They were moderns only in the sense that they were ancients.

History
Johns Hopkins University

Notes

1. Based upon a lecture given under the auspices of the History and Political Science Departments of Simon Fraser University, July 17, 1978.

2. Baron, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance*, Princeton University Press, 1966. Jerrold E. Seigel, *Rhetoric and Philosophy in Renaissance Humanism*, Princeton University Press, 1968. George Holmes, *The Florentine Enlightenment, 1400-1450*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969.

3. See Charles T. Davis, "Roman Patriotism and Republican Propaganda: Ptolemy of Lucca and Pope Nicholas III", *Speculum*, L, 3, 1975, pp. 411-33.

4. Rodolfo De Mattei, *Dal Premachiavellismo all'Antimachiavellismo*, Florence: G. C. Sansoni, 1969, pp. 159-60.

5. Donald Weinstein, *Savonarola and Florence: Prophecy and Patriotism in the Renaissance*, Princeton University Press, 1970.

6. In the next few paragraphs I summarise arguments to be found in my *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition*, Princeton University Press, 1975.

7. L. Muratori, *Rerum Italicorum Scriptores*, Milan: 1723-51, vol. XVIII, col. 1149. Renzo Sereno, "The *Ricordi* of Gino di Neri Capponi", *American Political Science Review*, 52, 4, 1958, pp. 1118-22.

8. Roberto Palmarocchi, ed., *Francesco Guicciardini: Dialogo e Discorsi del Reggimento di Firenze*, Bari: Laterza, 1932, pp. 94-5, 223, 261-62. *Machiavellian Moment*, pp. 125-6, 142-3, 250-1.

9. *Il Principe*, ch. XXV. *Machiavellian Moment*, pp. 96-7, 179-80.

10. *Discorsi*, II, 5; *Machiavellian Moment*, pp. 216-8.

11. *Considerations on the Discourses of Machiavelli*, in *Selected Writings*, ed. and trans. Cecil and Margaret Grayson, London: Oxford University Press, 1965, pp. 69, 117; *Ricordi*, trans. Mario Domandi, *Maxims and Reflections of a Renaissance Statesman*, New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1965, p. 69; Palmarocchi, *Dialogo e Discorsi*, pp. 68, 90-93, 155. See Herbert Butterfield, *The Statecraft of Machiavelli*, London: G. Bell, 1955, *Machiavellian Moment*, pp. 239, 245-48, 268-70.

12. *Dialogo e Discorsi*, pp. 148-58.

13. *Machiavellian Moment*, pp. 267-8.

14. Mark Phillips, *Francesco Guicciardini: The Historian's Craft*, University of Toronto Press, 1977. Felix Gilbert, *Machiavelli and Guicciardini: Politics and History in Sixteenth-Century Florence*, Princeton University Press, 1965.

15. *Cf.* John Gunnell, "The Myth of the Tradition", *American Political Science Review*, 72, 1, 1978, pp. 122-34.

16. *Leviathan*, ch. 46.

17. Pocock, "Time, History and Eschatology in the Thought of Thomas Hobbes", in *Politics, Language and Time*, New York: Atheneum, 1971.

18. Friedrich Meinecke, *Der Idee der Staatsräson*, English translation, *Machiavellism*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957. E. Thuau, *Raison d'état et pensée politique à l'epoque de Richelieu*, Paris: Colin, 1966. W. F. Church, *Richelieu and Reason of State*, Princeton University Press, 1972. Although Machiavellian elements are evident in these writers, the role of Guicciardini has been little studied; see forthcoming work by Lionel A. McKenzie, Johns Hopkins University.

19. See George L. Mosse, *The Holy Pretence: A Study in Christianity and Reason of State from William Perkins to John Winthrop*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1957.

20. *Machiavellian Moment*, ch. 13.

21. Joseph E. Cropsey, *Polity and Economy: An Interpretation of the Principles of Adam Smith*, The Hague: Nijhoff, 1957. *More Straussiano*, he links the pursuit of wealth in Smith directly with the fear of violent death in Hobbes. For discussion, see Donald Winch, *Adam Smith's Politics: An Essay in Historiographic Revision*, Cambridge University Press, 1978.