

Machiavelli, Envy, and the Corrupt Republic

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Abstract: I argue that envy (*invidia*) is a guiding theme in Machiavelli's *Discourses on Livy* that has heretofore been paid insufficient scholarly attention. For Machiavelli, envy presents a distinct threat to the stability of republics, especially those with corrupt political institutions vulnerable to usurpation by a tyrant. Machiavelli warns that envy can destroy a republic and, ultimately, liberty, just as it did in his native Florence. Through Machiavelli's account of the downfalls of Manlius Capitolinus, Savonarola, and Soderini, we learn that in order to combat envy in a corrupt republic that lacks adequate political checks, one must eliminate the envious rather than attempting to assuage their envy. Yet, Machiavelli also attempts to moderate the inclinations of prospective tyrants and advocates for institutional mechanisms as a safeguard against envy. I conclude that while Machiavelli's complicated antidote for envy is ultimately unworkable, studying this neglected theme is valuable insofar as it further underscores the challenge of assessing this enigmatic thinker's republican legacy.

Introduction

Envy (*invidia*) and its potentially detrimental effect on republics is an important theme in Machiavelli's writings, but one that is afforded surprisingly little sustained attention in the voluminous scholarship on his work. An exception is John McCormick's recent essay examining the successes and failures of Marcus Furius Camillus, one of the ancient Roman exemplars highlighted in Machiavelli's *Discourses on Livy*.¹ McCormick investigates Camillus's oscillation between combatting and eliciting the envy of the ruling class and people of Rome during his storied military and political career. By taking up Camillus, McCormick aims to challenge prevailing interpretations of

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¹ 'Machiavelli's Camillus and the Tension Between Leadership and Democracy' in *The Oxford Handbook of Law and Humanities*, eds. Simon Stern, Maksymilian del Mar, and Bernadette Meyler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 409-425.

Machiavelli's thought offered by the Cambridge School and students of Leo Strauss, two contemporary intellectual traditions that devote considerable attention to Machiavelli's work but reach divergent conclusions about its compatibility with republicanism.² Approaching something of a middle position between these two paradigms, McCormick argues that while Machiavelli promotes robust political institutions such as public trials for civil misconduct, both founding and maintaining these institutions requires leaders who may need to resort to unilateral action falling outside accepted political modes and orders.³ Yet McCormick insists that 'the influence exerted and prerogative enjoyed' by leaders such as Camillus 'do not constitute usurpations of popular deliberation but rather serve, in conjunction with properly empowering institutions, as necessary complements to democratic judgment'.⁴ Camillus's vacillation between public approbation and condemnation illustrates powerfully the tension between the republic's attraction to and suspicion of strong leaders and the importance of institutional restraints to prevent executive prerogative from being taken too far. McCormick's analysis of Camillus underscores both the enigma and the enduring appeal of Machiavelli's thought, which juxtaposes praise of ruthless acts of political violence to subdue one's opponents with endorsement of mixed governments employing modes of popular control of political elites. The difficulty of reconciling these disparate argumentative registers in Machiavelli's thought has given rise to clashing interpretations among scholars, who run the gamut from classifying Machiavelli as a 'teacher of evil', whose ideas embolden tyrants, to anointing him a forebear of modern liberal republicanism.⁵

² McCormick, 'Machiavelli's Camillus', 409-410. For seminal works on Machiavelli in these traditions as identified by McCormick, see J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975, rpt. 2003); Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, Vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978, rpt. 2002); Leo Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958); and Harvey C. Mansfield, *Machiavelli's New Modes and Orders: A Study of the Discourses on Livy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979).

³ McCormick, 'Machiavelli's Camillus', 409-410. Cf. *Machiavellian Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 114-138 and *passim*.

⁴ McCormick, 'Machiavelli's Camillus', 410.

⁵ Strauss famously writes, 'We shall not shock anyone, we shall merely expose ourselves to good-natured or at any rate harmless ridicule, if we profess ourselves inclined to the old-fashioned and simple opinion according to which Machiavelli was a teacher of evil. Indeed, what other description would fit a man who teaches lessons like these: princes ought to exterminate the families of rulers whose

While McCormick's labour with Camillus helps us better understand the political lessons about leadership that Machiavelli means his audience to learn from this complicated figure in the *Discourses*, his analysis invites more focused attention on the broader problem of envy in Machiavelli's work. McCormick leaves largely untraced the threads connecting Camillus with Marcus Manlius Capitolinus, the ancient Roman whose envy of Camillus sets into action a chain of events that culminates in Manlius' imprisonment and execution. I will argue that Machiavelli's chronicle of Manlius Capitolinus's disgrace in the *Discourses* serves as a cautionary tale illustrating the danger that envy can pose to a republic that is corrupt and not properly ordered to withstand it. Moreover, McCormick's brief remarks contrasting Camillus's successes and failures with those of Machiavelli's Florentine contemporaries do not probe important distinctions Machiavelli makes between Girolamo Savonarola and Piero Soderini in *Discourses* III.30, the chapter that addresses directly how to eliminate envy in a republic.⁶ McCormick interprets Soderini as a foil for Camillus, and he largely ignores Machiavelli's remarks about Savonarola. I will argue that the most instructive contrast Machiavelli makes in this discussion of envy is not between Camillus and Soderini; rather, it is between

territory they wish to possess securely.' Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 9. Yet Strauss tempers his initial position by admitting that Machiavelli is a 'patriot of a particular kind', albeit one whose love of country is pursued at the expense of the good, which 'is bound to strengthen the forces of depravity' (10-11). Maurizio Viroli, on the other hand, believes Machiavelli evinces 'a commitment to the ideal of a well-ordered republic—that is, a republic which is kept in order by rule of law and by constitutional arrangements that ensure that each component of the polity has its proper place; it is a commitment to the principles of the political and civil life (*vivere politico; vivere civile*) and to a conception of political liberty understood as an absence of personal dependence. . . .' Viroli, *Machiavelli* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 116. Catherine Zuckert argues that these variations in interpretation result from different analytical approaches, which she divides into three broad categories: contextual or historical, rhetorical or literary, and political-theoretical. Emphasizing that each approach has its merits and limitations, Zuckert endeavors to employ elements of all three to 'present a fuller, more comprehensive view'. Zuckert, *Machiavelli's Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 3 and *passim*. Zuckert marks Machiavelli to be 'the first to redefine the purpose of government as the satisfaction of popular desires for security of life, family, and property', 462.

⁶ All references to the *Discourses* (hereafter D) are indicated by the book, chapter, paragraph, and page number from the translation by Harvey C. Mansfield and Nathan Tarcov (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996). See D III.30.1, 278-281. The chapter is entitled, 'For One Citizen Who Wishes to Do Any Good Work in His Republic by His Authority, It Is Necessary First to Eliminate Envy; and How, on Seeing the Enemy, One Has to Order the Defense of a City'.

Savonarola and Soderini. While Machiavelli credits Savonarola for correctly understanding the problem of envy, he goes on to argue that Savonarola's efforts to grapple with envy during his short tenure were ultimately unsuccessful because of his hypocrisy and lack of political authority, resulting in his ouster and execution. In contrast, Soderini completely misunderstands envy's causes and consequences and adopts methods that are wholly ineffective for dealing with envy, contributing to the fall of the Florentine republic.⁷

By investigating Machiavelli's account of the downfalls of Manlius Capitolinus, Savonarola, and Soderini, I show that envy presents particular threats to the stability of republics in his thought, especially those with corrupt political institutions that will be vulnerable to usurpation by a tyrant who would sacrifice the freedom of the people and security of the state for personal gain. Rather than wishing to encourage such a tyrant, Machiavelli is committed to advising those in political power how to prevent aspiring tyrants from capitalizing on envy-fuelled calumnies to seize political power from those most qualified to govern; likewise, he attempts to moderate the ambitious inclinations of prospective tyrants by offering them a surer way to attain glory that does not rob the city of its freedom. Machiavelli's lesson is that the most important safeguard against envy is having an uncorrupt republic with strong political institutions, and founding institutions like these makes one worthy of longstanding fame. Nevertheless, I conclude that while Machiavelli may be dedicated to fostering republican institutions, his proposed modes render success unlikely. Machiavelli's advocacy of fraud as well as force exacerbates suspicion, fuelling the envy he attempts to eliminate.

1. Tracing the problem of envy in Machiavelli's thought

Before treating Machiavelli's models of more and less successful attempts at mitigating the harmful effects of envy, it is necessary to

⁷ Of course, the Florentine republic's problems predated both Savonarola's and Soderini's political involvement, as is catalogued in Machiavelli's *Florentine Histories*. While a treatment of the *Florentine Histories* is beyond the scope of this paper, in her book *Machiavelli's Florentine Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), Michelle T. Clarke discusses the contrasts between Cosimo de' Medici's leadership in fifteenth century Florence and that of Camillus and other classical heroes. See Chapter 4, 'The Questionable Virtues of the Medici', 96-98 and *passim*.

articulate what makes envy a *problem* for Machiavelli in the first place. This is an understudied theme in his work, and the lacuna in the scholarly literature is all the more surprising, given that Machiavelli connects envy closely with ingratitude, one of three key themes along with ambition and fortune that he treats in *i Capitoli*, a trio of poems written sometime between 1507 and 1515.⁸ Joseph Tusiani has argued that these poems introduce ‘the three pillars of Machiavelli’s world and the three main causes of its history’.⁹ Two of the poems, *dell’Ambizione* and *di Fortuna*, treat major themes in Machiavelli’s writings that have received far more scholarly attention than *dell’Ingratitudine*, an overlooked poem on a forgotten vice.¹⁰ There, Machiavelli ponders the effects of ingratitude and, closely entwined with it, envy, on political regimes and those who serve them.¹¹ While Machiavelli’s most sustained discussion of envy appears in the *Discourses*,¹² his early observations in *dell’Ingratitudine* clearly anticipate his mature view that envy hinders the best citizens from ascending to leadership positions. His verses on Scipio and Caesar, in particular, reinforce the lessons about envy we learn from Manlius Capitolinus, Savonarola, and Soderini in the *Discourses*.

In *dell’Ingratitudine* Machiavelli names envy as one of ingratitude’s key catalysts. He writes:

Of Avarice she [ingratitude] was the daughter and
of Suspicion; she was nursed in the arms of Envy;
in breasts of princes and kings she lives. There as in
her chief abode she makes her nest; from thence she

⁸ The composition date for *i Capitoli* is debated. Allan Gilbert says they were written between 1507 and 1515. See Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Chief Works and Others*, 3 vols., trans. Allan Gilbert (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1989). Hereafter cited as Machiavelli, *Chief Works*, by poem lines and pages numbers. More recently Albert Russell Ascoli and Angela Matilde Capodivacca have suggested dates for all three *i Capitoli* between 1506 and 1512. See Ascoli and Capodivacca, ‘Machiavelli and Poetry’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Machiavelli*, ed. John M. Najemy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 196.

⁹ Joseph Tusiani, trans. and ed., *Lust and Liberty: The Poems of Machiavelli* (New York: Ivan Obolensky, Inc., 1963), xviii.

¹⁰ For example, Ascoli and Capodivacca call *dell’Ambizione* ‘the most significant of the *capitoli*’, and briefly mention only one link between *dell’Ingratitudine* and *The Prince*. An exception is Haig Patapan, who studies all three poems but focuses on what they teach us about Machiavelli’s understanding of cosmology rather than his politics. See Haig Patapan, ‘*I Capitoli*: Machiavelli’s New Theogony’, *Review of Politics* 65.2 (2003): 185-207.

¹¹ In his translation Allan Gilbert titles the poem ‘Tercets on Ingratitude or Envy’. See Machiavelli, *Chief Works*, II, 740-744.

¹² See D III.30.1, 278-281.

anoints the hearts of all other men with the poison of her treachery.¹³

Along with avarice and suspicion, envy is one of the root causes of ingratitude, which appears first among political leaders and, subsequently, infiltrates the people. Moreover, ingratitude nursed by envy explains why a worthy citizen ‘sees his blood and his sweat and his life of good service repaid with injury and calumny’.¹⁴ How so? Machiavelli warns that ‘if any man early enrolls himself among the fortunate’ by his public conduct, he will soon find himself the target of ‘three cruel arrows’.¹⁵ The three arrows of ingratitude are, first, acknowledging without returning a benefit; second, forgetting a favour; and third, the worst and most deadly of all, neither remembering nor returning a favor but, instead, harming one’s benefactor.¹⁶ While ingratitude ‘triumphs in the heart of every ruler’, Machiavelli suggests it ‘takes more delight’ when it infects the broader populace, fostering rampant calumny.¹⁷ The people are

wounded more severely, because always where little is known, more is suspected, and its various persons, full of all manner of envy, keep Suspicion ever awake, and he keeps his ears open for slanders. From this it comes often that we see a good citizen reaping grain unlike the seed he sowed in the field.¹⁸

¹³ Machiavelli, *Chief Works*, II, lines 25-30, 740-741. Machiavelli, *Tutte le Opere*, ed. Mario Martelli (Florence: Sansoni, 1971), 980: ‘Fu d’Avarizia figlia e di Sospetto: nutrita ne la braccia de la Invidia: de’ principi e de’ re vive nel petto. Quivi il suo seggio principale annidia; di quindi il cor di tutta l’altra gente col venen tinge de la sua perfidia’. Hereafter cited as Machiavelli, *Opere*. When my interpretation hinges on it, I provide the Italian for the translated passage in a footnote.

¹⁴ Machiavelli, *Chief Works*, II, lines 37-38, 741. In *Discourses* I.29 when Machiavelli ponders whether the people or the prince is more ungrateful, he eliminates envy from his causes of ingratitude, concluding that ‘this vice of ingratitude arises either from avarice or from suspicion’. Yet, because avarice and suspicion both relate to his discussions of envy in the *Discourses*, this does not mark a significant shift in his view that envy is a powerfully corrosive force in a republic. D I.29.1, 64.

¹⁵ Machiavelli, *Chief Works*, II, lines 34-45, 741.

¹⁶ Machiavelli, *Chief Works*, II, lines 46-56, 741.

¹⁷ Machiavelli, *Chief Works*, II, lines 62-62, 741.

¹⁸ Machiavelli, *Chief Works*, II, lines 64-71, 741. *Opere*, 981: ‘Questo è ferito da ogni saetta più crudelmente, perché sempre avviene che dove men si sa, più si sospetta; e le sue genti, d’ogni Invidia piene, tengon desto il sospetto sempre, ed esso gli orecchi e la calunnie aperti tiene. Di qui resulta che si vede spesso com’un buon cittadino un frutto miete contrario al seme che nel campo ha messo’.

Envy drives the people, in their ignorance of public affairs, to out-sized suspicion of public servants, encouraging defamatory gossip about those who deserve the opposite.

Machiavelli then points to Scipio Africanus as an example of a victim of such undeserved ingratitude and envy, declaring:

Never in human hearts has been or will be seen—however worthy, splendid, and godlike—so much bravery and so much courtesy; and among those who are dead and those who live, and among all peoples ancient or modern, there is not a man who equals Scipio. But not for all that did Envy fear to show him the teeth of her madness, and to look on him with the pupils of her eyes aflame. She had him accused in the midst of the people, and decreed that boundless benefit with boundless harm should be joined.¹⁹

Scipio leaves the city amidst this turmoil and remains in exile for the duration of his life, depriving Rome of any further benefits from his talents. Machiavelli suggests that had Scipio stayed, it would have cost Rome its freedom: the ‘evil desire of others’ who envied Scipio and were ungrateful toward him would have destroyed the city rather than see him honoured or elevated to any position of authority.²⁰

Envy thus presents a conundrum for republics. It not only discourages recognition of the contributions of preeminent citizens, but it also creates an insuperable situation in which the republic will either push out those it envies or whip itself into a frenzy of calumny that deteriorates into tyranny. A variant on the latter theme is the maligned public servant who turns on the republic, which occurs when ‘wicked slanders, and very bold ones, against a good citizen sometimes render tyrannical a nature once mild and humane’.²¹ Machiavelli sees this character exemplified in Julius Caesar, who became a tyrant because Rome was ungrateful toward him. ‘Often a citizen becomes a tyrant and goes beyond the bounds of his country’s law in order not to suffer Ingratitude’s injury. This

¹⁹ Machiavelli, *Chief Works*, II, lines 106-116, 742. *Opere*, 981-982: ‘. . . Non però invidia di mostrargli i denti temé de la sua rabbia, e riguardarlo con le pupille de’ suoi occhi ardenti. . .’

²⁰ Machiavelli, *Chief Works*, II, lines 118-125, 742-743. Cf. D I.29.3, 66, where Machiavelli maintains that Rome was the least ungrateful city because Scipio is the only true example of Rome’s ingratitude. Coriolanus and Camillus deserved their exiles for injuries to the plebs.

²¹ Machiavelli, *Chief Works*, II, lines 148-150, 743.

made Caesar snatch the throne; and what Ingratitude did not bestow, rightful anger and rightful resentment gave him'.²²

Because Caesar's ignominy was unleashed by the people's ingratitude, Machiavelli intimates that the populace bears at least some responsibility for Caesar's actions. While Machiavelli warns aspirant public servants about these potentially grave consequences of popular envy, however, it is the ungrateful ruler who one must fear most immediately given his inclination to repay benefit with harm and even death. The peril is especially acute for those who have played a role in regime change, 'because when you cause a government to shift, the prince you have made then fears your taking what you have bestowed'.²³ This is why 'shifters of governments and givers of kingdoms with death or exile [are] always repaid. . . Hence often you labor in serving and then for your good service receive in return a wretched life and a violent death'.²⁴ Rather than be subjected to this fate, Machiavelli advises public officials to abandon their posts before facing the inevitable stings of ingratitude and envy: 'So then, Ingratitude not being dead, let everyone flee from courts and governments, for there is no road that takes a man faster to weeping over what he longed for, when once he has gained it'.²⁵ Thus Giovanni Folchi, the poem's addressee, is taught that envy is so insidious, it is better to avoid public service at all, lest one meet an end worse than Scipio's.²⁶

Machiavelli's lessons about envy in the *Discourses* neatly mirror his first ruminations in *dell'Ingratitudine*, to the effect that everyone is envious, envy is an obstacle to good government, and the envy of a leader is to be feared more than that of the people. Yet there are three noteworthy differences between Machiavelli's assessment of envy in *dell'Ingratitudine* and his later works. First, in Machiavelli's mature writings, he presents envy as a problem that is particularly troublesome to republics, but in *dell'Ingratitudine* this distinction is

²² Machiavelli, *Chief Works*, II, lines 151-155, 743. Cf. D I.29.3, 66, where Machiavelli says Caesar 'took for himself by force what ingratitude denied him'.

²³ Machiavelli, *Chief Works*, II, lines 172-173, 744.

²⁴ Machiavelli, *Chief Works*, II, lines 169-171, 181-183, 744.

²⁵ Machiavelli, *Chief Works*, II, lines 184-186, 744.

²⁶ Folchi was a friend of Machiavelli's who was implicated in the Boscoli conspiracy against the Medici, which led to Machiavelli's arrest and torture in 1513. See John M. Najemy, 'Machiavelli and the Medici: Lessons of Florentine History', *Renaissance Quarterly* 35.4 (1982): 552-553 and fn. 5. Cf. Roberto Ridolfi, *The Life of Niccolò Machiavelli*, trans. Cecil Grayson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 135; Viroli, *Niccolò's Smile* (New York: Hill & Wang, 2000), 135-144.

not made. While envy is referenced approximately thirty times in the *Discourses*, it is mentioned far less frequently in *The Prince*, appearing just four times total.²⁷ Moreover, none of these discussions in *The Prince* involves envy that is exclusive to a principality.²⁸ In the *Discourses*, by contrast, envy or its close cousin ingratitude are featured in the opening section of each and every book, signalling the importance of this theme for the discussion that follows. Ingratitude is also mentioned in the dedicatory letter, and envy appears prominently in the prefaces of Books I and II as well as in the first chapter of Book III, which lacks a preface.²⁹

In these introductory sections we find a second difference between *dell'Ingratitudine* and Machiavelli's later work on envy. In the *Discourses*, Machiavelli offers a plan for mitigating envy rather than encouraging those with political ambitions to flee from public life. Yet we also learn that Machiavelli's literary endeavour to divulge all that he has learned through hard political experience is no less susceptible to envy's perils than a career in public service. Notably, Machiavelli dedicates the *Discourses* to Zanobi Buondelmonti and Cosimo Rucellai, two men who 'deserve to be princes' and to whom he owes 'some gratitude', rather than to actual princes, a practice he dismisses as the foolish habit of writers 'blinded by ambition and avarice', who praise but do not blame those in need of reproach.³⁰ In the Preface to Book I, moreover, Machiavelli laments that his own work, undertaken solely for the common benefit, is risky, since 'the envious nature of men has always made it no less dangerous to find new modes and orders than to seek unknown waters and lands'.³¹ Envy thus follows not only those who distinguish themselves in public service but also those who set themselves apart through their

²⁷ All references to *The Prince* (hereafter P) are given by chapter and page number from Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 2nd ed., trans. Harvey C. Mansfield (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998). Mansfield and Tarcov provide a glossary of terms for their translation of the *Discourses* enumerating the appearances of the word envy, and Mansfield provides a similar glossary in his translation of *The Prince*. See D, 323; P, 121. Similarly, there are few references to ingratitude in *The Prince* but far more in the *Discourses*.

²⁸ One of the four references is to a mixed principality, and two of the four references are in whole or part to contemporary Florence. The fourth occurs in the conclusion to the work, as discussed below. See P 3, 11; 6, 25; 7, 31; 26, 105.

²⁹ See D I.Pr.1, 5; II.Pr.1, 123; III.1.2, 210.

³⁰ D DL, 3.

³¹ D I.Pr.1, 5. *Opere*, 76: 'Ancora che, per la invidia natura degli uomini, sia sempre suto no altrimenti pericoloso trovare modi ed ordini nuovi, che si fusse cercare acque e terre incognite'. Cf. Zuckert *Machiavelli's Politics*, 472.

intellectual achievements. In the Preface to Book II, Machiavelli identifies envy along with fear as the two driving forces behind human beings' inclination to revere the ancients while loathing their contemporaries. Playing to this inclination provides an important motive for his own project, which looks to ancient Rome for lessons about how to found a republic that can withstand the innate challenges of envy. 'Men hate things either from fear or from envy', he writes. But temporal distance puts these passions to rest:

[These] two very powerful causes of hatred come to be eliminated in past things since they cannot offend you and do not give you cause to envy them. But the contrary happens with those things that are managed and seen. . . [Y]ou are forced to judge them much inferior to ancient things, even though the present may in truth deserve much more glory and fame than they.³²

While Machiavelli can securely praise and blame Roman exemplars as he imparts his political wisdom, he may need to temper his praise of contemporary models to avoid provoking envy. On the other hand, likewise due to envy, it may be that criticisms levelled toward contemporaries cut more deeply than those made of the ancients, even though the contemporary failures upon which he reflects may be no worse than those he identifies among the ancients.

Finally, in the opening chapter of Book III of the *Discourses*, we again find Machiavelli revisiting a theme previously introduced in *dell'Ingratitudine*, namely, the reformation of institutions and consequent ascension of new leaders. But now Machiavelli introduces a new distinction: he contends that dramatic reformations in a regime can come about either through 'extrinsic accidents', such as the wars that afforded occasions for Camillus's return, or through 'intrinsic accidents'.³³ Notably, although envy is not his main theme in this passage, Machiavelli emphasizes that the Roman people and Senate were compelled to 'put aside all envy' of Camillus before they restored him to a position of leadership.³⁴ But an external shock is

³² D II.P.1, 123. *Opere*, 144: 'Oltra di questo, odiando gli uomini le cose o per timore o per invidia, vengono ad essere spente due potentissime cagioni dell'odio nelle cose passate, no ti dando cagione d'individiarle'.

³³ D III.1.2, 210.

³⁴ D III.1.2, 210. *Opere*, 195: ' . . . ed appresso tanto stimorono la virtù e bontà di Cammillo, che, posposto, il Senato e gli altri, ogni invidia, rimettevano in lui tutto il pondo di quella republica'.

not the only way to bring about a political reformation. Machiavelli also thinks intrinsic accidents can be initiated by a leader with *virtù*. These accidents fall into two categories: they ‘must arise either from a law that often looks over the account for the men who are in that body or indeed from a good man who arises among them, who with his examples and his virtuous works produces the same effect as the order’.³⁵ Thus, the republic that can be successfully reformed from within needs in the first instance institutions insulated from the hazards of self-interest and envy—specifically, Machiavelli tells us, dramatic public executions of those who commit crimes against state. The death of Manlius Capitolinus is one of the examples Machiavelli highlights of new orders ‘being brought to life by the virtue of a citizen who rushes spiritedly to execute them against the power of those who transgress them’.³⁶ Absent such an institutionalized system of capital punishment for public crimes, which Machiavelli says should occur no less frequently than every ten years, individual reformers can produce similar effects through their lived example of ‘simple virtue’. They can achieve this, Machiavelli argues, ‘without depending on any law that stimulates you to any execution’, as long as ‘they are of such reputation and so much example that good men desire to imitate them and the wicked are ashamed to hold to a life contrary to them’.³⁷ The influence of such an exceptional personality, whose example is so virtuous as to elicit imitation rather than envy, is an extralegal mode that falls outside the regime’s institutions, but not one that includes violence, a distinction Machiavelli makes carefully here.³⁸

What has been hitherto unnoticed by scholars is that this bifurcated model for renewing republics—through public trials and

³⁵ D III.1.2, 210.

³⁶ D III.1.3, 210.

³⁷ D III.1.3, 211.

³⁸ Examining under what circumstances, in general, Machiavelli believes violence is warranted is beyond this scope of this paper. Yves Winter has carefully catalogued Machiavelli’s treatment of violence in his recent book *Machiavelli and the Orders of Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), a study that builds on Sheldon Wolin’s contention that Machiavelli created an ‘economy’ of violence in his work. See Sheldon Wolin, *Politics and Vision* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 198, qtd. in Winter, op. cit., 7. Winter argues that Machiavelli’s use of violence, ‘is not a transparent and uniform strategy but part of a political pedagogy’ (24). While Winter’s investigation of violence is wide-ranging, he does not discuss Machiavelli’s treatment of envy in connection with these themes.

executions on the one hand, exemplary virtue and leadership on the other—clearly parallels the two modes of purging envy from republics that Machiavelli proposes later in Book III of the *Discourses*. There he writes:

Envy is eliminated in two modes: either through some strong and difficult accident in which each, seeing himself perishing, puts aside every ambition and runs voluntarily to obey him who he believes can free him with his virtue, as happened to Camillus. . . . In another mode, envy is eliminated when, either by violence or by natural order, those who have been your competitors in coming to some reputation and to some greatness die.³⁹

The first method of eliminating envy involves some ‘accident’ that induces the envious people to rally around a virtuous leader. This is equivalent to the second type of intrinsic accident for rejuvenating political and religious orders that Machiavelli identifies in *Discourses* III.1, relying on a good man to steer the ship. The exemplar cited in *Discourses* III.30 who illustrates this method is Camillus and his approach to organizing the military. The second method for eliminating envy is that those who envy you need to die, either by ill fortune (a stroke of ‘luck’ to the republic) or through deliberate violence. This resembles the first type of intrinsic accident in *Discourses* III.1, which similarly relies on violence or the threat of it to usher in significant institutional change. Machiavelli’s archetypes for this second approach in *Discourses* III.30 include Moses, who tried and succeeded at eliminating envy with violence; Savonarola, who knew he needed to use violence but was unable to do so; and Soderini, who failed to appreciate that violence was needed.⁴⁰

Why do some succeed at eliminating envy while others do not, and which method is best? Again, suggesting a link with themes in *Discourses* III.1 where Machiavelli asserts that periodic acts of violence help to restore a republic to its foundation, Machiavelli is clear

³⁹ D III.30.1, 279. *Opere*, 236: ‘Spegnesi questi invidia in due modi. O per qualche accidente forte e difficile, dove ciascuno, veggendosi perire, posposta ogni ambizione, corre volontariamente ad ubbidire a colui che crede con la sua virtù la possa liberare: come intervenne a Cammillo . . . in un altro modo si spegne l’invidia, quando, o per violenza o per ordine naturale, muoiono coloro che sono stati tuoi concorrenti nel venire a qualche riputazione ed a qualche grandezza’.

⁴⁰ D III.30.1, 280.

in *Discourses* III.30 that in a corrupt republic, violence is essential. He explains:

When they are men who are used to living in a corrupt city, where the education has not produced any goodness in them, it is impossible that by any accident they ever gainsay themselves; and to obtain their wish and to satisfy their perversity of spirit, they would be content to see the ruin of their fatherland. To conquer this envy, there is no remedy other than the death of those who have it. . .⁴¹

The justification Machiavelli offers here calls to mind his suggestive counterfactual in *dell'Ingratitudine*, that if Scipio had stayed in Rome, his opponents would rather have destroyed the city than see him enjoy continued adulation.⁴² However, Machiavelli's experience and learning in the interim have taught him that uprooting envy in a corrupt city requires eliminating one's opponents; no other method will impede envy's hazards. Envy's political impact and the approach needed to alleviate its burdens therefore depend on the regime's circumstances, and, in particular, whether or not the regime is corrupt. This analysis of envy's causes and effects provides the essential context for interpreting the lessons Machiavelli tries to impart through his examples of (more or less successful) past efforts at combatting envy in ancient Rome and fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Florence. While Rome possessed adequate institutional mechanisms to constrain Manlius Capitolinus's envy, Florence not only lacked comparable safeguards, but it also suffered from deficits in leadership with Savonarola, who may have had the knowledge but not the authority to combat envy, and then Piero Soderini, who was oblivious to envy's perils and ushered in the destruction of the republic.

2. Manlius Capitolinus' downfall: envy in ancient Rome

In *Discourses* III.1 Machiavelli directs the reader to Manlius Capitolinus' execution as an example of an intrinsic accident that can rejuvenate a republic. But this is not the only time Machiavelli

⁴¹ D III.30.1, 280. *Opere*, 236-237: '... A vincere questa invidia non ci è altro rimedio che la morte di coloro che l'hanno'.

⁴² Machiavelli, *Chief Works*, II, lines 118-125, 742-743.

discusses Manlius, whose downfall merits closer examination. Machiavelli first mentions him in *Discourses* I.8, where he contrasts calumnies with accusations that flow through institutional channels, emphasizing that while calumnies are always pernicious, formal accusations nurture freedom in a republic. He begins the chapter by recounting Camillus's celebrated return to the city after Rome was freed from the Gauls.⁴³ Manlius believed he deserved as much credit as Camillus for saving Rome, yet it was Camillus whom the people celebrated. Out of envy, Manlius began to slander Camillus to the plebs, suggesting that Camillus had squirreled away the bounty offered to the Gauls for his own use rather than alleviating the plebs' debts. Machiavelli writes: 'So loaded with envy, since he [Manlius Capitolinus] could not remain quiet because of the other's glory and saw that he could not sow discord among the Fathers, he turned to the plebs, sowing sinister opinions within.'⁴⁴ The Senate responded by appointing a dictator to investigate, who in turn demanded that Manlius provide evidence to support his accusations. When Manlius failed to provide proof that Camillus had taken what belonged to the people, the dictator sent him to prison. Machiavelli infers from this episode that calumnies are detestable, 'and that to repress them one should not spare any order that may suit the purpose'.⁴⁵ While Rome successfully managed the fallout from Manlius' calumny because it possessed legal institutions and orders that could punish him, Machiavelli asserts that Florence has never been able to withstand the harmful effects of calumny because 'it has always been badly ordered'.⁴⁶ In *Discourses* I.24 Machiavelli adds that such orders should never fail to punish someone because they have previously done good for the city, again pointing to Manlius and defending the Romans from what, at first glance, may appear to be ingratitude toward Manlius given his past heroism.⁴⁷

⁴³ D I.8.1, 26.

⁴⁴ D I.8.1, 26. *Opere*, 88: 'Di modo che, carico d'invidia, non potendo quietarsi per la gloria di quello, e veggendo non potere seminare discordia infra i Padri, si volse alla Plebe, seminando varie opinioni sinistre intra quella'.

⁴⁵ D I.8.2, 27.

⁴⁶ D I.8.2, 27. Cf. D I.55.2, 110, where Machiavelli remarks that all Italy in his time is likewise corrupt.

⁴⁷ D I.24.1-2, 59-60. For the account of Manlius's heroic actions, see Livy, V.46-48 in *The Early History of Rome*, trans. Aubrey de Sélincourt (London: Penguin, 1960, rpt. 2002), 424-425.

In *Discourses* I.58 Machiavelli reaffirms the salubrious nature of Rome's institutions, calling them uncorrupt, and he again points to Manlius' demise as the paradigm for which republics should strive.⁴⁸ Here he extols two elements of Rome's uncorrupt republic in particular, the people's good judgment and the fact that they were 'shackled' by laws. While the people lamented Manlius' loss after his execution and desired to have him back, remembering only his virtues, Machiavelli does not find this sentiment to express regret over poor judgement. Rather, he contends that had Manlius been brought back, the people would have been wise enough to condemn him again. His argument is that, contrary to common opinion, the people are less ungrateful and their judgment is more reliable than the prince's because they will not excuse wrongdoing on account of someone's past service to the republic.⁴⁹ He remarks:

A people is more prudent, more stable, and of better judgment than a prince. Not without cause may the voice of a people be likened to that of God; for one sees a universal opinion produce marvelous effects in its forecasts, so that it appears to foresee its ill and its good by a hidden virtue.⁵⁰

While popular opinion may be akin to the voice of God, it is not infallible; Machiavelli insists that the people need to be 'regulated by the laws' just as a prince is.⁵¹ Where laws are lacking, however, 'a licentious and tumultuous people can be spoken to by a good man, and it can easily be returned to the good way.'⁵² A wicked prince unshackled by laws is far more dangerous to political stability, since he acts out of self-interest, simply, while a people unshackled by laws pursues the good of the many but in misguided ways.⁵³ Machiavelli

⁴⁸ D I.58.2, 116-117.

⁴⁹ D I.58.2, 116-117. Cf. D I.29, 64-67, where he argues at length that princes are more ungrateful than the people.

⁵⁰ D I.58.3, 117-118.

⁵¹ D I.58.4, 118.

⁵² D I.58.4, 118-119. Machiavelli makes similar points in D I.53-54, where he says a deceived multitude can be checked by someone in whom they have faith, and, likewise, a licentious multitude can be calmed by the appearance of a 'grave man'. See D I.53.1, 106, and I.54.1, 108-109. Cf. D III.1.2-3, 210-211, where Machiavelli similarly argues that a good man can inspire regime change through his example.

⁵³ Zuckert argues that Machiavelli does not think there is a common good simply, 'if by common is meant a good that every member of the political community both desires and shares. . . . The 'common good' is thus the good of

therefore fears a mob less than a wicked prince. Nevertheless, the one acute danger that can result from a people unregulated by rule of law is the rise of a tyrant who capitalizes on the disorder.⁵⁴

Machiavelli's final discussion of Manlius Capitolinus in *Discourses* III.8 further underscores the divergence between corrupt and uncorrupt republics and their ability to check the harmful effects of envy. Machiavelli proclaims, 'Manlius would have been a rare and memorable man if he had been born in a corrupt city.'⁵⁵ However, Rome was not corrupt and had institutions to check the machinations of men like Manlius, who met an ignominious end despite his earlier heroism. Machiavelli therefore admonishes would-be tyrants wishing to 'alter a republic', since 'a wicked citizen cannot work for ill in a republic that is not corrupt'.⁵⁶ And he names Manlius as the foremost example of this lesson, because 'the envy that he had for the honors that were done to Camillus' led him to provoke tumults without considering the legal consequences that would result.⁵⁷ Recounting Manlius' second trial after he was brought back from exile and arrested for conspiring against the Senate, Machiavelli notes how extraordinary it was that his relatives and other nobles did not come to his defence as was customary, nor did the plebs, who typically would side against the nobility as a matter of principle.⁵⁸ Manlius was summarily sentenced to death. Of this Machiavelli avers, 'I do not believe that there is an example in this history more apt to show the goodness of all the orders of that republic than this, seeing that no one in that city moved to defend a citizen full of every virtue, who publicly and privately had performed very

the vast majority of people who want the security government by law can provide without oppression'. *Machiavelli's Politics*, 467.

⁵⁴ D I.58.4, 119: 'When a people is quite unshackled, the craziness it does is not feared, nor is present evil feared, but what can arise from it, since in the midst of such confusion a tyrant can arise'.

⁵⁵ D III.8.2, 239.

⁵⁶ D III.8.1, 237.

⁵⁷ D III.8.1, 237. *Opere*, 211: '... la quale, come si vede, nacque in costui per la invidia che lui aveva degli onori erano fatti a Cammillo'.

⁵⁸ Machiavelli's account of Manlius' trial omits an important detail from Livy's source material. Livy casts doubt on the veracity of some of the charges brought against Manlius related to the insurrection. After recounting Manlius' arrest, Livy adds, 'there is no clear record to say with whom he shared his plans or how far they went'. Similarly, of the trial, Livy writes, 'I cannot find in any authority what allegations were brought against the defendant by his accusers which have specific bearing on the charge of his wanting regal power, apart from meetings of the populace, seditious words, his gifts of money and false accusations'. Livy, VI.18, 20 in *Rome and Italy*, trans. Betty Radice (London: Penguin, 1982), 61, 63.

many praiseworthy works.⁵⁹ Further cementing Manlius's status as a cautionary tale for anyone who would dare to incite calumnies in an uncorrupt republic, Machiavelli warns that it is impossible for a single person to 'put a wicked form' on an uncorrupt republic in the space of a lifetime; it is possible, though, 'to seek glory in a corrupt city by modes other than in one that still lives politically'.⁶⁰ Machiavelli's aim here is to moderate the jealous impulses of those who would resort to calumny and defame their political rivals by teaching them that they have no chance at success in a republic with healthy institutions that will bring them to justice. Appealing to their ambition, he notes that while there is no glory in subverting good order in an incorrupt republic, in a corrupt republic, there are opportunities to affect change that will make one revered. They need, therefore, to 'accommodate themselves' to the times.⁶¹

But what if Rome *had* been corrupt and Manlius, acting out of envy toward Camillus who was receiving all the praise for saving the city, had succeeded in his efforts to turn the plebs against the Senate? Machiavelli suggests that there are two deleterious outcomes that envy can produce in a corrupt republic. The first is that it fails to recognize and reward those who contribute to the republic's wellbeing, to the detriment of both the state and the individual who exhibits these qualities. He writes:

Because excellent men in corrupt republics, especially in quiet times, are treated as enemies, either from envy or from other ambitious causes, one goes behind someone who either is judged to be good through a common deception or is put forward by men who wish for the favor rather than the good of the collectivity.⁶²

In *Discourses* III.16, Machiavelli elucidates this dynamic in greater detail, explaining why envy is especially threatening to republics in peaceful times when the people are less apt to recognize 'great and rare men'. He says that 'through the envy that the reputation their virtue has given them has brought with it, one finds very many citizens in such times who wish to be not their equals but their

⁵⁹ D III.8.1, 238.

⁶⁰ D III.8.1-2, 238.

⁶¹ D III.8.1, 238. Cf. D III.9, 239-241.

⁶² D II.22.1, 179. *Opere*, 178: 'E perché gli eccellenti uomini nelle repubbliche corrotte, nei tempi quieti massime, e per invidia e per altre ambiziose cagioni, sono inimicati?'

superiors.⁶³ In corrupt republics under peaceful conditions, those with special virtues who are envied are not simply unappreciated; the people who envy them also desire to subjugate them. This appears to be a subversion of the natural order of the two humours that Machiavelli describes in both *Discourses* I.5 and *The Prince* IX, where he distinguishes between the elite who wish to rule and the people who wish not to be ruled.⁶⁴ In an incorrupt city, by contrast, it is rare for an eminent citizen to be thus mistreated.

There is a possible exception to this rule, for Machiavelli, in an exemplum we have already encountered. In *Discourses* I.29 Machiavelli acknowledges that Scipio's exile seems to be a case in which the Roman people were motivated by undue suspicion of someone who had made illustrious contributions to the city.⁶⁵ If so, it would imply either that Rome was corrupt at the time (which Machiavelli denies) or that there is no correlation between envy and corruption (which he argues there is). Instead, Machiavelli rejects the premise. He blames envious magistrates for prompting mistrust of Scipio and describes the outcome as 'something unaccustomed in Rome'.⁶⁶ The magistrates' jealousy of Scipio marked a departure from the city's established methods for checking the ambition of someone who might capitalize on their personal interests to the detriment of the city's freedom. The people, on the other hand, were justified in their suspicion of Scipio. Machiavelli explains that Cato Priscus, who was

reputed holy, was the first to act against him and to say that a city could not call itself free where there was a citizen who was feared by the magistrates. So if the people of Rome followed the opinion of Cato in this case, it merits the excuse that, as I said above, those peoples and those princes merit who are ungrateful through suspicion.⁶⁷

⁶³ D III.16.1, 254-255. *Opere*, 222: 'Egli fu sempre, e sempre sarà, che gli uomini grandi e rari in una repubblica, ne' tempi pacifichi, sono neglitti; perché, per la invidia che si ha tirato dietro la riputazione che la virtù d'essi ha dato loro, si truova in tali tempi assai cittadini che vogliono, non che essere loro equali, ma essere loro superiori?'

⁶⁴ D I.5.2, 18 and P 9, 39. Cf. D I.4.1, 16.

⁶⁵ D I.29.3, 66.

⁶⁶ D I.29.3, 66.

⁶⁷ D I.29.3, 66-67. Cf. D III.1.3, 211, where Machiavelli points to both the elder Cato, who is referenced in I.29, and the younger Cato as examples of good men who tried to make the republic better.

The point is similar to Machiavelli's conclusion in *dell'Ingratitudine* that while Scipio's exile may have *seemed* undeserved, it was essential for maintaining the city's freedom.⁶⁸ Thus Scipio's treatment is, on closer inspection, not an exception after all, but rather another instance of the effectiveness of Roman modes and orders. The people may have been misled by envious magistrates, but if they had failed to act on their suspicion of Scipio's ambition (however misinformed), there would have been deleterious consequences.

Machiavelli illustrates the power of the incorrupt republic to correctly distribute recognition and reward, in proportion to the public good and at the opportune moment, with the case of Camillus. Camillus's exile differed from Scipio's in two respects: on the one hand, it was deserved for the real injury he did to the plebs; on the other hand, he was later able to return to Rome and use his military prowess to help the city in times of crisis.⁶⁹ In *Discourses* II.29 Machiavelli credits fortune that Camillus avoided execution for this reason, and in *Discourses* III.1 he refers to the war against the Gauls that precipitated Camillus's recall as an extrinsic accident that reminded the people 'that it was necessary not only to maintain religion and justice but also to esteem its good citizens and to take more account of their virtue than of those advantages that it appeared to them they lacked through their works.'⁷⁰ Similarly, in *Discourses* III.30, Machiavelli notes that it was 'some strong and difficult accident' which caused the people to recognize they needed Camillus's strong leadership once again.⁷¹ This time Rome was threatened by a new alliance between the Latins and Hernici, Rome's former allies, and the Volsci, Rome's bitter enemies; Camillus's fellow tribunes gave him the prerogative to reorganize the military to defend against this new league.⁷² Yet, these powers were not

⁶⁸ However, in P 17, Machiavelli suggests Scipio's mercy would have eventually led to his downfall. Machiavelli is also critical of Scipio in D III.21, suggesting the rebellion arose against him because he was not feared.

⁶⁹ D I.29.3, 66. Machiavelli discusses Camillus's offenses against the plebs that resulted in his exile in greater detail at D III.23, 268-269. Cf. McCormick, 'Machiavelli's Camillus', 418-420.

⁷⁰ D II.29.2, 198; III.1.2, 210.

⁷¹ D III.30.1, 279.

⁷² D III.30.1, 279. Elsewhere Machiavelli describes Rome's alliance with the Latins, noting that it was an unreliable one because the Latins envied Rome. Thus, envy can permeate both a republic's external and internal relationships. See D II.13.2, 156; II.14.1, 156. *Opere*, 163-164: 'così generò invidia e sospetto in quelli che vedevano e sentivano l'armi, intra i quali furono i Latini. E tanto poté questa

bestowed according to established laws or practices. Rather, the Romans bypassed institutional protocols such as the naming of a dictator and instead granted Camillus full discretion. Machiavelli here quotes Livy directly, to affirm that the Romans did not believe that granting Camillus this power in any way undercut their own authority or established institutions.⁷³ The reason is that Camillus had by this point overcome their envy of him, winning their trust during several rotations as dictator in which he served the public good rather than his own. Camillus acted decisively on this grant of power, taking action to reform the military and appoint new leaders. Machiavelli marvels at these measures, since ‘many times the cause that men cannot work well [is that] envy does not permit them to have the authority that it is necessary to have in things of importance’.⁷⁴ The Romans did not kill Camillus when he acted in self-interest early in his career only because their institutions could withstand the impact of his transgression. Only because the city was incorrupt and therefore secure in its freedom, in other words, were they able to exile him instead, thereby preserving his life and making possible his later heroism.

While Machiavelli suggests in *Discourses* I.29 that exile may be useful in an incorrupt city, where an envied man’s banishment can make him appreciate what he has lost and may also afford the occasion for his eventual return, in a corrupt city such as Caesar’s Rome, envy is far more malign and requires a different approach. Caesar thus exemplifies the second and more disastrous effect that envy can have in a corrupt republic, which is that beyond denying the republic the best leaders, envy makes the corrupt republic susceptible to lose its freedom and security altogether by devolving into tyranny. Caesar ‘took for himself by force what ingratitude denied him’, Machiavelli observes.⁷⁵ In an effort to anticipate and mitigate such a scenario, Machiavelli again appeals both to the prospective tyrant’s longing

invidia e questo timore, che non solo i Latini ma le colonie che essi avevano in Lazio, insieme con i Campani, stati poco innazi difesi, congiurarono contro a il nome romano’. *Opere*, 164: ‘Vedesi molte volte come l’umiltà non solamente non giova ma nuoce, massimamente usandola con gli uomini insolenti, che, o per invidia o per altra cagione, hanno concetto odio teco’.

⁷³ D III.30.1, 279. Cf. McCormick, ‘Machiavelli’s Camillus’, 414-417.

⁷⁴ D III.30.1, 279. *Opere*, 236: ‘la quale è molte volte cagione che gli uomini non possono operare bene, non permettendo detta invidia che gli abbino quella autorità la quale è necessaria avere nelle cose d’importanza’.

⁷⁵ D I.29.3, 66.

for glory and to the desire for prosperity of those who would be affected by his envy and ambition. In *Discourses* I.10, he is adamant that founders of tyrannies will be reviled in not only their own time but also in history.⁷⁶ Rather than seek to imitate Caesar, Machiavelli says that those who ‘[seek] the glory of the world . . . ought to desire to possess a corrupt city not to spoil it entirely as did Caesar but to reorder it as did Romulus. And truly the heavens cannot give to men a greater opportunity for glory, nor can men desire any greater.’⁷⁷ Echoing his reflections on Manlius’ failures in *Discourses* III.8, here Machiavelli declares forcefully not only that those who destroy institutions will be notorious, but also that they will make the country worse for everyone, including themselves. Anyone who dares praise Caesar as a strong leader is himself corrupt and misguided, because Caesar’s rotten legacy left Rome a place where ‘calumniators [are] rewarded . . . and those who lacked enemies [are] oppressed by friends’.⁷⁸ Machiavelli describes a cruel, violent place, riven with civil discord that ultimately brings its ruin. It is, moreover, a place not unlike the Italy he describes in *The Prince*, ‘enslaved . . . without a head, without order, beaten, despoiled, torn, pillaged, and having endured ruin of every sort’ because ‘her ancient orders were not good, and that there has not been anyone who has known how to find new ones’.⁷⁹

Foremost among those ignorant of how to reform corrupt Italian political institutions, according to Machiavelli, were Savonarola, the Dominican Friar who helped facilitate the adoption of republican institutions in Florence in 1494 after Piero de’ Medici’s exile, and Piero Soderini, who in 1502 was nominated Gonfalonier for Life.⁸⁰ Neither succeeded in their reforming efforts, and for that reason one might expect Machiavelli to hold them in equal contempt. Yet in his discussion of envy at *Discourses* III.30, Machiavelli insinuates that Savonarola came far closer to instigating new orders than Soderini.

⁷⁶ D I.10, 31-33.

⁷⁷ D I.10.6, 33.

⁷⁸ D I.10.5, 33.

⁷⁹ P 26, 102-103.

⁸⁰ See Ridolfi, *The Life of Girolamo Savonarola*, trans. Cecil Grayson (New York: Knopf, 1959); Roslyn Pesman, ‘Machiavelli, Piero Soderini, and the Republic of 1494-1512’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Machiavelli*, 48-63.

3. Savonarola's wisdom and Soderini's folly: envy in Machiavelli's Florence

While Camillus's reorganization of the military exemplifies the first (non-violent) method for eradicating envy in *Discourses* III.30, Machiavelli turns to contemporary examples when discussing the second approach, which is the elimination or—less euphemistically—the deaths of the envious. Machiavelli says envy is eliminated when ‘either by violence or natural order, those who have been your competitors in coming to some reputation and to some greatness die. As they see you reputed more than they, it is impossible that they ever acquiesce and remain patient.’⁸¹ They would rather destroy their country than see those they envy prosper, and for this reason, in a corrupt city, they must be killed.⁸² If the city is lucky, the envious will meet their end naturally. Absent this fortune, the envied citizen must be like Moses, and

think of every way of removing them from in front; and before he does anything, he needs to hold to the modes that overcome this difficulty. And whoever reads the Bible judiciously will see that since he wished his laws and his orders to go forward, Moses was forced to kill infinite men who, moved by nothing other than envy, were opposed to his plans.⁸³

The killings to which Machiavelli refers are narrated in Exodus 32, when Moses finds Aaron and the Israelites worshipping the golden calf in violation of the Decalogue. Moses orders the Levites, who had remained faithful to God, to destroy those who were not. Three thousand people were killed as a consequence.⁸⁴ In *Discourses* III.30 Machiavelli credits Savonarola with understanding the need to follow

⁸¹ D III.30.1, 279-280.

⁸² That Machiavelli finds contemporary Florence and all of Italy corrupt is stated in D I.8 and I.55 and P 26.

⁸³ D III.30.1, 280. *Opere*, 237: ‘ma quando e’ non abbi questa ventura, gli conviene pensare per ogni via a tôrseglì dinanzi; e prima che e’ facci cosa alcuna, gli bisogna tenere modi che vinca questa difficoltà. E chi legge la Bibbia sensatamente, vedrà Moisè essere stato fozato, a volere che le sue leggi e che i suoi ordini andassero innanzi, ad ammazzare infiniti uomini, i quali, non mossi da altro che dalla invidia, si opponevano a’ disegni suoi’.

⁸⁴ Exodus 32.28. Cf. P 6, where Machiavelli also discusses Moses’ success and Savonarola’s failure. In this chapter we also find one of the few references to envy in *The Prince*, when Machiavelli notes that ‘unarmed prophets’ will ‘find great difficulty in conducting their affairs’ unless they ‘[eliminate] those who had envied them for their quality’. P 6, 24-25.

Moses' example, but he observes that the Friar lacked the political power to act accordingly.

Machiavelli puts it this way:

Friar Girolamo Savonarola knew this necessity very well [but] was not able to conquer it because he did not have the authority to enable him to do it. . . and because he was not understood well by those who followed him, who would have had the authority for it. Not therefore because of him did it remain undone, and his sermons are full of accusations of the wise of the world, and of invectives against them, for so he called the envious and those who were opposed to his orders.⁸⁵

Of course, Savonarola may be held partially responsible for his own followers' misunderstanding of the urgent need to neutralize the envious. Elsewhere, Machiavelli blames this communications failure on the Friar's inconsistency and willingness to vary his message when it served his own interests. In a letter to Ricciardo Becchi, the Florentine Ambassador to the Holy See, in March 1498, just a few months before Savonarola was executed, Machiavelli describes his preaching in remarkable detail. He implies that Becchi had requested a first-hand account of Savonarola's sermons.⁸⁶ Eager to be of service, Machiavelli attended several, reporting back that the Friar 'acts in accordance with the times and colors his lies accordingly'.⁸⁷ For evidence he first submits a sermon in which Savonarola had instructed his followers that sometimes they must be willing to die for Christ, while at other times they should hide.⁸⁸ The Friar's initial position was that Christians now live in a moment that requires 'soldiering for God' against their adversaries, the 'wicked and

⁸⁵ *Discourses* III.30.1, 280. *Opere*, 237: ' . . . Nonpertanto per lui non rimase, e le sue prediche sono piene di accuse de' savi del mondo, e d'invettive contro loro: perché chiamava così questi invidi, e quegli che si opponevano agli ordini suoi.'

⁸⁶ Machiavelli to Ricciardo Becchi (March 9, 1498) in *Machiavelli and His Friends: Their Personal Correspondence*, trans. and ed. James B. Atkinson and David Sices (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2004), no. 3, pp. 8-10. Hereafter cited as Machiavelli, *Letters*, by number and page.

⁸⁷ Machiavelli, *Letters*, no. 3, 10.

⁸⁸ Machiavelli, *Letters*, no. 3, 9. See Girolamo Savonarola, Predica VI (March 2, 1498), in *Prediche l'Esodo*, Vol. I, ed. Pier Giorgio Ricci (Rome: Angelo Belardetti, 1955), 146-175, at 162-163: ' . . . venuto a morire per tuo amore e per darti el lume delle fede e monstrarti el tuo fine e portelo innanzi alli ochhi . . . Eccitiamo un poco el fervor nostro, armiamoci di questa arme del Salvatore, seguitiamo el ben vivere, abbiamo pazienza nelle tribulazioni, e amiamo e sopportiamo volentieri la morte, quando è bisogno per lo amore di Dio'.

obstinate' people who are for the Devil, implying this is a time that requires violence.⁸⁹ However, in a sermon delivered the very next day, Machiavelli recounts that Savonarola advocated a more passive approach, interpreting Moses' killing of the Egyptian as a metaphor for Christians' slaying their enemies by exposing their vices.⁹⁰ He also insinuated that there was an aspiring tyrant at large in Florence, and he pointed to the efforts to have him excommunicated as evidence of this ambition.⁹¹ Machiavelli attributes the rhetorical shift and the new, strained reading of the Exodus source material to a change in Savonarola's personal circumstances. In the interim Savonarola learned that the *Signoria* had interceded on his behalf in the case for his excommunication with a letter to Pope Alexander VI.⁹² In the letter to Becchi, Machiavelli implies that Savonarola's hypocrisy was obvious to everyone: 'It was your books, O priests, whose pages he leafed through, treating you in such a way that not even dogs would have eaten any of it.'⁹³

The episode exhibits remarkable parallels with Machiavelli's treatment of envy in the *Discourses*. The first sermon Machiavelli records provides a message compatible with the advice in *Discourses* III.30 about the need to eliminate one's enemies to eradicate envy, but the second sermon does not. Moreover, while the first sermon's call to punish one's enemies harshly was largely consistent with Savonarola's own sermons and writings from the previous several years, the second was not, suggesting the change was made to suit

⁸⁹ Machiavelli, *Letters*, no. 3, 9. Earlier in the sermon Savonarola states that while his followers are armed with faith, prayers, and patience, the wicked and obstinate fight with anger, hatred, and envy. *Esodo*, I, Predica VI (March 2, 1498), 149: 'Combattono ancora questi esercitize con nuovi modi: l'esercito di Dio combatte con fede, orazioni, e pazienza. L'altro combatte con ira, con odio, e con invidia'.

⁹⁰ Machiavelli, *Letters*, no. 3, 10. Cf. *Esodo*, I, Predica VII (March 3, 1498), 176-203, at 190: 'Adonee la voce a Faraone e fu accusato Moyses che aveva morto lo Egizio, et quaerebat occidere Moysen'. While Machiavelli does not call attention to this, it is noteworthy that Savonarola opens his March 3 sermon by highlighting the first two sins, which he identifies as pride and envy. See *Esodo* I, 176: 'El primo peccato che entrò nell'uomo, diletissimi in Cristo Iesù, quando el fu creato, fu la superbia; el secondo fu la invidia, e nota che in quello principio non poteva entrare altro peccato nel mondo, innanzi alla superbia'.

⁹¹ During his interrogation a few months after this sermon, Savonarola identified Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici as the aspiring tyrant, but the Friar admitted that he had no proof to corroborate this accusation, affirming Machiavelli's suggestion to Becchi that the claims made in the sermon were baseless. See Weinstein, *The Rise and Fall of a Renaissance Prophet*, 257-259, 353.

⁹² Machiavelli, *Letters*, no. 3, 10 and n. 10.

⁹³ Machiavelli *Letters*, no. 3, 10.

the Friar's thinly veiled self-interest.⁹⁴ In *Discourses* I.45 Machiavelli criticizes Savonarola for precisely this sort of hypocrisy when he discusses the Friar's refusal to speak out against one of his most ardent followers, Gonfalonier Francesco Valori. The Gonfalonier had denied the right of appeal to five citizens who were convicted, sentenced to death, and immediately executed for plotting a conspiracy to restore the Medici and overthrow the *Signoria* that was then controlled by Savonarola's party.⁹⁵ Previously, Savonarola had been an enthusiastic proponent of the 'appeal of six beans', which was adopted in 1495 and provided for the commutation of a death sentence when six members of the *Signoria* agreed. He believed this would help to restore tranquillity to the city after the turmoil following the French invasion of 1492 and Piero de' Medici's subsequent exile, which persisted even after the adoption of the new constitutional measures in 1494 that provided increased representation for the people in a Great Council.⁹⁶ Machiavelli says Savonarola's failure to defend the law for which he had worked so tirelessly 'took away more reputation from the friar than any other accident' because refusing to condemn Valori for violating the rule of law was clearly 'a thing that was turned to his purpose. . . . This exposure of his ambitious and partisan spirit took away reputation from him and brought him very much disapproval.'⁹⁷ What is more, Machiavelli's remarks about Valori in *Discourses* I.7 indicate that the Gonfalonier was precisely the sort of individual he thinks needs to be checked. Machiavelli says Valori was 'like a prince of the city.

⁹⁴ For the development of Savonarola's message regarding punishing one's enemies in his sermons and political writings, especially those involved in calumnies, and Machiavelli's response to this, see Rebecca McCumbers Flavin, *The Battle of the Unarmed Prophets: Religion and Republicanism in the Thought of Girolamo Savonarola and Niccolò Machiavelli* (Doctoral Dissertation, University of Notre Dame, 2014), Chapters 3 and 6.

⁹⁵ D I.45, 93-94. Cf. D I.7.3, 25.

⁹⁶ For examples of Savonarola's remarks emphasizing the necessity of the appeal, see his 'Compendium of Revelations' in *Apocalyptic Spirituality: Treatises and Letters of Lactantius, Adso of Montier-en-Der, Joachim of Fiore, The Franciscan Spirituals, Savonarola*, trans. Bernard McGinn (Mahwa, NJ: Paulist Press, 1979), 207, 210; Savonarola, *Prediche Sopra I Salmi*, Vol. I, Predica I (January 6, 1495), ed. Vincenzo Romano (Rome: Angelo Belardetti, 1969), 13. For the history of the constitutional reforms in 1494-1495 and Savonarola's role in them, see Nicolai Rubinstein, 'Politics and Constitution in Florence at the End of the Fifteenth Century' in *Italian Renaissance Studies: A Tribute to the Late Cecilia M. Ady*, ed. E. F. Jacob (London: Faber & Faber, 1960), 164; Donald Weinstein, *Savonarola: The Rise and Fall of a Renaissance Prophet* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 146.

⁹⁷ D I.45.2, 93-94

He was judged by many to be ambitious and a man who with his audacity and spiritedness wished to pass beyond a civil way of life.⁹⁸ Valori's inclinations to abandon established political orders to seek vengeance against his opponents are therefore similar to the methods used by Manlius Capitolinus and Caesar. Through his hypocrisy, Savonarola was enabling a potential tyrant.

Savonarola's failure to rein in Valori not only underscores the difficulty his insincerity posed for his followers trying to turn his teachings into political action, but also lays bare the limits of the authority Savonarola did possess. In *Discourses* I.11 and I.56 Machiavelli implies he was impressed by Savonarola's ability to amass a large following of people who believed, on account of his 'life, learning, and the subject he took up', that he spoke to God and received prophetic visions revealing natural events like lightning strikes and political calamities, like the French invasion of Italy, as God's chastisement for Florence's sin.⁹⁹ This is not to say that Machiavelli is surprised by Savonarola's influence, as he makes frequent references to the potential for good men to wield soft power that influences mass behaviour.¹⁰⁰ Indeed, in *Discourses* III.1 and III.30 this kind of moral leadership is offered both as a way to initiate political renewals and to eradicate envy. Nevertheless, Savonarola's downfall arguably reveals an embedded check on this type of authority, which is that it is effective only so long as one maintains goodness consistently, or at least the appearance of goodness.¹⁰¹

In contrast with Savonarola, Soderini did possess official political power, but he squandered his opportunity to combat envy because his approach was nothing like that of Moses. While Machiavelli

⁹⁸ D I.7.2, 25.

⁹⁹ D I.11.5, 36; D I.56, 113-114.

¹⁰⁰ See D 1.2.2, 13 ('suggestion of some good man'); 1.4.1, 17 ('easily yielded when the truth is told them by a man worthy of faith.'). 1.13.2, 40 ('Publius Ruberius, a citizen grave and of authority'); 1.53.1, 106 ('if it is not made aware that that is bad and what the good is, by someone in whom it has faith, infinite dangers and harms are brought about into republics'); I.54, 108-109 (title: 'How Much Authority a Grave Man May Have to Check an Excited Multitude'); I.58.4, 118-119 ('tumultuous people can be spoken to by a good man, and it can easily be returned to the good way'); III.34.2, 287-288 ('one individual through public word and fame'; 'The best modes that can be held are to keep company with grave men of good customs reputed wise by everyone'). Cf. D III.1, 209-212, and III.30.1, 279.

¹⁰¹ Cf. P 6, 24: '[Brother Girolamo Savonarola] was ruined in his new orders as soon as the multitude began not to believe in them, and he had no mode for holding firm those who had believed nor for making unbelievers believe'.

intimates in *Discourses* III.30 that Soderini sensed envy was a problem for the republic, he did not understand how it functioned or how to eradicate it. Soderini, Machiavelli says,

believed that with time, with goodness, with his fortune, with benefiting someone, he would eliminate this envy; seeing himself very young of age, and with so much new support that the mode of his proceeding brought him, he believed he could overcome as many as were opposed to him through envy without any scandal, violence, and tumult. He did not know that one cannot wait for the time, goodness is not enough, fortune varies, and malignity does not find a gift that appeases it.¹⁰²

Rather than physically eliminating those who envied him, Soderini attempted to befriend them.¹⁰³ That this betrays a fundamental misunderstanding of how to eliminate envy is implied in *Discourses* II.14, where Machiavelli asserts that humility cannot conquer pride, especially the pride of the envious. '[It] is often seen', he observes, 'how humility not only does not help but hurts, especially with insolent men who, either by envy or by another cause, have conceived hatred for you.'¹⁰⁴ Similarly, in *Discourses* III.9 Machiavelli criticizes Soderini's leadership qualities because he did not know how to adjust

¹⁰² D III.30.1, 280. *Opere*, 237: 'credeva, col tempo, con la bontà, con la fortuna sua, col beneficiare alcuno, spegnere questa invidia. . .' and 'che credeva potere superare quelli tanti che per invidia se gli opponevano, senza alcuno scandolo, violenza e tumulto . . . '.

¹⁰³ Machiavelli does not identify those who were envious of Soderini. Ridolfi discusses several of Soderini's enemies in his account of the downfall of the Florentine republic, including, generally, all those who supported the Medici, and, specifically, *ottimati* like Filippo Strozzi and former *Frateschi* like Giovambattista Ridolfi. See Ridolfi, *Machiavelli*, 120-132. Among others Machiavelli may have had in mind were members of the *ottimati* like Alamanno Salviati, who, as Valori notes, was the dedicatee of Machiavelli's *First Decennial*. See Viroli, *Niccolò's Smile*, 94-95, 97-98. Michael White suggests the opposition to Soderini was rooted in the *ottimati's* fears that the Gonfalonier would turn into a dictator, and, in an effort to improve his own political standing, Soderini distanced himself from Machiavelli and his plans for the citizen militia. See White, *Machiavelli: A Man Misunderstood* (London: Abacus, 2004), 106-107.

¹⁰⁴ D II.14.1, 156. *Opere*, 164: 'Vedesi molte volte come l'umiltà non solamente non giova ma nuoce, massimamente usandola con gli uomini insolent, che, o per invidia o per altra cagione'. McCormick offers a different interpretation of Soderini's conception of envy, suggesting Soderini did understand that he needed to eliminate those who envied him, but he thought had plenty of time to do this, given his appointment as Gonfalonier for life. He leans heavily on Machiavelli's remarks in D III.3 that Soderini was concerned that the Florentines would eliminate the office of Gonfalonier for Life after his death. McCormick, 'Machiavelli's Camillus', 416, 423-424. Cf. D III.3.1, 215.

his methods to the situation. While he was initially successful, ‘times came later when he needed to break with patience and humility[;]... he did not know how to do it, so that he together with his fatherland was ruined.’¹⁰⁵ One particular shortcoming was Soderini’s failure to recognize that Florence lacked an adequate ‘mode of accusation against the ambition of powerful citizens’ because its criminal court, the *Otto di Guardia*, was too small to be effective.¹⁰⁶ Machiavelli’s discussion of Manlius’ downfall accentuates that the lack of functional institutions to channel accusations of public misconduct was a grave omission for Florence.

Consequently, Soderini’s enemies were able to sow discord with impunity, and when Soderini himself was accused of malfeasance, there was no legal recourse for him to prove his own integrity. Lacking legal means to express their grievances, Soderini’s opponents sought outside help from the Spanish army, whose aid to the city brought back the Medici and, with them, an end to the city’s short experiment with more representative republican institutions such as the Great Council and Machiavelli’s own crowning achievement, the citizen militia.¹⁰⁷ Further underscoring that he desires to temper the ambitions of those who would act upon envy to the detriment of the republic, in *Discourses* I.52 Machiavelli argues that those who envied Soderini would have been better served by opposing him through legal channels. Instead, they sought to put themselves in his place and destroyed the republic in the process. He remarks:

To the citizens who bore envy for his greatness, it was much easier, and was a thing much more honest, less dangerous, and less harmful for the republic, to anticipate him in the ways with which he made himself great than to wish to put themselves up against him so that all the rest of the republic was ruined with his ruin.¹⁰⁸

Just as he remonstrated with those who would dare imitate Caesar or Manlius, now Machiavelli rebukes those who brought about the end of the Florentine republic. Although its institutions were imperfect and in need of dramatic renovation, the better option for both the city and those who machinated against Soderini would have been

¹⁰⁵ D III.9.3, 240.

¹⁰⁶ D I.7.4, 25.

¹⁰⁷ Ridolfi, *Machiavelli*, 120-144.

¹⁰⁸ D I.52.2, 104.

to seek glory in the ways Machiavelli advises in the *Discourses*, by ordering the city for ‘a political way of life’ so that it could ‘go on for a time, always increasing toward the best by the virtue of that orderer’.¹⁰⁹ Here Machiavelli strives to give practical advice directed toward the end of establishing a city that is securely free.

Conclusion: envy and Machiavelli’s republican legacy

I have argued that Machiavelli attempts to moderate tyrants and that his lessons about envy are made with the goal of preserving liberty, but the fact that eradicating envy in a corrupt republic will likely require acts of violence and eliminating one’s enemies leaves us with a conundrum. What are we to make of this lesson about envy in relation to the broader debate about the significance of Machiavelli’s writings and his republican legacy? Machiavelli’s counsel that to eradicate envy in corrupt republics one must eliminate the envious, it cannot be denied, resembles those lessons for which he is most criticized in *The Prince*.¹¹⁰ As for his conclusion that in an incorrupt republic, when emergency situations arise and institutions prove inadequate to check envy, men of great spirit and ability may weather the storms with their *virtù*, this is complicated by his claims elsewhere that ‘not virtue but the prudent use of virtue and vice leads to happiness’.¹¹¹ Some have attempted to account for this difficulty by reading Machiavelli’s works as concealing clever deceptions that set up the failure of those attempting to implement the lessons.¹¹² Others counter these interpretations by pointing to the patriotism Machiavelli exhibited in personal correspondence with his friends, including an exclamation made to Francesco Vettori in the last few months of his life: ‘I love my native city more than my own soul’.¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ D II.P.2, 123.

¹¹⁰ As Strauss grapples with Machiavelli’s legacy he reminds us that Machiavelli advises, ‘princes ought to exterminate the families of rulers whose territory they wish to possess securely; princes ought to murder their opponents rather than to confiscate their property since those who have been robbed, but not those who are dead, can think of revenge. . . etc.’ Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 9.

¹¹¹ Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 9.

¹¹² See, e.g., Mary Dietz, ‘Trapping the Prince: Machiavelli and the Politics of Deception’, *American Political Science Review* 80 (1986): 777-799.

¹¹³ Machiavelli to Vettori (April 16, 1527) in *Letters*, no. 331, 416. For an account of Machiavelli’s patriotism, generally, and this letter to Vettori, specifically, see Viroli, *Niccolò’s Smile*, 254-255.

Still others have simply accepted the badge of immoralism and worn it with a kind of pride.¹¹⁴

Giving closer attention to what Machiavelli tries to teach us about envy reveals what is dissatisfying about all of these responses to his thought. Machiavelli finds envy to be especially threatening to republics that lack institutions to channel the people's suspicion in ways that will safeguard rather than undermine liberty. However, his proposed remedy for mitigating and overcoming envy mixes laudatory institutional strategies and reliance on the influence of respected citizens when these institutions are lacking with disturbing advocacy of violence. The paradox may be that in teaching his reader that the prince must at times use fraud as well as force, Machiavelli makes mistrust endemic, effectively rendering his own strategies for eradicating envy unworkable in both corrupt republics, where people are rightfully sceptical of their political institutions' legitimacy, and incorrupt republics, where the motives of all committed patriots would be doubted. For a thinker who seeks to provide 'the effectual truth' rather than the 'imagination of it', this is ironic, indeed.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ Carl Schmitt hypothesizes that in traditions other than the Western European one that has made Machiavelli's name synonymous with evil, Machiavelli's ideas would be far less shocking. Indeed, Schmitt finds Machiavelli's approach to be, paradoxically, more honest than those critics of Machiavellianism. He finds in Machiavelli a proponent of 'political self-preservation' who 'would be bad, if humans were good; but humans are not good'. See Schmitt, 'Machiavelli, on the 22nd of June 1927' in *The Tyranny of Values and Other Texts*, trans. Samuel Garrett Zeitlin, ed. Russell A. Berman and Samuel Garrett Zeitlin (Candor NY: Telos Press Publishing, 2018), 45-50.

¹¹⁵ P 15, 61.