

## Panel 3.1 Abstracts

***Machiavellian Freedom and Equality: The Differing Democratic Conceptions of The Discourses on Livy and The Florentine Histories*****Christopher Holman**

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Anglo-American scholarship on Machiavelli has for decades prioritized the study of the form of relation between *The Prince* and the *Discourses on Livy*, given the seemingly diverse objects of analysis and normative prescriptions detailed in these texts. More recent commentary, however, has turned to consider how Machiavelli's later so-called Florentine writings fit into the Machiavellian oeuvre and problematize conventional accounts of the trajectory of Machiavelli's thought. As John McCormick has recently highlighted, most readers interpret a shift within these later writings, they being characterized by a general conservative turn that repudiates the earlier republican defence of the productivity of popular political activity in civic life. While agreeing with McCormick that the Florentine writings, contra such interpretations, do contain a democratic content, I argue here that this content is unique from that of the *Discourses*, and that a fully consistent Machiavellian democratic theory can only be constructed through a synthesis of the two distinct images that Rome and Florence present. The complete revelation of a Machiavellian form of democratic life as a normative political goal is only revealed through a combination of the various lessons contained within these texts. That said, although the latter do emphasize differing elements of democratic life, these emphases are not mutually incompatible, thereby necessitating our thinking the form of relation between them in terms of break or transition. On the one hand, in the Florentine writings Machiavelli highlights the fact that the equalization of economic conditions is a possibility that may be concretely actualized within the city. This possibility was closed off in the republican Rome of the *Discourses* as a result of the continued existence of the *grandi* as a separate social class. On the other hand, in the *Discourses* Machiavelli highlights the fact that the non-antagonistic expression of human ambition is only possible if there exist political forms that can productively channel or vent it. This possibility was closed off in the Florence of the *Florentine Histories* as a result of the lack of stable institutional orders respected by all citizens. What unites both the republican writings of the *Discourses* and the later Florentine writings is the affirmation of an ambitious popular desire for creative self-expression. In the former text Machiavelli theorizes the institutional conditions for the socially productive sublimation of this popular desire, while in the latter texts Machiavelli theorizes the possibility of the establishment of a general economic equality via the abolition of the *grandi* and the self-education of the people. The synthesis of these two accounts, never undertaken systematically by Machiavelli himself, generates a more complete and coherent democratic model.

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***The Wisdom and Nature of the People: Leo Strauss and John McCormick on Machiavelli*****Max Morris**

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That Machiavelli expressly stated that the people are wiser than princes does not mean he thought that the people are wise. This paper draws on Leo Strauss' interpretation of Machiavelli to appraise that of John McCormick. I will argue that McCormick exaggerates Machiavelli's democratic partisanship.

McCormick and Strauss are two scholars who have—in their view, in the spirit of Machiavelli—made Machiavelli the mouthpiece of their own philosophical programs. Aside from their fundamental disagreements, McCormick and Strauss have a similar understanding of what grounds Machiavelli's normative framework; for both, it is the 'effectual truth' that the classical 'best regime' has invariably failed to live up to expectations, because it is based upon the false assumption that a wise or perfectly good ruler is possible. To avoid the inevitable oligarchic implications of classical republicanism, Machiavelli saw the necessity to (almost) unequivocally endorse the people's moral and political wisdom over that of princes and the elite alike. However, unlike McCormick, Strauss notes that Machiavelli's critique of classical republicanism presupposes that all rulers must, from time to time, act immorally. The reason is that people are not altogether good in Machiavelli's view. In fact, Strauss thinks that Machiavelli reduces human nature to the desire for 'mere life'. From this morally neutral standpoint, it is impossible to say that Machiavelli was a convicted partisan of democracy. Thus, by drawing on Strauss to reveal the anthropological basis of perhaps the central argument of McCormick's democratic reading of Machiavelli, this paper will argue that McCormick significantly overstates his case.

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***Machiavelli or the Theorist as a Popular Preacher*****Alessandro Mulieri**

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It was Strauss who first suggested that Machiavelli's teaching continues the Platonic tradition of the philosopher-king. How should one relate this view to the contemporary populist readings of Machiavelli (McCormick, Vatter, Winter)? This article presents a third view based on a comparative reading of chapters 4 and 58 of the 1st book of the Discourses and a text that none of the two above interpretations have considered with sufficient attention: The Discourse on the Florentine Affairs. In this latter text, Machiavelli equates philosophers to founders or reformers of republics and says that both deserve the highest praise. I argue that this claim invites us to reconsider Machiavelli's role as a philosopher for reasons that are quite different from Strauss' view. First, drawing on some underdeveloped insights of both McCormick and Del Lucchese, it is shown that the Machiavellian theorist is no longer a philosopher but a civil preacher who, despite stabilizing the whole polity curing its corruption, still remains partisan in his commitment to the people. We could better describe the Machiavellian theorist as a civil prudent (*prudente*) whose main task is to help people stick to their specific humor: not to be oppressed from the nobles. Second, it is argued that, unlike Plato's philosopher-king, the Machiavellian theorist is like a lawgiver or a reformer who actively intervenes in actual politics. He retains the right to invent the best laws but his perspective remains "populist" because he needs the people to preserve, change and maintain any of these laws. In its final part, the paper stresses the novelty of the Machiavellian approach by contrasting this view to that of another important "populist" Italian theorist: Marsilius of Padua. While Marsilius' "populism" is still caught within the Platonic opposition between the many and the theorist, for Machiavelli elitism and democracy are not opposites but good complements.

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***Machiavelli and the Plebeian Power to Create and Punish. Towards a Republican Theory of Constituent Power*****Camila Vergara**

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The paper proposes to see Machiavelli as putting forward a plebeian strand of constitutional thought that originates in his materialist, realist reading of the Roman republican experience, and his critical reaction on the democratic constitutional regime in Florence. I show how Machiavelli's constitutional thought is materialist in its analysis of law and procedures, and anti-oligarchic in its institutional design. By accounting for the influence that socio-economic inequalities exert over political power, embracing conaict as the effective cause of free government, and seeking to channel emancipatory, anti-oligarchic energies through the constitutional structure, Machiavelli's constitutional ideas are the origin of a plebeian strand in constitutional theory that radically departs from the tradition coming out of democratic theory. The paper focuses on Machiavelli's most important contribution to constitutional thought: the plebeian nature of republican constituent power. I argue that the constituent power in Machiavelli serves not as a "bridge between the juridical and the political" (Del Lucchese 2017), but rather as the extraordinary power to resist relentless corruption and domination.

While in democratic theory the constituent power has been conceived as an autopoietic power of the whole community to constitute itself, in republican theory the constituent power would be defined functionally, that is, determined by the goal of achieving liberty as non-oppression. Because for Machiavelli liberty is attained through the realization of a plebeian desire not to be dominated—a situation that is gained through conaict and tumults (Pedullà 2019)—the preservative power of free government would be the power of the people to periodically redraw the boundaries of what is considered permissible and what is deemed oppressive. Only the many—who desire not to be oppressed by the powerful few, and do not partake in ruling—are for Machiavelli the guardians of liberty, and therefore the only ones who would exert extraordinary power to preserve liberty.

I analyze Machiavelli's ideas for reforming Florence through his theory of institutional renewal aimed at redeeming corrupt republics, focusing on his proposal to normalize instances of constituent creation and punishment in ten-year intervals as the antidote for systemic corruption. Having periodic plebeian-led extraordinary actions able both to establish new basic rules and institutions, and punish acts of corruption—acts that are not illegal but have resulted in the overgrowth of oligarchic power—would be, according to Machiavelli, the most effective way of keeping the original fear of foundation fresh in the minds of the powerful few who easily convert duty into privilege, and privilege into law.

Given our current conjuncture, in which oligarchic power has grown out of bounds, allowing for increased oppression of the many, an intellectual window has opened to question the foundational ideas of our constitutional frameworks. Machiavelli's thought allows for thinking outside the liberal-democracy box, and therefore, understanding his conception of constituent power from a republican perspective rather than from a democratic one, seems crucial for developing critical constitutional thought for the 21st century.