

CHAPTER 4: LUCK AND CHARACTER IN MACHIAVELLI'S POLITICAL THOUGHT

I have argued the case for the presence of a skeptical and deflationary approach to luck in the political thought of Aristotle. By contrast, the presence of such an approach in Machiavelli's thought is well-known. Although his predecessors and contemporaries had extensively considered questions of luck, virtue, and character, Victoria Kahn has shown that Machiavelli put to his own purposes the *Quattrocento* humanist treatment of fortune and virtue.¹ Whereas the humanists had extolled the Ciceronian and Christian virtues as remedies for both good and bad fortune, Machiavelli denied that the world was ordered either by a hierarchy of natural ends or by the providential will of the Christian God.² By abstracting God from politics, and by presenting human nature as oriented toward the acquisition of external goods such as power and glory, Machiavelli was led to redefine virtue as efficacious power.³ This redefinition in itself illustrates how profoundly Machiavelli had already departed from Platonic, Aristotelian, Stoic,

¹ See Victoria Kahn, *Machiavellian Rhetoric*, 18–24, 32, 38. Kahn's is the most comprehensive and persuasive account of Machiavelli's critique of the Renaissance humanists. See also Hulliung, *Citizen Machiavelli*, 3-30; and Pitkin, *Fortune Is a Woman*, esp. 18–19, 143–44, 153. Even Gilbert acknowledges that none of Machiavelli's contemporaries explored so doggedly and precisely the relation of virtue to fortune; see his *Machiavelli's Prince and Its Forerunners*, 206. For an interpretation that more or less reconciles Machiavelli to his civic-humanist milieu, see Skinner, *Foundations of Modern Political Thought*.

² On this point, see Berlin, "The Originality of Machiavelli," 37; Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, 201.

³ See Fischer, "Machiavelli's Rapacious Republicanism," xxxv.

and mediaeval Christian paradigms, according to which virtue was intrinsically noble and choiceworthy, even if it did not always constitute a bulwark against the ravages of fortune.⁴

But how far, in Machiavelli's view, did the efficacious power of *virtù* extend—even to the character of the virtuoso himself? A number of scholarly authorities insist that Machiavelli ascribes to the man of virtue the capacity to shape both his own nature and those of his fellows freely and at will.⁵ In fact, though, Machiavelli's thought on the dynamic relation between virtue and fortune is shot-through with a surprising number of apparent inconsistencies, compromises, and ambiguities. On the one hand, Machiavelli reveals and recommends technologies of political power that promise to deliver to virtuous princes and republics the goods of fortune that they desire. On the other hand, Machiavelli also attends to the fateful and often controlling presence of *fortuna* in our political lives, and even in the constitution of the character of the virtuous prince. This chapters aims to do justice to both the optimistic and the pessimistic sides of Machiavelli's thought on the topic of fortune, though it focuses on the latter, which has received short-shrift in the critical literature.⁶

⁴ See Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 234-69; and Newell, "How Original Is Machiavelli?," 617-38.

⁵ See, for example, Lefort, *Machiavelli in the Making*, 167; Mansfield, *Machiavelli's Virtue*, 36-38; McIntosh, "Modernity of Machiavelli," 190; Newell, *Tyranny*, 303-34; Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 252-53, 297-98.

⁶ Multiple commentators have called Machiavelli's political vision comic. See Lord, "On Machiavelli's *Mandragola*," 807; Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 285, 292. Of course, Machiavelli wrote comedies, not tragedies. Machiavelli did, however, sign his letters: "Niccolò

In particular, I argue that the character of the virtuous Machiavellian prince arises out of a complex and contingent series of events and experiences that Machiavelli himself associates with the idea of fortune. This argument challenges head-on the view of the Machiavellian prince as a wholly self-made man. Equally important, whereas notable republican and democratic interpreters of Machiavelli suggest that Machiavelli's Rome succeeded, to the greatest extent possible, in overcoming "time and change" and in making an "escape from *fortuna*," I show that the civic education identified by Machiavelli as a chief source of Rome's resiliency was likewise influenced by fortune.⁷ To be sure, these are deep and paradoxical incongruities and tensions in Machiavelli's political thought. But perhaps the fractures belong to political reality itself rather than to Machiavelli alone. Either way, examining questions of human agency and contingency in the company of the Florentine will shed light both on the questions themselves and on his political vision.

I begin by revisiting the problematic relation of virtue to fortune in *The Prince*. If there is anything novel to say about this well-worn theme, it is that the prince of *virtù* is vulnerable, both extrinsically and intrinsically, to *fortuna*. For Machiavelli, the prince's inability fully to control

Machiavelli, *istorico, comico e tragico*." See Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, 187; Plato, *Symposium* 223d.

⁷ These phrases are drawn from Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*, 190. McCormick has modified Pocock's republican reading of Machiavelli to accommodate egalitarianism and democracy. See McCormick, *Machiavellian Democracy*; and more importantly, for the purposes of this chapter, McCormick, "Addressing the Political Exception," 888–900. Cf. Zuckert, "Machiavelli's Democratic Republic," 262–94.

his character gives rise to a grave political problem—the problem of succession. Machiavelli’s analysis of this problem leads us to his other masterwork, the *Discourses on Livy*. In the *Discorsi*, Machiavelli seems to say that the republic is superior to the principality because the republic contains a deep pool of potential leaders, whose diverse natures may be matched to the diverse external contingencies faced by the republic over time. What he shows us, however, is that the republic, no less than the prince, is vulnerable to luck. Yet Machiavelli’s hardheaded acknowledgement of the pervasiveness of contingency does not issue in tragic resignation. The depiction in the *Discourses* of the Roman re-founder Marcus Furius Camillus suggests that a leader who learns in adversity the necessity of prudent self-reliance can teach the republic to imitate his virtue.

However, two questions remain. First, where and how does the republican re-founder arise in the first place? Is his arrival a matter of luck, similar to the appearance of a god among mortals? Second, Machiavelli seems to argue that the re-founder ought to follow Camillus, who cultivates a quasi-Stoical indifference to fortune in order to acquire precisely those goods of fortune—in particular, power and glory—that the Stoics disdained. The conclusion of the chapter will consider the significance of this paradox, which modern political thought inherits from Machiavelli.

Luck and Character in *The Prince*

The question of the individual’s vulnerability to luck lies at the heart of the controversy surrounding Machiavelli’s legacy. Many interpreters argue that Machiavelli’s legacy extends beyond republican political thought and practice to the birth of Enlightenment science and modern technology. “Hidden in Machiavelli’s writings,” writes Roger D. Masters, “is the

proposal that humans use natural science and technical expertise to imitate the creative power of the Judeo-Christian God.”⁸ According to Waller Newell, Machiavelli’s proposal for the conquest of nature can be seen in the virtue he ascribes to his greatest princes. Newell defines virtue as a “godlike power for the transformation of human nature and the natural environment.”⁹ In addition, Newell writes that the virtue of Machiavelli’s new prince makes possible “an expression of power so perfect that it ranges far beyond mere personal triumph to the imposition of epoch making new modes and orders.”¹⁰ On Newell’s interpretation, then, the prince is invulnerable to luck, since his virtue masters even nature and history.

In my view, Newell’s definition of virtue as unimpeded mastery exaggerates the effectiveness of virtue while diminishing its usefulness as a guide to action. For if virtue describes the successful overcoming of whatever conditions stand in the way of the prince’s striving, then virtue always carries success in its train, while success always betokens virtue. As Kahn has noted, Machiavelli himself ascribes this view of virtue not to the prudent prince, but rather to the ignorant many.¹¹ In Machiavelli’s own words: “For the vulgar are taken in by the

⁸ Masters, *Machiavelli, Leonardo, and the Science of Power*, 209.

⁹ Newell, *Tyranny*, 303.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 334.

¹¹ Kahn, *Machiavellian Rhetoric*, pp. 38–9. See also Garver, “Neglected Rhetorical Classic,”

appearance and the outcome of a thing, and in the world there is no one but the vulgar” (*P* 18).¹² To suppose, with the people, that every good outcome reflects efficacious human agency is to forget that success sometimes occurs as a consequence of dumb luck. But Machiavelli is at pains to define, precisely, the relation of virtue to luck.

More importantly, Machiavelli’s examples reveal the vulnerability of the prince to contingencies of circumstance. The nineteenth chapter of the first book of the *Discourses* supports this point: “[the prince] who is like Numa will hold [the state] or not hold it as the times or fortune turn under him, but he who is like Romulus, and like him comes armed with prudence and with arms, will hold it in every mode unless it is taken from him by an obstinate and excessive force” (*D* 1.19.4). Even Romulus, whom Machiavelli counts among the four greatest princes, might have been deprived of his state “by an obstinate and excessive force” (cf. *P* 6). Consider, too, the nineteenth chapter of *The Prince*, in which Machiavelli discusses the death of the Roman emperor Caracalla at the hands of a mere centurion: “Here it is to be noted that deaths such as these, which follow from the decision of an obstinate spirit, cannot be avoided by princes because anyone who does not care about death can hurt him; but the prince may well fear them less because they are very rare” (*P* 6). Whether an individual is a Romulus or a Caracalla, an

¹² I cite *The Prince* and the *Discourses on Livy* according to the standard fashion (by work, book, chapter, and paragraph), and I inlay references in the text. I follow the Mansfield translation of *The Prince* and the Mansfield-Tarcov translation of the *Discourses*.

“armed prophet” or an inept hereditary prince, his life may be ruined by an accident that could not have been predicted or prevented.¹³

External contingencies form an indelible feature of “the Machiavellian cosmos”:¹⁴ “In all human things he who examines well sees this: that one inconvenience can never be suppressed without another’s cropping up” (*D* 1.6.3; see also 1.37.1, 3.37.1; *P* 21).¹⁵ It is not surprising, therefore, that Machiavelli’s conception of virtue is suited to a world in which external contingencies are pervasive. For Machiavelli, contingencies of circumstance occasion the

¹³ See also *D* 3.6.19: even though Machiavelli observes that conspiracies led by republican generals are the most likely to succeed, he still maintains that these conspiracies “have had various outcomes according to fortune” (*D* 3.6.19).

¹⁴ The reference is to the title of Anthony Parel’s book.

¹⁵ Machiavelli’s works are rife with similar statements about the instability of *fortuna*. For example, see *D* 3.37.1: “It appears that in the actions of men, as we have discoursed of another time, besides the other difficulties in wishing to bring a thing to its perfection, one finds close to the good there is always some evil that arises with that good so easily that appears impossible to be able to miss the one if one wishes for the other. One sees this in all the things that men work on. So the good is acquired only with difficulty unless you are aided by fortune, so that with its force it conquers this ordinary and natural inconvenience.” See also *D* 1.37.1; *P* 21; McCormick, “Addressing the Political Exception,” 888–900; Wootton, “From Fortune to Feedback,” 25; Lukes, “Fortune Comes of Age,” 34–35. As Lukes makes clear, acknowledging the importance of contingencies of circumstance in Machiavelli’s thought does not mean positing fortune as something “out there” in the world.

exercise of virtue. Hannah Arendt explains: “*Virtù* is the response, summoned up by man, to the world, or rather to the constellation of *fortuna* in which the world opens up, presents and offers itself to him, to his *virtù*. There is no *virtù* without *fortuna* and no *fortuna* without *virtù*.”¹⁶

Whether *virtù* itself may be shaped by *fortuna* is, however, a problem that has not been explored in depth. The few commentators who have discussed the prince’s internal vulnerability to luck—among them Eugene Garver and Gennaro Sasso—do not recognize that Machiavelli himself offers a careful and extended treatment of the problem.¹⁷ In the first paragraph of “The Life of Castruccio Castracani of Lucca,” for example, Machiavelli notes that most virtuous individuals have been afflicted by serious misfortune: “Those who consider it, my dearest Zanobi and Luigi, think it wonderful that all, or the larger part, of those who have done very great things, and who have been excellent among the men of their era, have in their birth and origin been

¹⁶ Arendt, “What Is Authority?,” 137.

¹⁷ For example, Garver thinks that the “destructive achievement of chapter 25”—i.e., “Machiavelli’s necessary but incoherent demand that one choose a character”—renders Machiavelli’s treatment of luck and character in *The Prince* ultimately incoherent. See Garver, *Machiavelli and the History of Prudence*, 117–121. Similarly, Sasso, in an important passage that has been translated by McCanles, writes that fortune describes “human nature itself . . . that dark and *non virtuosa* zone of character, which every man, even the most prudent and *virtuoso*, contains necessarily within himself.” Cf. Sasso, *Niccolò Machiavelli*, 395–96; McCanles, *Discourse of Il Principe*, 131-32.

humble and obscure, or at least have been beyond all measure afflicted by Fortune.”¹⁸ Possibly, at least, it is merely coincidental that the exemplary political figures to whom Machiavelli refers in this passage have experienced prior misfortune on a significant scale.

Yet the sixth chapter of *The Prince* suggests a closer causal relationship and thereby transforms this connection into a paradox. Somehow the extraordinary political actor must experience bad luck in order to become virtuous. Could it be that bad luck is actually good luck insofar as bad luck occasions the development of a naturally talented character in the direction of virtue? To be sure, Machiavelli defines virtue in this chapter as self-reliance in contradistinction to deference to fortune: “he who has relied less on fortune has maintained himself more” (*P* 6). Machiavelli also insists that his four exemplary princes—Moses, Cyrus, Romulus, and Theseus, not to mention the “lesser example” of Hiero of Syracuse—did not have “anything else from fortune than the opportunity, which gave them the matter enabling them to introduce any form they pleased” (*P* 6). Newell thinks that this line by itself shows that Machiavelli invests princely virtue with “godlike” creative power.¹⁹ However, in the very next line, Machiavelli says that “without that opportunity their virtue of spirit would have been eliminated” (*P* 6). The existence of princely virtue is altogether contingent upon the presence of certain “opportunities.”

Yet when Machiavelli goes on to elaborate these opportunities, they do not sound like opportunities in the usual sense at all. Each of the princes named by Machiavelli—Moses, Romulus, Cyrus, Theseus, and Hiero—was exposed or cast out as a child; so too was

¹⁸ Trans. Gilbert. Machiavelli, “Life of Castruccio,” 533. Strauss confirms that fortune is a leitmotif of this work. See *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 223–25.

¹⁹ Newell, *Tyranny*, 301.

Castruccio.²⁰ In addition, before founding their states, each prince was stateless and oppressed, if not outright enslaved as in the case of Moses (*P* 26). Their earliest experiences of the world, then, were marked by serious misfortune, illustrating the point that Machiavelli himself had made in the first line of the “Castruccio.” After recounting their various travails, Machiavelli concludes: “Such opportunities, therefore, made these men happy, and their excellent virtue enabled the opportunity to be recognized; hence their fatherlands were ennobled by it and became very happy” (*P* 6).

How exactly did the experience of bad luck contribute to the virtue and the accomplishments of Machiavelli’s armed prophets? The sixth chapter of *The Prince* raises this question without answering it. Even so, Machiavelli’s choice of examples places the emphasis on the experience of serious misfortune early in life, almost beginning with the moment of birth. The experience of bad luck somehow contributes to the character-formation of individuals who do not rely on luck.²¹ Bad luck may be good luck insofar as bad luck constitutes an opportunity for the prince to learn something important about himself. In light of the type of virtue realized by the armed prophets, it seems that, for Machiavelli, misfortune brings home to the capable

²⁰ Machiavelli, “Life of Castruccio,” 533–35. Anachronistically, one might say that these princes were born into the Hobbesian state of nature, radically alone and at risk.

²¹ Thus Erica Benner’s recent interpretation—according to which *virtù* and *fortuna* are mutually exclusive symbols of approbation and reprobation, respectively—seems too simple. See her “Machiavelli’s Amoral Fortuna,” 481–99.

individual the importance of self-reliance. In this way Machiavelli may offer his own take on the proverbial Greek idea of *pathei mathos*, “learning through suffering.”²²

Machiavelli’s thematic treatment of fortune in the twenty-fifth chapter of *The Prince* clarifies his argument in the sixth. Note, first of all, that Machiavelli begins and ends this chapter by attacking the idea that fortune is itself an independent force—that contingency exercises agency. Whereas Augustine and Boethius trace changes in the fortunes of human beings to the educative aspect of divine providence; whereas medieval cosmologists trace such changes to the motions of the stars, Machiavelli casts fortune as a river and a woman, against which men may contend.²³ But in the chapter’s central section, Machiavelli “descends to particulars,” again affirming that the character of the virtuous prince is vulnerable to luck (*P* 25). In the sixth chapter, Machiavelli had dramatized the paradoxical power of bad luck to plant the seed of virtue in the characters of the greatest princes; in the twenty-fifth, Machiavelli shows that the human character is, in general, rocky soil for the cultivation of virtue. His careful analysis of the inability of most human beings to become virtuous may help us to see why even the “armed prophets” needed to experience bad luck in order to realize their virtue.

²² For example, see Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 177, 250.

²³ Note that many commentators suppose—mistakenly, in my view—that Machiavelli did see fortune as an independent force, if not as a goddess. See Parel, *Machiavellian Cosmos*, 1718, 28–29, 77; Parel, “Farewell to Fortune,” 587–604; Nederman, “Amazing Grace: Fortune, God, and Free Will,” 617–38; Viroli, *Machiavelli*, 21–24. But Machiavelli explodes the view of fortune as an external power; see my analysis of the river image in Chapter 1 above.

Prudence is the keynote of Machiavelli's analysis of luck and character in this chapter. For Machiavelli, prudence refers to the capacity of the individual to adjust his ways of acting and ruling to fit shifting circumstances.²⁴ Luck inevitably obtrudes on imprudent action because imprudent action proceeds without regard for contingency or circumstance. But even prudent action is vulnerable to luck, inasmuch as it is a matter of luck whether a man becomes prudent and therewith virtuous. Thus Eugene Garver writes: "chapter 25 of *The Prince* precisely seems to make the ability to withstand incident luck into a matter of constitutive luck."²⁵ Yet, Garver sees this turn in the argument as the self-destruction of Machiavelli's conception of princely agency, while I see it as the culmination, in *The Prince*, of Machiavelli's careful yet paradoxical reflections on the topic of responsibility for character. Here Machiavelli burrows into the psyche of the prince in order to explain his internal vulnerability to luck:

On this also depends the variability of the good: for if one governs himself with caution and patience, and the times and affairs turn in such a way that his government is good, he comes out happy; but if the times and affairs change, he is ruined because he does not change his mode of proceeding. Nor may a man be found so prudent as to know how to accommodate himself to this, whether because he cannot deviate from what nature inclines him to or also because, when

²⁴ Machiavellian prudence departs from its Aristotelian and Ciceronian ancestors, since it is not yoked to ethical virtues such as justice or *honestas*. See Garver, *Machiavelli and the History of Prudence*, 54; Kahn, *Machiavellian Rhetoric*, 32; Mansfield, *Machiavelli's Virtue*, 13, 384–5, 309–10.

²⁵ Garver, *Machiavelli and the History of Prudence*, 111.

one has always flourished by walking on one path, he cannot be persuaded to depart from it. And so the cautious man, when it is time to come to impetuosity, does not know how to do it, hence comes to ruin; for if he would change his nature with the times and with affairs, his fortune would not change. (*P* 25)

The most important obstacle to prudence is the tendency of the individual to cleave out of habit to a certain mode of acting or ruling. “When one has flourished by walking on one path, he cannot be persuaded to depart from it”; evidently, the prince often believes that he himself is responsible for his success, that his success is not contingent but natural and deserved (cf. *P* 2; *D* 3.8.2, 3.31.1). The belief that what worked in the past will work well in the future corrupts prudence, and for this reason likely issues in failure. Not only is bad luck actually good luck, but the obverse is also true: good luck is bad luck because good luck seduces the prince into thinking that he is invulnerable. It is no accident that many princes who achieved success early in their careers—for example, Cesare Borgia and Piero Soderini—are presented by Machiavelli as failures in the end (*P* 7; *D* 3.3).

This explanation of the badness of good luck also illuminates, more brightly than the sixth chapter, the goodness of bad luck. What does the prince learn through his suffering? He learns that the human being is, as such, vulnerable to contingencies of circumstance. Aware of his own vulnerability to contingencies of circumstance, and hence of his need for prudence, the prince can resist both becoming “intoxicated” in good fortune and “abject” in bad (*D* 3.31.1–3). Self-knowledge is the hoped-for-outcome of bad luck.²⁶ Otherwise, why was it necessary for

²⁶ Observe the key line in Castruccio’s deathbed speech: “It is in this world of great importance to know oneself, and to be able to measure the forces of one’s spirit and of one’s position.”

Moses to find himself and his people enslaved in Egypt, for Romulus to find himself stateless and bestialized? To be sure, bad luck provided the armed prophets with a dark background against which their virtue could shine. But the Machiavellian picture of politics suggests that such a background is almost always available. Moreover, in the twentieth chapter of *The Prince*, Machiavelli argues that a prince can “astutely nourish some enmity so that when he has crushed it, his greatness emerges the more from it” (*P* 20). What a prince cannot nourish absent adversity is the “spirit in great things” that enables him to act in accordance with prudence even as the blows of fortune fall upon him (*D* 3.6.15).

To become, through bad luck, the kind of human being who is able to adjust to changes in luck, precisely because he knows himself to be vulnerable to luck, is to owe a great debt to luck indeed. But to say this much is still to understate the extent to which the prince’s character is shaped by luck, because, as the above passage makes clear, the prince must also have the right nature. Machiavelli concludes that passage as follows: “if he would change his nature with the times and with affairs, his fortune would not change” (*P* 25). What Machiavelli means to indicate, in my view, is that the prospect of perfect flexibility is a tantalizing impossibility. Scattered throughout Machiavelli’s writings are similar statements on the inability of men to change their natures. Consider *Discourse* 3.9: “Two things are causes why we are unable to change: one, that we are unable to oppose that to which nature inclines us; the other, that when one individual has prospered very much with one mode of proceeding, it is not possible to

Machiavelli, “Life of Castruccio,” 554. It may be no coincidence that this speech mentions fortune more often (i.e., five times) than any other speech in Machiavelli’s writings—so far as I know.

persuade him that he can do well to proceed otherwise” (*D* 3.9.3). A discussion of these themes in the letter known as the *Ghiribizzi* sounds the same note: “[men] cannot command their natures.”²⁷ Emphatically and repeatedly, Machiavelli declares that the nature of the prince is inflexible.²⁸

Scholars who follow Leo Strauss—such as Newell, with whom I began this section—would probably disagree with the foregoing reading. For these interpreters, Machiavelli depicts the prince as a shape-shifter, who tames and channels his passions in order to master fortune. Certainly Harvey Mansfield aims to follow Strauss when he locates “the origin of what is called the ‘reductionism’ of modernity” in the persona of Machiavelli’s protean prince.²⁹ For Mansfield, the prince’s flexibility comprises the sum and substance of his humanity: “while beasts are confined to their single natures, man is the all-around beast who because of his rationality is free to take on the nature of any convenient beast.”³⁰

The problem with this emphasis on flexibility is that it does not square with Machiavelli’s examples. While Machiavelli’s princes manifest flexible judgment, their natures seem inflexible. Mansfield concedes the point: “Virtue, we have seen, must be flexible. . . . But the main truth is that individuals have inflexible natures that define their virtues and limit them to flourishing in times in which those virtues are appropriate.”³¹ What else could one conclude from the example

²⁷ Trans. Gilbert. Machiavelli, “Letter No. 116,” 897.

²⁸ On this point, and the *Ghiribizzi*, see also Nederman, “Amazing Grace,” 623-24.

²⁹ Mansfield, *Machiavelli’s Virtue*, 37.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 38.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 41-42.

of Pope Julius II in *The Prince*, chapter 25? Although Machiavelli marvels at Julius's caginess, he also affirms that Julius was impetuous by nature; and it was by chance that the times favored an impetuous, warlike pope.³² "If times had come when he had needed to proceed with caution, his ruin would have followed: he would never have deviated from those modes to which nature inclined him" (*P* 25). In fact, inflexibility marks almost every ancient prince or "prince of the republic" whom Machiavelli praises.³³ Hannibal was cruel; Titus Manlius Torquatus, severe; Fabius Maximus, prudent and cautious; Scipio Africanus, agreeable; Valerius Corvinus, gentle; Romulus, warlike; and Numa, pacific.³⁴

True, Machiavelli exhorts the prince to manage his reputation theatrically. In Newell's view, for example, Machiavelli "tells the prince that there is nothing more useful for him than to cultivate the appearance of possessing the traditional virtues as a reputational smokescreen."³⁵ Indeed, beginning with Guicciardini, readers of Machiavelli have often noted the importance of

³² Ronald Beiner notes Julius's guile in *Civil Religion*, 24–26. Cf. *D* 3.44.

³³ The phrase, "prince of the republic," occurs in *Discourse* 1.33.3.

³⁴ Machiavelli treats the inflexible nature of Hannibal in *The Prince* ch. 18 and *Discourse* 3.21; that of Torquatus, in *Discourse* 3.22; Fabius, in *Discourse* 3.9; Scipio, in *The Prince* ch. 14 and 17 and *Discourse* 3.21; Valerius, in *Discourse* 3.22; Romulus, in *The Prince* ch. 6 and *Discourse* 1.19; and Numa, likewise in *Discourse* 1.19. In these lines I echo the formulation of Strauss while challenging his conclusion. See *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 244 ff.

³⁵ Newell, *Tyranny*, 329.

“theatricality” to Machiavellian virtue.³⁶ It is important, though, that we do not conflate the reputation for virtue with virtue itself—the very mistake that Machiavelli associates with the classical and Christian discourses on the virtues. The point of Machiavelli’s trans-valuation of the virtues in Chapters 15 through 19 of *The Prince* is to substitute virtues that are effective “in deed” for philosophic and otherworldly virtues, which aid the prince only “in speech” (*P* 15).³⁷

³⁶ For example, Guicciardini, “Considerations,” 412; Kahn, *Machiavellian Rhetoric*, 15, 33–35; Mansfield, *Machiavelli’s Virtue*, 16–19, 25.

³⁷ See also *Discourse* 2.15, in which Machiavelli quotes, from Livy, the words of the Latin praetor Annius: “‘I judge it to belong to the highest of our affairs for you to consider more what we ought to do than what is to be said. Once the counsels are made clear, it will be easy to accommodate words to things.’ Without doubt these words are very true and should be relished by every prince and by every republic” (*D* 2.15.1; cf. Livy 8.4). Later in the *Discourses*, Machiavelli recommends a similar speech by the Roman consul Valerius Corvinus: “‘Soldiers, I want you to follow my deeds, not my words; to seek from me not only discipline but also example, who have won for myself with this right hand three consulates and the highest praise.’ These words, considered well, teach anyone whatever how he ought to proceed if he wishes to hold the rank of captain; and one who has done otherwise will find in time that whether he was led to the rank by fortune or by ambition, it will be taken from him and will not give him reputation, for titles do not give luster to men, but men to titles” (*D* 3.31.1; cf. Livy 7.32). In sum, deeds are more efficacious than words—though a stirring speech about the efficaciousness of deeds is also efficacious, apparently. It would be useful and interesting to compare the

For example, Machiavelli says, in Chapter 17, that “Cesare Borgia was held to be cruel; nonetheless, his cruelty restored the Romagna, united it, and reduced it to peace and faith” (*P* 17). Therefore a prince “should not care about the infamy of cruelty,” because cruelty, as practiced by Cesare and Hannibal, works as a mode of rule (*P* 17). In the eighteenth chapter, Machiavelli again redirects the gaze of the prince away from speeches and toward deeds. His striking suggestion is that the tendency of the people to be “taken in by the appearance and the outcome of a thing” actually relieves the prince of the need to pander to the people: “So let a prince win and maintain his state: the means will always be judged honorable, and will be praised by everyone” (*P* 18; see also *P* 3; *D* 3.3). At the same time, and for the same reason, it is easy for the prince to win over the people by giving outward signs of generosity and religiosity. Because “everyone sees how you appear, [yet] few touch what you are,” the prince can focus his attention on the effective application of power, while appeasing the people from time to time (*P* 18). Thus Machiavelli concludes this line of argument: a prince who knows “how to avoid those things that make him hateful and contemptible . . . will have done his part and will find no danger in his other infamies” (*P* 19; see also *D* 1.27.2).

Not only does Machiavelli assert, then, that nature dispenses inflexible characters to princes by chance, but he also warns against the pursuit of perfect flexibility as a mode of rule: “Above all, a prince should live with his subjects so that no single accident whether good or bad has to make him change” (*P* 8). Because the prince cannot change his nature, he should not attempt to walk a “middle way” between qualities, but should instead “always [proceed] as

dynamic opposition between words and deeds in Machiavelli’s thought to the similar opposition found in Thucydides’ thought.

nature forces [him]” (*D* 3.9.1, 3.21.3).³⁸ To do otherwise is to repeat the mistake of the Roman Decemvir Appius Claudius, who deceived himself when he tried to ascend from humble friendship with the Roman people to proud rule over them (*D* 1.40–41, 2.14). Flexible judgment, not flexibility of character, is the key to success for Machiavelli. Thus we can make sense of his parody of the Ciceronian parable in *The Prince*, Chapter 18: “the one who has known best how to use the fox has come out best” because foxy cunning, steeled by experience in wielding leonine force, is usually successful (*P* 18).³⁹ As we have seen, prudence requires, for its development, the coincidence of a talented nature—a “first brain” (*P* 22)—with bad luck sufficient to spur the would-be prince to develop his virtue. The prince of virtue is, therefore, vulnerable to luck—both inside and out.

³⁸ Against this argument, someone cite *The Prince*, ch. 18: “And so [the prince] needs to have a spirit disposed to change as the winds of fortune and variation of things command him. . . .”

Without a doubt, there is a tension in Machiavelli’s thought on this point—though I think that the preponderance of the evidence suggests that Machiavelli advises the prince to exercise flexible judgment, not to try to change his nature altogether. When Machiavelli says in this line that the prince should have a spirit (*animo*) disposed to change like the wind, he may mean that the prince should be sufficiently bold and irreverent to take advantage of every contingency of circumstance. On *animo*, see Clarke, “On the Woman Question in Machiavelli,” 237–41; Mansfield, *Machiavelli’s Virtue*, 40. See also Mansfield’s note on *animo* in *The Prince*, 4 n. 5: “*animo* refers to the ‘spirit’ with which human beings defend themselves. . . .”

³⁹ I do not intend to follow Lukes in “Lionizing Machiavelli,” 561–75. Prudence is powerless absent boldness, while boldness needs prudence in order to rise above recklessness.

That the prince is not responsible for his own character gives rise to a political problem that lies at the heart of Machiavelli's thought. What will happen to the prince's state when he dies? Machiavelli doubts that the virtuous prince can communicate his virtue to his son. Septimius Severus, a man whom Machiavelli calls "a new prince" and "a very fierce lion and a very astute fox," fathered Caracalla, who succeeded him as emperor (*P* 19). Although Caracalla's nature resembled that of his father, Machiavelli suggests that Caracalla did not experience the type of bad luck that might have taught him his father's foxiness. Conversely, the gentle and philosophic Marcus Aurelius generated a son, Commodus, whose brutal and obtuse nature overwhelmed his education (*P* 19; see also *D* 3.6.10). Machiavelli's treatment of the problem of succession in the nineteenth chapter suggests that the prince should adopt his son; elsewhere Machiavelli makes explicit his preference for adoption (*D* 1.10). Be that as it may, *The Prince* exhibits the general failure of princes—even "adopted princes," such as Marcus Aurelius—to select worthy heirs. Just as the prince cannot fully control his own character, so too he fails to control the character of his successor. It is for this reason that Machiavelli is, ultimately, a critic of the principality as a regime-type. He prefers to the principality the regime that aims to generate "infinite most virtuous princes," namely, the republic (*D* 1.20).

The Problem of Fortune Solved? Machiavelli's *Discourses*

In *Discourse* 3.9, Machiavelli offers a programmatic statement on the superiority of the republic to the principality. This discourse is linked to *The Prince*, Chapter 25, by its title, argument, and examples. As in *The Prince*, Machiavelli argues that a man would enjoy continuous good fortune if he could change his nature to fit every circumstance; the fact of the matter, however, is that he cannot so change himself. So too Julius II appears, again, as an example of inflexibility.

However, *Discourse 3.9* goes on to address the key political question that is left unaddressed in *The Prince*—the question of succession. In particular, Machiavelli recounts the succession in Roman leadership from Fabius Maximus Cunctator to Scipio Africanus:

But [Scipio] was born in a republic where there were diverse citizens and diverse humors; as it had Fabius, who was the best in times proper for sustaining war, so later it had Scipio in times apt for winning it.

Hence it arises that a republic has greater life and good fortune longer than a principality, for it can accommodate itself better than one prince can to the diversity of times through the diversity of the citizens that are in it. For a man who is accustomed to proceed in one mode never changes, as was said; and it must be of necessity that when the times change not in conformity with his mode, he is ruined. (*D 3.9.1–2*)

Machiavelli suggests that republican adaptability arises, in the first place, from the diversity of human types contained within the republic's pool of citizens. Moreover, the republic somehow manages to call upon the right leader at the right time. In a time that called for caution, Fabius Maximus Cunctator (hesitator) led the Roman army against Hannibal; but the young and fiery Scipio Africanus assumed the command when the opportunity arose to defeat Hannibal once and for all. The question is how the republic transitions from one leader, or set of leaders, to another in accordance with changes in circumstance. One may also wonder how the republic generates so many potential leaders. While Machiavelli insists, in *Discourse 3.9*, on the adaptability of the republic in responding to accidents, he does not explain how this works.

Civic-humanist and democratic interpreters of Machiavelli seize on *Discourse 3.9* because these interpreters think that they can readily explain the phenomenon of republican

succession and hence of republican adaptability. In short, the republic as a whole prudently chooses its leaders, employing democratic mechanisms of deliberation and election. Citing *Discourse* 3.9, J.G.A. Pocock writes: “the few and the many together know how to choose . . . the right man at the right moment.”⁴⁰ John McCormick also emphasizes “the will of [the] political body” of Roman citizens in “responding to accidents.”⁴¹ For McCormick, the socioeconomic and institutional mixing of the few and the many rendered the Roman republic “more conducive and specifically *adaptive* to political reality.”⁴² Similarly, Garver goes so far as to call Machiavelli’s Rome “a community of Machiavellian princes,” in which “prudence and virtù are employed by an entire community.”⁴³

It does not make sense, however, to consider the Machiavellian republic “a community of princes” unless the people in fact elects its “princes” and holds them accountable. Ryan Balot and Stephen Trochimchuk have recently argued against the democratic view of Machiavelli’s Rome.⁴⁴ They show that the people, on Machiavelli’s presentation, does not participate in deliberation and self-government; rather, the demos is ruled, either directly or indirectly (for example, through religion), by the nobility. For my purposes in this section of the chapter, in which I aim to clarify the puzzle of the republic’s “greater life and good fortune,” asserted by Machiavelli in *Discourse* 3.9, it suffices to say that the civic-humanist and democratic

⁴⁰ Pocock, “Machiavelli and Rome,” 152–53.

⁴¹ McCormick, “Addressing the Political Exception,” 889.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 895.

⁴³ Garver, *Machiavelli and the History of Prudence*, 123.

⁴⁴ Balot and Trochimchuk, “The Many and the Few,” 559–588.

interpreters of Machiavelli seem to miss the mark, because the actions of Machiavelli's plebs are neither self-guided nor prudent. Whereas the prince is inflexible, the people is all too flexible.

The flexibility of the people is a point that scholars have not recognized, though it is one that Machiavelli himself accentuates across his works. Machiavelli's Roman citizenry does not manifest "political, moral, and economic autonomy," in the words of Pocock.⁴⁵ On the contrary, what defines the many, in contradistinction to the few, is flexibility, that is, the susceptibility of the many either to be educated or corrupted at the hands of the few. In Machiavelli's own words: "The nature of peoples is variable; and it is easy to persuade them of something, but difficult to keep them in that persuasion" (*P* 6). Machiavelli ascribes to the prince tremendous power to reshape the character of the people: "It is more true than any other truth that if where there are men there are no soldiers, it arises through a defect of the prince and not through any other defect, either of the site or of nature (*D* 1.21.1).⁴⁶ Furthermore, Machiavelli does not wholly exempt republican peoples from his characterization of the demos as flexible, though he does recognize that republican peoples display fierce patriotism (*P* 5; *D* 1.58, 3.8.1). Even the Roman people reacted, hysterically, to changes in circumstance—by turns hoping for the unattainable best and fearing the unlikely worst (*D* 1.44, 1.53, 2.29). Machiavelli joins a long line of political thinkers, stretching back to classical antiquity, who worry that the fickle emotions of the demos

⁴⁵ Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*, 212.

⁴⁶ The prince's ability to shape the people is relevant in the republican context. Machiavelli frequently refers to "princes of the republic" (e.g., *Discourses*, 1.12.1, 1.18.4, 1.20, 1.29.3, 1.33.3).

cloud its judgment.⁴⁷ At the same time, Machiavelli sees in the irrepressible fears and hopes of the people the possibility of successful demos-management. Extraordinary leaders can use emotional alchemy, as it were, to order the people, especially during war (*D* 3.14, 3.33).

That the flexible Roman people are themselves shaped and directed by inflexible princes of the republic raises, with greater urgency, the question of how the republic manages to solve the problem of succession by matching leaders of diverse natures to the diverse accidents faced by the republic over time. What accounts for the “greater life and good fortune” of the republic? To be sure, “there was always a place for the virtue of men” in Machiavelli’s Rome because the republic was “ordered for war” (*D* 3.16.2). Moreover, the Romans “went to find virtue in whatever house it inhabited,” refusing to discount leaders on the basis of age, wealth, or social status (*D* 1.60, 3.25.1). These design features do not explain, however, why it was that Rome had a large number of capable citizens in its pool of potential consuls, tribunes, dictators, and captains. Nor do they explain the fundamental problem: how did one leader come to succeed another?

Could it be the case, then, that particular Roman leaders arose at particular times as a matter of luck? Indeed, when we look more closely at the signal example put forth by Machiavelli in *Discourse* 3.9, the transition in leadership from Fabius Maximus Cunctator to Scipio Africanus, we see that a confluence both of contingent relations between the classes and of contingent events on the battlefield precipitated Scipio’s ascendancy and success. How did Scipio win the consulship and defeat Hannibal? Machiavelli nowhere says that the plebs

⁴⁷ See, for example, Thucydides’ remarks at 2.65.4–9 and 4.108.4, among many other passages treated in Chapter 2.

“elected” Scipio. He might seem to say, at the conclusion of the seventeenth chapter of *The Prince*, that the Senate was responsible for Scipio’s ascendancy to the consulship. However, *Discourse* 1.53 shows that the Senate trusted “the judgment of Fabius Maximus” over and against that of Scipio (*D* 1.53.4). Only when Scipio threatened to propose the enterprise to the people, knowing “that great hopes and mighty promises easily move [the people],” did the Senate acquiesce in his plan to venture to Africa.⁴⁸ Evidently the Senate held out little hope that Scipio would defeat Hannibal; but defeat him he did. Here the narrative becomes still more complex. For Scipio’s success was also brought about by Hannibal’s imprudent hopefulness. Hannibal pressed on after defeating the Romans at Cannae, whereas, in Machiavelli’s judgment, “the intention of the Carthaginians should have been to show the Romans that they were able enough to combat them, and, having had victory over them, one should not seek to lose it

⁴⁸ These words are drawn from the title of *Discourse* 1.53. Machiavelli suggests that the Senate may have agreed to send Scipio against Hannibal for the same reason it previously agreed to send Marcus Centenius Penula, “a very vile man”: “To the Senate [Penula’s] request appeared rash; nonetheless, thinking that if it were denied to him and his asking later became known among the people, there might arise from it some tumult, envy, and disfavor toward the senatorial order, they conceded it to him, wishing rather to put in danger all those who followed him. . .” (*D* 1.53.3). Penula and his detachment never returned. The implication is that the Senate was likewise willing to try its luck with Scipio, believing that his defeat would at least rid the city of a menace. On senatorial manipulation of Scipio, see the recent account of McCormick, “Machiavelli’s Inglorious Tyrants,” 29–52.

through hope of a greater” (*D* 2.27.1). Thus the career of Scipio Africanus, as Machiavelli depicts it, involves a complex interplay of human agency with accidents domestic and foreign.

Throughout the *Discourses*, in fact, Machiavelli shows that “accidents” obtrude on the political agency of the republic, and he explicitly associates *accidenti* with *fortuna*.⁴⁹ On the topic of Rome’s internal vulnerability to luck, consider that Machiavelli declines to praise Rome for the gratitude shown by its citizens to exceptional individuals, just as he declines to blame ancient-democratic Athens for its ingratitude. Machiavelli instead emphasizes “the diversity of accidents that arose in these cities. For whoever considers things subtly will see for himself that

⁴⁹ For example, the near-conquest of Rome by the Gauls was both the work of “fortune” and an “extrinsic accident” (*D* 2.29–30, 3.1). See Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 223: “We conclude that the fundamental thought which finds expression in both books consists in a movement from God to Fortuna and then from Fortuna via accidents, and accidents occurring to bodies or accidents of bodies, to chance understood as a non-teleological necessity which leaves room for choice and prudence and therefore for chance as the cause of simply unforeseeable accidents.” Precisely because Machiavelli does not see fortune as something “out there” in the world, he can use this idea in multiple registers, including in reference to the unexpected outcomes of human action itself. On the distinctiveness of Machiavelli’s language of accidents and its specific differences from scholastic usages of the term, see McCormick, “Addressing the Political Exception,” 888–89. On the possibility that Machiavelli was influenced by the Lucretian usage of “accidents,” see Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, 455–58; Brown, *The Return of Lucretius*, 68–87, 113–22; Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 222; Rahe, “In the Shadow of Lucretius,” 30–55; Krayer, “The Revival of Hellenistic Philosophies,” 102–106.

if freedom had been taken away in Rome as in Athens, Rome would not have been more merciful toward its citizens than the latter was” (*D* 1.28). Individual leaders of the republic inevitably alter its constitution and history; the accidental rise of the Peisistratid tyranny accounted for the ingratitude of the Athenians. Thus Machiavelli suggests that the Roman republic might have succumbed to tyranny at the time of the Decemvirate if Appius Claudius had been shrewd (*D* 1.40.5). Alternatively, if a man “expert in civil affairs,” such as the Florentine *Niccolò da Uzzano*, had been alive during the time of Caesar, the republic might have been preserved (*D* 1.33.3). Of course, Machiavelli argues, in the opening discourses of the work, that the very institutional structure of the Roman republic arose out of a series of accidents that he explicitly ascribes to chance: “what an orderer had not done, chance did” (*D* 1.2.7 ff.).⁵⁰

Rome’s external vulnerability to accidents is no less fundamental to Machiavelli’s analysis. As we have already noted, contingent events on the battlefield, such as Scipio’s conquest of the Carthaginians at Zama, affected the composition of the Roman leadership and relations between the classes. Machiavelli returns again and again to the near-defeat of the Romans at the hands of the Gauls; this “extrinsic accident” could have resulted in the end of Roman freedom (*D* 2.29–30, 3.1, 3.30). In the event, however, the invasion of the Gauls was

⁵⁰ In these passages Machiavelli uses the words “fortune,” “chance,” and “accidents” interchangeably; in addition to the line quoted above, consider the following line, drawn from the same passage: “For if the first fortune did not fall to Rome, the second fell to it; for if its first orders were defective, nonetheless they did not deviate from the right way that could lead them to perfection” (*D* 1.2.7). Cf. the title of the following *Discourse*: “What Accidents made the Tribunes of the Plebs Be Created in Rome, Which Made the Republic More Perfect” (*D* 1.3).

among those “strong and difficult accident[s], 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” (*D* 3.30.1). Having escaped the Gauls, due to the leadership of the general Marcus Furius Camillus above all, the Romans supported Camillus in his project of re-founding the republic’s religious and judicial orders (*D* 3.1.2). Extrinsic accidents, mediated by the actions of leaders like Camillus, led to alterations in Rome’s core institutions and practices. To give another example, a certain “conspiracy” of the Latins and the Sabines, who sought to check Rome’s burgeoning power, occasioned the advent of the dictatorship, a “remedy” that Machiavelli judges “always most useful in all those accidents that arose at any time against the republic in the increasing of the empire” (*D* 1.33.1).

Thus Machiavelli’s paradoxical identification of bad luck with good luck recurs on the level of the republic. Not only did the mixed structure of the Roman government arise out of contestations between the few and the many after the death of the Tarquin kings, but Rome also achieved its military strength and glory-loving ethos not least because “in every least part of the world the Romans found a conspiracy of republics very armed and very obstinate in defense of their freedom”—that is, because neighboring peoples attacked them from all sides, compelling the Romans to grow stronger (*D* 2.2.2). The modes and orders of the Roman republic took shape under pressures exerted by apparent misfortunes. It was by accident, so to speak, that the republic discovered *modi ed ordini* capable of responding to accidents.

But this means that while “it is of necessity, as was said other times, that in a great city accidents arise every day that have need of a physician,” the republic does not always succeed in

diagnosing the disease or in prescribing the appropriate remedy (*D* 3.49.1).⁵¹ Thus, in this final discourse of the work, Machiavelli offers the example of Quintus Fabius Maximus, who restored the exclusivity of the Senate by reversing the reforms of Appius Claudius Crassus—reforms that had allowed plebian Romans to be elected senators.⁵² Rome had need of such a correction to its most fundamental institutions “every day” in Machiavelli’s view (*D* 3.49.1). In this way Machiavelli suggests that Rome’s basic orders were themselves radically contingent. I conclude, then, that Pocock goes too far when he suggests that “escape from time and change” was the goal of Rome; and that “this goal was achieved” by the republic.⁵³ Machiavelli’s Rome does not “escape from *fortuna*”; even at the height of its power, the republic was shaped by its daily confrontation with *fortuna*.⁵⁴

The Constancy of Machiavelli’s Marcus Furius Camillus

This chapter cuts against the grain of the critical literature inasmuch as I attempt to clarify Machiavelli’s pessimistic reflections on political agency. But I do not conclude, with Viroli, that Machiavelli’s “belief in Fortune . . . calls for resignation.”⁵⁵ As we have seen, Machiavelli shows

⁵¹ *Discourses*, 3.49.1.

⁵² See Livy 9.46.

⁵³ Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*, 190. Cf. McCormick, “Addressing the Political Exception,” 895.

⁵⁴ Again, see Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*, 190.

⁵⁵ To be fair to Viroli, I reproduce the full line: “[Machiavelli’s] belief in Fortune and heaven call for resignation; his commitment to the pursuit of great things calls for political action.” See his

that the extraordinary political actor sometimes learns in adversity the importance of prudence and steadfastness; these qualities of character empower him to contend with fortune. What is more, Machiavelli suggests, in the third book of the *Discourses*, that a republican re-founder should attempt to imprint his virtuous character on the citizens of the republic.

More precisely, Machiavelli's treatment of Marcus Furius Camillus, the great re-founder of Rome, demonstrates how an extraordinary individual may convert his virtue into "a mode of life" or an "education" that leads even the overly flexible people to approach his firmness of spirit (*D* 3.31). The "greater life and good fortune" of the republic had its origin in the Roman education, which Machiavelli traces to the mind of Camillus—though he makes clear, at the same time, that Camillus was one among a series of Roman re-founders (*D* 3.1, 3.49).

Furthermore, Machiavelli's depiction of the career of Camillus suggests that the nature of the Roman nobility, no less than that of the plebs, was susceptible to being shaped by a prince of the republic (*D* 3.31.3, 3.36, 3.46).⁵⁶

Machiavelli, 21. Yet, on Viroli's reading, the pursuit of great things is possible only to the extent that fortune permits it. Viroli argues that Machiavelli deferred to *fortuna* when he resigned himself to life on the fringes of politics (173). For a fundamentally similar view, see Martinez, "Tragic Machiavelli," 102–109.

⁵⁶ Perhaps the Roman education took hold of the nobility most of all. Machiavelli's Roman Senate often acted in accordance with the ethos of hardhearted detachment inculcated by Camillus and the other re-founders (cf. *D* 1.11, 1.13, 1.33, 1.38, 1.48, 1.51, 1.54, 1.55, 1.57, 2.23, 2.33, 3.11, 3.22, 3.25, 3.28). But this topic lies beyond the scope of the chapter.

How, then, does Camillus' re-founding of Rome bear on the puzzle of *Discourse 3.9*? I have not yet explained how the republic 1) generated a deep pool of potential leaders, while managing 2) to call upon the leader whose nature suited the time. Machiavelli's depiction of the republican re-founding wrought by Camillus goes some way toward solving the first half of the puzzle. Camillus shaped the Roman character, including the character of the nobility; in so doing, he might have hoped to generate multiple potential successors. The second problem, however, will prove intractable.

Close attention to Machiavelli's account of Marcus Furius Camillus is all but absent from the critical literature.⁵⁷ This is a peculiar lacuna, in light of the attention that Machiavelli himself lavishes upon Camillus. Of all the "prudent princes" who ordered Rome for a "free way of life" (*D* 3.1.1), Machiavelli devotes, in the *Discourses*, the most ink and praise to Camillus, who was "the most prudent of all the Roman captains" (*D* 3.12.3) and a man "adored as a prince" (1.29.3). Not even Romulus receives similar treatment. One possible reason for the discrepancy is that Machiavelli wants to explode the distinction between the founder and re-founder: "And truly, if a prince seeks the glory of the world, he ought to desire to possess a corrupt city—not to spoil it

⁵⁷ Those who mention Camillus do so in the context of treating what Strauss calls "the Tacitean subsection," i.e., *Discourses* 3.19–23. Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 160–5; Coby, *Liberty and Greatness*, 179–88; Mansfield, *Machiavelli's New Modes and Orders*, 373–86; Sullivan, *Machiavelli's Three Romes*, 148–54; Zuckert, "Machiavelli's Democratic Republic," 288, 290. No entry for Camillus is found in the indices of many books on Machiavelli's republicanism—e.g., Mikael Hörnqvist, *Machiavelli and Empire*; and Bock, Skinner, and Viroli, eds., *Machiavelli and Republicanism*.

entirely as did Caesar but to reorder it as did Romulus” (*D* 1.10.6). Since every founder is a re-founder, Machiavelli attends to the paradigmatic re-founder, Camillus.⁵⁸

More importantly, Machiavelli uses the re-founding of Rome by Camillus to deepen his reflections on the relation of political agency to contingency. Fortune looms large in the career of Camillus. Camillus is a prince who learned through bad luck—in his case, exile—to cultivate indifference to luck, the better to adjust to luck. Prior to his exile, Camillus was “altogether rash and hardly prudent” (*D* 3.23). Machiavelli tells us that Camillus vacillated, wildly, in his rule as general. For example, Camillus confiscated the booty gathered by his soldiers after the conquest of Veii on the grounds that he had promised it to Apollo; yet, upon returning to Rome, he paraded through the city in the guise of Jupiter, an act that betrayed Camillus’ impiety (*D* 1.55.1, 3.23).⁵⁹ It was only in exile that Camillus evidently learned to be at once prudent and steadfast—in a word, virtuous. Post-exile Camillus emerges as the embodiment of self-reliance for Machiavelli. With Camillus as his exemplar, Machiavelli argues that “excellent men retain their

⁵⁸ Anticipating Nietzsche and Foucault, Machiavelli argues that there exists no primordial moment of foundation. See Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” 142. Consider also Machiavelli’s characterization of Romulus as the paradigmatic founder in comparison to the Augustinian and Ciceronian depictions of Romulus. Characteristically, Machiavelli endorses the Augustinian depiction, while severing that view from its Augustinian corollary, i.e., Christ as the founder of the City of God. Cf. Augustine, *City of God* 22.6, in which Augustine also reproduces Cicero’s depiction of Romulus in the *Republic*. Finally, on these points, cf. Breiner, “Machiavelli’s ‘New Prince,’” 66–92.

⁵⁹ In this respect Machiavelli’s Camillus differs from Livy’s more pious Camillus. See Livy 5.23.

same dignity in every fortune,” because for “great men [who] are always the same . . . fortune does not have power over them” (*D* 3.31.1). It was by chance, though, that Camillus was recalled to Rome at all. According to Machiavelli, the “extrinsic accident” of the Gallic invasion led the Romans to send for Camillus, “who alone could have been the sole remedy for such an evil” (*D* 2.30.1). Moreover, Camillus arrived in the nick of time; already the Romans were submitting to the terms of surrender set by the Gauls (*D* 2.30.1). In more than one way, then, Machiavelli presents Camillus’ re-founding of Rome as accidental.

At the same time, Machiavelli argues that the republic did gain a significant degree of control over fortune through Camillus’ renovation of Rome’s modes and orders. Consider *Discourse* 3.31, which constitutes both Machiavelli’s last word on Camillus and his final thematic statement on *fortuna* in the *Discourses*. The title of this discourse is “Strong Republics and Excellent Men Retain the Same Spirit and Their Same Dignity in Every Fortune.” Mansfield argues that “it is with regard to Machiavelli himself that one must understand this passage”; for the passage seems to introduce a Stoic lesson on equanimity, whereas the discourse as a whole recommends “a substituted hardness of calculation in place of the noble and enduring qualities of soul.”⁶⁰ I suggest that Machiavelli does not simply take a dim view of Stoicism. In *Discourse* 3.31, Machiavelli puts Stoic equanimity to his own purposes, politicizing and democratizing it.

The argument of *Discourse* 3.31 proceeds as follows. First, Machiavelli points to the example of Camillus in order to show that “great men are always the same in every fortune; and if it varies—now by exalting them, now by crushing them—they do not vary but always keep their spirit firm” (*D* 3.31.1). His next move is to say that “the virtue and vice that I say are to be

⁶⁰ Mansfield, *Machiavelli’s Virtue*, 51–52; see also Mansfield, *New Modes and Orders*, 401–404.

found in one man alone are also found in a republic” (*D* 3.31.2). A captain can imprint his character on the citizens of the republic by re-founding the republic’s modes and orders, especially its martial modes and orders. Machiavelli’s Camillus re-ordered the republic “in every part, so as to be able to have men who have spirit, and indeed the orders and modes of his proceeding”; otherwise, in fact, Camillus would have “come to ruin” (*D* 3.31.4). By changing the tenor of its existence, its “mode of life,” republican re-founding empowers a whole people to become and remain ferocious in the face of serious misfortune:

For becoming insolent in good fortune and abject in bad arises from your mode of proceeding and from the education in which you are raised. When that is weak and vain, it renders you like itself; when it has been otherwise, it renders you also of another fate; and by making you a better knower of the world, it makes you rejoice less in the good and be less aggrieved with the bad. What is said of one alone is said of many who live one and the same republic: they are made to that perfection that its mode of life has.

Although it was said another time that the foundation of all states is a good military, and that where this does not exist there can be neither good laws nor any other good thing, it does not appear to me superfluous to repeat it. (*D* 3.31.3–4)

This passage confirms that Machiavelli places equanimity at the core of princely and republican virtue. Strength requires self-possession, the peculiar combination of prudence and boldness that enables the extraordinary individual—and, under his tutelage, the whole state—to face up to ostensible bad luck. However, Mansfield is right to argue that Machiavelli parts company with Livy and Cicero in the decisive respect. Whereas for the Stoics equanimity describes genuine indifference to the goods of fortune, Machiavelli thinks that equanimity is

good for the character of the prince and the republic because action grounded in equanimity most often succeeds in winning the goods of fortune. Thus we can explain why Machiavelli repeats, at the conclusion of the above passage, his old saw on the fundamental importance of arms (*P* 12; *D* 1.4.1). What explains Rome's "greater life and good fortune" is, in particular, the quasi-Stoical martial education authored by a series of princes of the city, especially Camillus. Machiavelli admires the Roman education because such an education is a wellspring of efficacious power and martial glory.

Conclusion: The Inconstancy of Machiavelli

Does Machiavelli's unique treatment of Camillus answer the questions that we have raised about the vulnerability of the prince and the republic to luck? On the one hand, Machiavelli's Camillus appears to be the rare prince who exercises control over his own character—albeit after learning, through bad luck, what virtue requires. In particular, Camillus learned that indifference to good or bad luck allows one to remain coolheaded; what's more, Camillus made his understanding effectual by teaching the Romans to imitate his boldness, if not his prudence. Having been remade in the image of Camillus, Rome was, arguably, more stable and powerful. In the short term, Rome may have contended, more successfully, with extrinsic accidents, especially the attack of the Tuscans (*D* 3.30). Perhaps Camillus' education of the Romans also produced, in the long-term, multiple future leaders who shared his character, such as Titus Manlius Torquatus (*D* 3.23–24). The re-founding of Rome by Camillus may seem to represent a solution to the problem of succession.

Yet this solution is merely partial. If the character of the whole republic is set by a re-founder such as Camillus, Machiavelli begs the question: whence the re-founder? Machiavelli

offers no concrete advice for overcoming this regress, which is not to say that he does not recognize the problem. The last of the *Discourses* states, in uncompromising terms, the necessity of continuous innovation in the institutions and practices of the republic. “Every day” Rome found itself in need of a “wise physician,” that is, a Camillean re-founder, who could respond, prudently, to the intrinsic and extrinsic accidents afflicting the republic (*D* 3.49; see also *D* 3.1). Of course, Rome did not always succeed in discovering a re-founder rather than a corrupter, a Camillus rather than a Caesar. Just as the vulnerability of the extraordinary individual to fortune leads the reader from *The Prince* to the *Discourses*, so too does the vulnerability of the republic to fortune lead him back to the topic of founding and hence to *The Prince*. It is appropriate, in fact, that both *The Prince* and the *Discourses* conclude with unblinking acknowledgment of the vulnerability of the prince and the republic to fortune. If Machiavelli had exaggerated the effectiveness of virtue in controlling fortune, then he would have ceased to explain virtue and to teach it.

More questionable, however, is the quasi-Stoical ethos that Machiavelli ascribes to Camillus. According to Seneca, for example, virtue “demands no external equipment. It is home-grown, proceeding wholly from itself: it begins to be subject to fortune if it attempts to derive any part of itself from without.”⁶¹ Original to Machiavelli is the idea that equanimity constitutes virtue because equanimity succeeds in acquiring for the individual and the republic the equipment that Seneca regards as superfluous, if not downright damaging, to virtue. This is a paradox: for Machiavelli, it is advantageous to cultivate internal superiority to fortune precisely

⁶¹ I have slightly modified Barker’s translation, replacing “paraphernalia” with “equipment.” See Seneca, “Letter IX,” 24.

because a person who possesses such a character is most likely to succeed in winning the goods of fortune. How Seneca would respond is patent: it makes no sense to look down on alterations in fortune unless one is actually indifferent to the goods and evils those changes might bring. Doubtful, too, is the psychological soundness of the Machiavellian ethos. How is it possible for an ambitious individual—who wants, badly, to succeed, to win the goods of fortune—to cultivate indifference to his own abjectness, as Machiavelli's Camillus claims to have done?

Again, Machiavelli recognizes this problem. As we have seen, he argues that experience, especially adverse experience, has the potential to teach the naturally talented political actor that he can think straight when he distances himself from his successes and failures. Bad luck constitutes an opportunity for the princely individual to learn the limits of his own power, which, paradoxically, may help him to acquire greater power. With the help of luck, princes and princes of republics can become at least partially responsible for their virtue.

Some modern political philosophers after Machiavelli seek to cut the Gordian knot by conquering fortune once and for all, thereby relieving human beings of the responsibility of virtue. The difference between Machiavelli and Hobbes, for example, is that Hobbes attempts to create a new political form, the modern state, that will deliver material well-being to the people irrespective of the character of the individuals who exercise political authority. Hobbes indicates his departure from Machiavelli in the letter dedicatory that precedes *Leviathan*. Whereas Machiavelli seizes on the invasion of Rome by the Gauls as a signal instance of the paradoxical equation of bad luck with good luck, since the invasion led to the rise of Marcus Furius Camillus and the re-founding of Rome, Hobbes uses this episode to suggest that the state can be made invulnerable to luck. Human beings can be relied upon to squawk like the Capitoline geese; what cannot be relied upon is the virtue of a Camillus (or a Manlius Capitolinus or a Sidney

Godolphin).⁶² The political form that relies on ordinary passions rather than exceptional persons does not leave itself exposed to the influence—worse, the absence—of the latter.

Machiavelli doubts that *virtù* could ever conquer or tame *fortuna* once and for all. At the same time, grasping one's own internal vulnerability *fortuna* does not mean relying on the blind revolutions of fortune's wheel (memorably depicted by Machiavelli in his *Tercets to Fortune*). For Machiavelli, virtue consists in prudence fueled by boldness. In the crucible of conflict, the virtuoso learns to grasp the patterns of politics, irrespective of his hopes and fears, his prospects for success or failure. Truly to make progress in virtue, however, one may need to learn much more besides.

⁶² Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 1–2. In Chapter 29 of *Leviathan*, Hobbes argues that his commonwealth is “designed to live as long as mankind” (210). That the perdurance of the state should not depend on the character its leaders is a central plank of Hobbes's critique of republican liberty in Chapter 21. Of course, many modern political theorists follow Machiavelli by emphasizing the importance of virtue among both leaders and the people. For example, Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 115: “in the constitution of all peoples, whatever the rest of its nature may be, there is a point at which the legislator is obliged to rely on the good sense and virtue of its citizens. . . . There is no country where the law can foresee everything and where institutions will take the place of reason and mores.”