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Social Discord as the Foundation of Republicanism in Machiavelli's Thought

Abstract   *The purpose of this paper is to introduce the concept of social discord, based on the analysis of early chapters of Niccolo Machiavelli's Discourses on Livy. I argue that, by deriving a broader philosophical concept from Machiavelli's peculiar position that strife between the plebs and the senate made the Roman republic free and powerful (Machiavelli 1998: 16), we can greatly enhance our understanding of not only some of the more original and controversial positions within the Florentine theorist's* magnum opus, *but also of his thought in general. Furthermore, by analyzing crucial moments within Machiavelli's observation of the rise and fall of the Roman republic through the lens of social discord, I argue that the concept can be established as the foundation of his understanding of republicanism, while contesting his designation of the people as the* guardians of liberty. *Finally, I contrast the concept of* social discord *with that of* social conflict *– a subtle and seemingly negligible distinction that can, in my understanding of Machiavelli's thought, nonetheless mean the difference between a republic's development and prosperity and its untimely downfall.*

Keywords: *Machiavelli, republicanism, social discord, social conflict, Roman republic, plebs, senate, freedom.*

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Introduction

Developed during a time of great social, cultural and religious change in one of the most politically progressive city-states of renaissance Italy, Machiavelli's republicanism represents a blend between political theories of the classical period and the emerging modern view of society and state.[1] While the foundations of his political thought can certainly be traced back to the works of renowned theorists of the antiquity, such as Aristotle and Cicero, his theory, nonetheless, departs from both classical and renaissance republicanism in significant ways and its relation to the republican tradition thus remains, as John McCormick puts it, "a puzzling issue" (McCormick 2001: 298). The difficulty in determining not only whether Machiavelli's theory can be viewed as part of a coherent tradition

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1   An earlier version of the analysis presented in this paper was developed as part of my M.A. thesis (University of Belgrade, 2014), arguing for the introduction of the concept of *social discord* as the foundation of Machiavelli's republicanism, based upon the fundamental connection between his realist political worldview and his historical analysis of the rise and fall of the Roman republic.

of political thought, but also, what his views are in principle, can in no small part, be attributed to the highly unsystematic nature of his *magnum opus*. John Pocock notes that Machiavelli was a "complex and deliberately enigmatic writer" (Pocock 2010: 144); the Florentine theorist would often cover topics ranging from politics, across morality and religion to battlefield tactics, all within the space of several paragraphs. It can thus be argued that the lack of a broader philosophical principle should not be attributed to Machiavelli's failure to recognize the theoretical potential of his work, but, rather, to his lack of desire to do so. The consequences of such a choice, however, may be mostly negative, as his most important work, the *Discourses on Livy* is greatly overshadowed by the shorter and more poignant, but less theoretically relevant *The Prince*, while the contemporary use of his name as a synonym for ruthless and unscrupulous policies can be traced back to the sixteenth century (Kahn, 2010: 240).

The derivation of a broader philosophical concept based on Machiavelli's writings, primarily the introductory chapters within the *Discourses*, could, therefore, demystify his theory and contribute to our understanding of it, while simultaneously helping to focus our attention on the work in which, as the author himself wrote, he expressed as much as he knows and has learned through a long practice and a continual reading in worldly things (Machiavelli 1998: 3). In the first part of the paper, I will present an analysis of Machiavelli's observations of the causes that ensured the development of republicanism in Rome, while briefly overviewing his understanding of government; in the second part, I will derive and define the concept of *social discord* and contrast it with that of *social conflict* based on this analysis; finally, in the third part, I will apply the concept of *social discord* to the analysis of Machiavelli's description of the rise and fall of the Roman republic, arguing that it can be viewed as the theoretical foundation of republicanism in Machiavelli's thought.

1. Disunion as a basis for the development of republicanism

In the early chapters of the *Discourses*, Machiavelli presents an analysis of both the events immediately following the overthrow of Lucius Tarquinius Superbus, the last king of Rome, and those that preceded the introduction of tribunes of the plebs, the popular representatives within the Roman republic. In his understanding, the popular uprising that led to Tarquinius' overthrow and the establishment of the Roman republic caused a flourishing in the relations between the senate, mainly representing the interests of the patricians (nobles), and the people of

Rome (Machiavelli 1998: 15). This amity, however, was based on fear – the patricians' fear of what might happen if the people, angered by their mal-treatment at the hands of the nobles, turned back to Tarquinius for help; therefore, as soon as the former king had passed away, the nobles quickly reverted to using their wealth and leverage in the senate to realize their interests, often at the cost of the people. The resulting strife would ulti-mately be remedied, though never fully resolved, through the introduction of tribunes of the plebs, or popular tribunes (Machiavelli 1998: 15).

Let us take a moment to analyze Machiavelli's observation of these his-torical events: it could be argued that a somewhat subtle moment is si-multaneously the most crucial one – namely, that even though the ban-ishment of the former king and the establishment of the republic caused a flourishing in the relations between the senate and the people of Rome, the resulting amity was, nonetheless, superficial. The social norm that could be derived from this is that, no matter the amount of shared in-terests, the division between different classes within a society can never truly be abridged. Machiavelli goes even further than this, arguing that the primary cause of the friendship between the nobles and the people was the nobles' fear of being replaced by the overthrown king. His fa-mously unapologetic realism aside, he may be exaggerating: the very fact that, through the establishment of the republic, both classes took major steps toward realizing their interests may be, on its own, enough of a reason for temporary cooperation, at the very least. Nevertheless, Ma-chiavelli correctly recognizes that neither this, nor any other overlapping of interests can ever fully abridge class distinctions – at best, it can only temporarily set them aside.

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Disunion in and of itself presents a unique problem: the fact that classes, while necessarily being different, still share common interest by virtue of being part of the same society notwithstanding, the discord between them cannot bode well for any state in general and a republic in particular: its power limited by a number of factors, a republican government, on the outside, appears less capable of remedying problems caused by social strife; however, as the concept of *social discord* that can be derived from Machiavelli's arguments implies, it may be more capable of remedying the very *causes* of social strife. Furthermore, Machiavelli's position implies that, beyond simply having the best means to combat the problem of social strife, a republic need not even combat it – with enough flexibility and readiness to accept change, the "problem" of social disunion becomes a contributing factor to the development of republicanism and the preser-vation of freedom.

In its initial state, however, disunion is, nonetheless, a problem that demands a solution, and that solution can come in the form of various types of government, having varying amounts of power over their subjects, as well as internal factions and classes. The most obvious solution would probably be to establish a strong central government based on princely virtues that would have the power to regulate internal relations and suppress the negative sides of human nature through authority rooted in divinity, as some of Machiavelli's contemporaries have suggested (Rubinstein 2008: 31-33). Machiavelli himself, however, never wanted to settle for guaranteeing stability at the cost of freedom; instead, he sought after the means to simultaneously achieve both.

Accepting the fact that classes within a society will, for lack of a common foe, battle each other despite having shared interests, one has to wrestle with the problem of controlling the strife between them, especially when strict measures directed by a strong central authority are out of the question, as is the case with any republic. Where a monarchy or a dictatorship may be considered the best type of government for directly intervening in order to suppress social strife, a democracy may just as intuitively be viewed as the best form of government for a republic – after all, democracy and republicanism are practically considered synonymous in our time. A closer look at the republican tradition in general, as well as Machiavelli's theory in particular, reveals keen skepticism toward a high degree of popular rule; in this instant, the cause for concern is primarily the issue of representation.

Democracy, whether direct or indirect, is defined as the rule of the people; when we use the term today, it is generally meant to imply the rule of *all* people, regardless of their social status. For Machiavelli, however, the term had a more specific meaning, denoting the rule of the lower classes (*governo popolare*), as opposed to principality (*principato*) and aristocracy (*ottimato*), representing the rule of the highest social elite (usually kings or princes) and the nobility, respectively (Machiavelli 1998: 11). Democracy, in Machiavelli's view, would therefore denote the rule of the lower classes or their respective political representatives only, to the exclusion of any privileged representation for the nobility – a concept that the Florentine theorist viewed as both dangerous and implausible.

Recognizing the nobility's inherently greater sway within any government, regardless of its form, as both a political fact and an important source of stability, Machiavelli doesn't strive to abolish classes within society, or to formulate a government that would provide for truly equal

representation; instead, he uses the nobility's political influence as the foundation of government in a society whose every further development represents a step toward both greater contestatory, as well as participatory[2] powers for the people. The resulting constitution is that of a mixed government, which, while being inherently advantageous for upper classes, still allows for the representation of all; flexible laws that enable progress toward greater popular representation are arguably its defining characteristic.

This brings us to Machiavelli's analysis of the very process of creation of what he considers to be the paramount example of a mixed regime: that of the Roman republic. Seeing as the nobility held greater sway within the senate (McCormick 2001: 300), Rome didn't have a true mixed government in the early stages of the republic's existence, immediately after the abolishment of the principality; the crucial political development that brought about the mixed regime was the introduction of popular tribunes. Machiavelli's highly original and controversial analysis of this process is rooted in the belief that it was no peaceful development, or that its result was a product of willing cooperation – he rather considers the process to be that of constant strife, and the product – a compromise born out of disunion.

Rather than being seen as insurmountable obstacles, disunion and strife are observed as contributing factors for the development of republicanism; Machiavelli writes that while he cannot deny the role that fortune and military might played in ensuring Rome's dominance, he believes that "those who damn the tumults between the nobles and the plebs blame those things that were the first cause of keeping Rome free and that they consider the noises and the cries that would arise in such tumults more than the good effects that they engendered" (Machiavelli 1998: 16). In this observation, Machiavelli calls attention to the fact that a development engulfed in turmoil and riddled with obstacles isn't necessarily negative – our judgment of it should be based on its consequences, rather than its troubled process.

In what is possibly the most crucial portion of this chapter, Machiavelli writes that one cannot in any mode, with reason, "call a republic disordered where there are so many examples of virtue; for good examples rise from

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2   It should be noted that Machiavelli's position on the issue of democracy has been the subject of debates among interpreters for some time. Phillip Pettit suggests that the political institutions proposed by Machiavelli are limited to contestatory democracy, for fear of a possible tyranny of the majority (Pettit 1999: 293-294), while John McCormick criticizes this view, insisting that only participatory democracy can provide the people with the means to oppose the influence of the nobility in practice, as well as in theory (McCormick 2003: 633).

good education, good education from good laws, and good laws from those tumults that many inconsiderately damn. For whoever examines their end well will find that they have engendered not any exile or violence unfavorable to the common good but laws and orders in benefit of public freedom" (Machiavelli 1998: 16). This paragraph represents the central point of Machiavelli's separation from the republican tradition, in both its classical and renaissance stage, as "those who damn the tumults between the nobles and the plebs" is his dismissal of the observations of Titus Livy, as well those of some of Machiavelli's contemporaries.

As his analysis of disorder shows, strife, while an inherently destabilizing, but, as he argues, unavoidable process, may lead to good outcomes; however, they are by no means guaranteed. Further analysis will show that the only way for strife to produce generally beneficial outcomes is for it to be kept in check, directed and control – the crucial characteristics, or lack thereof will present the basis for the key distinction between the concepts of *social discord* and *social conflict*, respectively. In this regard, it's interesting to note that essentially the same process, with only seemingly slight variances in its development based on a number of factors, resulted in the creation of the institution of popular tribunes and the development or republicanism in one instance, and in its fall in the other.

With the introduction of popular tribunes, the Roman republic had finally fully realized the constitution of a mixed regime – the consuls represented the principality, the senate – the aristocracy, and the tribunes represented democracy within the mixed government. The chief characteristics of the process that brought it about, and that essentially continued to develop and evolve until the rise of the empire, are internal disunion and flexible laws, which Machiavelli contrasts with the more serene, inflexible systems of Sparta and Venice (Machiavelli 1998: 18). As his argument follows, internal strife and a flexible legal and governmental system is ideal for an ambitious republic, engaging in constant territorial expansion, while a more stable system should be the cornerstone of development of republics that don't pursue conquest in general. To describe the choice between political and legal flexibility and stability, Machiavelli uses the metaphor of entrusting the *guardianship over freedom* to either the people or the nobles (Machiavelli 1998: 17); the merits of his argument aside, this formulation will be shown to be highly problematic later in this paper.

An important broader theoretical view that can be derived from Machiavelli's analysis of the overthrow of king Tarquinius and the rise of the early Roman republic, is that no matter the amount of mutual interest

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or benefit, differences between classes and factions within society, as well as the resulting strife between them can never be fully abridged. Even so, the fact that these groups nonetheless always have common interest by virtue of belonging to the society is of paramount importance – it essentially forms the very foundation of the possibility that social strife may result in beneficial outcomes.

Before proceeding with the introduction of the concepts of *social discord* and *social conflict* and their respective application to the analysis of Machiavelli's republicanism, it's also important to point out that while the Florentine theorist considers that "the end of the people is more decent than that of the great, since the great want to oppress and the people want not to be oppressed" (Machiavelli 1998: 39), he realizes that the inherently honest intentions of the people can nevertheless lead to ruinous consequences, and that they often do. This is part of the reason why he recognizes the greater noble influence in politics as both a necessity and a source of stability; the outcomes of clamors for equality, such as the disastrous rule of the decemvirate, are the primary reason for his opposition to any attempt at abolishing classes.

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2. Social discord and social conflict

Machiavelli establishes the disunion between the plebs and the Roman senate as a crucial moment in the development of republicanism; however, he doesn't use it as the foundation of a broader concept which could be applied in order to better interpret the role of various political institutions and practices, both within historical Roman republicanism, and in Machiavelli's own prescriptions for sound political practice. In this chapter, I will introduce and define the concept of *social discord*, while contrasting it with that of *social conflict*; in the final chapter, I will apply the concept as a means of interpreting the various aforementioned institutions and practices, arguing that it can be considered the foundational principle of Machiavelli's republicanism.

The idea that harmony, whether attained through more clearly defined class roles, or by giving aristocracy an even greater role within the government (McCormick 2001: 298), was a necessary condition for stability, was prominent in classical political thought – in that regard, Machiavelli's insistence on the potential positive outcomes of discord present a stark contrast. Nonetheless, seeing as we intuitively believe that unity and order benefit society, whereas strife and discord harm it, the question has to be asked: why discord as a foundational principle? Why not harmony?

The answer lies beyond the *Discourses*, in Machiavelli's *The Prince*, where he states that "since my intent is to write something useful to whoever understands it, it has appeared to me more fitting to go directly to the thing than to the imagination of it. And many have imagined republics and principalities that have never been seen or known to exist in truth; for it is so far from how one lives to how one should live that he who lets go of what is done for what should be done learns his ruin rather than his preservation" (Machiavelli 1998: 61). It could be argued that this quote represents the quintessential foundation of Machiavelli's realism: it serves as a clear statement of his goals in regard to establishing principles upon which a state should be founded, excluding any possibility of introducing metaphysical, ontological or even idealistic political elements as part of its constitution.

Of course, whether what Machiavelli considers realism is actually too harsh and whether it descends into pessimism remains an open question. Nevertheless, the quote from *The Prince* helps us understand the connection between Machiavelli's realism and his republicanism – in order to insure a republic's stability and development, it has to founded on the basis of, perhaps even harshly realistic principles, lest it be doomed to quickly collapse. As such, the idea of harmony is a priori excluded as impossible – a decision that, again, might be deemed too pessimistic, but that nevertheless serves as a cautiously conceived guarantee of a republic's very possibility in a world defined by dangerous ambitions of both those inside the state and those outside of it.

To formulate the concept of *social discord*, I take Machiavelli's position regarding the benefits of disunion between the senate and the people of Rome for the development of republicanism as a basis and proceed to build upon it, creating a principle that can be defined and applied to the interpretation of Machiavelli's work. The fact that conflict of interests and strife between classes and factions within society are an immutable part of political life represents the basis of this principle; the concept of *social discord* itself, more narrowly defined, comprehends that disunion and strife are, therefore, *substantial* and *permanent*, but *incomplete*. What do all of these characteristics mean individually and as a whole?

Firstly, the idea that strife is *substantial* means that classes and factions within society aren't engaged in conflict over *trivial* or *temporary* matters – their interests are *substantially* different due to the fact that the growing of one side's influence often comes at the cost of that of the other side's. Note that this does not mean, however, that the possibility of common interest is excluded.

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Secondly, social strife is *permanent* because, regardless of the level of cooperation and the number of areas of common interest, classes and factions will *always* retain substantial differences. In context of the Roman republic, this is perfectly exemplified by the fact that even after the overthrow of king Tarquinius, strife between the plebs and the senate was merely postponed until after his death, whereupon distrust and disunion were quickly reenkindled. In this regard, Machiavelli's theory sharply contrasts with the ideal of a classless society – in fact, he believes that any attempt to create such a society by necessity degenerates into the collapse of republicanism and the rise of tyranny, which will be discussed in more detail in the final chapter of this paper.

Finally, *incompleteness* can rightly be considered the most important characteristic of the concept of *social discord* – its defining characteristic. It alone accounts for the fact that despite the *substantiality* of strife, as well as its *permanence*, disunion, if approached as an opportunity, rather than a liability can, indeed, be used as both the foundation of republicanism, as well as an instrument for its continual development. The fact that strife is incomplete is especially important to point out as part of the outlaying of *social discord* because the concept's other two characteristics might imply a pessimistically harsh view of strife that leaves no room for cooperation.

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Completeness is crucially important in this regard, as it would imply that groups within society are necessarily conflicted over *every* relevant social issue, or that, in a somewhat milder theoretical, but no less dangerous practical sense, they *perceive* each other as such. *Incompleteness* of strife between classes and factions implies that, assuming their readiness to compromise and cooperate with each other – in other words, to promote their interests as compatible with those of the whole society, there is a chance that, as Jean-Jacques Rousseau puts it, "the general will would always emerge from the large number of small differences, and the decision would always be good." (Rousseau 1999: 66)

The concept of *social discord* therefore comprehends the inevitable fact of strife between the various classes and factions within society, but, nonetheless, leaves room for compromise between them, paving the way toward reaching common interest through *moderate, limited* antagonism. *Social conflict*, on the other hand, would mean something different entirely – it is questionable whether any common interest could be identified under the assumption of conflict. Yet it need not be caused by an actual desire of one class or faction to subdue all others and attain complete

dominance; all that is needed is for its motivation to be perceived as such – the cause of *social conflict* usually isn't a group's actual desire for dominance, so much as its rivals' fear of its power. It is that fear that drives groups to take reckless action in defense of their position, often making things worse by paving the way to power for those that seek to use instability to their advantage.

Another important characteristic of *social conflict* that distinguishes it from *social discord* is that while the latter concept implies a fluctuating, but constant state, the former points to the need for one side's victory over the other. As Machiavelli's analysis of the decline of the Roman republic shows, such a victory is impossible, and any hope to the contrary merely inspires rash actions that inevitably lead to tyranny – the tyrants often being those who presented themselves as protectors of the oppressed.

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The defining contrast between *social discord* and *social conflict* could, therefore be made by describing strife within the former as substantial, permanent and *incomplete*, and as substantial, permanent and *complete* within the latter. The concepts are indeed very similar, but the subtle distinction accounts for the fact that one represents the foundation of a republic's stability and development, whereas the other signifies its impending downfall. That, however, still leaves us with the question of what complete strife between different groups within the same society would entail.

As I pointed out earlier, the very fact that certain conflicted classes and factions are part of the same society means, by necessity, that they share at least some common interests. How, then, can complete strife arise spontaneously? The simple answer is that, no matter what, it can't; however, the fact that strife cannot naturally be complete doesn't bar the possibility of it being *perceived* as such. Taking the example of strife between the plebeians and the patricians in Rome, that will later be analyzed in more detail, the plebeians don't have to actually attempt to destroy the privileges of the nobles, nor do the patricians need to actually attempt to fully subjugate the people – one side's mere perception of the motives of its opposition as such can be the spark that ignites *social conflict*.

Because of the subtlety in the *social discord – social conflict* distinction, the process of the former's degeneration into the latter is very difficult to trace accurately. However, due to its enormous potential theoretical value for the further analysis of Machiavelli's work, as well as the explanation of various developments that caused the deterioration of the Roman

republic and the rise of the empire, it is well worth investigating. The subtle differences, again, make specifying exact causes practically impossible; however, various factors that contribute to this process can be specified – and, in fact, some of them were specified by Machiavelli himself.

One of the crucial factors contributing to the degeneration of *social discord* into *social conflict* is intense political polarization, especially one that leads to the establishment of factions that continue to deepen the rift. Machiavelli was fiercely critical of the formation of factions and parties, perceiving it as a manifestation of hatred and division within society (Machiavelli 1998: 27). In terms of historical and contemporary examples, he directed the majority of his criticism towards his home city of Florence, the developments in which, in the context of the aforementioned dichotomy, could be view as a product of *social conflict*, as opposed to those of *social discord* in Rome: the level of political division in Florence caused the formation of factions, which in turn, undermined social reform and contributed to the maintenance of a high level of corruption (Cabrini 2010: 129).

Building upon Machiavelli's critique of factions, Jean-Jacques Rousseau argued that, given the difference between separate interests being permeated without factions, direct democracy on the level of legislation is the optimal means for achieving the *general will*, or common interest: ""In truth", says Machiavelli, "some divisions within states are harmful, and some are helpful. Those are harmful which are accompanied by parties and factions; helpful, those which subsist without organized parties and factions. The founder of a republic, being unable to prevent dissention within the state, must at least prevent the existence of faction."" (Rousseau 1999: 67)

The primary cause of the factions' negative influence on society is the fact that, through gaining power, they go beyond their original role of political representation, and, gradually separating from their constituency, begin to develop unique interests, increasingly different from, and incompatible with those of both their constituents and the whole society. While not technically a political party, the Roman decemvirate, which will later be considered in detail, represents a good example of this development.

Another relevant factor that may be identified as one of the primary causes of the degeneration of *social discord* into *social conflict* is the political representation's extreme ambition, regardless of which class the politicians represent. As opposed to constructive, moderate ambition,

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directed toward realizing factional interests compatible with those of society as a whole, extreme ambition is manifested in attempts to increase one's power by subverting that of others. The representation of the nobility, which Machiavelli perceives as the most ambitious class in society (Machiavelli 1998: 39), presents a particular danger in this regard; however, counterintuitive as it may seem, the people's representatives may pose an equal, if not even greater threat for the republic's stability.

Having been entrusted with the task of preserving freedom through checking noble ambition and protecting the people from them, the people's representatives (popular tribunes, in case of ancient Rome) are expected to counter the nobility's attempts at seizing more power. However, what happens when popular representatives, or those styling themselves as such, take to introducing measures designed not to control the nobility, but to eliminate all its privileges, allegedly as part of developing a just, classless society? Power plays of this kind usually involve the creation of a new political elite, one that often ends up becoming more powerful and dangerous that the one it vowed to displace.

The third and, possibly, most relevant factor in the degeneration of *social discord* into *social conflict* is simultaneously a crucial element for the development of republicanism – the key difference being in its amount and intensity: namely, one faction's or class' *fear* of another. Fear, when moderate and justified, leads to appropriate measures and necessary precautions that prevent every individual, class or faction from attaining too much power; exaggerated and based upon wrong perception of motivations and actions of others, it leads to measures that permanently destabilize the balance of power between classes and factions, undermining the very foundations of republicanism. Whereas extreme ambition drives factions to pursue their goals independent of, and often even contrary to, those of society, extreme fear creates a perception that their opposition is doing exactly that, leading to equally disastrous outcomes.

3. Social discord as the foundation of republicanism

Machiavelli views disunion, at the very least, as an important instance in the development of republicanism in ancient Rome, crediting it with being a key factor for the preservation of freedom in general and the creation of the institution of popular tribunes in particular (Machiavelli 1998: 16). In the previous chapter, I argued that a broader concept of *social discord* can, not only be derived on the basis of Machiavelli's view of the potential benefits of disunion, but also understood as the

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foundation of his republicanism. In this chapter, I aim to show that by analyzing further chapters of the *Discourses* through the lens of *social discord*, observed as a principle, as opposed to merely a developmental instance, we can deepen our understanding of other concepts within Machiavelli's work, primarily through explaining their role, as well as the underlying causes for their introduction.

Postulating *social discord* as the foundational principle of republicanism bears the implication that disunion is society's defining characteristic – one that, if left unchecked, and allowed to descend into boundless strife, can cause society's downfall, and yet also one that, if properly utilized through the adaptation of laws and practices within society, can be the primary source of both its stability and its further development. In this regard, a republic, being no exception to the rule, is actually its greatest potential beneficiary, as the inherently more flexible legal system characteristic of it can be constantly molded and adapted. Through the analysis of various examples, ranging from the broader issues of the social role of morality and religion, to the more concrete ones of specific institutions, I will argue that their societal role can be understood as having been built upon the foundational principle of *social discord*, their positive role being principally owed to attunement with it. Additionally, I will argue that certain crucial developments leading to the Roman republic's demise can be shown as paradigm examples of *social discord's* degeneration into *social conflict*.

Observed through the lens of *social discord*, the various concepts and institutions that Machiavelli analyzes are meant to either lessen the impact of strife and disunion through rebalancing the scales of political power, often by introducing measures that make it harder for the privileged to rule unchecked, or to broaden the perception of common interest by imbuing all citizens with a sense of belonging to the same society, regardless of class distinctions, the ultimate goal of both being to maintain *social discord* and prevent its degeneration into *social conflict*.

Let us begin, then, with the broader topics of morality and religion. While they can justifiably be viewed as an important characteristic of republicanism, both ancient and modern, civic virtues have a peculiar position within Machiavelli's thought, as his somewhat inconsistent position toward morality may even be described as contradictory in some instances. In both of his most renowned works, he takes a very pessimistic view of human nature, insisting that "men are so unquiet that however little the door to ambition is opened to them, they at once forget every

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love that they had placed in the prince because of his humanity" (Machiavelli 1998: 263-264), and, furthermore, that "men deceive themselves believing that through humility they will conquer pride" (Machiavelli 1998: 156), which is mainly why he advises maintaining power and control through fear, instead of love (Machiavelli 1998: 66).

It could be argued, though, that because these instances implicitly address governing a principality, the advice that Machiavelli gives here may not apply in case of a republic, within which, rather than essentially being an obstacle on the prince's path to power, the people are political constituents with a vested interest in the society's development and prosperity. With that in mind, Machiavelli's opinion that civic virtues play an important role within a republic, conditioned upon the assumption that, despite inherent flaws, people are capable of change, seemingly inconsistent with his pessimistic views of human nature, can be better understood. While presenting a stark contrast to Christian virtues, still the norm in the early renaissance, civic virtues also embody the ideal of cooperation and sacrifice of personal interests for the common good: instead of compassion, mercy and love of God, Machiavelli names justice, discipline, courage, vigor and fortitude as chief virtues (Berlin 1980: 45).

Their primary goal is to expand the perception of common interest, potentially reducing the number of issues that cause strife and increase the number of those that encourage cooperation. By viewing themselves as citizens first, and members of a class or faction second, citizens will tend to think of others not as inherent opponents, but as potential partners. Of course, this will not pave the way toward harmony, nor will it extinguish disunion, but it will deescalate it, lessening the negative impact that strife could have upon society's stability and development. In addition, encouraging citizens to recognize virtue in sacrificing personal interests for the common good, while it has no particular effect on strife, can somewhat remedy the inherent human flaws that Machiavelli discusses throughout his works.

Religion, as understood by the Florentine theorist, can be viewed much in the same way as civic virtues, at least in terms of its relation to *social discord*. Completely disregarding the context of spirituality, Machiavelli plainly views religion as nothing but a tool to maintain control, indistinguishable from superstition and gullibility (Machiavelli 1998: 37). He even goes so far as to claim that Rome owes the success of its armies, the spirit of its people and the morality of its citizens more to Numa Pompilius, who constituted religion in Rome, than to Romulus, the legendary founder of the city (Machiavelli 1998: 34-35).

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Encouraging the use (and misuse) of religion to justify political and military decisions, Machiavelli openly states that rulers should favor and magnify all things that arise in favor of religion, even those they deem false (Machiavelli 1998: 37). In this regard, Machiavelli's reasoning harkens back to the political elitism characteristic of the classical period, as opposed to the insistence on transparency as a means of both legitimating the government and enabling voters to make informed decisions, characteristic of the modern period. Viewing all sophistication as a potential source of corruption, he claims that "whoever wished to make a republic in the present times would find it easier among mountain men, where there is no civilization, than among those who are used to living in cities, where civilization is corrupt; and a sculptor will get a beautiful statue more easily from coarse marble than from one badly blocked out by another" (Machiavelli 1998: 35).

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The essential meaning of this quote – that rather than being a danger due to the fact that it leaves people open to manipulation, the lack of sophistication is actually a quality, as the simplicity it entails serves as a source of natural virtue, will serve as a central concept of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*. While generally favoring a high level of democracy, Machiavelli's position on religion implies the belief that due to their difficulty, as well as their potential consequences for society, certain decisions must be left in the hands of either the political, or the military elite, depending on the situation – the manipulation of omens and the misuse of religion being there to give such decisions legitimacy and public support.

In terms of its relation to the concept of social discord, religion serves a relatively similar role as civic virtues, and is, in fact, intertwined with them to a degree. Much like justice, fortitude, courage and vigor, religion is meant to inspire people with a sense of higher purpose – in this case merely an instrument meant to further develop social bonds and cohesion through shared values, consequentially reducing the intensity of strife.

As opposed to morality and religion, which are meant to reduce the impact of disunion by broadening areas of shared interest and inspiring selflessness and dedication to the common good, specific institutions like those of popular tribunes or public accusations tackle the problem of strife directly, seeking to rebalance the scales of political power. Seeing as Machiavelli perceived the introduction of popular tribunes as an immediate positive outcome of disunion, the developmental instance itself needs no particular elaboration, as it represents the basis for the concept

of *social discord*, discussed in the previous chapter of this paper. What does require additional analysis, though, is Machiavelli's following inquiry into whether the *guardianship over freedom* should be entrusted to the people or to the nobles.

Using the examples of Rome, Venice and Sparta, Machiavelli presents a brief overview of these countries' history and development, arguing that the guardianship over freedom should be entrusted to the nobles in relatively peaceful, non-expansionist states like Venice and Sparta, whereas it should be entrusted to the people in an aggressive, expansionist state like Rome (Machiavelli 1998: 18). In this regard, if *social discord* were to be understood as merely a developmental instance, little fault could be found in this analysis; however, if we approach it as a broader principle, the very idea of *entrusting guardianship over freedom* to any class or faction becomes highly problematic.

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Recall that the concept of *social discord* comprehends strife as *substantial* and *permanent*: every political body within the state possesses its own unique interests, often incompatible with, or even contrary to those of society as a whole. Therefore, it follows that the political representation of *every* class or faction should be distrusted and regarded as a potential threat, which necessitates control through constant rebalancing of political power. Entrusting the *guardianship over freedom* to the representatives of any single class or faction would amount to institutionally off-balancing the ever elusive distribution of power, creating the possibility of tyranny of the minority/majority, depending on the ruling class.

Social discord, presenting both a threat and an opportunity, depending on how it's handled, points, instead, to a solution somewhat different than both options that Machiavelli considers: namely, rather than sacrificing political progress for stability or vice versa (Machiavelli 1998: 18), *guardianship over freedom*, if the concept should even be used, should be entrusted to all classes and factions and their respective representatives equally, creating balance between progress and stability, and ensuring that every political body within the state has just enough power to *resist* usurpation, but never enough to *usurp*. It could be argued that Machiavelli himself doesn't arrive at this solution primarily because of his understanding of the people as inherently benign political actors, in comparison to the nobles (Machiavelli 1998: 39). His analysis of the Roman agrarian reforms and the rise of the decemvirate, however, point to a somewhat more ominous reality.

The institution of public accusations, a major concept in the *Discourses*, which Machiavelli explores throughout several chapters, formally comprehends that every citizen, commoner or noble, is eligible to be publically accused and tried "when they sin in anything against the free state" (Machiavelli 1998: 23). Seeing as positions of higher office were practically reserved for the nobility, however, public accusations were, in practice, mainly meant to give the people and their representatives a means to keep higher officials accountable, as well as to punish purely partisan actions, aimed at increasing the nobility's power at the expense of the people's freedom (McCormick 2001: 305).

A prominent example of this practice was the public accusation of Coriolanus, an opponent of the popular faction that attempted to starve the people into submission to the nobility: by forcing him to defend his actions in a public trial, as Machiavelli argues, the tribunes not only acted justly, but also saved his life, as popular anger would otherwise have led to him being lynched in front of the offices of the senate that pardoned him (Machiavelli 1998: 24). He proceeds to make the case that even if a publically accused representative were to successfully plead his case before the public, popular anger would still be quenched, as the orderly manner in which public accusations are conducted would in and of itself inspire a sense of justice and fairness, simultaneously allowing the people to vent their anger and resentment toward the nobility (Machiavelli 1998: 24).

The relation of public accusations to the concept of *social discord* is highlighted by two key moments: first, the orderly manner in which they make prosecution possible and second, the mode for venting popular anger that Machiavelli mentions near the end of the chapter. In many ways, the institution of public accusations could be considered the most apparent and direct tackling with the issue of *social discord*, acknowledging the fact that dangerous and potentially fatal strife exists between the classes, and controlling and regulating it through orderly, lawful process which prevents its degeneration into anarchy. The example of Coriolanus' public trial and its outcome paradigmatically represents the product of limited, positive disunion, as opposed to the full-blown conflict that would have ensued were it not for the institutional means for its control.

Machiavelli contrasts public accusations with pernicious calumnies, frivolous charges that cannot be legally resolved and are purposefully put forward to damage a citizen's reputation and political standing (Machiavelli 1998: 26). It should be noted that, while describing public accusations as a means of assuring accountability for all citizens, he essentially treats

them as an instrument entrusted to the *guardians of freedom*. The implicit misconception that on the basis of its benignity, one class can be entrusted with that role may account for the apparent lack of motivation to level public accusations against those claiming to represent the people's interests, as well as the reason why tyranny in Rome, from its subtlest to its most direct forms came from an unexpected source, which brings us to the issues of the rise of the decemvirate and the agrarian law, as well as their position within the framework of *social discord* and *social conflict*.

These two developments have a unique role within Machiavelli's understanding of the fall of the Roman republic, with the first representing a critical, but borderline issue that the republic could still come back from, despite the deep division it created, and the second representing an essential beginning of the end that marked the inevitable descent toward tyranny. On a broader level, both developments point to a frightening reality: that the worst of consequences can emerge from the best of intentions, in both cases rooted in the people's defined role as the *guardians of freedom*.

Machiavelli accounts that the people of Rome, having been inspired by the example of the Athenian statesman Solon, decided to partially suspend existing representatives and institutions, entrusting a new ruling body, the decemvirate, led by Appius Claudius, with the power to change existing laws and enact new ones, based on the promise of a more equal and just society (Machiavelli 1998: 85), with a system of laws in which ""every individual citizen could feel he had not only *consented* to accept, but had actually himself *proposed*"" (McCormick 2001: 308). The reduction of consular and tribunal authority led to a regression in republicanism, due to a reduction of institutional diversity (McCormick 2001: 308), and Claudius, who had once been cruel to the people, reverted to his old ways upon establishing absolute authority; having seen the error of their ways, the people turned back to the nobles, the combined strength of both classes and their representation barely being enough to reassert the authority of republican institutions (Machiavelli 1998: 87).

The agrarian law, on the other hand, created an even greater divide that continued to spiral into ever greater mistrust and careless partisan decisions, made at the cost of the common good, with a similar, honest strive toward greater freedom and equality being the impetus for its enactment. The law had a twofold function – to limit the size of land legally eligible for ownership, and to oblige the senate to give conquered land to the people of Rome; the real motivation for the law's introduction, which also accounts for the vagueness of its second function, was the tribunes'

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intended goal of directly reducing the Senate's power through institutional restrictions, as well as indirectly reducing the nobility's power through the limitation of wealth. The Senate's and the nobility's foreseeable response was sending armies further and further away, making conquered land increasingly less attractive for commoners to populate, deepening the rift that would eventually result in the rise of the empire – for this reason, Machiavelli describes the law as being "the cause of the destruction of the republic" (Machiavelli 1998: 79).

It could be argued that the greater long-term destructiveness of the agrarian law, compared to that of the creation of the decemvirate may be attributed to the subtlety of its functions: rather than directly suspending existing institutions and replacing them with what easily amounts to an obvious foundation of tyranny, the purpose of the agrarian law was to subversively undermine the power of the nobility and its representation. Therefore, rather than creating a new political force that would quickly prove itself to be the enemy of both classes, thus enabling them to hastily make amends and unite against it, as was the case with the decemvirate, the agrarian law created what in the beginning seemed like a minor political rift, no more deserving of attention than any factor of the ever permeating disunion, but which turned out to be the first in a long and seemingly unstoppable chain of events that would lay the groundwork for the rise of the empire.

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These two defining instances of the fall of the Roman republic also represent paradigm examples for distinguishing *social discord* from *social conflict* on the level of their defining characteristic: *complete*, as opposed to *incomplete* strife, and disunion that provides a basis for the common good, as opposed to that which comes at the cost of it. In this regard, it's important to emphasize again that since classes and factions are still parts of the same society, regardless of their vast differences, *complete* strife can never naturally arise between them: rather, its most common cause is the *mutual perception* of classes and factions as completely opposed to each other – a result of overreaching ambition, unjustified fear, or both.

The most important characteristic of *social discord* – its defining moment that enables it to serve as the foundation of republicanism and the basis for attaining the common good in spite of conflicting interests, is the concept that disunion can only be beneficial if it is moderate, as manifested by classes and factions pursuing their interests as compatible with those of others and of the society as a whole. By contrast, *social conflict* entails a pursuit of one group's interests to the exclusion of those

of others, and without regard for potential damage to society. It could be argued that, on a basic level, the introduction of tribunes as well as the creation of the decemvirate and the enactment of the agrarian law, were all motivated by the same inherently honest popular strive toward greater freedom and equality; what, then, made the first change positive, and the other two negative?

While Machiavelli commends the flexible nature of the Roman constitution, citing its ever changing nature as a source of resourcefulness in the face of various "accidents", internal and external changes and threats that may have destabilized other republics (McCormick 1993: 894), he neglects, to a certain degree, the importance that foundational stability plays even in flexible systems – for a republic's development and progress, *substantial* change is essential, but *radical* change remains potentially fatal. There can be no doubt that the introduction of popular tribunes represented a limitation of the nobility's power, an unwanted, but necessary compromise that the privileged had to consent to; however, it was no foundational impact to their social position and political standing.

The creation of the decemvirate and the enactment of the agrarian law, however, were radical, albeit benevolently conceived attempts at drastically redistributing power in the short run, and conceivably, eliminating the class system in the long run. The fact that social discord can be argued to be the foundational concept of Machiavelli's republicanism points to his uniquely unapologetic realism: while he implicitly recognizes the injustice inherent in the very existence of classes (Machiavelli 1998: 39), he also sees that injustice as a reality that demands recognition and compromise, as implied by his statement regarding idealism and focusing on what should be done rather than on what is done (Machiavelli 1998: 61).

The two major developments leading up to the fall of the Roman republic further illuminate the relevance of the *incompleteness* of strife within social discord, in spite of its *permanence* and *substantiality*. What follows from Machiavelli's analysis is that *complete* strife, the definitive characteristic of *social conflict*, never leads to the abolition of class system or to the rise of a more just and equal society in general. In fact, the possibility of victory, the driving force behind a class' or a faction's strife to subdue its opposition is an illusion that only serves the demagogues capable of cunningly manipulating the ensuing chaos; thus, rather than ending in the nobility's unopposed domination, or the people's freedom and equality, social conflict, by necessity, results in the victory of a third party – one that manages to usurp power by representing itself as the

people's champion, only to later reveal itself as the subjugator of both the people and the nobility. While the rise of the decemvirate represents a perfect example of this process within Machiavelli's analysis, it should be noted that the historical developments that followed, especially those in the first half of the twentieth century further support this view.

A crucial, yet easily overlooked point regarding these developments is that, while both the creation of the decemvirate and the enactment of the agrarian law could, to some degree, be blamed on the nobility's abuses of power, neither were the result of its direct action, but rather, those of the people's initiatives for greater freedom and equality – in fact, while formally assigning the duty of *guardianship over freedom* to the people, a concept that was shown to be problematic regardless of the republic's constitution, Machiavelli levels strong criticism against both it and the senate for their role in these developments (Machiavelli 1998: 79, 85). His realistic approach to political theory is defined by its emphasis on consequences of actions, rather than the motivation behind them: regardless of the people's unprivileged position, and its inherently "more decent" ends (Machiavelli 1998: 39), the results of these disastrous initiatives imply that in spite of the benignity of its motives, every class and faction within society, given too much power, represents a potential threat to republicanism.

This gives further credence to the alternative presented above – that as a foundation of both stability and development, *guardianship over freedom*, if the concept should be used at all, can only be equally entrusted to all classes and factions within society. In keeping with the implications of Machiavelli's further analysis, it could be said that this concept comprehends moderate actions of the various groups' members, both to their group's benefit compatible with the common good, and to the damage of those seeking to usurp it; of course, as clearly implied by Machiavelli's observation of developments that led to the fall of the Roman republic, both moderation and common good are seemingly as elusive as the permeating strife which they must constantly mitigate and compensate for, in an effort to prevent *social discord* from degenerating into *social conflict*.

Conclusion

When both the immediate impact and the lasting popularity of Machiavelli's work are considered, there can be no doubt that the Florentine theorist was ahead of his time: his unique contribution to political philosophy, in the form of republicanism founded upon harsh and unforgiving realism

remains as influential as it is controversial. It could be argued that the controversy of his work owes much to the popularity of the short, brisk and poignant *Prince's* overshadowing of his *magnum opus*, the *Discourses on Livy*. The latter work, a historical and conceptual analysis of republicanism, remained largely obscure, primarily due to its complexity, which still inspires vastly different and strongly conflicting interpretations of Machiavelli's thought.

The discrepancies between interpretations can, at least in part be attributed to a lack of central principle within Machiavelli *magnum opus*. Primarily a work of political theory, sociology and history, the lack of broader encompassing concepts in the *Discourses*, should be attributed not to his failure to grasp and realize the philosophical potential of his work, but to his lack of desire to do so, which is consistent with John Pocock's description of Machiavelli as a "complex and deliberately enigmatic writer" (Pocock 2010: 144). Nonetheless, I argued that the introduction of such a principle would allow us to see his work in a new light, enhancing our understanding of not only his work in general, but also of the various crucial concepts therein in particular.

The subtle, yet permeating influence of *social discord* serves as a strong foundation for its enactment as such a principle: while Machiavelli approaches it as the source of a single, albeit highly relevant development of republicanism, the introduction of numerous other institutions and concepts meant to reduce strife and adapt society to it can be traced back to *social discord*. Rather than affirming its position as merely the source of a developmental instance, this overarching influence presents a basis for arguing its status as the foundational principle of Machiavelli's republicanism.

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Ivan Matić

Društvena disharmonija
kao temelj republikanizma u Makijavelijevoj misli

Apstrakt

Svrha ovog rada je uvođenje koncepta društvene disharmonije, na osnovu analize ranih poglavlja Makijavelijeve *Rasprave o prvoj dekadi Tita Livija*. Tvrdim da izvođenjem šireg filozofskog koncepta iz Makijavelijevog jedinstvenog stava da je nesloga između plebsa i senata učinila rimsku republiku slobodnom i moćnom (Machiavelli 1998: 16), možemo znatno da pospešimo naše razumevanje, ne samo originalnijih i kontroverznijih stavova u njegovom *magnum opusu* nego i njegove misli u celini. Pored toga, tvrdim da na osnovu analize ključnih momenata u okviru Makijavelijeve opservacije uspona i pada rimske republike kroz okvir *društvene disharmonije*, ovaj koncept može biti uspostavljen kao temelj njegovog razumevanja republikanizma, istovremeno kritikujući njegov opis naroda kao čuvara slobode. Konačno, suprotstavljam koncept *društvene disharmonije* konceptu *društvenog konflikta* – suptilna i naizgled zanemarljiva distinkcija, koja, prema mom razumevanju Makijavelijeve misli, ipak može da znači razliku između razvoja i prosperiteta republike, i njene prevremene propasti.

Ključne reči: Makijaveli, republikanizam, društvena disharmonija, društveni konflikt, rimska republika, plebs, senat, sloboda