The intricacies I am going to deal with will start with a little book written in Latin, published in Rome in 1623: *Paedia politices*, a title which I will translate, with a deliberate anachronism I will explain later, as *Elements of Politics*. The author, Kaspar Schoppe, better known by his Latinised name of Scioppius, was born in Bavaria in 1576 into a Lutheran family. In his youth he converted to Catholicism and went to Rome where he spent many years, protected by cardinals and popes. Scioppius loved literary fights. Until his death in 1649 he wrote numerous polemical works against the Protestants, against the Jesuits, and against Joseph Justus Scaliger (1540–1609), the famous scholar who was an arch-enemy of the Jesuits. He was included among the ‘gladiateurs’, or gladiators, of the Republic of Letters—a well-deserved label.

In his *Paedia politices*, dedicated to Cardinal Ludovico Ludovisi, Scioppius argued for an unpopular cause: rehabilitating Machiavelli, whose work had been included in the *Index of Forbidden Books* since 1559. In less than fifty pages Scioppius condensed the gist of an argument he had put forward in a lengthy *Apology for Machiavelli*, which circulated in manuscript form but remained unpublished. *Paedia politices* never mentions Machiavelli; but that missing name could not be missed. Typically, it pops up over and over again, written in a seventeenth-century hand, in the margins of the exemplar of the first edition of the *Paedia* I consulted at the UCLA Research Library. Put in a nutshell, Scioppius’s argument was as follows: some unnamed writers on politics, whose works have been published with pontifical approval, have been repeatedly attacked, but unjustly, since they simply echoed arguments already advanced by Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas.

*This is the revised text of the Nicolai Rubinstein Lecture I delivered at Queen Mary, London, on 20 Mar. 2014. I am very grateful to Quentin Skinner for his invitation. Many thanks are due to Franco Bacchelli, Maria Luisa Catoni and Quentin Skinner for their criticism, to Maria Rosaria Manunta, Director of the Biblioteca Universitaria, Sassari, for her help in my research; to the anonymous readers of this Journal for their comments and suggestions.

1. K. Schoppe, *Autobiographische Texte und Briefe*, ed. K. Jaitner, 6 vols, Munich 2004–12.
2. C. Nisard, *Les gladiateurs de la République des Lettres au XVVe, XVIe et XVIIe siècles*, 2 vols, Paris 1860, II, pp. 1–206.
3. Ibid., pp. 155–57. M. d’Addio, *Il pensiero politico di Gaspare Scioppio e il machiavellismo del Seicento*, Milan 1962, pp. 383–574; G. Procacci, *Machiavelli nella cultura europea dell’età moderna*, Rome and Bari 1995, pp. 158–60. Here I am developing an argument I put forward in the following essays: ‘Machiavelli, l’eccezione e la regola. Linee di una ricerca in corso’, *Quaderni storici*, cxiv, 2003, pp. 195–213; and ‘Spuren einer Paradigmenabfolge. Machiavelli, Galilei und die Zensur der Gegenreformation’, in *Spuren lesen als Orientierungstechnik und Wissenskultur*, ed. S. Krämer, W. Kogge and G. Grube, Frankfurt am Main 2007, pp. 257–80.
4. UCLA, Special Collections, Z. 233. A 42. S373. 1623: Caspar Scioppius, *Paedia Politices sive Suppetiae logicae scriptoribus politicos latae adversus AIAIAIEUEIAN et acerbatem plebeiorum quorundam judiciorum*, Rome 1623.
Before examining the argument in detail, its long-term impact must be noted. The article ‘Machiavel’ in Pierre Bayle’s *Dictionnaire historique et critique* includes a footnote quoting a) a long passage in which the German scholar Hermann Conring (1606–81) argued that Machiavelli had plagiarised Aristotle; and b) a long passage in which the French libertin érudit Gabriel Naudé (1600–53) argued that Machiavelli had plagiarised Thomas Aquinas. Both quotations (Bayle particularly relished the latter) went back to Scipio’s *Paedia politices*: Naudé had praised the book in his *Considérations politiques sur les coups d’état* (1639); Conring republished it with a commentary, along with Naudé’s *Bibliographie politique* (1673).

So far, I have been walking along a well-trodden path. The texts mentioned hitherto have been repeatedly listed and sometimes closely analysed as examples of the enduring, contentious reception of Machiavelli’s writings. Obviously, both Machiavellianism and its counterpart, anti-Machiavellianism, ought not to be confused with Machiavelli, whose work defies the simplistic stereotypes, for and against, which have so often dominated the subsequent debates about it.

I am very sympathetic to those warnings. Moreover, I am receptive to the scholarship generated by them. For a long time scholars have been trying to put Machiavelli back into the historical context which was his own; only in that context can his writings be read and analysed without distortion. And yet, inspired by old Nick (the Elizabethan nickname for the devil), I feel tempted to play the devil’s advocate. To what extent is the clear-cut distinction between the reception of a text and the analysis of a text intellectually productive?

Let me emphasise right away that I strongly object (as I have for many years) to neo-sceptical approaches arguing that all readings are equally permissible. I also object to those versions of reception theory which focus on the history of the different readings of a text, as an alternative, either tacit or explicit, to an effort to reconstruct its meaning. The reception of a work of art (or a novel or a philosophical work) is a very valuable field of inquiry, but should not be regarded as an alternative to philology: in fact, both approaches can fruitfully interact, on two grounds. First, and as I have suggested elsewhere, they can interact by developing (and reworking) the well-known distinction between the *etic* and the *emic* approaches as advanced by the anthropologist Kenneth Pike: historians start from questions—their questions—inevitably articulated in the observer’s anachronistic language;

5. Pierre Bayle, *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, 6th edn, 4 vols, Basel 1741, iii, pp. 244–49 (246 n. E). See Gabriel Naudé, *Considérations politiques sur les coups d’état*, ed. L. Marin and M. O. Perulli, Paris 1988, p. 92; idem, *Bibliographia politica, et Casparis Scioppii Paedia politices ut et ejusdem argumenti alia*, ed. H. Conring, Frankfurt am Main 1673.

6. It will suffice to evoke the title of Mario d’Addio’s massive tome on Scipio: *Il pensiero politico di Gaspare Scioppo e il machiavellismo del Seicento*, Milan 1962.

7. Q. Skinner, ‘Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas’, in his *Visions of Politics*, i, *Regarding Method*, Cambridge 2002, pp. 57–89 (first published in *History and Theory*, viii, 1969, pp. 3–53).

8. This seems to be a partial echo of the questions raised by Claude Lefort in his *Le travail de l’oeuvre. Machiavel*, Paris 1972. But my answers will be utterly different from his.
but those questions aim to rescue the actors’ answers, articulated in a language which is inevitably different from theirs. Translated into the language of reception theory, the etic level refers to the readers, the emic level to the text and its meaning. Here then comes my second point, which I would like to illustrate in my paper: the different readings of a text, if put back in their proper historical context, may help us to get closer to the meaning of the text on its own terms. In saying this, I am following the example of the great art historian Roberto Longhi (1890–1970), who brilliantly showed how connoisseurship may be oriented by a close historical analysis of the reception of a painting.

All this may sound too theoretical—too abstract. Let me go back to the case study I had begun to examine.

3.

As we have seen, in his Dictionnaire Bayle recorded two distinct accusations raised against Machiavelli: that he plagiarised Aristotle and that he plagiarised Thomas Aquinas. Both accusations went back (although in inverted form) to Scioppius, who in his Paedia politices had argued, in praise rather than as a criticism, that the sinister arguments ascribed to some unnamed ‘writers about politics’—i.e., Machiavelli—had been already put forward by Aristotle and Aquinas. I will explore the possibility that Scioppius’s reading, albeit rooted in the context of Counter-Reformation Rome, may shed some light on Machiavelli’s writings, written in Florence 100 years before. In other words, I will test the possibility that Scioppius’s historically located reading might have a referential element. (This may be the case with our readings as well.)

Let us start the test with a question: did Machiavelli read Aristotle’s Politics? An affirmative answer seems obvious, since Aristotle is explicitly mentioned in Machiavelli’s Discourses on Livy, III.26. Further, though debatable, evidence is provided by an exchange of letters between Francesco Vettori and Machiavelli at the end of August 1513. Vettori referred to Aristotle in a letter of 20 August. After arguing that the expansion of Swiss power had some intrinsic limitations, he cited an authority:

Because, if you read the book on Politics attentively and [look at] the republics of the past, you will find that a divided republic, like that one [the Swiss], cannot expand itself.

On 26 August, Machiavelli replied with impatience:

9. C. Ginzburg, ‘Our Words, and Theirs: A Reflection on the Historian’s Craft, Today’, in Historical Knowledge. In Quest of Theory, Method and Evidence, ed. S. Fellman and M. Rahikainen, Cambridge 2012, pp. 97–119.

10. R. Longhi, ‘Due dipinti inediti di Giovano Gerolamo Savoldo’ [1927], in his Saggi e ricerche: 1925–1928, 2 vols, Florence 1967, i, pp. 148–55. My perspective is therefore divergent from that of scholars who focus exclusively on the reception of Machiavelli’s work, notably Procacci (as in n. 3); and S. Anglo, Machiavelli. The First Century: Studies in Enthusiasm, Hostility, and Irrelevance, Oxford 2005.

11. Vettori to Machiavelli, 20 Aug. 1513, in Niccolò Machiavelli, Opere, ed. C. Vivanti, 3 vols, Turin 1997–2005, ii, p. 285: ‘perché, se voi leggerete bene la Politica, et le repubbliche che sono state, non troverrete che una repubblica, come quella [of the Swiss], divulsa, possa fare progresso.’
I don’t know what Aristotle says about divided [i.e., confederate] republics; but I do think carefully about what reasonably could be, what is and what has been.12

In his reply Machiavelli was reacting against a bookish approach to the reality of political life. Later, in the Discourses, Machiavelli tacitly accepted Vettori’s argument about the intrinsic limitations to the expansion of Swiss power.13 But my point here is that Vettori did not need to mention Aristotle’s name, since he took for granted Machiavelli’s familiarity with the Politics. A few months later, on 13 December, Machiavelli announced to Vettori the composition of Il principe:

I have ... composed a little book De principatibus, in which I delve as deeply as I can into reflections on this subject, debating what a principate is, what the species are, how they are gained, how they are kept and why they are lost.14

This résumé of the first eleven chapters of The Prince sounds (as has been noticed before) like a list of rubrics from Aristotle’s Politics.15 I am not trying to turn Machiavelli into an Aristotelian, which he was not. On a general level, he was certainly not a bookish man. But in the dedicatory letter to The Prince he insisted on his knowledge of the actions of great men, gained from ‘long experience in modern affairs and continual reading of ancient ones’.16 Those readings certainly included Aristotle’s Politics—but in which edition?

This second step of my ongoing test is less obvious than the previous one. The scholarly debate on Machiavelli’s sources has too often hinged on texts quoted from editions he could never have seen, sometimes written in languages (for instance, Greek) he was unable to read.17 One may seek a remedy to those anachronistic propensities by limiting our enquiry to the following three sources:18

12. Machiavelli to Vettori, 26 Aug. 1513, ibid., p. 289, and see p. 1567: ‘Né so quello si dica Aristotile delle republiche divulse; ma io penso bene quello che ragionevolmente potrebbe essere, quello che è, et quello che è stato’.

13. Niccolò Machiavelli, Discorsi, ii.4, in his Opere (as in n. 11), i, pp. 339–40, 1008–09.

14. Ibid., ii, p. 296: ‘io ho... composto uno opuscolo De principatibus; dove io mi profondo quanto io posso nelle cogitationi di questo subietto, disputando che cosa è principato, di quale specie sono, come e’ si acquistono, come e’ si mantengono, perché e’ si perdono’; Niccolò Machiavelli, The Prince and Other Works, tr., introd. and notes by A. H. Gilbert, New York 1946, p. 242.

15. The chasm between those chapters and the following ones was pointed out by Friedrich Meinecke in a controversial essay; see his introduction to Niccolò Machiavelli, Der Fürst und kleinere Schriften, tr. E. Merian-Genast, Berlin 1923, pp. 38–47.

16. Niccolò Machiavelli, Il Principe, in his Opere (as in n. 11), i, p. 117: ‘...una lunga esperienza delle cose moderne e una continua lezione delle antiche’; tr. Gilbert (as in n. 14), p. 93.

17. For example, in a recent book on Machiavelli’s Discourses, all the quotations from Aristotle’s Politics are taken from an edition of Leonardo Bruni’s translation published in Venice in 1542, 15 years after Machiavelli’s death. G. Pedullà, Machiavelli in tumulto. Conquista, cittadinanza e conflitto nei ‘Discorsi sulla prima deca di Tito Livio’, Rome 2011, p. 221. and passim, refers to ‘Aristotele, Politicorum libri, a cura di Raffaele Volterrano, traduzione di Leonardo Bruni, Venice, Hieronymus Scotus, 1542’. In fact, Raffaele Maffei, known as Volterrano (1451–1522), far from being the editor, was the author of the short ristampe introducing each book. A correct reference would cite Aristotle Stagiritae Politicorum ad Nicomachum lib. primus Raphaels Volterrani argumenta in codem, Leonardo Bruni interprete, Venice (Hieronymus Scotus) 1542 [=1543].

18. For these sources I have used the invaluable list provided in an appendix to Niccolò Machiavelli, The Discourses, tr. and ed. L. J. Walker, 2 vols, New Haven, CT 1950, pp. 273–77 (on Aristotle).
Aristotle's writings (including his *Politics* in three volumes, with commentaries by Averroes, Venice 1483; *Le livre de politiques d’Aristote*, Paris 1489, a French translation of the *Politics* by Nicolas Oresme; Leonardo Bruni's Latin translation of the *Politics*, with Thomas Aquinas’s commentary, Rome 1492.

The last edition (or possibly its reprint, published in Venice in 1500) is, I will argue, the edition Machiavelli read. This hypothesis, if proven, would imply a series of Chinese boxes, which I will open in reverse chronological order:

- the double accusation raised against Machiavelli that he plagiarised both Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas—as a caricature of
- the argument put forward by Scioppius, in which Machiavelli is presented implicitly as a follower of both Aristotle and Aquinas—as a simplified description of
- the strong impact on Machiavelli of his reading Aristotle’s *Politics* as commented by Thomas Aquinas. (To the best of my knowledge only one, earlier edition, published in 1478 in Barcelona, pointed out that the commentary’s second part had been written by a follower ‘and imitator’ of Thomas Aquinas, Peter of Auvergne).

The possibility that Machiavelli had read Aristotle’s *Politics* along with Thomas Aquinas’s commentary has been suggested in the past, notably by Leslie Walker. In his discussion of Thomas as a source of Machiavelli, however, Walker insisted mostly on *De regimine principum*. I will focus, on the contrary, on Aristotle’s *Politics*, and especially on the fifth book, as well as on the commentary allegedly written by Thomas Aquinas (in fact, by his follower, Peter of Auvergne).

19. For the Rome 1492 edition see below, section 5 and n. 22. The reprint is Thomas Aquinas, *In octo Politicorum Aristotelis libros cum textu eiusdem. Interprete Leonardo Aretino*, Venice 1500 (colophon: ‘Venetiis, impensis domini Andree Torresani de Asula arte vero Simonis de Luure ultimo mensis Octobris MD. feliciter’). UCLA, Special Collections, *A.T.361.1500 [oversize]; The Ahmanson Murphy Aldine Collection*. Another edition was published in Venice 1514, ‘mandato et impensis heredum ... Octaviani Scoti cuius Modoetensis et sotiorum summa diligentia impressus Venetiis per Georgium Arrivabenum’; there is a copy in Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, MAGL. 5.2.338/b. On these and other related editions, C. Martin, ‘The Vulgate Text of Aquinas’s Commentary on Aristotle’s *Politics*,’ *Dominican Studies*, v, 1952, pp. 35–64, is still fundamental.

20. L. Lanza, ‘Aspetti della ricezione della *Politica* aristotelica nell’XI secolo: Pietro di Alvernia’, *Studi Medievali*, ser. III, xxxix, 1994, pp. 643–94. See Thomas Aquinas, *In libros politicorum Aristotelis comen tum foeliciter incipit*, Barcelona 1478, colophon: ‘Comentum in Ar[istotelis] polythicorum libros per sanctum Thomam fratrem ordinis predicatorum inutum per venerabilem vero Petrum Alvernensem eiusdem ordinis fratrem illius doctrine studiosem ac solerem imitatorem. Absolutum foeliciter explicit ab Ioanne Ferrario cive barchin[onensi] humanitatis studiorum amantissimo accuratissime emendantur qui ut longius Ar[istotelis] commemoratos polythicorum libros facilior sit aditus textui antiquae traductionis huius nunc Leonardo Arethini textum subiuugere non pretenderis ... Petro Bruno et Nicholao Spindeler ... qui ... impressionem apud Barchinonam urbem absolverunt, XVIII mensis Decembris 1478’. I consulted a reproduction of the exemplar owned by the Biblioteca Universitaria, Sassari. I have not been able to consult Aristotle, *Politicorum libri*, tr. Leonardo Bruni, Barcelona (N. Spindeler) 1481; there is a copy at the Convent de Sant Francesc d’Assis, Barcelona.

21. Walker, ed. (as in n. 18), ii, pp. 293–98, esp. 298. He refrained from mentioning, not to say commenting on, the fifth book of the *Politics*. The possibility that Machiavelli had read Thomas Aquinas’s *Summa* was mentioned, in a paradoxical tone, by C. Singleton, ‘The Perspective of Art’, *The Kenyon Review*, xv, 1953,
But first, a description of the book which I believe was read by Machiavelli. It is a folio volume, printed in Rome by Eucharius Silber alias Franck in 1492, which displays Aristotle’s text and Thomas Aquinas’s commentary on the same page.\(^2\) The exemplar I consulted at the Biblioteca Comunale degli Intronati, Siena, is a very special one, since it was originally owned by the man who initiated the editorial project: Agostino Piccolomini (1470–96), a nephew of Cardinal Francesco Tedeschini Piccolomini.\(^2\) In a dedicatory letter addressed to Ludovico of Valenza, a learned Dominican friar and professor of theology, who had been his teacher, Agostino explained that in the previous summer, in Tuscany, he had come across a manuscript of Thomas Aquinas’s commentary on Aristotle. Agostino’s original plan to publish the commentary was delayed because the manuscript, written by an incompetent copyist, was full of mistakes and blunders. Having searched in vain for other manuscripts in Rome to compare with the one he had found, Agostino committed the editorial work to friar Ludovico of Valenza, ‘to help those men, involved in public life (‘civiles viri’), who devote their efforts to understanding Aristotle’. A cleaned up, unblemished edition, Agostino went on, would be invaluable for ‘city governors and state administrators’, for ‘when they read Aristotle only in order to put his precepts into practice, they have to struggle with the interpretation of words; therefore they reject and ignore Aristotle.’ But if friar Ludovico would accept this editorial task, ‘they will praise you, they will put Aristotle’s precepts into practice, they will venerate him’. You should leave aside your theological studies for some time, Agostino insisted, in order to commit yourself to the correction and emendation of those commentaries, pruning them as if you were to work in an orchard. You might include Leonardo Bruni’s translation of Aristotle’s Politics, although (Agostino emphatically wrote) it was published in such a confusing way that not a word by Bruni survived.\(^2\) Your edition will provide an Aristotle without a blemish and ‘will bring Thomas Aquinas, previously concealed in darkness, back to the light’.\(^2\)

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22. Thomas Aquinas, Commentaria ... in octo Politecorum Aristotelis libros cum textu eiusdem. Interprete Leonardo Aretino, Rome 1492. The colophon reads: ‘impressum est hoc opus Romanæ per magistrum Eucharium Silber alias Franck, xiiii kal. Aug. 1492’. On this edition (IGI 841; ISTC ia01024000) see Martin (as in n. 19), pp. 41–43 (but the passage on Ludovico of Valenza’s critics is rather cursory).

23. Siena, Biblioteca Comunale degli Intronati, a-z8 A-18. This Agostino Piccolomini is not to be confused with Agostino Patrizi Piccolomini: see R. Avesani, ‘Per la biblioteca di Agostino Patrizi Piccolomini vescovo di Pienza’, in Mélanges Eugène Tisserant, 7 vols, Vatican City 1964, vi (Bibliothèque vaticane, I), p. 2 n. 4.

24. This was probably a reference to the edition published in Barcelona in 1478 (see above, n. 20). Another possibility would be Aristotle, Ethica, Politica et Oeconomica, Leonardo Bruni interprete, Strasbourg (Johann Mentelin) ante 10 Apr. 1469. See K. Schorbach, Der Strassburger Frühdrucker Johann Mentelin (1458–1478). Studien zu seinem Leben und Werke, Mainz 1932, Anhang, p. 10*.

25. Thomas Aquinas, Commentaria, 1492 (as in n. 22), sig. aiii*: ‘Quod si (ut spero) expolitum candidum ve librum praestabis, quantam ab his qui civitatibus praesunt qui ve una republicas administrant sis consecuturus tu qui prudentissimus es considera. Hi enim cum Aristotelem legunt ut praecepta solum exequantur, dum in verborum interpretatione immorari eos necesse est et Aristotelem damnant et negligunt. Quod si laborem hunc dempseris et sumnopere te laudabunt et philosophi praecepta
Another dedicatory letter follows, addressed by the editor, friar Ludovico, to Agostino’s uncle the cardinal, who, a decade later, would become, for a few months, Pope Pius III (Francesco Piccolomini was himself nephew of Pope Pius II, Enea Silvio Piccolomini). Those names speak for themselves: the project to publish Thomas Aquinas’s commentary on Aristotle’s Politics had been conceived in Siena at the highest level of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, in a humanist environment. Thomas’s commentary was regarded as an indispensable tool for putting Aristotle’s precepts to practical use. But then, Ludovico explained, an obstacle emerged. He was not prepared to agree with those who thought that the old translation commented on by Thomas Aquinas (this was William of Moerbeke’s famous version of Aristotle’s Politics) did not match Aristotle’s text. Nonetheless, Bruni’s translation was certainly ‘more transparent’ and its Latin ‘more correct’. Then, he realised that ‘St Thomas commented on the old translation, but he seems to have interpreted the new one’. The obstacle had been overcome.

Better, more faithful texts, written in a better Latin, as instruments for a better politics: just what we would expect from a Renaissance edition of Aristotle. But the juxtaposition of Aristotle’s text and Thomas Aquinas’s commentary—an ancient palace, framed by a medieval building, made accessible by a humanist—generated an underlying tension.

One can see this tension emerging from Agostino Piccolomini’s dedicatory letter to friar Ludovico. The letter’s conclusion was unequivocal: the ‘dreadful and dirty’ (‘horridum immundumque’) manuscript on which the edition was based had to be thoroughly cleaned up. No additions, no omissions introduced by the copyist were to be allowed; nothing unrefined, barbarous or uncooth should appear. The assumption of an intrinsic convergence between truth and classical Latin paved the way for a rejection (not fully shared, as we have seen, by the editor, friar Ludovico) of the old translation commented on by Thomas Aquinas. But what about Thomas’s commentary itself? Could it not also be conceived as ‘unrefined’ and ‘barbarous’?
To evoke these aggressive questions is not a gratuitous exercise. They seem to have inspired a passage of Ludovico of Valenza’s dedicatory letter, attacking ‘those rhetoricians of our time who despise all writers who either do not deal with history or do not debate rhetoric. They refuse to read and to know everyone else’.29 Those strong polemical words were followed by a defensive statement, in which friar Ludovico emphatically declared his veneration for Plato, Theophrastus and their translators, like Theodore Gaza. Then came a further attack, against those who, although they do not know anything about nature, as soon as they can say something about de urbe condita [i.e., Livy] or about the task of the orator, turn into critics of all disciplines.30

Who were friar Ludovico’s unnamed adversaries? Humanists, for sure.31 His contentious words bring back the contentious overtones of the Renaissance—meant as a movement, not as a period, to use Ernst Gombrich’s indispensable distinction.32

For a long time Machiavelli has been regarded as a synonym of the Renaissance—or of ‘modernity’, an emic category devoid of any analytic value. But the Middle Ages/Renaissance dichotomy does not help us to understand Machiavelli’s intellectual development. As I argued a few years ago, when presenting the early results of a research project I am developing here, Machiavelli’s remarks on norms and exceptions, both in La mandragola and Il principe, show the impact of the Quaestiones mercuriales of Giovanni d’Andrea (d. Bologna 1348), a professor of canon law. An exemplar of Quaestiones mercuriales was owned by Bernardo Machiavelli, Niccolò’s father.33

The commentary on Aristotle’s Politics initiated by Thomas Aquinas and completed by Peter of Auvergne would have confronted Niccolò with something different: the complex relationship between the scholastic tradition and the legacy of antiquity. Whether Niccolò read the commentary, we do not know for sure. But we can try to set up a thought experiment, imagining his reactions to a section of it, taken from the fifth book.

Aristotle had remarked that tyranny is ‘a compound of both oligarchy and democracy in their most extreme forms: it is therefore most injurious to its subjects, being made up of two evil forms of government, and having the perversions and

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29. Ibid., fol. 2r: ‘sed culpa vestra est o Rhetores nostrae aetatis qui contentitis omnes scriptores qui vel historiam non tradunt vel de oratoria non disserunt. Omnes alios legere et scire recusatis.’

30. Thomas Aquinas, Commentaria, 1492 (as in n. 22), fol. 2r: ‘Sed in illos dico qui totius naturae ignari cum aliquid de Urbe condita aut de Rhetoris officio possunt dicere omnium se artium censureo faciant.’

31. A. Campana, ‘The Origin of the Word “Humanist”’, this Journal, ix, 1946, pp. 60–73; repr. in idem, Scritti, I, Ricerche medievali e umanistiche, ed. R. Avesani, M. Feo and E. Pruccoli, Rome 2008, pp. 263–81.

32. E. H. Gombrich, ‘The Renaissance: Period or Movement?’ in Background to the English Renaissance: Introductory Lectures, ed. J. B. Trapp, London 1974, pp. 9–30.

33. Ginzburg, ‘Machiavelli, l’eccezione e la regola’ (as in n. 3), p. 98.
errors of both' (1310a81–86). Then he moved on, to the ways in which tyrannical
governments can be preserved. I shall cite the passage from a modern translation
of the *Politics*:

As to tyrannies, they are preserved in two quite opposite ways. One of them is the old
traditional way in which most tyrants administer their government. Of such arts Periander
of Corinth is said to have been the great master, and many similar devices may be gathered
from the Persians in the administration of their government. There are firstly the prescriptions
mentioned some distance back, for the preservation of a tyranny, in as far as this is
possible; viz. that the tyrant should lop off those who are too high; he must put to death
men of spirit; he must not allow common meals, clubs, education, and the like; he must be
upon his guard against anything which is likely to inspire either courage or confidence among
his subjects; he must prohibit schools or other meetings for discussion, and he must take
every means to prevent people from knowing one another (for acquaintance begets mutual
confidence).35 (1313a35–b7)

In Leonardo Bruni’s Latin translation (republished, as we have seen, in the
1492 edition of Thomas Aquinas’s commentary), the sentence ‘There are firstly
the prescriptions mentioned some distance back’ included one more word—an
adjective, identifying those prescriptions as perniciosa, pernicious: ‘Sunt autem hec illa perniciosa quae supra retulimus’.36 Bruni’s intervention may seem unproblematic: after all, Aristotle was listing a series of measures which he clearly considered
to be vicious and disruptive. Bruni simply added one touch to reinforce the picture.
About the year 1420, he had defended his own translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics*,
comparing the old translators of Aristotle to those who disfigured the paintings of
Apelles, and good translators to faithful copyists.37

Did Bruni try to prevent a possible misunderstanding—and therefore a distor-
tion—of Aristotle’s remarks? Certainly, the dry paraphrase provided by Thomas
Aquinas’s continuator, Peter of Auvergne, which Bruni might have seen and which
framed his translation of Aristotle in the 1492 Roman edition, showed no trace of
moral reprobation. One of the methods for preserving tyranny, the commentary
reads, is to murder, to kill (spegnere, as Machiavelli said) the most powerful, the
richest and wisest people: ‘fuit excellentes in potentia vel divitiis interimere....
Iterum interficere sapientes...’.38 The second method was more ambiguous, because
it implied an imitation of a monarchical government. Here is Aristotle once again:

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34. Aristotle, *Politics*, cited from his *Complete Works: The Revised Oxford Translation*, ed. J. Barnes, 2 vols, Princeton 1984, ii, p. 2080.
35. Ibid., p. 2085.
36. Aristotle, *Ethica, Politica et Oeconomica*, Leonardo Bruni interprete, Strasbourg ante 10 Apr. 1469 (as in n. 24), fol. 156v. On this basis I can confirm that the word perniciosa was not added by friar Ludovico, the editor of the 1492 edition; cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentaria*, 1492 (as in n. 22), fol. 160v.
37. C. Ginzburg, *History, Rhetoric, and Proof*, Hanover, NH and London 1999, p. 65. Bruni’s *De interpretazione recta* and the introductions to his trans-
lations have been edited, translated and commented on by Paolo Viti: see his edition of Leonardo Bruni, *Sulla perfetta traduzione*, Naples 2004. According to
E. Garin, ‘Le traduzioni umanistiche di Aristotele’, *Atti e memorie dell’Accademia fiorentina di scienze morali La Colombaria*, ser. II, xvi, 1947–50, pp. 55–104 (67),
Bruni’s translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics* was ‘una rielaborazione e correzione sistematica’.
38. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentaria*, 1492 (as in n. 22), fol. 160v–v.
... and there is another [method] which proceeds upon an almost opposite principle of action...
... for as one mode of destroying kingly power is to make the office of king more tyrannical, so the salvation of a tyranny is to make it more like the rule of a king. But of one thing the tyrant must be careful; he must keep power enough to rule over his subjects, whether they like him or not, for if he once gives this up he gives up his tyranny. ... In the first place he should pretend concern for the public revenues, and not waste money in making presents of a sort at which the common people get excited when they see their hard-won earnings snatched from them and lavished on courtesans and foreigners and artists.... Also he should appear to be particularly earnest in the service of the gods; for if men think that a ruler is religious and has a reverence for the gods, they are less afraid of suffering injustice at his hands, and they are less disposed to conspire against him, because they believe him to have the very gods fighting on his side.39 (1314a30–15a2)

Thomas Aquinas's (that is, Peter of Auvergne's) commentary on this shocking page sometimes reads more like an expansion than a literal paraphrase. Let me quote, for example, the passage about the tyrant's attitude towards religion:

he says that to preserve tyranny, the tyrant must behave very carefully and reverentially in matters related to religion and cult, and as different from everyone else as he is more powerful than everyone else. And the reason is this: if his subjects regard their prince as a religious and pious man, they will not be afraid of receiving evil from him. From a godly being no one expects any evil.

(et dicit quod ad salvationem tyrannidis, tyrannus in quae ad religionem et cultum divinum pertinent studiose et reverenter se debet habere et tanto magis differenter ab aliis quanto magis excellit. Cuius ratio est: quia subditi existiment principem religiosum et deicolam esse non timbunt male pati ab ipso. A divino enim nullus expectat malum per se.)40

Three points may be noted:

(a) To describe the subjects' attitude towards the prince and his religious behaviour, the commentator uses (in the negative) a verb with obvious religious connotations: timere, to fear. The same verb had been used by William of Moerbeke in his translation.41 But the commentator's gloss—'From a godly being (a divino) no one expects any evil'—suggests a conflation of religious and secular power, introducing a nuance absent in Aristotle's text.

(b) The commentator turns tyrannical deeds 'contra iustitiam' (Bruni's translation of τι παράνομον) into the abstract noun male, 'evil', giving a moral, and possibly Christian, overtone to the Greek word νόμος and its violation.

(c) Echoing the medieval translator, William of Moerbeke, who had used the word princeps, prince, the commentator chose a neutral word—principans, prince—instead of tyrannus, tyrant.42

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39. Aristotle, *Politics*, ed. Barnes (as in n. 34), pp. 2086–87.
40. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentaria*, 1492 (as in n. 22), fol. 164v.
41. Aristotle, *Politicorum libri octo cum vetusta translatione Guilelmi de Moerbeke* (as in n. 26), p. 581.
42. See, e.g., Aristotle, *Política: libros I–II.11: translation prior imperfecta interprete Guillelmo de Moerbeke*,
We may imagine Machiavelli reacting to both Aristotle’s text (as translated by Bruni) and the comments on it.

9.

The Machiavellian flavour of the fifth book of Aristotle’s Politics has been repeatedly emphasised, from the sixteenth century onwards. In his Les Politiques d’Aristote (1576), Louis Le Roy, professor at the Collège de France, addressed the issue as explicitly as possible. Le Roy commented on the methods used by tyrants to preserve their government, starting with perniciosa, the adjective inserted by Bruni into his translation: ‘Et estans tres pernicieus...’. Antonio Brucioli had inserted the same adjective in his Italian translation of the Politics (1547). Le Roy (cited here in an early English translation) unfolded the implications of Bruni’s addition:

Which three things being very pernicious, are not gathered by Aristotle to allow them, by knowing the miseries of Tyran[t]s, who are constrained to serve their turns with such evils, thereby to assure their persons and Estates: Machiavel of Florence writing of a Prince, hath taken from this place the most part of his precepts, adding thereunto Romane and Italian examples.

Indirectly, Le Roy’s attempt to tame the most disturbing passages of Aristotle’s Politics (or a possible reading of them) implied that even The Prince could be read in a non-Machiavellian perspective. He was, therefore, distancing himself from the stereotype of Machiavelli which prevailed in France during the Wars of Religion.

Some modern interpreters seem unaware of those nuances. It has been argued that Aristotelianism and Machiavellianism were utterly incompatible, since their respective mottoes were in medio stat virtus, ‘virtue lies in the middle’, and in medio stat corruptio, ‘corruption lies in the middle’. This conventional remark, based on large, comprehensive categories (Aristotelianism, Machiavellianism) can help us to clarify a point which is not entirely obvious. Machiavelli, who was certainly fond
of extremes, could have found food for thought in Aristotle’s Politics, as well as in its commentary, both in the section by Thomas Aquinas and in that by Peter of Auvergne. The passages I have quoted above, describing the ‘opposite’ methods which may be used to preserve tyrannical regimes,48 are eloquent enough—if we bear in mind the distinction between ἀπλῶς and κατὰ χρόνον which Aristotle advanced at the beginning of his Peri hermeneias (16a18–19). In that text, translated by Boethius as De interpretatio, countless generations of students learned the difference between, on the one hand, an absolute (ἀπλῶς) atemporal dimension and, on the other, a dimension related to a specific time (κατὰ χρόνον)—an opposition which Boethius translated as simpliciter and secundum quid (the latter expression being much more comprehensive than Aristotle’s reference to time).49 The impersonal question ‘in which ways are tyrannical regimes preserved (σώζονταν)?’ neither implied a judgement about tyrannical regimes simpliciter, that is, in absolute terms, nor a moral choice inspired by the ‘virtue lies in the middle’ principle. It was a question requiring an answer within specific circumstances: a secundum quid answer.50 This approach inspired the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate conspiracies against tyrants which was put forward by Thomas Aquinas in his Summa theologiae (Secunda secundae, questio XLII).

10.

Machiavelli, who suffered prison and torture for his alleged involvement in the anti-Medicean conspiracy of Pietro Pagolo Boscoli, was certainly familiar with Thomas's distinction, as with its reworking by followers of Savonarola. It is recalled, for example, at the end of Luca della Robbia's Recitazione del caso di Pietro Pagolo Boscoli e di Agostino Capponi (composed probably in 1513).51

This brings us back once again to Scioppius, one of the most perceptive readers of Machiavelli’s writings. In his Paedia politices, Scioppius argued that both Aristotle, in his Politics, and Thomas Aquinas, in his commentary on it, divided their subject matter into four parts:52

(1) ‘knowing which form of state is absolutely (simpliciter) the best, and the most desirable’;
(2) ‘knowing which is the best according to specific circumstances (pro conditio) … since the character of some populations does not adapt itself to the best form of state’—like the Asians who, as Agesilaos said according to Plutarch, are bad if they live in freedom and good if they live in servitude;53
(3) knowing how to reform and preserve the state, whatever it is, which Aristotle labels ‘res publica ex hypothesi’ (a ‘hypothetical state’);
(4) and knowing which state form ‘is most widespread and fitting to most people’.54

‘Politia est ars’ (‘politics is an art’), Scioppius concluded, which deals with a wide range of forms. (By choosing the word ars, Scioppius echoed Aristotle’s τέχνη—the same word which had inspired Machiavelli’s use of the expression arte dello stato in his famous letter to Francesco Vettori of 10 December 1513.)55 Therefore, all forms of state must be explained: not only the one which is absolutely the best (simpliciter sit optima), but also that which is the best ‘according to the conditions’ (pro conditione rerum), and even those which merely exist.

II.

Scioppius’s argument was based on the beginning of the fourth book of Aristotle’s Politics, filtered through the commentary ascribed to Thomas Aquinas (in fact, written by Peter of Auvergne). ‘The true legislator and statesman’, Aristotle wrote, ought to be acquainted, not only with that [government] which is best in the abstract (απλώς) but also with that which is best relatively to circumstances. We should be able further to say how a state may be constituted under any given conditions (δι᾽ ὀπόθεσις)… We should consider, not only what form of government is best, but also what is possible and what is easily attainable by all.56 (1288b25–37)

But Aristotle insisted that his aim was the practical one of convincing people to act in the existing circumstances:

since there is quite as much trouble in the reformation of an old constitution (πολιτείαν) as in the establishment of a new one … And therefore, in addition to the qualifications of the statesman already mentioned, he should be able to find remedies for the defects of existing constitutions, as has been said before.57 (1289a4–7)

If I am not mistaken, both Bruni’s translation of this passage, and the commentary on it, left a profound mark on Machiavelli’s mind. First, the commentary:

Therefore, those who wish to correct a constitution must first remove its inordinate features, and then introduce a new order.

53. Plutarch, Sayings of the Spartans (Moralia, 213C), in his Moralia, Loeb edition, ii, ed. and tr. F. Cole Babbitt, Cambridge, MA 1989, p. 275.
54. In the UCLA exemplar I consulted (see n. 4), this fourth point has a marginal note in a 17th-century hand: ‘De tali forma Principatus agit Machiavellus’.
55. Scioppius, Paedia politices (as in n. 4), address to the reader, p. 3: ‘qui artem ipsam civilem sive Politicam non didicerint nec rerum civilium usum habuerunt’. See Machiavelli to Vettori, 10 Dec. 1513, in Machiavelli’s Opere (as in n. 11), ii, p. 296: ‘si vedrebbe che quindici anni, che io sono stato a studio all’arte dello stato, non gl’ho né dormiti né giuocati’.
56. Aristotle, Politics, ed. Barnes (as in n. 34), p. 2045.
57. Ibid., pp. 2045–46.
To introduce a new order (‘inducere novum ordinem’): that most Machiavellian expression was elicited by the commentary, not by Bruni’s translation of the *Politics*,

Nam est non minus difficile corrigerre Rempublicam iam institutam quam ab initio instituere: quemadmodum et post discere quam ab initio didicisse.59

But it must be noted that Bruni, once again, had turned Aristotle’s vague allusion to ‘the qualifications of the statesman already mentioned’ into an additional, specific reference to states which exist in books, as opposed to states which exist in reality. A citizen (*civiliis homo*) must come to the assistance of both:

It is therefore appropriate for a politician, as we said, not only to be able to render aid to those constitutions that are written in books but also to the ones that exist in reality.

(Ma sendo l’intenzione mia stata scrivere cosa che sia utile a chi la intende, mi è parso più conveniente andare dreto alla verità effettuale della cosa che alla imaginazione di essa. E molti si sono immaginati republiche e principati che non si sono mai visti né conosciuti in vero essere.)61

Machiavelli, in a famous remark in chapter XV of *The Prince*, reworked the opposition between states which exist in books and states which exist in reality. His words echo the anti-Platonic overtones of the passage from Aristotle which he had read in Bruni’s translation:

But since it is my purpose to write something useful to an attentive reader, I think it more effective to go back to the practical truth of the subject than to depend on fancies about it. And many have imagined republics and principalities that never have been seen or known to exist in reality.

12.

Scioppius, in his covert apology for those unjustly attacked political thinkers who his *Paedia politices* left unnamed, argued that they had followed the example of Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas: they wrote *ex hypothesi*, from a hypothetical perspective. To say that a tyrant, in order to preserve his power, must murder

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58. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentaria*, 1492 (as in n. 22), fol. 97f.
59. Ibid. See Machiavelli, *Il Principe*, ch. VI, in his *Opere* (as in n. 11), 1, p. 132: ‘Quelli e’ quali per vie virtuose, simili a costoro, diventono principi, acquistano el principato con difficultà, ma con facilità lo tengono; e le difficultà che gli hanno nello acquistare el principato nascono in parte da’ nuovi ordini e modi che sono forzati introdurre per fondare lo stato loro e la loro sicurtà. E debbesi considerare come e’ non è cosa più difficile a trattare, né più dubbia a riuscire, né più pericolosa a maneggiare, che farsi capo di introdurre nuovi ordini. Perché lo introduttore ha per nimico tutti quegli che degli ordini vecchi fanno bene, e ha tiepidi defensori tutti quelli che delli ordini nuovi farebbono bene’. See J. H. Whitfield, ‘On Machiavelli’s Use of Ordini’, *Italian Studies*, x, 1955, pp. 19–39.
60. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentaria*, 1492 (as in n. 22), fol. 97f.
61. Machiavelli, *Il Principe*, in his *Opere* (as in n. 11), 1, p. 159. Translation from Gilbert (as in n. 14), p. 141.
wise and excellent men, was ‘not an absolute, simple, categorical discourse’, but a hypothetical one, related to specific exceptions and conditions. This example, taken from Aristotle and his commentator, had been introduced by a more general remark. Some people complain, Scioppius observed, that writers about politics simply describe tyrannical governments, without saying how horrendous those governments are. But a true philosopher knows that such judgements ‘are completely foreign to reflection about politics (schola politica), as they belong to the domain of ethics and moral philosophy’. (Three centuries after Scioppius’s Paedia politices, and without quoting it, Benedetto Croce considered it ‘well known’ that Machiavelli discovered the ‘autonomy of politics’.)

Scioppius also put forward a very different argument in defence of Machiavelli. An explanation may be ‘either straightforward and more open, or oblique and more covert’. If a politician (i.e., Machiavelli) says ‘that the tyrant is half-man and half animal, part lion and part fox’, and so forth, one may conclude, Scioppius wrote, that tyrannical governments must be avoided.

The image of The Prince as an anti-tyrannical text—indirectly suggested, as we have seen, by Louis Le Roy—has been quite successful, even if today no one would accept it at face value. But can we accept Scioppius’s less conventional idea that Machiavelli wrote ex hypothesi, in a hypothetical perspective?

In the context I am talking about, the word ‘perspective’ is not merely a metaphor. In his dedicatory letter to Lorenzo de Medici (later Duke of Urbino), Machiavelli compared himself to landscape painters, ‘a coloro che disegnano e’ paesi’. This was possibly a reference to Leonardo da Vinci’s famous map showing a bird’s eye view of Imola; Leonardo and Machiavelli had met at Imola in 1503, at Cesare Borgia’s court. Here is Machiavelli:

those who draw maps of countries observe the nature of the mountains and the high places from a low position on a plain, and to observe the nature of the plains ascend the high mountains; in like fashion, he who wishes to understand the nature of the peoples must be prince, and he who wishes to understand that of princes must be one of the people.

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62. Scioppius, Paedia politices (as in n. 4), p. 30: ‘est loquendi modus non absolutus, simplex, aut categoricus sed hypotheticus, sive cum exceptione aut conditione’.
63. Ibid., p. 20: ‘Hoc autem a schola politica alienissimum esse, et ad ethicam vel moralem pertinere’.
64. B. Croce, Elementi di politica [1924], in his Etica e politica, Bari 1931, p. 251: ‘Ed è risaputo che il Machiavelli scopre la necessità e l’autonomia della politica, della politica che è di là, o piuttosto di qua, dal bene e dal male morale…’ See J. H. Whitfield, ‘The Politics of Machiavelli’, The Modern Language Review, li, 1955, pp. 433–43, esp. 433.
65. Scioppius, Paedia politices (as in n. 4), pp. 30–31: ‘vel directa et apertior, vel obliqua et occultior...’ Si ergo dicit Politicus, Tyrannum esse semi-hominem et semi-belluam, ex leone puta et vulpe compositum.’
66. C. Ginzburg, ‘Distance and Perspective: Two Metaphors’, in Wooden Eyes (as in n. 49), pp. 139–57.
67. Machiavelli, Il Principe, in his Opere (as in n. 11), i, p. 118: ‘Né voglio sia imputata prosunzione se uno uomo di basso e infimo stato ardisce discorrere e regolare e’ governi de’ principi; perché così come coloro che disegnano e’ paesi si pongono bassi nel piano a considerare la natura de’ monti e de’ luoghi alti e, per considerare quella de’ luoghi bassi, si pongono alto sopra’ monti, similmente, a conoscere bene la natura de’ popoli, bisogna essere principe, e, a conoscere bene quella de’ principi, conviene essere popolare.’ Translation from Gilbert (as in n. 14), p. 94.
The invention of linear perspective provided Machiavelli with a powerful metaphor—a cognitive equivalent—of his own approach to politics: an interaction of *secundum quid* and *simpliciter*. Only a located, contextual point of view can give access to *la verità effettuale della cosa*. A momentous discovery: its implications are, for better or for worse, still with us today.

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