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Machiavelli and Thucydides: A Comparative Analysis

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Introduction

The History of Florence by Niccolo Machiavelli and the History of the Peloponnesian War by Thucydides, if studied carefully, can illustrate how parallels exist between certain variables in societies and the development of certain patterns of thought among exceptional individuals. To accomplish this purpose, however, an approach must be implemented and maintained rigorously throughout the analysis. A strong approach to such an argument can be achieved through the examination of sequential questions, which draw the broad pictures of their respective societies down to the specifics of their works.

Three questions may easily be identified to assist in the examination of each issue. These questions, however, must not be seen as questions to be answered in a traditional sense, but rather as questions to be considered. The first, and most broad question is what are the parallel elements in the fifth century Athens of Thucydides and the sixteenth century Florence of Machiavelli? Both the striking similarities and the subtle nuances of these societies contribute greatly to central theme of the paper.

The next question, while more complex, is equally as broad -- How do their respective environments affect the fundamental characteristics of Machiavellian and Thucydidean thought ? Machiavellian thought, as expounded in his Prince and Discourses, has perhaps received more careful study than the thought of Thucydides, which must be painstakingly extracted from the body of his history. The consideration of this question will highlight certain inherent similarities between the two great thinkers and lead to the third question for analysis.

How do the similarities in the environments of the two authors, as manifest in their parallel ideas, influence their respective historical works? This question will be the basis for the paper. However, only once all these questions are studied can any general conclusion be reached on whether or not any true merit can be given to these two times and two authors writing for a parallel purpose.

What makes this process somewhat less difficult is the fact that both of these men are writing out the same general traditions. While Machiavelli, who did not know Greek, probably had no direct contact with Thucydides, although a Latin translation did exist after 1452[1], he most definitely had contact with other authors who came out of the Thucydidean tradition. Polybius, Livy and other great classical historians were definitely familiar to Machiavelli[2]. As were the works of his Italian predecessors, such as Leonardo Brunni, who also received inspiration from classical sources[3]. So, it is not surprising that many structural attributes of Machiavelli are not unlike those of Thucydides. Most notable among these are the frequent descriptions of battles, the tendency to express personal opinions in fabricated speeches and the lack of character development. Thus, it must be accepted that certain consistencies will exist between the authors that are not necessarily tied directly to their similar environments but rather, are derived from their shared historiographical traditions.

Beyond these two men's shared historiographic traditions, then, lies the basis for the consideration of our questions. The responses will find its

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[1] M. I. Finley, Introduction to History of the Peloponnesian War by Thucydides (New York: Penguin Books, 1972), 30.

[2] Giuseppe Pressolin, Machiavelli, trans. Giaconda Savini (New York: Farrar Straus and Giroux, 1967), 96.

[3] Eric Cochrane, Historians and Historiography in the Italian Renaissance, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 3.

roots in several dominant themes. The broadest of the themes utilized by both writers is the concept that their histories will be used by future generations, and are thus written to illustrate certain timeless truths. This parallel becomes even more intriguing when the apparent motivations behind writing this type of history are compared. Both men seem to be inspired by a realization of their world in decline, the role of hubris in this process, and how it relates to their conception of an ideal republic. These inspirations are conveyed by the authors through the interconnectedness of central themes. Thus, the following paper will seek to show not only how these independent ideas are manifest in the History of Florence and The History of the Peloponnesian War, but also how within these works, they interrelated among themselves.

I

The first issue that this paper will address is the treatment of the republic, or more broadly the role of civil government, in the History of Florence and The History of the Peloponnesian War. This issue will be particularly interesting to examine due to the many circumstances in which it is relevant. What exactly a republic is a widely debated issue, but for the purposes of this paper a republic can be defined as any state where a segment of the population has some democratic control over many aspects of civil government. Under this definition, and, more importantly, in the eyes of both authors, Florence and Athens exist as republics during the most of the periods examined in the two works.

Following the methodology outlined in the introduction the first step in analyzing how these two authors treat this issue, is an examination of

their respective environments. In both cases the states possessed the apparatus for putting decisions before a collected assembly of males for a vote. In the case of Florence the composition of the group was derived from a process of drawing lots from a bag of eligible candidates[4]. The Florentines liked, in fact, to draw parallels between their own government and that of the Roman Republic and Periclean Athens[5]. Unlike Rome and Greece, however, many of those who could be elected derived their position from merchant enterprises rather than any hereditary status[6]. In Athens all, free, male citizens, could participate in "the world's first fully participatory democracy."[7] Thucydides, it can be safely assumed, was a member of this hereditary elite, who enjoyed voting privileges, and thus saw the system through the eyes of an individual for whom it worked[8]. The Florentine system was, admittedly somewhat less predictable, in that constant manipulation occurred as to who was to be included in the group eligible for public office. While in Athens the group of voters was more stable. This difference, however, does not conflict with the common ideology that in some way the citizens of the polity should have some role in its governing. This did not necessarily mean mob rule, but rather the rule of a limited number of competent individuals. These principles greatly influenced both these men's thought.

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[4] Felix Gilbert, History Choice and Commitment, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1977), 473.

[5] Rachel Annand Taylor, Invitation to Renaissance Italy, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1930), 27.

[6] Robert S. Lopez, The Commercial Revolution of the Middle Ages 950 - 1350, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 68.

[7] David Whitehead, "Thucydides: Fact-Grubber of Philosopher," Greece and Rome 2 (October 1980): 158.

[8] Ibid., 158

One of the most dominant elements in Thucydidean though is what F.E. Adcock calls his "strong conviction that human events are guided by human wits."[9] Thucydides developed in a society where, unlike medieval Europe or Imperial Rome, the rulers did not claim their power as derived from some divine or mysterious source who could not be confronted or questioned. He lived in a democracy where those who rule were directly answerable to those who were ruled. So, in his thought, the good of the individual should always be subordinate to the good of the city.[10] Why this developed in ancient Greece is difficult to determine. It could be the fact that, Greek city-states were only conceived of in terms of a "union of citizens." "[I]t was not Athens which made treaties or struck coins but 'the Athenians.'"[11] Perhaps, the Athenians strong feeling for democracy was a result of their close encounter with the mighty Persian Empire, which had an incredibly powerful king. For whatever reason, a strong democratic tradition existed among Greeks, and especially among Athenians, at this time, and with it the concept that the ruler was to be held accountable by those he ruled and, therefore, responsible for their well being.[12]

Machiavellian thought revolves around similar themes, which are indicative of his similar environment. As Florence claimed her political lineage from a line beginning at Thucydides' Athens, Machiavelli similarly noted the importance of the people in controlling their own destiny. All his works express his deep distrust for any form of government ruled by an

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[9] F. E. Adcock, Thcydides and his History, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 56.

[10] Ibid., 50.

[11] Chester G. Starr, "Athens and Its Empire," Classical Journal 2 (December - January 1988), 116.

[12] J. K. Davies, Democracy and Classical Greece, (Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1978), 25.

aristocracy or a traditionally elite few.[13] Perhaps he realized the importance of freedom and liberty to the ruling mercantile elite of Florence, whose freedom of both person and capital contributed greatly to her increase in power, in relation to contemporary manorial systems where capital and movement were restricted by feudal bonds.[14] Also involved was the fact that Florence and the other city republics of Italy won their freedom from the Holy Roman Emperor, in a series of conflicts. The Emperor embodied all that was autocratic, and as a result the Italian City States naturally gravitated to the other extreme -- all that was republican.[15] From this tradition, Machiavelli emerges touting republics as the form of government which has the greatest tendency to provide the people with the greatest good -- if operated with that intent in mind. Similar to Thucydides, then, Machiavelli sculpted his thought around the republican tradition of his environment, and thusly claimed, in the words of Gene Brucker, that the " ideal form of political organization was a republic in which men were so imbued with virtu (as were the ancient Romans) that they would willingly sacrifice themselves for the state."[16]

Two similar thought patterns, evolving out of similar environments lead to very much parallel interpretations of historical events and personages. Both authors make note of any attempt to restrict the liberty and self determination of their population and in general react to it negatively, but similarly both men recognized the importance of having those best versed in governing, govern. For Machiavelli and Thucydides the

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[13] Pasquale Villari, The Life and Times of Niccolo Machiavelli, trans. Linda Villari, (New York: Haskell House Publishers, 1969), 26.

[14] Lopez, 67.

[15] Gilbert, 94.

[16] Gene Brucker, Renaissance Florence, (Berkely and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), 280.

the hinge on which the merits of a republic is weighed is its ability to preserve the good of the people, and that any attempt to inflict harm on the people may bring about disaster. Similarly, when a disaster does occur it is never the fault of the system, but rather the fault of those who failed to implement it correctly.

A good example of Machiavellian thought regarding republics can be found in the beginning of Book VII. Here he describes in detail how Cosimo de Medici runs the Florentine Republic. Machiavelli claims the most praiseworthy means to achieve power is centered around the use of "friends" as a power base. In order to get these "friends" a reputation must be acquired by "public ways" such as "winning a battle, acquiring a town, carrying out a mission with care and prudence, [or] advising the republic wisely and prosperously."[17] This method of power is set up in opposition to one based in "partisans" and developed through "private modes" which include "benefiting this or that other citizen. . . helping him with money, getting him unmerited honors, and ingratiating oneself with the plebs with games and public gifts."[18] At one point, when Cosimo's power over the state was challenged, he described as having the dilema whether to regain the state by use of partisans or friends. He opted for the use of friends. However, this permitted many incompetent people to become involved in government, because it is difficult to choose a friend and a necessity to choose a patron. As the state declined Cosimo allowed the people to recognize their mistake of challenging him to begin with, and only after some hardship returned the state to its previous condition.[19] Thus

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[17] Niccolo Machiavelli, Florentine Histories, trans. Laura F. Banfield and Harvey C. Mansfield, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990), 7.1.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid., 7.4.

essentially, what Machiavelli means to convey in this confusing passage is that a competent ruler is one who not only has power due to the love of the people, but also is recognized as being gifted enough that he should not be challenged. A republic, therefore, should have its most competent citizens at its head, in order to guarantee the stability of the state for the good of the people.

Similar observations are made when right of the people to assemble is restricted in Milan. During a period of flux, after the death of their previous ruler, various parties rushed in to fill the power vacuum. The city magistrates, who were ruling the city temporarily, refused to allow people to assemble in the fear that they would rise up because "the Milanese were brought almost to extreme misery . . . [the poor] were dying of hunger in the streets; and uproar and complaints arose from different parts of the city."[20] Machiavelli explains how this failure to accommodate the well being of the people led to their rising up and the overthrow of the magistrates. Eventually this led to the rejection of a republic by the Milanese because it had been presented so poorly in the past, and the very reluctant invitation of the adventurer Francesco Sforza to become duke of the city, so that they might regain some stability and peace. This example highlights the major principle of Machiavellian thought - the good of the people can best be preserved in a republic unless those in charge abuse its privileges or fail to be true to its design.

Similarly on a more basic level, in an earlier part of his Histories, Machiavelli harshly accuses the failure of certain nobles to make decisions in a timely fashion. "The result was blame and dishonor for the city."[21]

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[20] Ibid., 6.24.
[21] Ibid., 2.27.

These are especially harsh words considering the only crime was the failure to speedily concur with the people, who felt that a threatening army, already defeated by the Florentines in battle, should have been pursued and destroyed. This delay left it sufficient time to escape into the protection of a nearby town. The connection here seems strong in saying that if the people are right it is the job of those who lead to bring their judgments to fruition.

In all three of these separate instances the message presented by Machiavelli seems clear. A republic in order to be successful must have leaders who posses the ability and willingness to react, in a timely fashion, to circumstances which affect the well being of the citizens. A similar message is expressed by Thucydides, who reserves his harshest criticism for those who would abuse the privileges inherent in a republic and mislead the people into endeavors which might endanger their well being.

The most potent example of this is in the debate over whether or not Athens should launch an attack on the island of Sicily, an action which later would result in the greatest Athenian defeat of the war. Recounted in Book VI of his history, this debate fumed between the elderly noble statesman Nicias and a young firebrand Alcibiades, and is described in a number of alternating speeches. Ultimately in these speeches Nicias, who is opposed to the invasion, but has ironically been chosen as its commander, is portrayed as a man who looked out for the interests of the city first and foremost. Alcibiades is presented as a man who has other than the best interest of the city at heart. Thucydides proceeds to criticize Alcibiades on two separate but related levels. On one level, Thucydides highlighted his questionable motivation for the campaign, which he saw as Alcibiades quest for

"successes which would . . . bring him personally both wealth and honor."[22] On another level he refers to two separate instances when Alcibiades was suspected of plotting to overthrow the democracy, an accusation, which would amount to almost sacrilege in the minds of an average Athenian. Once by commenting on how when the people "thought that he was aiming at becoming a dictator, and so they turned against him."[23], and once in reference to several acts of sacrilegious vandalism which citizens saw as "all parts of a plot to overthrow the democracy, and that in all this Alcibiades had had a hand; evidence for which they found in the unconventional and undemocratic character of his life in general."[24] It would appear that these criticisms were made in retrospect considering the fact that the ill-fated invasion was approved by a vote of the whole citizenship as was customary. Thucydides, therefore, leaves the reader with the perception that Alcibiades did not respect the democratic traditions of Athens. This was most clearly illustrated in his willingness to use his power of persuasion to manipulate people to vote for a policy not in their best interest. Thucydides intentionally ties together the abuse of republican principles and the defeat of Athens in Sicily through his description of Alcibiades.

Similar behavior by Thucydides is seen in his treatment of Cleon, the great rival of Pericles. Cleon was one of the demagogues who succeeded Pericles. These were men who moved the masses not through intellectual brilliance and leadership ability, but through appeals to emotion. Davies notes especially how Thucydides "paints a lurid portrait of them" and how he "writes of Kleon with more personal animus than he allows himself

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[22] Thucydides, History of the Peloponnesian War, trans. Rex Warner intro. M. I. Finley, (New York: Penguin Books, 1972), 6. 15.

[23] Ibid., 6. 15.

[24] Ibid., 6. 28.

anywhere else."[25] It seems that Thucydides, fears demagogues who used the democratic process to mislead the people into approving actions which might not be in their best interest -- an early advocate of responsible government, perhaps. Cleon, therefore, is consistently depicted to appear unstable and irresponsible. Cleon is noted for "the violence of his character" and how "he exercises far the greatest influence over people." in III.36. Furthermore, he is portrayed in IV. 27 as being far too concerned about the fact "that he was becoming unpopular" to the point that he declared a messenger who brought an unsatisfactory reports as "not telling the truth." Thucydides even goes so far as to say that Cleon's personal pride eventually swelled so large, as a result of his ability to control the masses to his own ends, that it interfered with his ability to make rational decisions,[26] but this will be examined later. What makes this criticism of Cleon more than simply a personal attack against an enemy, is how Thucydides parallels it to the leadership of Pericles.

Pericles is consistently regarded in the History, as close to the ideal leader. He stands as an example of how a republic should be run. Thucydides make no effort to hide the fact that what makes Pericles a greater leader than the demagogues that followed him, is not through any adherence to constitutional practices or political theory, but rather because he held the good of the people as paramount. Machiavelli, would most likely approve of this. Unlike the magistrates in Milan, who met an unfortunate end, Pericles awareness of the peoples plight led him to "guide their thoughts in a direction away from their immediate sufferings."[27] When compared to his successors he was praised by Thucydides

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[25] Davies, 113.
[26] Thucydides, 5. 7.
[27] Ibid., 2. 63.

> "because of his position, his intelligence, and his known integrity, could respect the liberty of the people, and at the same time hold them in check. It was he who led them not them who led him, and since he never sought power from any wrong motive he was under not necessity to flatter them."[28]

These two example are enough to demonstrate how in Pericles Thucydides personified how a republic should be run, just as Cleon demonstrated how it could be abused.

The resounding message is the same preached by Machiavelli, that on the most basic level, an ideal republic represented a system of government, not where the mob ruled, but rather where the peoples' interest were held above those of the leaders. The individual in power should be answerable to the people, with infighting, and rhetorical trickery that might limit this answerability being kept to a minimum. Similarly they both demonstrate how unfortunate circumstances can arise when best interests of the people are not the top priority.

II

When the good of the people is sacrificed to the good of the individual both Machiavelli and Thucydides are quick to criticize, as is the case with Cleon or Cosimo. Each writer sees hubris as the main evil present in both individuals and society. An evil so great that it has the power to upset the republican virtues which are necessary for the stability and prosperity of their respective states. Hubris, as a literary term, can be defined broadly as "Arrogance, excessive self-pride, and self-confidence... Hubris is that form of harmartia or tragic flaw that stems from overbearing

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[28] Ibid., 2, 65.

pride and self assume superiority."[29] However, in its literary sense it implies an element of divine retribution which is absent in the secular histories of Machiavelli and Thucydides. They, identify hubris alone as sufficient for a fall, and mark it as the most common human tendency responsible for failure, relegating any mention of divine intervention, blatant incompetence, or pure malice to a far secondary role. The prosperity of both Athens and Florence during the period described in much of these histories provides an ample incubating place for hubristic tendencies.

Both Athens and Florence during much of the time examined by these works were, to some extent empires. Florence not only controlled several neighboring cities, but also dominated the peasant and villages in the surrounding countryside. Athens similarly had a long list of over 175 tributary states, and protectorates which she dominated.[30] Florence and Athens also managed to control a large portion of foreign trade and amassed huge amounts of wealth from these commercial enterprises, which allowed for generations of unparalleled prosperity. To acquire and maintain these empires, and the prosperity they permitted, both states had to at times rely on military force. As such wars and invasions factored heavily in the body of their works. Thucydides obviously deals with the war on the Peloponnesos with Sparta and her allies, but he also examines in some detail the invasion of Sicily, and several smaller and perhaps less significant campaigns. Machiavelli's history also deals heavily in warfare between the myriad independent city - states, such as Milan, Venice, Florence, Sienna, Pisa, the Papal States and Naples, with their mercenary armies. At this time the practice in Italy was for these states was to hire a

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[29] Harry Shaw, Dictionary of Literary Terms. (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1939), 187.

[30] Starr, 119.

mercenary adventurer to lead the cities cause in the field of battle. In general, then, both authors describe similar environments where prosperous states fight constant wars.

Machiavelli is critical of the war and conflict between the independent cities of Italy. He sees these conflicts as very damaging to the citizens of the cities and only in the rarest cases beneficial. While he admits that past victories have brought riches and booty to enrich the city and inhabitants he sees "Victories in the times we are describing firsts emptied the treasuries, then impoverished the people, and still did not secure you from you enemies."[31] The atmosphere among waring nations at this time was such that absolute victory, while desirable, was impossible. Attempts to achieve victory were futile acts by hubristic adventurers to gain personal glory, or even mislead a state into thinking it could achieve glory and peace, at the expense of the people. Behavior like this, to Machiavelli was a mortal sin, which could only lead to ruin not only for the people involved but for all of Italy.

Thucydides recognizes similar symptoms among individuals in his own time, and like Machiavelli relates them to eventual doom. Cleon has already been shown to be guilty of playing to the hubristic tendencies of the Athenians, but Thucydides goes even further to suggest that the entire attitude of the state was at fault for the great disasters. He almost seems question the predominant claim that the Athenians had the right to power.[32] Thucydides saw that "the root cause for Athenian defeat was the ever more ruthless imperialism of Athens. . . Not for him the comforting gloss that the Athenians deserved their rule because they drove back the

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[31] Machiavelli, 6. 1.
[32] Davies, 117.

Persians or were culturally the school of Hellas."[33] The freedom and prosperity of Athens to some extent rested on the oppression and destitution of her "allied" states, and this marked a contradiction in thought which Thucydides recognized as too fundamental to overcome.

Essentially, then Machiavelli and Thucydides had the same views. Both saw attempts to expand the power of their respective states as counter productive, and consistently showed how such actions led ultimately to defeat.

"[M]en are moved so much more by the hope of acquiring than by the fear of losing, for loss is not believed until it is close, while acquisition, even though distant, is hoped for."[34] And with that observation Machiavelli characterized the people and leaders of Florence, just prior to their embarking on a campaign against their neighboring city Lucca, which had always been friendly to them. In the course of the wars which engulfed Italy throughout this period, however, "Lucca had been left to them as booty by the Venetians and the duke."[35] An army under Florentine control succeeded in looting and pillaging the countryside around Lucca, in such a cruel and destructive manner that it when the details were made known to Florence "it displeased not only the magistrates but the whole city."[36] After several stern rebukes were issued against the perpetrators of these acts, which were "unfortunate not because they did not acquire many towns,"[37] the Florentine government changed the leadership of its army, which then settled in for a siege of the town, leaving the countryside to lick it wounds.

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33 Starr, 121.
34 Machiavelli, 4. 18.
35 Ibid., 4. 19.
36 Ibid., 4. 20.
37 Ibid.

Machiavelli then proceeds to tell how, this siege eventually degenerated into a series of poorly managed attacks against the city, which ultimately resulted in the withdrawal of Florentine troops. In the end the "Lucchese not only regained their own towns but seized all those in the district of Pisa."[38] All Florence managed to acquire from this campaign was a loss, in both prestige, as suffered from a defeat, and resources in the expense in fielding an army -- both things which Machiavelli pointed out that the desire to acquire would hide.

A second example of what Machiavelli saw as the destructive tendency of hubristic behavior was his descriptions of the conflict between the Count Francesco Sforza and the Venetians over who would control the city- republic of Milan after the death of her Duke. The city of Milan realized that it was stuck between these two powerful and essentially greedy parties. "The Milanese were very much disturbed by this case, since it appeared to them that they had discovered the count's ambition and the end toward which he was heading."[39] However, on the other hand they feared the Venetians "pride and harsh conditions."[40] Machiavelli sees the two evils in basically hubristic terms, "pride" on one side and "ambition" on the other. The end result of this conflict is that the Milanese caught in this conflict suffered greatly after the ambitious Count Sforza succeeded (see p. 7). " The princes lamented, the popular men grieved, women and children wept."[41] While the ambitious count was in this case victorious Machiavelli's message is still clear that ambition, and greed are characteristics which consistently lead to pain and suffering.

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[38] Ibid., 4. 26.
[39] Ibid., 4. 17.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid., 4. 20.

Perhaps the broadest condemnation of hubristic behavior issued by Machiavelli is his attacks on the adventurer mercenary soldiers. While Francesco Sforza received much of this abuse his case is sufficiently unique to be dealt with separately (at least in that he succeeded). Others, however, are seen as the embodiment of tendencies which led to Italies eventual decline and domination by outside powers. Machiavelli felt that their personal ambition allowed them to lead the states for which they fought into prolonged and exaggerated conflicts that persisted in keeping Italy divided. The list of them is extensive, Niccolo Piccinino, Niccolo Fortebraccio, Gattamelata and other so called "condottiere" made it easy for rival Italian states to wage wars upon their neighbors with a minimum of effect upon themselves.[42] These men fought not for noble or just causes, but for the sake of fighting and personal ambition. Machiavelli describes the destructive and negative aspects of these wars in some detail in the beginning of Book V, and never fails to mention ambition, pride, or lust for glory when it motivated a prince or a republic to hire one of these despicable and similarly motivated men.

Machiavelli never fails to note the destructive results of hubristic behavior throughout his History. He regards attempts by individuals or Italian states to expand or even conquer all of Italy as impossible and divisive, characteristically identifying pride and arrogance with any action which leads to suffering and loss. The divisive nature of these wars eventually led Italy into a period of decline and eventually foreign domination.

Hubris was also a major concern of Thucydides' History. Throughout his History he suggests that Athens was able to maintain her vast empire

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[42] Ibid., 5. 1.

only through some degree of military superiority. One of the earliest conflicts in Thucydides' history, involves the Athenian treatment of one of her tribute paying allies, Potidea. An Athenian army was laying siege too this city-state after it tried to revolt with the help of Corinth, which in turn asked Sparta for assistance in breaking the siege. In order to avert all out war Athens sent delegates to Sparta to attempt to justify their behavior. These delegates admitted that they had acquired their empire "for our own honour and our own interests,"[43] and the Athenians refused to give it up because "Three powerful motives prevent us from doing so - security, honour and self-interest."[44] They continued, "It has always been a rule that the weak should be subject to the strong; and besides, we consider that we are worthy of our power."[45] This arrogance seems intentionally portrayed by Thucydides in these speeches (which he most likely fabricated) to prove his point that Athenians provoked Sparta, through it refusal to concede even the smallest amount of its empire, into their eventual declaration of war against Athens.

A. French suggests that Thucydides' continues to develop this mentality further in the famous Melian Dialogue, where the "mentality of imperialism is exposed mercilessly. No other authority is recognized save that of power, which has by now assumed an unchallengeable position in the Athenian hierarchy of values."[46] Here the delegates from the invading Athenian army seek to persuade the inactive, but nonetheless Spartan allied community, on the island of Melos to surrender. A similar arrogance

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[43] Thucydides, 1. 75.

[44] Ibid., 1. 76.

[45] Ibid.

[46] A. French, "Thucydides and the Power Syndrome," Greece and Rome 1, (April 1980), 28.

is shown by the Athenian delegate in this instance as was before in his saying "You, by giving in, would save yourselves from disaster; we, by not destroying you, would be able to profit from you."[47] The Melians responded by asking why they could not continue to exist as mutual friends, but the Athenian responded coldly "our subjects would regard that as a sign of weakness in us, whereas your hatred is evidence of our power."[48] Here the Athenians demonstrated the willingness to actually destroy another state rather than allow it to continue to exist without fear. While in Machiavelli the results of hubristic behavior are often immediate in Thucydides they continue to mount, as they do here.

While A. French sees the Melian Dialogue as the ultimate expression of the lust for power, it seems that a more persuasive argument can be made for Thucydides description of the second Sicilian expedition. In Books IV to VII, Thucydides proceeds to describe how Alcibiades manages to convince the Athenian people to attack Sicily (see p.8), the details of the expedition, and eventually, and most importantly, a tragic enumeration of their defeat. Thucydides makes no effort to hide the motivation behind the Sicilian campaign, which the Athenians saw as an "absolutely safe" opportunity for booty and glory. In the end, however, these motivations proved inadequate and the campaign was a disaster.

> "This was the greatest Hellenic action that took place during this war, and, in my opinion, the greatest action that we know of in Hellenic history - to the victors the most brilliant of successes, to the vanquished the most calamitous of defeats; for they were utterly and entirely defeated; their sufferings were on an enormous scale; their losses were as they say, total; army, navy, everything was destroyed, and, out of many only few returned. So ended the events in Sicily."[49]

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[47] Thucydides, 5. 93.
[48] Ibid., 5. 95.
[49] Ibid., 7. 87.

Power, glory, pride, ambition all lead men into many tragic errors. Both Machiavelli and Thucydides identified these tendencies as the leading causes for disaster in their histories. So as much as the republic was typified as the ideal form of government, hubris was identified as the leading cause for its failure. Ultimately, however, these observations are dependent on a fixed vantage point, from which the historian is able to identify merits and faults of the described behaviors. Here is where Machiavelli and Thucydides share the most potent of similarities.

III

Perhaps keystone of the arch between Machiavelli and Thucydides is the perspective from which they are writing their histories. Here again an interesting parallel can be developed, but once as before a certain amount of background must be given in both their environments and thought.

Machiavelli's History of Florence was commissioned by Pope Leo X, Giovanni de Medici, through the intercession of then Cardinal Giulio de Medici in1520. In 1525 the first eight books were presented Giulio de Medici, who had been crowned Pope Clement VII some time earlier.[50] This part of the history, the only extant, covers up to the year 1492. During the thirty odd years between the last book in the history and its composition certain influential events took place. Florence entered a period of pronounced decline. Her dominance in trade fell off due to the decline of trade with the Greek east and increased competition from English and Flemish wool.[51] The invasion of Italy by King Charles VIII of France in

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[50] Prezzolini, 130.

[51] J. H. Plumb, The Italian Renaissance, (New York: Harper and Row, 1985), 58.

1494 cost Florence several coastal cities including Pisa, and issued a blow to the Florentine's confidence which Florence would never recover.[52] As a result of this the de Medici's, after sixty years of rule, were expelled from Florence, leaving the republic to formulate a new means of governing, a task which to some degree they were unable to accomplish, for they invited their most famous family to return in 1512.[53] Gene Brucker points out "Like most Italians, Florentines had come to believe that the peace and prosperity they enjoyed were consequences of their virtue and intelligence, of their ability to control their environment."[54] Thus, as their world declined they began to look for answers why this occurred.

Machiavelli, himself, also suffered a personal upheaval as a result of these dramatic changes. In 1512, with the return of the Medici's he left the city, as his patron Soderini was forced to resign.[55] Later that year he was tortured for being mention in relation to a conspiracy.[56] During this time of unofficial exile he composed his two most important and famous works, The Prince and Discourses, which outlined the principles of his thought.[57] Machiavelli, however, eventually returned to favor receiving the commission for his History of Florence in 1520, but never was choosen for a government position.[58] Nevertheless, his relatively well controlled world of Renaissance Florence was shattered and many, especially Machiavelli himself, looked for answers in the events of the past.

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[52] Brucker, 267.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Prezzolini, 159
[56] Ibid., 160.
[57] Villari, 153.
[58] Ibid, 130.

The history of Thucydides' work is more complex. A considerable debate rages over exactly when or even whether Thucydides composed his history as a single body. The most convincing argument is put forward by John H. Finley and others who feel that it was written in one piece, some time after the events it describes, and is based on certain elements of style and content.[59] The last datable entry in Thucydides history took place around 411. Athens was ultimately defeated by Peloponnesian forces in 404[60] So, like Machiavelli's Florence Thucydides' Athens also experienced a notable decline. In the beginning of his history Athens was the most powerful nation in the Aegean and by the end, it had suffered a terrible defeat in Sicily and was wracked by internal conflicts.

Thucydides, also experienced personally the repercussions of this decline. He was exiled for his role in an Athenian military defeat.[61] Thus, Thucydides, too, had a real motivation for writing his history in that, like Machiavelli, he had been a victim of the instability and decline of his state. Also like Machiavelli he had the opportunity to stand away from the his state and reflect on the events that had transpired.

IV

From the considerations made in this paper, it would appear that a certain parallel existed between the work of Machiavelli and the work of Thucydides. Both authors observed the decline of states with strong republican traditions. In these traditions accountability was key. The ruler

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[59] John H. Finley, Three Essays on Thucydides, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1967), 121.

[60] Davies, 150.

[61] Thucydides, 5. 26.

was held accountable to the people. People from these traditions understood that events were related to human actions and therefore certain actions would produce certain results. Men like Thucydides and Machiavelli sought to to tie together actions to results and develop patterns which they could then apply to past events. When they did this successfully, they took the these works of applied theory and presented them to the world not simly as ways of interpreting the past, but as ways of controlling the future. Thucydides makes this claim "if these words of mine are judged useful by those who want to understand the past and which (human nature being what it is) will at some time or other and in much the same way, be repeated in the future."[62] Machiavelli mouths a similar philosophy in the beginning of Book V when he explain why he is describing the behavior of deceitful princes. "It may, perhaps, be no less useful to know these things than to know the ancient ones, because if the latter excite liberal spirits to follow them, the former will excite such spirits to avoid and eliminate them."[63]

Ideally, this study would have been more complete if an author from a non-republican tradition was included. If the theory proposed here holds, they should perceive past history much as they perceive their own destiny. A historian who lives under a divine right monarch will not only understand his destiny as an individual at the mercy of God, but he should also perceive past events as being merely examples of divine will.

Perhaps, as Americans, we can see our present environment in much the same light as Machiavelli and Thucydides, and this may be why we

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[62] Ibid., 1.22
[63] Machiavelli, 5.1.

have so anxiously searched for better ways to be in control of our own destinies.

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This is a recent translation of Machiavelli's classic work. It contains excellent footnotes regarding difficult words to translate, or words that are regularly repeated. A stronger introduction might have been helpful.

Thucydides. History of the Peloponnesian War. Translated by Rex Warner. With an Introduction by M. I. Finley. New York: Penguin Books, 1972.

The Warner translation was an excellent and very readable translation of Thucydides, with an equally impressive introduction by one the leading classical scholars. It did, however, lack some of the notation that would be necessary for more source intensive scholarship.

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The Loeb text is the classic American literal translation of Thucydides produced by Harvard University in the early twentieth century. It suffers from stilted and dated language, which limits its readability. The presence of Greek on the opposite page will often encourage forays into the fascinating but extremely difficult text, aided by adequate notation.

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Davies, J. K. Democracy and Classical Greece. Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1978.

Davies text was an extremely helpful and informative description of classical Greece and her democratic principles. It covers the time from the end of the Persian War to the defeat of Athens by Phillip of Macedon, heavely utilizing numerous extant classical

sources. Chapters six, seven and nine were especially useful in gaining insight into the Greek world.

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This work, by the eminent classicist Sir Moses Finley, provided basic background information on the methodology of ancient historians. It also examined some aspects of the Greek city-state and conception of government.

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This work is also a collection of essays covering a wide range of classical topics. The most notable section in this work, which deals mostly with later historians, examined the social and political structure of the Greek city-state during the fourth and third centuries.

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especially good in noting the classical influences on the Renaissance tradition.

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As the definitive history of Florence, this work contains an overwhelmingly thorough survey of Florentine history. It served as an interesting companion to Machiavelli by providing more detailed background for some of his value judgements. In general, however, the work was simply too lengthy to act as anything more than an occasional reference guide.

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This short book outlines the last forty years of the Florentine Republic extremely competently. It provided good basic insights into why the government collapsed describing both internal and external causes.

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This concise book was a very good and broad based study of Thucydides. It was particularly helpful in examining Thucydidean thought along with the traditional analysis of the work itself.

Connor, W. Robert. Thucydides. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1985.

As a commentary on Thucydides, this book was most helpful. It progressed in the traditional book by book study and concludes with an interesting commentary on the abrupt end of the manuscript. This book could be quite helpful to a scholar studying the original Greek text.

Dover, K. J. Thucydides. Greece and Rome New Surveys in the Classics No. 7. London: Oxford University Press, 1973.

The most helpful characteristic of this book was its bibliography. Aside from this, however, the book proved to be a very basic overview of Thucydides, addressing many of the common issues in his study. Like Adcock's work this book contained a short section on Thucydidean thought.

Finley, John H. Three Essays on Thucydides. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1967.

As indicated in the title, this book contained three short essays examining various aspects of Thucydides history. The only one of these essays that was of particular use was the one pertaining to the composition of Thucydides' work. He clearly outlines why he believes that it was written at one time after the conclusion of the Peloponnesian War.

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Whitehead, David. "Thucydides: Fact-Grubber or Philosopher?" Greece and Rome 2 (October 1980):158-165.

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