**The Machiavellian Body: Sensualizing Agency in Machiavelli’s Political Thought**

Amanda Griffiths

Graduate Student, University of California, Los Angeles

[amjgriffiths@gmail.com](mailto:amjgriffiths@gmail.com)

(This is a draft. Please do not circulate, quote, or cite without author’s permission.)

**Introduction.**

Within the rhetorical tradition of Western political writing, it is common to deploy and interpret tropes involving the human body as a metaphor for the general body politic. In Livy, for instance—the putative source of inspiration for Machiavelli’s three-part *Discourses on Titus Livy—*we frequently find bodies serving as metonymic devices whose experiences represent the status of the *patria.* If we attempt to interpret Machiavelli’s references to the body and its attributes according to the same tradition, however, we encounter a number of inconsistencies that result from our having begged the question of precisely *what* tradition Machiavelli is following. Worse yet, a number of other questions elude us entirely: ones that, if asked, might help us resolve further curiosities or seeming discrepancies in Machiavelli’s political thought. We also overlook the fascinating riddle Machiavelli presents us in his tendency to associate specific sensations with specific aspects of political action or experience. Benefits, Machiavelli tells us, are tasted.[[1]](#footnote-1) The excellent statuses of great men, whose legacies should guide our actions, have an odour.[[2]](#footnote-2) *Fortuna—*the whirlpool of contingencies neither willingly designed nor consciously created—must not be ‘leaned on,’ nor turned against, but faced squarely and collided with.[[3]](#footnote-3) Particular senses, it seems, enable us at once to experience, to judge, and to effect highly specific and discrete dimensions of politics in Machiavelli’s literature. In this paper, I will explain why this might be so, explore how this is so, and consider which aspects of political experience are conveyed through which sensations in Machiavelli’s writing. Ultimately, I wish to suggest that sensation is not merely a matter of passive spectatorship in Machiavelli’s political thought. It is the primary mechanism through which we engage and encounter agency in the world, bringing the force of our own agency into contact with that of others’. Interpreted thus, sensation is always-already a type of action.

Perhaps more provocatively, this paper also discourages a strictly metaphorical reading of Machiavelli’s sensory referents. When Machiavelli writes of ‘tasting benefits,’ of ‘the odour’ of ‘excellent statuses,’ of the sight given to the many who ‘see what you seem,’ of the touch given to the few who ‘feel what you are,’[[4]](#footnote-4) or of the kinetic play that we engage in when we collide with the spirit of *fortuna,* he is instead tapping into a quasi-humoural understanding of political experience, in which distinct aspects thereof are absorbed through discrete sensory channels. Put another way, we may say that Machiavelli’s writing introduces us to a concept of ‘political synesthesia,’ whereby political experience is sensory experience. There being no discrete organ for political experience, however, its sensation must be transferred through our other sensory faculties, each of which apprehends distinct aspects of political experience, internalizes it, renders a judgment as to its quality, and motivates a particular response—a political effect—inspired by the stimulus’ affect. Machiavelli’s account of sense-perception is that it ‘digests’ political experience, making sense—or, more accurately, different senses—of it.

Yet Machiavelli’s idiosyncratic use of the body does not end with the senses. Should we interpret Machiavelli’s account of the dismemberment of Remirro de Lorqua—a ‘cruel and ready man’ sent (and subsequently executed) by Cesare Borgia to unify the Romagna—according to a more Livian convention, taking the episode merely as a device for depicting the ensuing status of the general body politic, we should find ourselves much confused at what Machiavelli writes was the outcome of de Lorqua’s tenure and execution: under de Lorqua and then Borgia, the people of the Romagna were pacified, united, and equally represented in the civil court newly erected in the heart of its territories. This hardly sounds like a body that, as de Lorqua’s had been, was cut ‘in two pieces, with a piece of wood and a bloody knife beside [it].’[[5]](#footnote-5) This is one of many instances in which convention and context do not add up.

To consider how and to what end particular bodies become either the subjects or the sites of discrete political events in Machiavelli’s writing, I will in a subsequent study analyze and compare two vignettes in which individual bodies figure prominently: the Romagnoli people’s discovery of Remirro de Lorqua’s dismembered body in chapter seven of *The Prince;* and the Florentine multitude’s execution of Guglielmo d’Assisi, detailed in the *Florentine Histories*. These are only two among the myriad episodes in which Machiavelli deploys the bodies of political figures differently than we might expect according to convention. It is therefore not my intention to use these two vignettes to draw any unilateral conclusions about the multifaceted role of the body in Machiavelli’s political thought, but rather to develop ‘avenues for play’. In particular, I will suggest that we may credibly and fruitfully ‘play’ with the notion that, when Machiavelli invokes specific bodies in his writing, he does so as a means of giving the abstract idea of political agency a concrete subject: The Body—that is, ‘this body’; the phenomenological being of the event in question. When reading Machiavelli, we are therefore not to read bodies as tropes, but as literal, physical vessels of agency.

As I will show, similar accounts of sensation and judgment were not entirely foreign within Machiavelli’s intellectual orbit, although they were not entirely orthodox either. Certainly, Machiavelli is unique for situating his iteration of these accounts within the political, as opposed to the epistemological, theological, or scientific. First I will review some of the theoretical traditions familiar to Machiavelli, from (and at times against) which he might have derived some concept of sensation and embodiment as a medium of agential encounter. From there, I will examine episodes and passages in which Machiavelli's use of the senses works as something other than a mere rhetorical set of gestures to mind body dualism, as is commonly thought, or even as a nod to the symbiosis between body and soul. Instead, I submit that in Machiavelli’s writing and understanding, the sensory faculties are what render agency perceptible and tangible to oneself and others. That is: sensory engagement renders agency effectual; and the sensory faculties render agency.

‘Political agency’ is, of course, a contemporary term. However, the *idea* around which contemporary theories of agency are structured—the idea of the individual’s capacity to influence external events and conditions—has long been a touchstone of Western political thought. That Machiavelli does not use the abstract phrase ‘political agency’ should not preclude us from considering whether and how he uses the body to ground that abstraction, having it serve as a tangible vessel for an all-too-often intangible idea.

**Sensation.**

Whether sensation reveals or obscures truth, whether it enables or corrupts virtue, was of no less debate among the many ancient schools familiar to Machiavelli and his contemporaries than it was for the scholars of his own age. Generally speaking, the ancient world understood the body as the primary ‘reference point for the world around it’,[[6]](#footnote-6) although views on the reliability and purpose of such references, especially vis-à-vis absolute truth (when it was claimed), varied considerably. Pre-Socratics held sense-perception to be of fundamental importance for knowledge not only of the world but of one’s soul, which coordinated both one’s reason and one’s sense of self. In Heraclitus, for example, sensation serves as the conduit between the individual soul and the world’s soul—two entities that are, fundamentally, one. Heraclitus warns, however, that organs such as ‘the eyes and [the] ears are bad witnesses, if you have a barbarian’s soul.’[[7]](#footnote-7) The senses are a means of accessing and changing the conditions around us as much as they are a reflection of those conditions—and those conditions can be deceiving if we do not engage our faculties critically.

Parmenides, by contrast, regards the soul as something imprisoned in its worldly body, whose sensory capacities limit the capacity of the self to apprehend Truth. So too does language, an invention and extension of the sensing body, inhibit access to the pure, intangible Truth privileged by Parmenides. Nevertheless, both the body and language are imperfect but necessary messengers that allow the human being to perceive—however cloudedly—and think—however fallibly—whatever dilutions of Truth our senses deliver to us in fragments.[[8]](#footnote-8)

Aristotle’s hierarchy of sensation privileges sight above the other senses, followed by hearing, smell, taste, and finally touch. This sequence is consistent with the prejudice, common among several ancient traditions, that ‘distance sensations’ are better trusted than intimate ones, since sensations like taste and touch force the body into contact with a potentially corrupting agent and render the perceiver subject to the object in question. Such accounts typically depict the intimate senses as indulgent[[9]](#footnote-9) or even pathological, whereas the distance afforded by sight and hearing are thought to temper the corresponding perception with a degree of objectivity, and hence rationality.[[10]](#footnote-10)

Against the Aristotelian paradigm, ancient materialists like Lucretius prioritize touch *above* the other senses, by very dint of the fact that it is *tactus* that brings all experience and material existence into being.[[11]](#footnote-11) For Lucretius, ‘all senses are variations of touch’:

Vision works by means of *simulacra* that peel off from things, like the bark from the tree… and move through the air impacting on the eye. Hearing involves sounds that ‘strike upon the sense’ and ‘penetrate’ the ears. Taste engages bodies that we ‘squeeze out’ and that ‘touch’… the tongue. Finally, smell concerns odors that ‘assail’ and ‘penetrate’ the nostrils.[[12]](#footnote-12)

Far from being the riskiest and most readily corruptible of the senses, touch grounds our ability to ‘distinguish between truth and falsehood’ in the Lucretian universe.[[13]](#footnote-13)

Inheritors of the Aristotelian account extended into the middle ages and thereafter the Italian Renaissance, when Christian theologians foregrounded sense-perception as the primary medium through which demons entered the body and assaulted the soul. This narrative, however, did not go uncontested: the late 1480s saw an influx of Kabbalistic and other Jewish mystical texts within major Florentine intellectual circles, including ‘oral discussions and the shared study of texts’ between Jewish and Christian thinkers.[[14]](#footnote-14) In addition to theorizing a non-hierarchical, nondualistic unity of body, heart, mind, and spirit, these texts emphasized the immanence of the transcendent: the notion that the body was the site of transformation and holiness.

It is, moreover, because of the senses that this is so. Yohanan Alemanno, one of the foremost Jewish intellectuals of Machiavelli’s period, writes that ‘the quintessence of man is a living [and] speaking being; and the form of life is perfected in the senses; and the form of speech is perfected in the intellect.’[[15]](#footnote-15) Indeed, ‘the senses move in order to fulfill the command of the intellect.’[[16]](#footnote-16) That ‘man is able to see, that is, to contemplate God, by starting from his own bodily structure [was] a leitmotif in Kabbalah,’ writes Idel. According to certain moral philosophers whose thought found footing in fifteenth-century Florence, this is because the senses are precisely what man *shares* with God: ‘the Holy One, blessed be He, gave me ten things of His own,’ writes R. Eleazar of Worms: ‘the Soul, Countenance of the Face, and the hearing of the ear and the sight of the eye, and the smell of the nose, and the speech of the lips, and the usage of the tongue, and the touch of the hands, and the walk of the feet, Wisdom, and Understanding.’[[17]](#footnote-17)

In the Hebrew Bible and Kabbalistic literature, writes Aviya Kushner, ‘the body matters’ in a different way: ‘the ancient Bible often relies on body parts in its metaphors and descriptions, which is not necessarily a contemporary way of viewing the world.’[[18]](#footnote-18) Yet metaphor is hardly the extent to which the body figures by this account. ‘The body also often acts as an indicator of physical placement,’ Kushner continues, calling the body ‘a signpost of morality’ as well as ‘emotion—for God and man’ in Jewish thought.[[19]](#footnote-19) That God, no less than man, seems to share the ostensibly all-too-human connection between affect and physical expression adds a tangle to the conventional Christian view that God is somehow beyond the embodied; that God’s Truth cannot be known through or within the body. By this alternative account, the body becomes a source of communion with divinity: the point of effectual access to divine Truth.

Kushner posits that ‘the degree of bodily detail’ present within the Hebrew Bible—in which particular body parts correlate with particular affective, material, or moral positions held by particular figures at specific times—allows the narrative to become ‘more intimate, more personal, more deeply human.’[[20]](#footnote-20) I will suggest that the body serves a similar function—not with respect to divine experience but political experience, agency, and judgment—in Machiavelli’s writing. Using the language of the body and sensation to locate discrete aspects of political experience directly within the embodied, sensing subject allows Machiavelli to inaugurate a revolution in conventional and often hierarchical paradigms of political representation and indeed truth-claims. In Machiavelli’s theory and through Machiavelli’s writing, the political becomes personally tangible and imminently useful: able to be individually reasoned as well as acted upon.

Yet by no means has the belief in a fundamental division between the senses ever been taken universally for granted. One seicento pioneer of this ‘deconstructed’ account of sensation was Bernardino Telesio (1509–1588). Routinely dubbed the ‘first modern’ scientist, Telesio, a younger contemporary of Machiavelli’s, would have trafficked in the same ideas and operated within the same general sociopolitical climate as he.

Writing a few decades after Machiavelli’s death, Telesio uses the language of the natural sciences to provide substance to a concept that I argue is essential to Machiavelli’s political thought: that of the innate politicality not merely of the body, but (or perhaps because) of sensation. In Telesio we find examples of what modes of thought and discourse made it possible for Machiavelli and his contemporaries to conceive of the sensual as the political; and of the political as the sensual.

Telesio—who rejects not only the division of the senses, but the concept of discrete sense-organs themselves—regards the body as useful for ‘provid[ing] an easy and open entry to the forces of external things and to those things themselves.’[[21]](#footnote-21) Neither sense, nor the sensorium, nor even that which is sensed has any natural prefiguration, Telesio argues, writing that the body and soul *(spiritus)* perceive neither Platonic Forms nor Aristotelian species but *effects—*‘impulses of light and air.’[[22]](#footnote-22) If we overlay this explanation of what we perceive, and why we do so through the body, atop Machiavelli’s stated enterprise to ‘go directly to the effectual truth of the thing,’ given in chapter 15 of *The Prince*, we can develop a new picture of what it might mean to ‘go directly to the effectual truth of the thing’—and what the body’s role might be thereto.

It has become commonplace, if not canonical, to take *verità* (truth) as the subjective element in Machiavelli’s phrase *‘la verità effetuale della cosa’.* Nowhere, however, does Machiavelli argue that there are two essentially different truths: a metaphysical or universal one; and an effectual or situational one. Whether he believes in such a dichotomy or not, the phrase ‘go directly to the effectual truth of *the* thing’ does not foreclose the possibility one way or another. What it does is distinguish (without differentiating) between a thing, or *the* thing *(la cosa)*, and the *effects* that can be experienced or created through it. Just as Telesio writes that we perceive neither light nor air in the abstract, but rather any set of infinite possible *impulses* of light and air—all of which require the existence of light and air, and none of which, in being perceived, negate that existence—so might we understand Machiavelli’s effectual truth as that which neither abstracts itself from, nor negates the existence of, truth, but rather bears on and through us via our effectual faculties; that is, our senses. By *la verità effetuale della cosa,* Machiavelli is speaking, not about objective or subjective truths about ‘things,’ but about the *felt facticity* of the *matter.* In this understanding, the body becomes the primary—that is, the first—point for encountering and exercising the effects borne of political agency: our own, and others’. In this regard, we might say that Machiavelli’s project is to render affects effectual.

What this reading permits us to do, in elucidating the link between sensation and agency in Machiavelli’s political thought, becomes clearer when we return to Telesio’s natural-scientific theory of sensation. As he lays the groundwork for his repudiation of the Platonic-Aristotelian paradigm, Telesio makes a series of moves tying sensation directly to judgment. Ultimately, he argues, sensation is ever and only the perception that one has been affected in a certain way; whereupon one’s spirit ‘judges these sensations according to the basic scheme of pleasure and pain’ and then assigns the body a physical reaction commensurate with that judgment, ‘like moving towards something or avoiding contact.’ When ‘the spirit perceives,’ he writes, all that it perceives—and the only reason that it perceives—is that ‘it is affected’ by ‘the activities of things and impulses in the air [bearing on the spirit’s] own passions, transformations, and movements. …The spirit perceives them because [it] perceives that *[it] is affected by them, that [it] is being changed and moved*.’[[23]](#footnote-23) To perceive oneself affected is to perceive that a stimulus has elicited an either pleasurable or painful change in one’s state. Yet this determination alone is not the end of perception, for Telesio. It is, rather, for purposes of *movement* that the spirit perceives *having been moved*: either towards a thing, or away from a thing. Perception, therefore, is a process that ends in action: a stimulus is perceived; a judgment is rendered about whether a stimulus is pleasurable or painful; and a verdict is carried out either to move towards or turn away from the stimulus’ *perceived* cause. For Telesio as much as for Machiavelli, sense-perception is always-already active, beginning with a change and ending in a series of choices made by the perceiver. The first of these is a choice as to the type of change that has occurred: pleasurable or painful. The last is a choice to change one’s state further, either for or against the stimulus judged to have provoked the initial change. Sensation, therefore, is a thing both contingent and agential: an act of simultaneously being moved and moving.

*Sight: Causes and Effects*

‘For if in a republic one sees a noble youth arise who has an extraordinary virtue in him, all eyes of the citizens begin to turn toward him and agree in honouring him without any hesitation, so that if there is a bit of ambition in him… he comes at once to a place where the citizens, when they become aware of their error, have few remedies to avoid it.’ —D I. 33

‘In all things, princes who plan to cancel them or oppose that strength should open their eyes, so as not to give them increase instead of decrease, believing that they are pushing a thing back while pulling it along…’ —D I. 33

‘[Men] have one mind in the piazza and another in the palazzo. Thus… one sees how, seeing that a generality deceives [the people], one can soon open the eyes of the peoples by finding a mode by which they have to descend to particulars, as did Pacuvius in Capua and the Senate in Rome.’ —D I. 47

‘Fortune blinds the spirits of men when it does not wish them to oppose its plans.’ —DII. 29 T

‘…and so they were able to wish, and, in wishing, to give colour to their plan.’ —DI. 19

‘…the Senate had to eliminate the tribunes and the plebs to eliminate the consuls. This blinded them in such a mode that they agreed to such disorder.’ —D I. 40

‘…the greed for dominating that blinds [a kingly conspirator] also blinds him in managing the enterprise.’ —D III. 6

‘Plautianus, blinded by ambition, [wrote a note vouching for the murder of Severus the emperor and his son Antoninus]…’ —D III. 6

‘Although such colouring over as this is easily recognized… nonetheless peoples are often deceived in it who, greedy for present peace, close their eyes to whatever other snare might be laid under the big promises.’ —D III. 12

‘Although [Crassus] recognized the vain promises of the Parthians… he was not able to keep them obstinate, blinded by the offers of peace that were made to them by their enemies, as one sees particularly from reading his life.’ —D III. 12

‘…because the people was blinded by a species of false good, it ordered the dictator…’ —D III. 29

‘Thus by this text one can easily see whether the military of our times is blind and haphazard or consecrated and solemn…’ —D III. 36

‘A prince should thus take great care that nothing escape his mouth that is not full of the above-mentioned five qualities and that, to see him and hear him, he should appear all mercy, all faith, all honesty, all humanity, all religion. And nothing is more necessary to appear to have than this last quality.’ —P 18

When we look at Machiavelli’s visual vocabulary, tropes involving sight typically emerge in two instances: in discussions of intentions or causes; and in discussions of outcomes or effects. According to Heraclitus, Reason derives from the intercourse between sensation and spirit, the latter being what gives a person or thing its intention, motive, or cause—all of which can be both communicated and obscured through the medium of sight. If we catalogue the language of sight in Machiavelli’s writing, we find that it, too, is nearly always proximate to the language of ends—whether by ‘ends’ we mean causes, aims, or effects.

True causes and long-term effects are often revealed only in hindsight. Along with hearing, sight is routinely discussed in the context of military endeavors—instances when one’s foresight is hardest to hone, and yet most critical to success.

Blindness is a persistent malady bemoaned in Machiavelli’s *Discorsi.* As the title of II. 29 warns us, ‘Fortune blinds the spirits of men when it does not wish them to oppose its plans.’ In III. 6, ‘the greed for dominating that blinds’ a kingly conspirator ‘also blinds him in managing the enterprise’ of that conspiracy. Indeed, in the same chapter Machiavelli proceeds to recount how ‘Plautianus, blinded by ambition,’ wrote a note vouching for the murder of the emperor Severus and his son. In III. 12, those who are ‘greedy for present peace close their eyes to whatever other snare might be laid under’ such promises.

Pathos—intention or desire, motivated not by internal reason but by short-term, externally-imposed stimuli—thus becomes a blinding force that can inhibit men either from divining the intentions of others or deriving the modes that will produce outcomes most salutary to their Reason. It is through pathos that ‘fortune blinds the spirits of men when it does not wish them to oppose its plans,’ both by inciting the Fabii to make war on Rome and by having the Romans simultaneously expel one of their greatest captains, Camillus, from the city. The military was then made lazy by (what Machiavelli here calls) fortune and failed to set up their encampment with ‘any of the accustomed diligence—not looking at the place in advance’ and ‘fle[eing] before they were assaulted.’

Here sight also appears related to planning: this, again, is consistent with the high frequency of visual idioms in martial episodes as well as the correlation between sight, appearance, reason, and intention. Perhaps the most palpable instance of this correlation, along with that between the senses, writ large, and judgment, appears in *P* 18*,* where we are told that:

Men universally judge more to the eyes than to the hands; because it touches everyone to see, few to feel. Everyone sees what you seem, few feel that which you are; and those few dare not oppose themselves to the opinion of the many who have the majesty of the state that defends them: and in the actions of all men, and especially [maximally] of princes, where justice is not to who complains [i.e., the one who complains will not receive the justice his complaint merits], one looks at the end.[[24]](#footnote-24)

*Smell: Status, Legacy, and Reputation*

‘…A prudent man should always follow in the path beaten by great men and imitate those excellent statuses, so that if his virtue does not arrive there, at least he will render some odour of it [or them].’ —P 6

The above quotation is one of the only instances in which Machiavelli diffuses certain aspects of political agency—particularly judgment—through the sense of smell. It is also one of the only parts of Machiavelli’s ouvre where he explicitly elucidates his understanding of how and why political agents should refer to exemplars—historical examples—in charting their own courses for political action. The nature of such an enterprise is important here. Exemplarity, Machiavelli writes, is meant to guide an arc; to reveal a path. It cannot delineate discrete actions that agents should take in the here and now. Exemplars serve to set an overall scope for the agent’s political program—one that neither can nor should be reduced to a set of specific actions and deeds identical to the exemplar’s own. The exemplar rather offers the agent a sense—an odour—of how he might proceed. Perhaps this is a very strong odour, but it is an odour nonetheless: indefinite, lacking a clear form, and—relative to an icon, sound, touch, or even taste—irreplicable.

Just as importantly, in the passage quoted above, both the primary exemplars *and the ones who follow them* will render an odour. This suggests that, by abiding by Machiavelli’s particular program of exemplarity, the agent—he who ‘follow[s] in the path beaten by great men,’ striving not to replicate it but to renovate upon it—can himself become an exemplar for future generations.

Odour is perhaps the least definitive of the so-called five senses. It is also the one most intimately tied to remembrance. (What is curious, for our purposes, is that this connection was established only recently: while Machiavelli could have certainly had multiple experiences of some smell eliciting some memory—as we all have—it is doubtful he had recourse to any empirical research formalizing that bond.) An odour cannot be reproduced in the same way that other classifications of sensory stimuli can. Nor, then, are the actions of exemplars meant to be followed definitively. Simply put: odour gives us a scent to follow. However—precisely because of the political purpose Machiavelli assigns it—this vagueness does not subordinate odour to any of the more tangible or delimitable sensations. Odour’s value derives from its imprecision.

At this point, we might note that many of these same qualities may also be attributed to taste. One distinction between odour and taste, though, is that taste resides internally. It is private. One only tastes when the particular object of one’s taste is no longer available for public consumption, as it were. Two people cannot imbibe the exact same mouthful of wine at once. Yet two people—indeed, as many people as are near enough as its nose is strong—can smell a chianti’s bouquet.

The way in which Machiavelli uses odour to elaborate his theory of exemplarity, writes Kirstie McClure, ‘reinvents “exemplarity” as a recombinative distillation of past particulars, a distillation within which historical reflection provided neither rules nor prescriptions but exercises of imaginative engagement with the vicissitudes of political action.’[[25]](#footnote-25) In other words, we might say that all sensation—but, because of its nebulous quality, smell especially—is an act of distilling particular aspects from the plurality of an experience; combining those (partly) objective particulars into a (partly) subjective event; and rendering a meaning that then justifies subsequent action. Odour, then, is not judgment itself: it is a conditioning stimulus derived from a set of particulars available, for judgment, to all within its ambit. Machiavelli’s writing emphasizes the agential capacity afforded by all sensation, which becomes the faculty for judgment. This makes sensation inherently political as well as innately agential.

*Taste: Utility and Benefit*

‘…for the captain who has virtuously acquired an empire for his lord, overcoming enemies and filling himself with glory and his soldiers with riches, of necessity acquires such reputation with his soldiers, with enemies, and with the subjects belonging to that prince that the victory cannot taste good to the lord who has sent him.’ —ID I. 29

‘For not being able to defend its subjects tasted bad to [the Senate], and that they should arm themselves without them tasted bad, for the said reasons and for many others that are understood.’ —D I. 38

‘This [present lack of recourse to virtuous, ancient exemplars of founding and maintaining states] arises… from not having a true knowledge of histories, through not getting from reading them that sense nor tasting the flavor that they have in themselves.’ —D I. Preface

‘He thought, especially, that he had acquired the friendship of the Romagna, and that he had gained all those peoples to himself since they had begun to taste well-being.’ —P 7

‘For injuries must be done all together, so that, being tasted less, they offend less; and benefits by little so that they may be tasted better.’ —P 8

‘But lack of prudence in men begins something in which, because it tastes good then, they do not perceive the poison that lies underneath…’ —P 8

Neither, however, does Machiavelli overlook what we have pointed out are certain similarities between smell and taste. This is evident in his use of the latter sensation to refer to the study of ancient texts, also for purposes of deriving exemplars, in the preface to DI, where he attributes our present lack of recourse to virtuous, ancient exemplars—through which we might found and maintain more lasting states—to a lack of ‘true knowledge of histories, through not getting from reading them that sense nor tasting the flavour that they have in themselves.’

Why the transition from the odour of exemplary actions to the flavour of ancient histories? Consider that, while the ‘odour’ of one’s virtue applies to one’s legacy—the status it will have for others—the ‘flavour’ of histories applies simultaneously to their innate status in themselves—undiluted by the prejudices with which we otherwise adulterate them—*and* to the change in our status that we may derive by absorbing this ‘true knowledge’ of historical examples.

Yet there is something deeper at work in this shift from odour to flavour. Due to our present refusal to taste our histories as they are, Machiavelli adds,

it arises that the infinite number who read them take pleasure in hearing of the variety of accidents [happenings] contained in them without thinking of imitating them, judging that imitation is not only difficult but impossible. …Wishing, therefore, to turn men from this error, I have judged it necessary to write on all those books of Titus Livy that have not been intercepted by the malignity of the times whatever I shall judge necessary for their greater understanding… so that those who read these statements of mine can more easily draw from them that utility for which one should seek knowledge of histories.[[26]](#footnote-26)

Here the connection between history, taste, flavour, judgment, understanding, and utility becomes both palpable and profound. (Machiavelli also here makes mention of the work of agency—his readers’ and his own—in just what sort of taste, and subsequent judgment and benefit, can be derived from his work). Insofar as the odour of one’s virtue lingers outside the body, it may yet seem impossible, even for those who can ‘smell’ it *around* them, to internalize and reify *within* their own actions. Taste, however, is always-already an internalization. Once a thing is tasted, it becomes a part of the body that tastes it. Its energy literally becomes available for use. This is precisely the future Machiavelli intends for Livy’s histories—as he presents them, having himself tasted their flavour.[[27]](#footnote-27) ‘A true knowledge of histories,’ by Machiavelli’s account, is a knowledge that makes their truth effectual: it is a knowledge of a people’s history as a part of who that people are today, and therefore a source of sustenance and vitality for what that people may do and become.

Early philosophers, Noellé Bauer writes, ‘associated taste with immediacy and the ability to feel, while vision and sight related to distance and the ability to reflect.’[[28]](#footnote-28) This articulation stands apart from the more nuanced account of gustatory taste that Machiavelli gives us both above and elsewhere: although the action of tasting does seem linked to immediate pleasure or pain, its judgmental aspect—which we may take as part of the sensation itself—has more to do with the agent’s assessment (accurate or not) of a thing’s overall merit or value. Taste, in Machiavelli’s telling, is not the way in which we intercept a fleeting set of conditions that disappear the moment they are ingested. Rather, as objects of ingestion, objects of taste are ipso facto considered on the basis of how they will sustain the one who ingests them. Taste rarely, if ever, has to do with ephemeral minutiae; and whether something ‘tastes’ good or bad is almost always a matter of whether its long-term effects will be salutary or detrimental. ‘The [victory of] the captain who has virtuously acquired an empire for his lord, overcoming enemies and filling himself with glory and soldiers with riches, of necessity acquires such reputation… that the victory cannot taste good to the lord who has sent him,’ Machiavelli writes in *D* I. 29, since the captain’s glory threatens the status and security of the lord himself. Moreover, the long-term implications of Rome’s continued refusal to arm its subject-cities are precisely what prompted the Roman Senate to shift course in *D* I. 38, with the Volsci and the Aequi besieging the subject Latins and the Hernici. ‘…[A]t other times the same Senate had forbidden said peoples to arm and defend themselves,’ Machiavelli writes, ‘But this one always judged things as they should be judged, and always took the less bad policy for the better. For not being able to defend its subjects tasted bad to it, and that they should arm themselves without [their subjects] tasted bad, for the said reasons and for many others that are understood.’ Here, reasoning informs taste, rather than taste corrupting reason, as the Aristotelians had alleged.

Yet this is not always the case. Sometimes, as in *P* 13, ‘The lack of prudence in men begins something in which, because it [that something] tastes good then, they do not perceive the poison that lies underneath.’ Whether born of true or false pretenses, taste refers to a type of appreciation for something’s long-term injuries or benefits: so did Cesare Borgia, whom Machiavelli lauds both in his books and in letters between himself and his friends, trust that he had won the peoples ‘of the Romagna to himself since they had begun to taste well-being.’ Moreover, both the flavour and the frequency of what is tasted can be manipulated so as to turn a people’s judgment in one’s favour: this is one reason for which ‘injuries must be done all together, so that, being tasted less, they offend less; and benefits by little so that they may be tasted better.’

At many junctures, we find references to taste surrounded by references (often very direct ones) to judgment. This is not surprising, if we play with the hypothesis that all sensation, for Machiavelli, conditions a specific type of political judgment. If odour conditions judgment as to something’s status, legacy, or reputation, we might say that taste conditions judgment as to something’s utility. To taste is to make a determination of a thing’s lasting merit or value.

*Sound: Legitimacy and Authority*

‘…when [the army] heard that liberty was being cried out in Syracuse, being attracted by that name, it became entirely quiet, put down its anger against the tyrannicides, and took thought of how a liberal way of life could be ordered in that city.’ —D II. 2

‘If such voices produce great effects in a well-ordered army, in a tumultuous and badly ordered one they produce the greatest because the whole is moved by a like wind.’—D III. 14

‘Whereupon, even though many were upset by this, the wiser part of the Senate said, “The voice of a liberal man had been heard…”’ —D II. 23 (here Machiavelli is quoting from Livy)

‘Messer Jacopo, although old and not practiced in such tumults, mounted on horse to make this last trial of their fortune with perhaps a hundred armed men who had been prepared for such an enterprise and went to the piazza of the palace, calling to his aid the people and liberty. But because the one had been made deaf by the fortune and liberality of the Medici and the other was not known in Florence, he had no response from anyone.’ —FH VIII. 8

‘Therefore, it is necessary that there be many bodies in an army, and that each body have its own flag and its own guide. For having this, it must have many souls and, as a consequence, many lives. Thus the infantrymen must march according to the flag, and the flag move according to the music. The music, having been well ordered, commands the army, which, while going with steps that correspond to its time, ends up keeping the orders easily. This is why the ancients had pipes, fifes, and perfectly modulated instruments.’ —AoW II

‘For this [the right mode of] speaking takes away fear, inflames spirits, increases obstinacy, uncovers deceptions, promises rewards, shows dangers and the way to flee them, fills with hope, praises, vituperates, and does all of those things by which the human passions are extinguished or inflamed’ —AoW II

Sound, for Machiavelli, is uniquely cohortative: the quality of being heard or voiced denotes the capacity to initiate group political organization and activity. When speaking of causes or means that impel a people to take some type of uniform action—military or civic—Machiavelli evokes various types of sound and noise, especially speech and music. Factional discord (which is nevertheless generally salutary, for Machiavelli) is stoked by or associated with various sorts of noise; whereas military harmony is often discussed in terms of music. Music, we are told in *AoW,* ‘commands the army, which, while going with the steps that correspond to its time, ends up keeping the orders easily’. The right mode of speaking, we are likewise told, ‘takes away fear, inflames spirits, increases obstinacy, uncovers deceptions, promises rewards, shows dangers and the way to flee them… and does all of those things by which the human passions are extinguished or inflamed.’ Note, again, the connection between the humours and the senses in the last part of this passage. Blindness may be caused by a dysfunction in one’s pathos, but pathos is extinguished or inflamed by sound.

In *D* III.14, Machiavelli alludes to why sound, in particular, has such power to unify, incite, or corrupt political and military bodies: ‘If such voices produce great effects in a well-ordered army,’ he says, ‘in a tumultuous and badly ordered one they produce the greatest because the whole is moved by a like wind.’

Outside the arena of battle, sound does not play as obvious of a role in Machiavelli’s sensory lexicon. Some notable exceptions have to do with the voice, and attunement, that is given to liberty. Either liberty has a voice, or voices have liberty—that is, those who can hear and make themselves heard are those who either have liberty, or at least—in Machiavelli’s words—a ‘memory of liberty’[[29]](#footnote-29) (which is essential to the desire for liberty as much as it is the ability to maintain it). As we learn in the *Discorsi,* ‘the name of liberty’[[30]](#footnote-30) is no less an impetus for unified (and generally violent) action than music or rhetoric are in the *Art of War.*

Machiavelli often speaks of the ‘name of liberty’ as though it is something innately vocative. Perhaps this is because republican liberty, in *D* I. 2, II. 2, and elsewhere, is presented as the institutional alternative to the ‘name of a sole head’; ‘the name of a tyrant’; or ‘the name of prince’. In *D* II. 2, Machiavelli tells us the ‘name of liberty’ was so much esteemed by so many ancient peoples that when the army of the tyrant Hieronymus ‘heard that liberty was being cried out in Syracuse, being attracted by that name, it became entirely quiet, put down its anger against the tyrannicides, and took thought of how a liberal way of life could be ordered in that city.’ Name, moreover, is at points synonymous with legacy, and therefore memory; so it would stand to reason that the ‘name of liberty’ is evocative, both of liberty in the here and now, and of the memory of it.

Recounting the Pazzi conspiracy, whose failure (and gruesome fallout) a nine-year-old Machiavelli likely witnessed in part, Machiavelli writes in the *Florentine Histories* that Jacopo Pazzi, a figurehead of the 1478 plot to overthrow the Medici government, ‘mounted on horse… with perhaps a hundred armed men… and went to the piazza of the [Palazzo della Signoria] calling to his aid the people and liberty. But because one had been made deaf by the fortune and liberality of the Medici and the other was not known in Florence, he had no response from anyone.’ His brother dragged through the streets and hanged, Jacopo, too, was eventually captured and returned to the Palazzo della Signoria, where, after being tortured, he too was hanged from the window of the palace beside the decomposing bodies of his brother and co-conspirator Francesco Salviati, which had been twisting there, in plain sight of all who passed through the Florentine city center, for several days. Jacopo, his brother, and Salviati were three of some eighty people executed over a six-month period for their alleged involvement in the conspiracy.

I draw out this episode to make a more general point about the hypersensual political environment into which Machiavelli was born, in which he worked, of which he wrote, to which he lost friends, and under which he, too, endured extreme torture and brutal interrogation as the result of erroneous allegations of conspiracy. The body was a political cudgel, so that to speak of it as a gateway to agency may sound paradoxical. This is where it becomes important to highlight the distinction Machiavelli seems to make, in his work, between sensation as feeling and sensation as touching. All forms of sensation are active, I argue, so that it would be misleading to refer to feeling, hearing, or tasting as ‘passive’ sensations. Yet all forms of sensation were, according to the dominant convention of Machiavelli’s time, variations of feeling or touch: this paradigm, popularized by many ancient philosophers including Lucretius, prevailed to Machiavelli’s day. Moreover, we have already reviewed how Telesio and other near-contemporaries understood sensation as the avenue toward reasoned engagement with the world. The world of Machiavelli’s politics was a very sensual world. Political experiences confronted the mind, and the spirit, tangibly—through appearance, sound, odour, flavour, and feeling. The intuitive response to these conditions would therefore have been to confront politics in kind—by seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching.

These details also help to substantiate another claim I am making about the role that the sensing body plays in Machiavelli’s work. They tell us, not merely what role the sensing body *actually* played during his lifetime, but what he wished to *transform* about the work of sensation, and indeed political experience writ large, *through* his writing. In Machiavelli’s *world,* the body was the material of domination. In his *life,* the senses were avenues of victimization. In Machiavelli’s *writing,* the body becomes the site of agency. The senses become arbiters of judgment. Sensation goes from being painful to empowering. It is transformed into something that is, itself, transformational. Nor, again, does this apply to sensation in isolation; for as has been shown, the political *is* the sensual, to Machiavelli; and the sensual *is* political. They are one and the same. Whatever Machiavelli does to sense, through sense, so too political experience.

Nowhere, perhaps, is this more palpable than with respect to our final sensation: kinesis.

*Kinesis: Power*

It is unclear, and perhaps unlikely, that Machiavelli regarded feeling and touch as discrete senses in their own right. Both in and before Machiavelli’s time (as in Lucretius’ writing, for example), it was common to consider every sense some aspect of touch, holding that all sensation derived from the body’s material encounter with external stimuli—in which both body and stimulus touched and were touched by one another. One way in which the Italian language bears out this paradigm is through its multivalent verb *sentire,* which can mean, simultaneously, ‘to sense,’ ‘to feel [physically or emotionally],’ ‘to understand,’ ‘to hear,’ and ‘to taste’. I will therefore discuss not Machiavelli’s political vocabulary of touch *per se* but his use of kinetic language, which, I argue, indexes relations of power.

If we grant that all sensation is an aspect of political engagement in Machiavelli’s writing, and that all sensation was an aspect of touch according to prominent aesthetic conventions, it is perhaps fitting that Machiavelli seems to use kinesis, the mechanism through which sensed objects engage our senses*,* to index the most agential, intentional, and empowered forms of political engagement. Leaders have ‘modes of proceeding’ or ‘walk on paths’; and princes easily acquire allies among ‘those who are of such quality that to maintain themselves they need somewhere to lean’. In maintaining those allies, moreover, they themselves ‘should never fall in the belief that [they] can find someone to pick [them] up.’ Prudent men, after consulting with their trusted advisors, ‘should move directly to the thing that was decided,’ for ‘whoever does otherwise… falls headlong because of flatterers.’ Judgment of one’s true character and intentions is performed not by the eyes, but by the hands, ‘because it touches everyone to see; to feel, few. Everyone sees that which you seem; few feel that which you are.’

Among all of the discrete senses—each a category of touch—only kinesis forces an immediate and equalizing bond between the feeling and the felt—‘equalizing’ because the feeling inevitably becomes the felt, at the moment of and through the very act of feeling itself. One can see and remain hidden, hear and remain silent, taste and remain unconsumed. One cannot feel without being touched. Nor can one engage without being engaged. Implicit in the notion that Machiavelli uses kinesis, so understood, to index relations of power is that Machiavellian power is not necessarily linear or hierarchical. Kinesis does not overpower its object as much as it does empower its subject. Moreover, there is always a dimension of equanimity at work within kinesis: its uniquely empowering status derives from the intimacy it necessitates between object and subject. One cannot touch without being touched. According to a worldview that associates kinesis with power relations, neither power nor agency can be a zero-sum game. For this reason, kinesis also denotes the most vulnerable forms of political engagement: those that place the agent at greatest risk.

The kinetically-coded interplay between power, equanimity, and vulnerability is especially potent in Machiavelli’s discussions of *fortuna.* For other writers, *fortuna* often serves as a foil to agency, the will, or reason; and Machiavelli himself speculates that *fortuna* ‘might be… the arbiter of half our actions’ in *P* 25. (He does, however, leave this clause in the conditional, and therefore the matter itself open to question). *Fortuna* proceeds in ‘thrusts’ *(impeti)—*so, too, are men urged to behave impetuously *(impetuoso)* toward *fortuna*, engaging with it in the manner that it engages them. Indeed, in *D* II.29 men are cautioned that they can neither rupture *fortuna* nor, in *P* 25, should they lean against it, but instead, in *D* III.31, to turn their faces toward it. In the tercet *Di Fortuna* readers are to grab *fortuna* as it turns and ‘press into’ it (*spingere*)—a word that finds a close, albeit far more urgent, companion in the ‘collision’ suggested by the verb *urtare* as it is used in *P* 25:

It is better to be impetuous *[impetuoso]* than cautious *[rispettivo,* whose roots also connote an element of ‘backward-looking’], because *fortuna* is woman, and it is necessary, wanting it to remain underneath [you], to strike at it and collide with it *[urtarla]*.

Why are our interactions with contingency predominately kinetic, and not auditory, gustatory, visual, or olfactory? Because they require three things: action, proximity, and change. Consider again what it means to ‘collide with’ *fortuna:* when colliding *with* an object,the distinction between subject and object, of the role each one plays in the force of the collision, and the power each one has over the outcome, is in flux. To Machiavelli, every action upon *fortuna* is a transformation of *fortuna’s* material, and it is thus a transformation of *fortuna* itself. Hence an agent, in their approach to contingency, forms the quality of their own *fortuna.* What is more, in colliding with contingency an agent takes on those powers that Machiavelli elsewhere relegates to the realm of *fortuna:* the power to create necessity, for instance;[[31]](#footnote-31) or the power to modify opportunity so that it becomes occasion;[[32]](#footnote-32) or the power to dictate the qualities of the times. This is how Machiavelli is able to declare that individual ‘glory can be acquired in any action whatever.’[[33]](#footnote-33)

The transformational dynamic of kinesis, and the power it is able to confer upon an actor, are also borne out in Machiavelli’s discussion of Lucius Junius Brutus,[[34]](#footnote-34) who introduces (or, as Machiavelli puts it, fathered[[35]](#footnote-35)) liberty in Rome—initiating the dawn of the Roman republic—after deposing the last of its early tyrants, Tarquinius Superbus. This episode follows the suicide of a Roman plebian girl, Lucretia, who in Livy’s history of Rome stabs herself after being raped by Tarquinius’ son Sextus.

Leading up to the event, Brutus, Machiavelli explains, had been working in deliberate proximity to the Tarquins, feigning loyalty in order

to be less observed and to have more occasion for crushing the kings and liberating his own fatherland whenever opportunity would be given him. That he thought of this may be seen, first, in the interpreting of the oracle of Apollo, when he simulated falling so as to kiss the earth, judging that through this he would have the gods favorable to his thoughts, and afterward, when over the dead Lucretia he was the first among her father and husband and other relatives to draw the knife from the wound and to make the bystanders swear that they would never endure that in the future anyone should reign in Rome.[[36]](#footnote-36)

Above, Machiavelli gives two examples of how Brutus collides with contingency—both in very physical, tactile ways—toward the purpose of ‘liberating his fatherland’. First, Brutus feigns insanity, as Machiavelli points out in the heading of *D* III.2, *in tempo,* or ‘in accordance with the times’: striking at the earth (which, traditionally, was simultaneously the realm of natural necessity and a conduit toward communion with the divine: both areas thought to eclipse human agency)—and then kissing it. In this case, Brutus even initiates a literal collision with the simulation of falling.

The second collision, however, is even more transformational. The advent of the Roman republic, which begins when Brutus’ hand hits the hilt of a knife, initiates Rome’s renewal—its being drawn ‘back to its beginnings’ by Brutus’ ‘recover[ing] the liberty of Rome’.[[37]](#footnote-37)

Brutus’ actions also change the very fabric of this event from accident to opportunity. At the moment that Brutus physically seizes upon the accident’s most proximate cause—the knife, which he draws from Lucretia’s wound—he transforms the significance of her death: no longer is it yet another casualty of the Tarquins’ tyranny. It is becomes the birth of Roman liberty. The bystanders, too, are transformed in the oath they swear to live as the guardians of and heirs to that liberty. Yet perhaps no one is more powerfully transformed through this episode than Brutus himself—the nephew of Tarquinius himself; and now the ‘father of Roman liberty’.[[38]](#footnote-38)

Liberty’s potentiating idea—agency—is here explicitly situated within the body. With this maneuver, Machiavelli gives political agency a material situation—the body—which can simultaneously be affected by and have an effect on other material situations. In Machiavelli’s writing, agency’s primary medium of encounter and engagement is the body in general, vis-à-vis the senses in particular.

If, as I want to suggest, we take the Machiavellian body in its totality as the faculty of agency, and its senses as faculties of reason, which both condition and are conditioned by agency, we can discover still further instances of the radicality of Machiavelli’s political thought. We have just seen how, in Machiavelli’s work, sensation (if used well) becomes the pivotal gateway to political judgment and effectuality as much as a conduit for deception and manipulation. This sets Machiavelli apart from much of the Western political and indeed theological canon. With some notable exceptions, the senses were deemed inimical to rationality—a notion echoed in the conventional Christian doctrine on the body (the cause and continued vessel of man’s original sin) and the senses (the channels through which demons, or more neutrally the passions, infiltrated and possessed men’s souls).

Machiavelli renovates these paradigms by rewriting the relationship between the body, sensation, and truth. He does not, however, rewrite the relationship between truth and agency: the idea that, to be ‘in liberty,’ one must be able to go directly—actively, agentially—to the effectual truth of a thing. Machiavelli’s emphasis on *verità effetuale* reminds us that ours is a sensory, kinetic engagement with truth. We arrive at it not by abnegating the body, overcoming the senses, or turning away from contingent stimuli, but by treating each of these as a mechanism of encounter and judgment—engaging each one through deliberate, agential action.

1. Citations of Machiavelli’s writings will take the following format: references from *Il Principe* will be written as *P* [chapter]; references from *I Discorsi,* as *D* [book.chapter]; references from *La Arte della Guerra,* as AoW [section]; references from *Istorie Fiorentine,* for which I am using an English translation, FH [book.chapter]. Translations are my own or are based on Harvey Mansfield’s *The Prince* (1998), University of Chicago Press; Nathan Tarcov and Harvey Mansfield’s *Discourses on Livy* (1996), University of Chicago Press; Laura F. Banfield and Harvey Mansfield’s *Florentine Histories* (1998), Princeton University Press. I am indebted to Andrew Gibson for highlighting and offering some very insightful commentary on several valuable passages from AoW. I have drawn from these in my discussion of sound. The above reference is from *P* 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *P* 6 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *P* 25 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *P* 18 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *P* 8 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Kushner, Aviya (2015). *The Grammar of God.* New York, NY: Random House Publishing, p. 70. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Graham, Daniel (2010). *The Texts of Early Greek Philosophy.* Cambridge University Press,p. 161. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. See Graham, ch. 6: “Parmenides,” pp. 203–244. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Korsmeyer, Carolyn. “Taste: Modern and Recent History.” In *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics,* p. 361. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. See Noellé Bauer, “Theories of Media: Key Words Glossary: Taste.” University of Chicago. Available online. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Maurette, Pablo (2014). “De rerum textura: Lucretius, Fracastoro, and the Sense of Touch.” *Sixteenth Century Journal* 45 (2), p. 314. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Maurette, p. 315. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Idel, Moshe (2011). *Kabbalah in Italy: 1280–1510.* Yale University Press, p. 194. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Idel, p. 329. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Idel, p. 62. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Idel, p. 321. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Kushner, p. 70. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Kushner, p. 76. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Kushner, p. 77. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Boenke, Michaela (2018). "Bernardino Telesio.” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*(Winter 2018 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta. Available online. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Ibid. Emphases mine. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. In this passage, ‘end’ *(fine)* is often translated as 'outcome'. I have argued elsewhere that Machiavelli's use of the masculine *fine (il fine),* present here, intentionally evokes its double meaning, which is of 'intentions' as well as 'outcomes'. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. McClure, Kirstie (1997). “The Odor of Judgment: Exemplarity, Propriety, and Politics in the Company of Hannah Arendt.” in *Hannah Arendt and the Meaning of Politics,* ed. Calhoun, Craig J. and McGowan, John. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. DI. Preface. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Flavour is also general: just as very different things can have the same flavour, wildly diverse actions can provide the same sustenance, utility, or detriment, depending on the situation. In this way, considering flavour’s generalizable quality can help us understand why Machiavelli often turns to extraordinarily divergent exemplars, whose particular modes of proceeding are very much at odds with one another, to illustrate the various methods through which the same ‘flavour’ of outcome can be achieved. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Bauer, “Taste.” Available online. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. P 5, D II. 2, and elsewhere. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. D I. 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. *D* III.44 [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. *P* 26 [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. *D* III.43 [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. See especially *D* III. 1, 2, 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. *D* III.1 [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. *D* III.2 [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. *D* III.1, *D* III.3 [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. D III.1 [↑](#footnote-ref-38)