

interpretation

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Machiavelli versus Dante: Language and Politics in the *Dialogue on Language*

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Political Scientists are less fortunate than academic linguists and language philosophers, who enjoy the luxury of being able to discuss language in isolation from politics. For us, however, these subjects are inseparable. "Wherever the relevance of speech is at stake," as Hannah Arendt puts it, "matters become political by definition."¹ It is understandable, then, that recent developments in linguistics and language philosophy have given rise to a sizable, and increasing, political literature, ranging from appraisals of Wittgenstein to questioning whether Chomsky's radical view of syntax is related to his radical political posture. This literature is very diverse but a common proposition unites it.² If language and politics are bound together, then determinations of what draws us together and divides us linguistically are simultaneously determinations of what draws us together and divides us politically. From the perspective of politics, debate over the character and constituents of language is also debate over the character and constituents of communal life.

With this in mind, we shall examine Machiavelli's *Dialogue on Language*, a tract of particular interest to political scientists inasmuch as it demonstrates the connections between political and linguistic arguments and between changes in political and linguistic positions.³ Essentially, we argue that the *Dialogue* represents the linguistic corollary to Machiavelli's more familiar political arguments. That is, at least on the surface, it reverses earlier views of language in a manner aligned with the reversal of earlier moral-political views in Machiavelli's thematic political works. Our argument, in this sense, arises in a presumption

1. *The Human Condition* (Chicago, 1959), p. 4.

2. H. Pitkin, *Wittgenstein and Justice* (Berkeley, Cal., 1972); N. Chomsky, *Language and Responsibility*, trans. J. Viertel (New York, 1972); P. Robinson, *New York Times Book Review*, Feb. 25, 1979. See, for recent explorations of the tie between language and politics, D. Laitin, *Politics, Language, and Thought* (Chicago, 1977), pp. 139ff.

3. The full title of the *Dialogue* is *Discorso o dialogo intorno alla nostra lingua*, hereafter cited as *Dial.* Our text is included in Niccolò Machiavelli, *Il teatro e tutti gli scritti letterari*, ed. F. Gaeta (Milan, 1965). The best available translation of the *Dial.* is in *The Literary Works of Machiavelli*, trans. J. R. Hale (Oxford, 1961). For our purposes, we need not recount the various scholarly debates about the *Dial.*, most of which concern its probable date and whether it is properly attributable to Machiavelli. For details on these matters, see A. E. Quaglio, "Machiavelli," in the *Enciclopedia Dantesca*, ed. U. Bosco (Rome, 1971), III, 754-7, and M. Martelli, *Una giarda fiorentina* (Rome, 1978). What follows here contrasts with Quaglio's judgment that Machiavelli distinguishes between Dante the political thinker and Dante the poet, and with Martelli's arguments that Machiavelli could not have written the *Dialogue*, and that the tract is at odds with most Machiavellian views.

that Machiavelli, whose heritage included demonstrations of the interrelatedness of language and politics and whose works display a consistent appreciation of the political force of language, understood that he could not change his predecessors' moral-political universe without changing their linguistic universe as well.⁴ At the risk of oversimplification, then, we hold that the *Dialogue* has a place among the linguistic battalions in what became known as the battle between the ancients and the moderns. If we are right in this, it follows that the *Dialogue* opens the way to understanding the political stakes in more recent linguistic discussions.

From the outset, the *Dialogue* operates at both linguistic and political levels. Machiavelli's express purpose in the tract is to settle the controversy, then current in Florence, over "whether the language written by our Florentine poets and orators is Florentine, Tuscan, or Italian." To this end, he devotes the greater part of it to an attack upon Dante's claim, in the *Vulgar Eloquence*, to have written in a "curial language," which Machiavelli takes to mean a "common Italian language," and its literal and figurative core consists of a debate between the two on the linguistic character of the *Divine Comedy*. Machiavelli argues that the poem is "wholly Florentine" and subsequently forces Dante to "confess" the point. Thus he resolves—or, at least, provides others "with matter for a fiercer dispute"—the linguistic question that troubles his countrymen. Henceforth, the language of Florence's poets and orators is to be considered Florentine.⁵ That Machiavelli even entertains this question, however, results from a prior political concern. In the *Dialogue*'s equivalent to the epistles dedicatory of his political works, he says that he will take the opportunity it offers to "honor his country (*patria*)." By refuting Dante he will simultaneously "defend" Florence and "attack . . . those too presumptuous persons who seek to rob her of her honor." The *Dialogue*'s audience is to understand that Dante's linguistic claim constituted a conscious challenge to his country's integrity, one of but many ways in which he criticized and defamed her. In this particular case, he sought to "dishonor" Florence by denying he wrote in her language and, thereby, denying her the "repute" he thought his writings gave her. From the *Dialogue*'s perspective, Dante is a political "parricide," that is, someone "who shows himself by thought or deed to be an enemy of his country" and loses sight of the fact that "a man is under no greater obligation than to his country."⁶ Our first impression of the *Dialogue* is that it depicts a confrontation between a patriot and a political renegade who are differentiated according to their opinions about the force of political obligations.

This is not to suggest that the *Dialogue*, as some critics would have it,

4. The most famous earlier statement, of course, is that of Aristotle, *Politics* 1253^a10.

5. *Dial.* pp. 183, 188, 189, 198.

6. *Dial.* pp. 183, 187.

is little more than a “petulant” profession of patriotism or an attempt by a failed politician to improve his fortunes at the cost of someone who cannot defend himself.⁷ Machiavelli’s explicit patriotism in the *Dialogue* does not necessitate that he restrict his arguments to the narrow bounds of Florentine partisanship or sectarianism. Indeed, he is quite willing to admit that Florence is imperfect and that a person who turns upon his country, like Dante, may have legitimate grievances. What he will not admit is that such imperfections or grievances excuse behavior like Dante’s. Machiavelli can, without rancor, accept the *Comedy*’s “clumsy, crude, and obscene” passages because Dante’s Florentine language calls for “this sort of thing” but he cannot accept what Dante explicitly “said” about Florence. What Dante “did” as a consequence of his Florentine heritage, in other words, was “done well” even if it reflected poorly upon him as an artist, but he should not have spoken about his country and his native language as he did. Rather, he ought to have realized that his freedom to speak in general was circumscribed by what he owed Florence in the same manner that his freedom as an artist was circumscribed by her language. Thus, the *Dialogue*’s reminder that a person owes his country his “very existence” and “every good that fortune and nature” bring parallels and subsumes its reminder that Dante had to use “an infinite number of words used nowhere else but in Florence” because art cannot wholly repudiate nature.⁸ The *Dialogue*, in this sense, adopts the same secular hierarchy implicit in Machiavelli’s famous assertion that he loves his country more than his soul. Dante errs linguistically because of his prior failure to see the ties to his country that preceded all his other secular ties. By the same token, his failure as a Florentine outweighs all his other achievements. That he was “excellent . . . in every way” and a man of “genius, learning, and judgment” does not offset the fact that when he spoke about Florence he lost his “gravity, learning, and judgment” and became “another man.” Where Florence was concerned, in short, Dante lost his sense of perspective and priorities. Not only that, he lost the qualities which virtually define political excellence in the *Prince* and the *Discourses*: the gravity which denotes political respectability and success, the learning upon which political action is predicated, and the judgment which is part of political realism.⁹

7. F. Salsano, “Machiavelli censore dell’ ‘exul immeritus’ Dante Alighieri,” *L’Alighieri*, x, n. 2 (1969), 27–29.

8. *Dial.* pp. 183, 193–4.

9. *Dial.* pp. 187–8. *Il Principe*, Epistle Dedicatory (1.3), XIV (1.48), XV (1.49), XIX (1.58); *Discorsi*, Epistle Dedicatory (1.87–8), I.xiii (1.132), liii (1.208), liv (1.209), II. Proemio (1.229–30), i (1.231), III.xxxiv (1.418–9); *Istorie Fiorentine*, Proemio (II.5), VI.xxix (II.315). The numbers in parentheses refer to *Tutti le opere di Niccolò Machiavelli*, eds. F. Flora and C. Cordie, 2 vols (Milan, 1949–1950), to which all Machiavelli citations other than to the *Dial.* will refer. Hereafter the *Prince* will be cited as *Pr.*, the *Discourses* as *Disc.*, the *Florentine Histories* as *FH.*, and the *Art of War* as *AW*. According to Machiavelli, before his exile Dante was a man of good “counsel and prudence” (*FH.* II.xviii[II.81]).

Dante's position as a writer and, as such, a public figure compounded these failures. A writer is called upon to be especially careful about the way he speaks because what he says, if he is at all successful, will of necessity be the object of public scrutiny. According to the *Dialogue*, however, Dante seems to have ignored this and consequently suffered in political terms. Indeed, Machiavelli suggests that instead of slandering, criticizing, and condemning Florence "diversely and in different modes" throughout his poem, Dante could have chosen a safer way to speak without compromising his viewpoint. He tells us that even after Dante became "another man," he might have remained in Florence or have been chased out as a "fool" had he judged everything as he judged her. Subsequent to becoming disaffected with his birthplace, in other words, Dante could have continued to have lived there or, at worst, would have had to endure being treated as a fool—not such a bad political fate if the *Discourses'* comments upon "playing the fool" are to be believed—had he extended his criticism of her to human affairs in general or submerged it in a criticism of the world at large.¹⁰ In short, Dante would have been politically a more successful writer had he been less outspoken on the subject of Florence. Thus, the *Dialogue* contrasts his behavior with that of Florence's other great literary figures. Boccaccio is said to have admitted to writing in the vernacular—Machiavelli's citation is ambiguous at best—and, therefore, is on what Machiavelli calls "our side." Petrarch is said to have been silent on the subject and, therefore, "stands neutral."¹¹ In contrast to Boccaccio, Petrarch, and, presumably, Machiavelli himself, then, the Dante of the *Dialogue* is exceedingly impolitic in both what he wrote and the way he wrote.

Unfortunately, the *Dialogue* offers little thematic treatment of the political and literary differences which separate its adversaries. It does, however, include a number of passages that point to these differences, passages which confer a sense of the background for its linguistic debate. Among these is a comparison Machiavelli draws between events in the *Comedy* and Dante's linguistic position. Dante's claim to use a common Italian language, Machiavelli says, is "no more to be believed than that he found Brutus in the mouth of greatest Lucifer, or five Florentine citizens among the thieves, or his Cacciaguida in Paradise." Here Machiavelli fastens doubts about what the *Comedy* records to doubts about what Dante says in the *Vulgar Eloquence*. Suspicions about the *Comedy* precede or accompany suspicions about Dante's linguistic claim. Given that Machiavelli is usually unstinting in his admiration for the *Comedy* and uses it on many occasions to his own advantage, we are led, therefore, to ask why these particular incidents are so unbelievable and what they may reveal about

10. *Dial.* pp. 187–8; *Disc.* III.ii, heading and text (1.332–3). Cf. *Inferno* IV.51; Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1415^b30. Citations to Dante will be to *Le opere di Dante*, eds. M. Barbi et al. (Florence, 1921).

11. *Dial.* p. 186. Cf. *Decameron* IV.ii, in *La letteratura Italiana*, eds. E. Bianchi et al. (Milan, 1960), VIII, p. 193.

his objections to Dante's linguistic views.¹² Unless Machiavelli means to convey that the whole of the *Comedy* is fantastic or his examples are fortuitous, is there something about these passages which is instructive with regard to his intentions in the *Dialogue*?

That Machiavelli considers the *Comedy*'s portrayal of Brutus unbelievable and implicitly rejects it is no surprise given his overtly sympathetic treatment of Brutus in the *Discourses*. Like other commentators, he seems to find it puzzling that Dante reserves his harshest punishment for a man usually regarded as a tyrannicide and a defender of freedom.¹³ Beyond this, however, he would also be bound to object to the apparent rationale for the *Comedy*'s procedure in the Brutus section and to Dante's open antagonism towards the killer of Caesar. The first represents a way of thinking refuted in the *Prince*, the second contrasts with the behavior the *Discourses* advises for men who live in republics and principalities, the regimes which, according to Machiavelli, divide the political world. To begin, Dante's punishment of Brutus is—at least on the surface—a facet of the familiar medieval argument that the Roman empire and, by extension, its leaders were divinely inspired. Brutus and Cassius merit their severe treatments because they willfully opposed Rome's providential mission, a mission that demanded the full development of the Roman eagle the *Paradiso* describes. Again, identifying the punishment of the betrayers of Caesar with that of the betrayer of Christ—placed by Dante in Lucifer's other mouth—is a token of the doctrines, especially true for Christian Aristotelians, that the secular world shares with the heavenly world in being subject to grace and that obedience to temporal rulers partakes of the obedience one owes to extra-temporal authorities. To put it as simply as possible, Dante's portrait of Brutus initially represents a typically medieval approach to secular affairs. Brutus' treatment signifies the subordination of the regimes and authorities of this world to ends which may not wholly be of their own making and which may not ultimately be realizable in this life. Thus, Dante's Brutus represents a way of thinking that Machiavelli puts aside in the *Prince*, when he tells us henceforth to base our actions on how men live rather than how they ought to live. In calling Dante's portrayal of Brutus unbelievable, he calls in question the secular and divine hierarchy which supports that portrayal. On the other hand, his objection to Dante's open condemnation of Brutus would be more practical. Dante's ferocity towards Caesar's enemy and his corresponding tolerance for Caesar himself, placed among the heroes in Limbo, recalls the *Discourses*' description of how Roman writers during the empire "celebrated" Brutus because it was unsafe to criticize Caesar. From the *Discourses*' perspective, the *Comedy* reverses the kind of literary caution typical of perceptive writers under

12. *Dial.* pp. 187–8. For Machiavelli's admiration for Dante, see, e.g., Quaglio, "Machiavelli."

13. Cf. *Inferno* xxxiii.37–69; *Disc.* III.vi. (1.339), I.xxxvii (1.177). But see Martelli, *Una giarda*, pp. 43–4.

the empire. More important, given Dante's own political situation, it also reverses the behavior Machiavelli advises, in the same place, for those who "live in private in a republic." Men of republics who "read history" and make use of the "records of ancient deeds" ought to emulate opponents of Caesarism and attend to the "highest scorn" directed at its advocates and the "most excessive praise" directed at its opponents. Dante's portrayal of Brutus, therefore, simultaneously sets him apart from perceptive and cautious inhabitants, past and present, of both principalities and republics. In one sense, this means that Dante resembles Machiavelli himself, who departs from "all writers" in the *Discourses* on the subject of the constancy of the people. But whereas Machiavelli corrects other writers by demonstrating that the people's failings are true of everyone including princes, thereby following his own advice in the *Dialogue* about extending particular criticisms to "everything," Dante focuses his criticism of Brutus in a manner virtually designed to inflame the republicans among whom he lived.¹⁴ The integrity of his argument might have been admirable, but its immediate political consequences were not. We are reminded, in this context, that before the century of the *Comedy* was out Dante would be attacked by Florentine humanists precisely because of his enmity for the man "who slew Caesar and plucked from robbers' jaws the liberty of the Roman people."¹⁵

The *Dialogue's* second example, Dante's encounter with the Florentine thieves in circle eight of Hell, calls forth a similar combination of Machiavellian objections. Dante's thieves are unremarkable in themselves but their episode is noteworthy for "the marvelously weird, uncouth, and uncanny punishment" Dante imposes upon them and because they move Dante to deliver "one of [his] bitterest invectives against his native city." In the first instance, Machiavelli's departure from Dante in theoretical terms is again revealed. The thieves' punishment takes the form of metamorphosis. They variously merge into one another and change into serpents, transformations whose final meanings may be disputable but which are consistent insofar as they point to the variability of human potential. "For Dante here," as one commentator puts it, "metamorphosis is . . . a token of the ranges latent within man, excited by the passions and unpredictable (but also reversible) in their stages." And to the degree that the transformation into serpents—the vilest of beasts in the medieval bestiary—represents a loss of identity and a stripping away of human nature, the *Comedy* reproduces Aristotle's argument that vicious men are worse than the lowest of animals whereas virtuous men are superior to any animal as such.¹⁶ Like Aristotle, Dante teaches that what distinguishes man as man and

14. Cf. *Inferno* iv.123, xxxiii; *Paradiso* vi.74; *Disc.* i.x (i.122–23), lviii (i.217). See *Disc.* ii. Proemio (i.227); Dante, *Convivio* iv.v.12.

15. Leonardo Bruni, *Dialogues*, in *The Three Crowns of Florence*, ed. and trans. D. Thompson and A. F. Nagel (New York, 1972), p. 35.

16. *Inferno* xxv.94–151, xxvi.1–3; *The Divine Comedy*, trans. C. Langdon (Cambridge, 1918), i, lv–lvi; B. Stambler, *Dante's Inferno* (New York, 1962), p. 67; W. W. Vernon, *Readings on the Inferno of Dante* (London, 1894), ii, 338–40; Aristotle, *Politics* 1253^a32.

man as political raises him above the beasts and does not partake of beastliness. Machiavelli, of course, exchanges this idea for the *Prince's* famous image of the unchanging beast-man, Chiron. And, instead of emphasizing the human element in this dichotomous figure, he urges us to bring forward the beastly (*la bestia*) and learn to imitate the lion and the fox. For Dante's Aristotelian view of the manifold possibilities of human existence, we now have the doctrine that men are "wicked" or "sad" (*tristi*) and the allied idea that the best way of life is that of the intelligent predator.¹⁷ Admittedly, this contrast hardly reaches the depths of the imagery employed in the *Comedy* and the *Prince*, let alone exhausts the question of how Dante and Machiavelli view human potential, but it serves to clarify the theoretical divide between Dante and Machiavelli. At a more practical level, on the other hand, the thieves episode again indicates the imprudence, for Machiavelli, of Dante's writing. Dante's open "savaging" of Florence in the invective which concludes the episode is one of the "deeds" forbidden in the *Dialogue*. A measure of Dante's error here is the *Dialogue's* own description of Florence. Just before he calls our attention to the *Comedy's* unbelievable events, Machiavelli extolls his homeland in a manner that, with remarkable precision, reverses Dante's outraged invective. In itself, this praise is puzzling—some critics seize upon it to deny the *Dialogue's* authenticity—in that it does not readily conform to Florence's historical situation at the time nor to other Machiavellian descriptions of her. In juxtaposition to an invective which is a direct result of Dante's distress over Florentine immorality, however, it serves as a counterpoint to the poet's impolitic writing and a lesson in what patriotic writing demands. Where Dante sardonically refers to Florentine "greatness" and says that "her wings beat over sea and land" and her "name expands itself" throughout Hell, Machiavelli refers to the "glory" that makes Florence "celebrated in all the provinces of the world." Where Dante couples his "shame" for Florence's thieving citizens with her failure to rise to "great honor," Machiavelli claims that Dante would have to admit his own "guilt or die again" were he to be reborn and see how Florence "prosper." Where Dante predicts a calamitous future for Florence, Machiavelli speaks of her "present . . . happy and tranquil" condition. In contrast to Dante's moral criticism of Florence, then, the *Dialogue* presents an example of the kind of writing to be expected in a context in which moral challenges to one's country are insupportable.¹⁸ Beyond this, it is within the range of speculation that the contrast between the two descriptions of Florence points to a still more practical lesson. If it is true that Machiavelli had reservations about Florence's political well-being when he wrote the *Dialogue*—and the evidence in this direction is compelling—then calling attention to Dante's critique of her is a respectful way of indicating his doubts. That is, repeating a lesson that was old in Socrates' day, Machiavelli may convey the problematic character of his praise of Florence

17. *Pr.* xviii (1.55). Cf. *Politics* 1338^a9ff.

18. Cf. *Dial.* p. 187; *Inferno* xxvi.1-3.

by directing us to critical words that come from the mouth of another. In any event, the thieves episode as a whole draws our attention to Dante's antique version of human potential and to how one ought and ought not to write about one's country.

The last of Machiavelli's examples is the most ambiguous. Dante's meeting with Cacciaguida spans four cantos and includes such varied material that it is difficult to fasten upon specific parts of it which would especially antagonize Machiavelli. At the end of the meeting, however, there is an exchange that is directly related to the *Dialogue's* indictment of Dante. Aware of his imminent exile from Florence—his “dearest place”—Dante worries that he will similarly lose “other places” because of his “verses.” He knows that for most of his contemporaries what he will “repeat” in his poem will likely “have the taste of bitter herbs.” Yet he also knows that “if I'm to truth a timid friend, I fear lest I lose life with those who will call this time ancient.” Dante is torn, then, between his knowledge of the immediate political consequences of his verses and his dedication to the truth and to future audiences. At this point, Cacciaguida comes forward. He, too, realizes that Dante's words will feel “harsh” to the men around him but argues that their initial impact will be offset by the future “nourishment” they will impart. The “offense” that results from the “first taste” of Dante's “voice” will be transcended by long-range benefits, such that Dante's arguments will eventually bring him “no small honor.” Together, Dante and Cacciaguida answer the *Dialogue's* charge that the *Comedy* was unpatriotic and impolitic. They are aware of the delicate political position of writers but refuse to qualify their arguments because of this. Cacciaguida, in fact, lauds Dante for his frankness inasmuch as an “argument that is not clear” will fail to relieve the “mind of a person who is to hear [Dante].” This section of the *Comedy* might be called Dante's apology.¹⁹ Rather than accept the tenets of Machiavellian instrumentalism, Dante would seem to accept the Aristotelian dichotomy between what is judged practically best at any given moment and what is best everywhere and always, and foregoes immediate political advantage for the sake of obligations which extend beyond Florence. To borrow from an Aristotelian passage of which Dante is fond, he chooses to be faithful to truth before his friends when the truth and his friends are at odds.²⁰ The Cacciaguida section of the *Comedy*, in this sense, identifies Dante with the “other writers” from whom Machiavelli departs in the *Prince*. Like them, Dante is unrealistic insofar as he points to a way of life which unmistakably contrasts with things as they are.

In sum, the *Dialogue's* “unbelievable” examples from the *Comedy* provide illustrations of the differences that form the background for its debate upon language. As proponents of different views of speech, Dante and Machiavelli,

19. *Paradiso* xvii.100–142. Cf. *Paradiso* xxxiii.70–72, where Dante prays that his *lingua* will be sufficiently powerful to move *la futura gente*.

20. *Convivio* iii.xiv.8, iv.viii.15; *Monarchia* iii.i.3. Cf. *Convivio* iv.vi.9, 15.

in turn, represent a classical-medieval approach to the world and a new way of thinking. Perhaps the final word on their division is provided by Dante. The last thing we hear from his mouth in the *Dialogue* is a quotation, from Luigi Pulci's *Morgante*, whose central point is that "one who begins is not deserving of merit."²¹ In the *Dialogue* as elsewhere, we would argue, Machiavelli stands for founders and new ways, and he is sufficiently fair to allow Dante to enunciate his reservations about such a stance.

We now return to our initial concern. If Dante and Machiavelli divide over issues that precede their linguistic differences, how do these differences, especially in their political manifestations, bear upon the *Dialogue's* linguistic arguments? The tone for the *Dialogue* as a whole, in this respect, is set early. Machiavelli proposes that we decide the question of the language of Florence's best writers by comparing their writings to the languages of different "parts" of Italy. By seeing where the resemblance is greatest, we may determine what language they used and, at the same time, rank the different dialects. Thus, he asks that we "distinguish all Italy" from its "towns," "cities," and "provinces"—to "avoid confusion" provinces will receive most attention—in order that by studying these separate places we can see the "great differences" in speech among them. The initial stage of Machiavelli's argument, therefore, correlates Italy's linguistic with its political divisions. Linguistic "frontiers" are to be seen through the medium of political frontiers. Conversely, Machiavelli introduces Dante as the "alleged authority" for the position that Italy is a single comprehensive linguistic "province" whose frontier is determined by use of the affirmative particle, *sì*. As evidence of Dante's view, Machiavelli quotes *Inferno* 33:

Woe Pisa, shame of the peoples (*genti*)
Of the fair land (*bel paese*) where sounds the *sì*.²²

The *Dialogue's* first linguistic confrontation, therefore, presents opposing descriptions of Italy; Machiavelli's grouping of separable linguistic-political units and Dante's association of "peoples" whose "fair land" subsumes lesser political entities like Pisa. This effectively transforms the question of the language of Florence's writers into another, greater question. Is Italy, after Machiavelli, to be considered a collection of linguistically autonomous political parts, or, after Dante, as an association of linguistically homogeneous peoples which supersedes Machiavelli's political divisions?

21. *Dial.* p. 192. See *Morgante* XXIV.1–2. Here, we recall the advice of L. Blasucci (*Niccolò Machiavelli opere letterarie* [Milan, 1964], p. xii) and H. Baron ("Machiavelli on the Eve of the Discourse," *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance*, 23 [1961], 452) that we ought to attend to the intention of both characters in the *Dial.*'s internal dialogue. In other words, we ought to approach its formal debate section in the same spirit that we approach a Platonic dialogue.

22. *Dial.* pp. 184–5; *Inferno* XXXIII.79–80.

With this, the *Dialogue* reopens an old discussion. Recognition that the world is divided among peoples or nations—*ἔθνεα* in Greek, *gentes* or *nationes* in the Latin translations—had long since prompted questions about what distinguishes peoples, their relationships to one another, and their bearing upon political orders. Answers to such questions differed—especially after the revelation of a chosen people—but the tie between peoples and languages was—so far as I am aware—conceded by all. Languages were seen to attach to peoples less permanently than their natural or divinely inspired characteristics, e.g., ferocity or softness, but more permanently than their laws. Languages held a position, as it were, between the simply natural or divine and the simply conventional. By the same token, they pointed to something in peoples that preceded constitutional or legal arrangements and, hence, to the priority of peoples to the regimes which gave them political form. Using Aristotle's formulation, a people, signified by a shared language among other things, stood to its laws or its constitution as a *polis* stands to its *politeia*. Dante's identification of Italian "peoples" unified in speech, therefore, may be placed in the context of two classically oriented ideas. First, Italian "peoples" are homogeneous insofar as they possess a language sufficiently common—Dante accepts the existence of dialects within the general vernacular framework—to separate them fundamentally from "foreign" peoples. Indeed, if Dante's linguistic "frontier" is a genuine barrier to Italians understanding non-Italians, then, to borrow from St. Thomas, Italians are "barbarians with reference" to non-Italians. Second, Italy exhibits the potential, a homogeneous set of peoples, for a generalized constitutional order. In combination with things Dante says in other places, *Inferno* 33 recalls Aristotle's assertion that the Greek peoples (*ἔθνεα*) constituted a Hellenic people (*ἔθνος*) that might have ruled "all" other peoples had it been able to realize its constitutional potential.²³ Dante's Italians, in other words, are reminiscent of Aristotle's Hellenes insofar as they are the matter for which a regime of classical dimensions could be fashioned. Thus, the *Vulgar Eloquence* identifies Latins according to a language peculiar to no single regime (*civitas*) in Italy and speaks of how they might join together in a "court" that would be "home" to the entire Italian realm.²⁴ This, of course, tells us very little about the specific character of the order Dante had in mind for Italy. After six centuries of criticism, that remains a vexing question. On the one side, there is reason to doubt that Dante intended for Italy's peoples

23. On peoples, see, e.g., *Politics* 1327^b20ff.; Alfarabi, *The Political Regime and The Attainment of Happiness*, and Maimonides, *Statement on Political Science*, both in *Medieval Political Philosophy*, eds. R. Lerner and M. Mahdi (Toronto, 1963), pp. 32, 73, 189; Thomas Aquinas, *In Libros Politicorum Espositio* 1.1.29, vii.v.1119–21, ed. R. Spiazzi (Turin and Rome, 1951). For the Thomistic link between politics and language, see also 1.1.23. For Hellenistic political potential, see *Politics* 1327^b34. On the *polis-politeia* dichotomy relative to Dante's work, see L. Minio-Paluello, "Tre note alla 'Monarchia'," in *Medioevo e Rinascimento* (Florence, undated), II, 511–22. See *Monarchia* II.vi.8ff.

24. *De Vulgari Eloquentia* 1.xvi.3–4, xviii.3, hereafter cited as *VE*.

to join together in an extended version of an Aristotelian good regime. Good regimes, as Aristotle made clear, suffer size limitations such that it is improbable that an order of the dimensions indicated in the *Vulgar Eloquence*—as well as Dante's other works—could meet Aristotelian standards of political excellence. Aristotle may speak, for example, of the potential for a pan-Hellenic regime but he also speaks of how Babylon, whose walls enclosed a "nation," is not a place to be emulated.²⁵ On the other side, there is equal reason to doubt that Dante looked forward to a mystical union of the Italian peoples, patterned upon the idea of the mystical body of Christ. A union of this sort would have as much denied the practical necessities that follow from political heterogeneity, in an Aristotelian sense, as Babylon denied the homogeneity necessary for a good regime. It is difficult, therefore, to be certain about the kind of politics Dante foresaw for Italy. Despite this, however, we may say that Machiavelli directs us to that aspect of Dantean thought whereby Italy would come to represent more than a collection of autonomous and independent communities.

Machiavelli's objection to Dante's argument for a common Italian vulgate, in this sense, includes a tacit challenge to Dante's position upon Italian political potential. Machiavelli, as Dante, recognizes that a people who share a language represent something anterior to a set of laws or a specific ruling order. The *Discourses*, for instance, tells us that the church found it easier to replace Roman laws than the Roman language and that its inability to accomplish the latter left its victory over Rome incomplete. To admit the existence of a common Italian language, consequently, would call for an admission that there existed an association of Italians to which the *Prince's* victorious ruler, "new laws," and "new orders" would have to defer.²⁶ If Dante is correct, in short, the reordering of Italy advised in the *Prince* could not be total. On the other hand, by separating Italy into separate linguistic areas—and explicitly denying that it contains a Dantean "court"—Machiavelli lessens the obstacles to such a reordering. In the *Prince*, for example, we learn that a prince who acquires a state of the "same province and same language" as his own must take care "if he wishes to hold on to them [not to] alter their laws . . . [Or] taxes." If he acquires a state in a province where "language, customs, and institutions" are disordered (*disforme*), however, he is free to do almost anything to hold it. A potential prince, it follows, will be best able to exercise his ruling skills and initiate his own order in heterogeneous situations. Roman rulers, for example, demonstrated their political excellence in disordered provinces whereas Louis XII failed in Italy because he did "the opposite of things he ought to have done in order to hold a state in a heterogeneous province."²⁷ This leads us back to the *Dialogue*. Its argument clears the way for the *Prince's* new Italian political order, led by a forceful ruler and put

25. *Politics* 1276^a28.

26. *Disc.* II.v (1.246–7); *Pr.* (1.83).

27. *Dial.* p. 194; *Pr.* III (1.7–11). Cf. *Pr.* VI (1.17–9), VII (1.20–1).

into effect by extraordinary procedures, by effectively separating Italian dialects and, thereby, presuming the disorder most advantageous to able founders.

The *Dialogue's* political bearing becomes clearer still when Machiavelli delivers his own "most true" account of language. Here, he introduces the standards whereby the *Comedy* will be shown to be written in Florentine and answers a question he himself raises about how Italians, given their language differences, can understand one another. "Common Italian speech," he says, would contain more of the common than of any local language, which sets the stage for his subsequent demonstration that the *Comedy's* "overwhelming" number of Florentine words and expressions moves it out of the realm of a common language. He also easily disposes of the question of how Italians understand one another. When men of "different provinces converse they take words from one another" and these "borrowed" words facilitate conversation across linguistic frontiers. Languages are accessible to other than native speakers insofar as they consist of native and foreign elements and are not totally unfamiliar to those not born to them. The mixing of native and foreign words cannot go on indefinitely, however. Languages "enrich" themselves and become "finer" as they become more copious, but in time the admixture of new words leads them into "bastardization" and "loss of identity." The length of time it takes for this to happen varies. If a "new population comes to live in a province," for example, it can occur during a single lifetime. In other circumstances, it takes longer. Whether rapid or slow, however, the process appears to be irresistible. Unlike Dante, for whom the invention of grammar provides a record of language impervious to linguistic fluctuation, Machiavelli gives us a linguistic world that is no more constant than human affairs generally, which is to say that it is not very constant at all. The only way to regain a lost language is by means of the "good writers" who used it, which means that we regain a language as it existed at the moment of a particular writer rather than as it existed throughout its life.²⁸ The *Dialogue's* account of language, accordingly, culminates in two points. First, common and local languages are differentiated despite their sharing of words. A "provincial" language exists when the greater part of its "words and usages" are not used in a dialect within its province, whereas a dialect or "one's own language" exists when the greater part of its words are not found in another provincial dialect. Second, languages are unstable, continually changing mixtures of native and foreign elements, with the foreign changing sufficiently to be accommodated by the native but not enough to allow the native to retain their identity indefinitely.

Together, these arguments clarify Machiavelli's expressly political departure from Dante. By differentiating between dialects as he does, Machiavelli brings about permanent separations, albeit of varying degrees, between men of different locales or of different dialects within the same locale. Even if Tuscans,

28. *Dial.* pp. 184, 188–9; *VE.* I.ix.11.

for instance, shared many words in common and there existed a kind of Tuscan *lingua franca*, they would remain members of separate communities with regard to their “own languages.” For Dante, in turn, this would mean that they are also significantly divided in a political sense. Following Aristotle, he holds that shared speech is coeval with the sharing of those things that give life to a genuine political association, for example, friendship and virtue. Where there is not shared speech, there is no sharing in the goods or ends that distinguish a political association, for example, from an alliance, where a common purpose like military strength does not presume a common good like virtue. As Dante puts it in the *Banquet*, “one’s own speech [is] conjoined with one’s parents, fellow citizens, and people” in a manner such that to be reborn in a city after its language changes would be like finding it “occupied by a foreign people.” This does not mean that Dante demands that all potential members of an Italian community speak in precisely the same manner. Indeed, the *Vulgar Eloquence* has it that the purest form of the vernacular is found only among “geniuses.” The vernacular does, however, provide a common ground for Italian dialects. It is the basis of an Italian linguistic “genus,” bearing the same relation to the various Italian dialects as what is simply white bears to various shades of white. Thus, despite the infrequency of the perfect vernacular, Dante still says that it identifies an Italian people and ties together “all the cities of Italy.”²⁹ Machiavelli’s dialects, on the other hand, have no such common thread. Save for sharing certain words, they are essentially independent of one another. If Machiavelli is correct, it follows, the Dantean tie between Italian cities disappears and, with it, the possibility of the Italian order Dante envisages.

In these terms, the *Dialogue* does more than merely deny the homogeneous peoples of *Inferno* 33. Its argument also transforms the Dantean political world, in the sense that it creates the conditions for only two kinds of political associations, alliances or confederations of independent communities where common goods are unnecessary or principalities where forceful leadership replaces the need for communal agreement. Machiavelli’s linguistic restructuring of Italy, in other words, produces a situation in which, upon Dante’s standards, any Italian political order would either be superficial or purchased at the cost of freedom.³⁰ Thus, whereas Machiavelli is apparently comfortable about con-

29. *Ethics* 1171^b32; *Politics* 1253^a14, 1280^b38; *Convivio* 1.xii.5, III.xi.14; *VE*. 1.ix.1, xvi, II.i.8–9. In the immediate sequel to *Convivio* 1.xii.5, Dante speaks of the tie between *lingua* and *la consuetudine de la gente*. There is considerable debate about the relative status of the vernacular and Latin for Dante, but the vernacular is certainly one of the principal things which ties Dante’s community together. See, e.g., C. Grayson, *Cinque saggi su Dante* (Bologna, 1972), pp. 1–31.

30. On how Machiavelli changes Dante in this regard, see F. Ercole, “Dante e Machiavelli,” *Quaderni di Politica*, n.2 (1922), 5–54. See also *idem*, *La Politica di Machiavelli* (Rome, 1926). Like other Italian writers of his time, Ercole tends to emphasize Machiavelli’s new *nazione* without sufficient note of the degree to which this notion is antithetical to Machiavelli’s predecessors, especially Aristotle. See, e.g., “Dante,” 13–14.

sidering France a fully fledged country although it encompasses different linguistic groups, he indicates that from Dante's perspective the French situation is more problematic. For the *Dialogue's* Dante, what a France of different languages *is*, and what it is *called*, are two different matters.³¹ But perhaps the best illustration of how Machiavelli integrates his new linguistic position with his political arguments is the *Dialogue's* analogy between the role of Roman legions in Rome's consular armies and the role of native expressions in the Florentine language. In both situations, we are confronted by alliances, in the one case of Romans and what the *Art of War* calls their friends and confederates, in the other of Florentine usages and foreign words. As Roman soldiers and officers ruled their allies in the consular armies, so Florentine usages command foreign expressions in Machiavelli's native tongue. Military and linguistic excellence are akin. Romans provided the "nerve . . . order and discipline" of the consular armies and thereby gave them "the name, authority, and dignity of Rome"; Florentine presses foreign words into its "own service," "subdues [them]," and "makes them seem part of itself." This ability to order disparate parts is in Machiavelli's context a mark as well of political excellence, perhaps *the* mark of political excellence. The final lines of the *Discourses*, for example, point to the meritorious service of Quintus Fabius, who earned the title *Maximus* by incorporating "new peoples" into Rome without serious political repercussions. For Machiavelli, linguistic, military, and political excellence are similar. All involve the ability to join things which are by nature dissimilar.³² Where such ability is wanting, concomitantly, Machiavelli is critical. He castigates the papal court for being a place where "there are as many modes of speaking as there are nations . . . and no rule" and where nothing "good or praiseworthy" happens. It demonstrates that "where customs are perverse then language too must be perverted," an intriguing rule given the incidence of famous literary works—like Dante's—produced during periods of political dissolution and unrest.³³ In any event, however, the example of the contemporary papal court reinforces the tie between language and politics and is further evidence that Machiavelli's world, linguistically and politically, demands the ability to impose rule upon elements which otherwise have little in common, at least upon Dantean standards.

Machiavelli's account of language, then, recapitulates his political argument

31. *Dial.* p. 185. Cf. *Pr.* III (1.7). But, see Ercole, "Dante," 38.

32. *Dial.* pp. 193–4; *AW.* VI (1.571). See, too, *Pr.* XXVI (1.83); *Disc.* III.xlix (1.444). Critical disagreement over the differing descriptions of the makeup of the consular army in the *Dial.* and the *AW.* has tended to distract critics from an analysis of why and how Machiavelli develops the equivalence in the *Dial.* Although, for example, the *Dial.* states that Florentine words bear the same relation to foreign words as Roman troops to foreign troops, Machiavelli reverses the numerical proportions. Where 11,000 Romans commanded 20,000 foreign troops, 20 legions of Florentine words and usages command a lesser number of foreign words. In this sense, the Florentine language appears to be more faithful to the description of the consular army in the *AW.* than in the *Dial.*

33. *Dial.* pp. 194–5.

insofar as it emphasizes the necessity for direction in a world dominated by change and lacking homogeneous standards. For Machiavelli, linguistic alteration is part of the same process whereby cities welcome “new learning and new arts” and because of the dangers in the process—exemplified by the perversion of the papal court, on the one hand, and the “bastardization” of language, on the other—there is need for strong leadership and extraordinary ruling measures. Thus, linguistically and politically, Machiavelli calls for refoundings. As the *Prince* calls upon Italian rulers to emulate the founders of antiquity, so the *Dialogue* calls upon contemporary writers to emulate the great Florentine writers—Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio—who led other Italian writers out of “the original barbarism in which their native tongues steeped them.” Another linguistic contrast suggests what is fundamentally at issue between Dante and Machiavelli in this respect. According to the *Vulgar Eloquence*, a mark of the vernacular’s excellence is its “polish” or completeness. That is, the final form of the vernacular provides the goal for well-intentioned writers. According to the *Dialogue*, however, Florentine is better than the language of any other Italian city because it was ready before them to lend itself to verse forms imported from Provence. Whereas the final version of Dante’s vernacular demonstrates its perfection, what Machiavelli’s language was at its beginnings makes it the best of languages. The same difference may be said to divide their formulations of political affairs.³⁴

One more matter in the *Dialogue* merits attention inasmuch as it touches upon the political issues raised above. Although the *Dialogue* systematically treats the first and last terms of the question it formally sets out—Was the language of Florence’s greatest writers Florentine, Tuscan, or Italian?—it fails to do the same for the middle term. We learn that the *Comedy* is “wholly Florentine” and that Dante’s alleged Italian vernacular is imaginary but Machiavelli leaves us in the dark about what Dante’s language might owe to Tuscany. His silence on this point is bedeviling. If it means that we are to consider Tuscan and Florentine synonymous, we wonder why he says that Dante used words found nowhere else but in Florence and that Florence, “of all Tuscany,” was especially well suited to receive Provençal verse forms. Conversely, if it means that Tuscan and Florentine are different, we wonder why the *Dialogue* does not discriminate between them with anything resembling precision. Why, for instance, does Machiavelli distinguish Tuscan from other provincial dialects and then direct us to search out writings that are “simply Florentine, Lombard, or from some other province”? Again, why does he ask Dante to consider the dignity of his “country’s language” (*la lingua patria*) and immediately thereafter refer both to Florentine and to Tuscan without indicating whether

34. *Dial.* pp. 188, 197–8; *VE.* XVII. Dante, like Aristotle, questions the general value of innovation and change, especially in a political context. Cf., e.g., *Politics* 1268^b33, 1275^a5, 1326^b20; *Convivio* 1.X.3; *Paradiso* XVI.43–5, 67.

patria applies to Tuscany, Florence, or both?³⁵ The *Dialogue*'s lack of clarity about a possible Tuscan component of Dante's language, therefore, creates difficulties for its readers. First, Machiavelli leaves us wondering about the degree to which the language of Florentine writers is to be identified with Tuscan, if at all. Secondly, he leaves us confused about whether Dante's linguistic claim entailed his being unfaithful to Tuscany as well as to Florence. This situation, in turn, reopens an old controversy about Machiavelli. By its ambiguous posture with respect to the relationship of Tuscan, Florentine, Tuscany, and Florence, the *Dialogue* becomes entangled in the question of what Machiavelli intends when he speaks of *patria*.

Rather than founder, like many others, over what Machiavelli means by *patria*, we choose a less hazardous option.³⁶ If the *Dialogue* is as opaque as Machiavelli's other writings with regard to *patria*, by way of it we may at least contrast Machiavelli's approach to the issue with that of one of his most notable predecessors. Moreover, the *Dialogue* also offers the opportunity to consider this contrast in relation to the linguistic contrast between the two. A passage in the formal debate portion of the *Dialogue* provides us an opening to both concerns. Here, Machiavelli says that Dante admits to using "Tuscan and Florentine" in the *Comedy* and, therefore, that it is "needless" to argue over whether he left Florentine in the poem. In support of this, he cites *Inferno* 23 and 10:

Do you not say of one you heard speaking in the *Inferno*

'And one who understood the Tuscan speech?'

And, again, in Farinata's mouth, when he is speaking to you

'Your speech makes manifest

That you are born of the noble country (*nobil patria natio*)

To which I was perhaps too harsh.'

According to Machiavelli, then, Dante's reference to Tuscan and Farinata's identification of Dante's *patria* with his speech prove that the *Comedy* is written in Florentine. We move from Dante's alleged admission that he used Tuscan and Florentine in the poem to the conclusion that it is written in Florentine as if Tuscan has no bearing upon the dispute between the two. Machiavelli not only ignores the possibility that Dante has something other than Florentine in mind when he speaks of Tuscan, he also seems to consider it self-evident that Farinata means Florentine when he speaks of the speech of Dante's homeland. For Machiavelli's purposes, Florence is simultaneously Dante's *patria*,

35. *Dial.* pp. 186, 192, 195–6.

36. On the problem of Machiavelli's political terminology, see, e.g., Ercole, *La politica*, pp. 20ff.; J. H. Hexter, "Il principe and lo stato," *Studies in the Renaissance*, IV (1957), 113–138. We tend to accept Hexter's point ("Il principe," 114) that Machiavelli confuses us in his use of terms because their meaning shifts from place to place. On the matter of Machiavelli's patriotism, see L. Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli* (Seattle, Wash., 1969), pp. 80–81, and *passim*.

his birthplace, and the source of his language. Thus, shortly thereafter, we learn that the importance of Dante's language "derived" from his having the good fortune to have been born in Florence.³⁷

From this perspective, the *Dialogue* conforms to a position that Machiavelli develops more fully in his political works. According to his version of history, Italian political affairs had once centered around its provinces and peoples. The Romans, for example, had to conquer Tuscany and its free people before they could subjugate Italy and they founded cities in Italy in order to control its conquered provinces. By Machiavelli's own time, however, this situation has changed. Now provinces have generally lost their strength and Tuscany, in particular, exists only in "name." The Romans would appear to be largely the cause of this alteration, especially with respect to Tuscany. In conquering it, they "wiped out" the things which made it influential, including its own language (*la sua lingua patria*). Indeed, according to the *Discourses*, there is no "civil life" in Tuscany worth mentioning.³⁸ The *Dialogue*'s rather off-handed treatment of Tuscany and its emphasis upon Florence, in this sense, may be understood to reflect what Machiavelli describes as the historical failure—even disappearance—of Italian provinces and peoples. In the *Dialogue* as elsewhere in his works, Machiavelli calls upon Italians generally and Florentines in particular to recognize the force of their immediate *patriae* and, in turn, to forget obligations that once bound them to their provinces. By the same token, he also calls upon them to recognize that patriotic demands are unqualified by the things that had, in former times, been associated with province and people.

The contrast between Dante and Machiavelli here can be seen by way of a further inspection of the passages from the *Inferno* that Machiavelli turns upon Dante. The first occurs when Dante meets, among the hypocrites in the eighth circle, two Bolognese friars who had once held high office in Florence. Machiavelli's account of this meeting, we discover, is not strictly speaking true to the *Comedy*'s text. It is not Dante who hears the friars' Tuscan speech but the reverse. The friars react to the language they hear Dante speaking to Virgil and, by way of it, identify him as a Tuscan. Upon the basis of what they hear, for example, they formally address him as "O Tosco." Only later, in response to their request, does Dante reveal that he was "born and raised in the great *villa* upon the beautiful Arno." Thus, the friars know Dante as a Tuscan prior to knowing him as a Florentine. The same order of recognition also emerges in the context of the Farinata passage that Machiavelli cites. This amounts to the second half of a short speech which Farinata delivers when Dante comes upon him in the circle of the heretics. For our purposes, however, the first half of the speech is equally instructive. Like the friars, Farinata

37. *Dial.* pp. 192, 197.

38. *FH.* I.xiii (II.26–7), II.i (II.59); *Disc.* I.lv (I.213), II.ii (I.234–5), IV (I.242–3), V (I.248), VI (I.248), XXI (I.292–3). See *AW.* I (I.472–3).

addresses Dante as a Tuscan—"O Tosco"—before he learns any of the particulars of Dante's background. That is, Farinata hears Dante speaking to Virgil, salutes him as a Tuscan, and only then inquires about things—in this case, ancestors—which place Dante as a Florentine.³⁹ Contrary to Machiavelli's argument, the events of *Inferno* 23 and 10 point to Dante's being recognized by others, according to the way he speaks, as a Tuscan before he is revealed to be a Florentine. From Dante's own perspective, his language links him to Tuscany, his Florentine birth and other ties notwithstanding. This position is consistent with Dante's general view of his relationship to his province and city. As he puts it in the *Vulgar Eloquence*, he is a "native" of the former, a "citizen" of the latter, categories which also bind men not of Tuscany and Florence.⁴⁰

Unlike Machiavelli, then, Dante will not disregard those of his origins which are independent of his immediate city, or, if you will, *patria*. He acknowledges that Italy's provinces and its peoples have become corrupt relative to what they once were, but he refuses to take the Machiavellian step and obliterate his obligations to things that go beyond *patria*. An example of his difference from Machiavelli in this regard is their respective treatment of Mosca Lamberti, whom they both regard as an instigator of Guelph-Ghibelline factionalism. Whereas, for Dante, Mosca is "the evil seed of the Tuscan people," for Machiavelli, he is the source of "the first division of Florence" and the person who "divided the whole city." Moreover, when Machiavelli places Guelphism and Ghibellinism in a broader context, he bypasses Tuscany entirely and says that "the seed of the Guelph and Ghibelline tempers" that "tore apart" Italy was planted in the quarrel between Pope Alexander II and Henry IV.⁴¹ Without further belaboring the point, we may say that Dante retains a sense of his province and people that is lost in Machiavelli. Dante, to return to our earlier argument, recognizes his Tuscan ties in a way reminiscent of the classical appreciation of the differing kinds of obligations which command one in the secular sphere. As he puts it in the *Vulgar Eloquence*, building upon Aristotle, he is bound as a man to be virtuous; he is bound as a Tuscan to follow the customs, manners, and language of his people; and he is bound as a Florentine to be law-abiding.⁴² By obscuring Dante's own view of his relation-

39. *Inferno* xxiii.76–99; x.22–46. See *Purgatorio* xvi.137.

40. *VE*. i.vi.3. Here, Dante refers to Tuscany as a region (*regio*) and Florence as a city (*urbs*) and then immediately compares Latins to other *nationes* and *gentes*. See *Monarchia* ii. vi.8ff.; *Inferno* xxiv.123–6; xxvii.20–27; *Purgatorio* xi.58; xiv.103, 124; *Paradiso* xxii.112–17. An illustration of Dante's distinction in action is that when his is in Caina among traitors to kindred he is called a Tuscan (*Inferno* xxxii.66), whereas when he is in Antenora among traitors to party and country he is called a Florentine (*Inferno* xxxiii.11–13).

41. *Inferno* xxviii.108; *FH*. i.xv (ii.28–9), ii.iii (ii.63–4). See H. Mansfield, Jr., "Party and Sect in Machiavelli's *Florentine Histories*," in *Machiavelli and the Nature of Political Thought*, ed. M. Fleisher (New York, 1972), pp. 252–3. Mansfield goes beyond our argument to suggest that, for Machiavelli, the changed position of a people with regard to politics involves its allegiance to a pope before any other secular leader (p. 245).

42. *VE*. i.xvi.3.

ship to Tuscany and diminishing the force of Tuscan, it follows, the *Dialogue* reinforces the overpowering sense of *patria* which pervades Machiavelli's other works.

This is not to say that the world Dante describes is fully amenable to Aristotle's categories, nor that Machiavelli denies their importance. There is evidence that Dante saw that the antique view of *polis* and *politeia*, from which his view of province and city derives, was in large degree lost to his contemporaries and that there were barriers to reestablishing it.⁴³ Similarly, there is evidence that Machiavelli appreciates the situation of his contemporaries in terms of the old view. But this does not deny the divide between the Dantean and Machiavellian positions. As Machiavelli sees it, the only old-fashioned province and people left intact are Germany and the Germans, and their example is useless in other places because it depends upon things that cannot be duplicated elsewhere, for example, isolation. Thus, he will reconstruct provinces in a thoroughly modern fashion, removing their influence on politics and *patria* in the same manner that the *Dialogue* removes their influence on language. The modern province—any province subsequent to the overrunning of imperial Rome—is, in effect, a product of invasion. That is, to use Machiavelli's words, it results from "occupation" rather than the development "through the ages" of a people and their "mode of life." As such, it becomes an extension of an empire and is externally controlled. A people in their province are no longer the seedbed of the political order, as for Dante. They are now but a potential source of conquest for others stronger, in some sense, than themselves.⁴⁴ So too, in the *Dialogue's* terms, their language will be subdued as Machiavelli says Florentine subdues its foreign words.

Perhaps the final word on all this is found in parallel passages in the *Prince* and *Discourses*. In the *exhortatio* which ends the former, Machiavelli salutes his new prince as a man who will restore "lifeless" Italy and stop the devastation of its provinces: that is, "put an end to the sack of Lombardy, and to the

43. Here one might usefully compare the three occurrences of *patria* in the *Comedy*. Virgil's old-fashioned identification of his parents as Lombards whose *patria* was Mantua (*Inferno* 1.67–9) contrasts with Farinata's ambiguous statement (*Inferno* x.22–7) and Peter Damian's reference to the location of Dante's *patria* without any reference to his province (*Paradiso* XXI.106–11). The difficulties raised by Dante's *patria* are indicated by G. A. Scartazzini in his edition of the *Enciclopedia Dantesca*, 3 vols. (Milan, 1905). Without remarking on any possible conflict, he identifies Peter Damian's *patria* with a *paese*, *stato*, or *regione* and the *patria* of Virgil and Farinata with a *provincia*, *città*, or *luogo* where one is born. The same dichotomy prevails in the Bosco edition of the *Enciclopedia*, which identifies *patria* as a *terra* inhabited by a *populo* or, as in Farinata's speech, a *città* where one is born.

44. Rome, according to the *Disc.*, turned "kingdoms into provinces" (II.iv [i.244]). See AW. VI (1.594). On the way such changes occur in Machiavelli, see Hexter, "Il principe," 129–30; Ercole, "Dante," 35. The best description of the change Machiavelli betokens is perhaps that of Rousseau: "ancient kings who, only calling themselves Kings of the Persians, the Scythians, the Macedonians, seem to have considered themselves leaders of men rather than masters of the country. Today's kings more cleverly call themselves Kings of France, Spain, England, etc. By thus holding land, they are quite sure to hold its inhabitants" (*On the Social Contract* I.ix, trans. J. R. Masters [New York, 1978], p. 57).

tribute exacted from the Kingdom of Naples, and from Tuscany.” To this end, he directs the prince to model himself upon Moses, Cyrus, and Theseus, “who redeemed their provinces” and whose success depended upon their finding “the people of Israel enslaved . . . the Persians oppressed . . . and the Athenians dispersed.” The success of Italy’s new redeemer, therefore, is predicated upon the disarray of Italy and the destruction of its independent provinces and peoples. The prince will not reconstruct Italy so much as recreate it. He will forge a new community, a new *patria*, independent of the communities once powerful in Italy. But how, in a question that must occur to any reader of the *Prince*, is this transformation to be effected and, once effected, how will the prince maintain himself? An answer of sorts is found in the *Discourses*. In a chapter entitled “A New Prince, in a City or Province That He Has Taken, Must Make Everything New,” we find that the prince succeeds precisely by destroying that upon which Dante sets such store. Among other things, he is urged “to move inhabitants from one place to another” and, “in sum, to leave nothing in [his] province intact . . . and nothing in it” un beholden to him. He should emulate Philip of Macedon, “of whom a writer says that he moved men from province to province as shepherds move sheep.”⁴⁵ We have come full circle. The new prince conquers and holds by reducing Dante’s provinces and peoples, and their independent languages, to a point where, from Dante’s perspective, they virtually disappear. The *Dialogue*, we will recall, speaks of the speed with which a language changes when a new population moves into a province.⁴⁶ The new prince, one might say, improves upon what the church did to Rome by remaking the languages as well as the laws in the provinces he takes. It is a lesson in Machiavellian boldness that the *Dialogue* chastises Dante for his ineffectual criticism of Florence while the *Discourses* advises the new prince to take steps that would culminate in the destruction of Dante’s Tuscany. But this is not the only lesson about Machiavelli upon which the *Dialogue* touches. It also teaches that in linguistic as other matters, Machiavelli does not play for small stakes.

This concludes our political introduction to the *Dialogue*, but it hardly exhausts our topic. Indeed, we have scarcely touched upon the details of Machiavelli’s arguments. To comprehend fully what constitutes a strong language for Machiavelli, for example, we would have to examine his comments on the relative merits of serious and comic writing. However, beyond such things, there is another level of the *Dialogue* which demands consideration. Dante is famous

45. *Pr.* xxvi; *Disc.* i.xxvi. Cf. *AW.* I (1.475–6). Ercole (“Dante,” 14) argues that Machiavelli considers *provincia* synonymous with *nazione*, which may be true but says nothing about how Machiavelli perverts the old sense of province and nation.

46. See *FH.* I.v (II.15–16) where *nuove lingue* are said to have developed among the *nuovi popoli* and the *rovine* (ruins) left after Italy and other Roman provinces were overrun by the barbarians. Such new languages were “mixtures” of the old Roman and the *lingua patria* of the natives that resulted in “new order(s) of speaking.”

for having spoken of politics as a way station in the quest for higher things, a stance to which his discussion of language is not opposed. Machiavelli is equally famous for dismissing concern for such things and being “realistic.” The divide between these positions is as much—more—the context of the *Dialogue* as the matters considered above. To do it justice, a systematic investigation of the formal debate at the heart of the *Dialogue* would be necessary.