

Between wisdom and political realism: machiavelisms by Francisco Suárez

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This essay is a comparison between *Machiavelli* and *Suárez* that is not merely based on the usual scheme of an openly hostile and critical attitude of the second towards the first.¹ Instead, it focuses on a few latent convergences and affinities between the two thinkers, obviously taking into account divergences present throughout their political thought.² To this end I consider it advisable to focus on the concept of *prudencia*, which allows more than others an effective comparison, though used with a different meaning and in a different context by the two thinkers.

The concept of *prudencia* connotes an epochal issue. This concept, complex and at the same time open to further interpretations, is considered fundamental and recurrent in the history of thought. However Humanism in particular focuses the attention on the concept of prudence.³

Surely one of the protagonists who played a leading role in this new interest in a different interpretation of such concept is *Giovanni Pontano*. In fact, a few years before *Machiavelli*, the Neapolitan humanist dedicated a specific, though short, treatise to this concept: the *De Prudentia*. The treatise is important for the topic we are dealing with, since it can be seen as a conceptual *trait-d'union* between two worlds which might seem far from each other or even opposite: the world of the Florentine secretary and the world of the theologian from Coimbra.⁴ This treatise which looks like an accurate description of the concept of *prudencia*, is theoretically based on an attentive study of classics, in particular of Aristotle, with *Nicomachean Ethics* on one side, and of *Thomas Aquinas* with *Summa Theologiae* on the other. The content of the treatise, therefore, has given

¹ *Suárez*, *Tractatus de legibus ac Deo legislatore in decem libros distributus*, Neapoli 1872, III, ch. 12 § 2, 170.

² On the subject I would like to recall here above all *Machiavelli, Suárez e la ragion di Stato* by *Carlo Giacon*, an essay originated by the new interest in studying Humanism and *Machiavelli*. Clearly this work shows the nature of the criticism of the Jesuit towards the Florentine secretary. In it *Giacon* emphasizes how according to *Suárez* policy is subordinate to morals and religion because civil society and State come into existence only after the union of individuals; this idea is clearly the opposite of that of *Machiavelli*. Cf. *Giacon*, *Machiavelli, Suárez e la ragion di Stato*, in: *Castelli* (ed.), *Umanesimo e Scienza politica. Atti del congresso internazionale di studi umanistici*, Rome-Florence 1949, 1951, 186-199. However, I will stray from this view to look for another interpretation taking into account other parameters in my opinion neglected till now.

³ In fact, next to a classical conception of *φρόνησις* – i.e. Prudence applying to practical offices never in contrast with man's ethical purposes – prudence becomes what drives man to the practical finality of happiness, halfway between hedonism and utilitarianism. Cf. *De Mattei*, *Sapienza e Prudenza nel pensiero politico italiano dall'Umanesimo al sec. XVII*, in: *Castelli* (ed.), *Umanesimo e Scienza politica. Atti del congresso internazionale di studi umanistici*, Rome-Florence 1949, 1951, 129.

⁴ *Suárez* is known in the history of philosophy as *Doctor Eximius* or the theologian from Coimbra or the philosopher from Granada. Certainly, among these, the most significant title is *Doctor Eximius*, because it was given by Pope Paul V.

rise to renewed interest in the theme of prudence, which has also found space in particular in *Discourses on the First Decade of Titus Livius* and in *The Prince* by Machiavelli.

Thanks to this solid conceptual basis, *Pontano* focuses on man in his daily life with his doubts, stirred by stimuli and driven by strong passions. The result of his study is a new concept of prudence called by the Neapolitan humanist „neque scientiam esse, neque artem, sed in actionibus versari“.⁵ Human behaviour is the discriminating element. It is enhanced by the word „actio/actiones“ which finds its peek in the definition which has just been quoted. According to this interpretation, prudence looks like a worldly virtue, connected on one hand to ‚sapientia‘ of man, which helps him to understand what surrounds him,⁶ and on the other hand to ‚Fortuna‘, which reigns over kings, popes and common men and women. Prudence and Luck are the opposite constituents of human deeds; Prudence seeks an equilibrium, whereas Luck upsets or endangers such equilibrium.⁷ Prudence and Luck are both necessary to man and human deeds.

Clearly, the subject of study are the actions which lead the man to happiness and *Pontano* is aware of this. Therefore, in his work, he speaks to the man who acts to reach happiness through the „bene vivere“.⁸ Hence, *Pontano*’s man is a „homo bene constitutus“,⁹ who seeks his complete realization by taking an active part in life and in social relation commitments;¹⁰ so this idea recalls Aristotle’s concept of *homo politicus*.

Pontano had no link whatsoever with stoic philosophy,¹¹ though knowing its principles. He proves to be a humanist seriously involved in the revival of the concept of man. He devotes, therefore, the opening of *De prudentia* to the concept of „bene vivere“ leading to happiness. In fact according to *Pontano*’s approach, we have to seek happiness in daily life, i.e. a worldly and concrete happiness. Happiness is the most concrete result obtained by prudent man. Hence prudence is called „virtutum omnium comes et magistra“.¹²

Prudence, companion and teacher of all virtues, is a virtue among the virtues, and has the task of teaching how to act. It was called *φρόνησις* by the Greeks, i.e. the wisdom that comes from use of the intellect; the *Prudentia* of the Romans, or experience, during the Middle Ages, became a cardinal virtue together with justice, fortitude and temperance, but it enters in daily life during Humanism, to be adapted to the renaissance of art

⁵ *Pontanus*, *De Prudentia*, Florentia 1508, ch. LVIII-LIX.

⁶ It can be said that „Aristotle, followed by Aquinas, pointed out of *art* had no moral connotations“, whereas *Pontano* „silently subverted these distinctions, emphasizing the contiguity between art and politics, *sapientia* and *prudentia*“. Prudence shall refer to deeds and decisions and be somehow supported by *sapientia*, which pertains to cognition. Cf. *Ginzburg*, *Pontano, Machiavelli and Prudence: some further reflections*, in: Ramada Curto/Dursteler/Kirshner/Trivellato (eds.), *From Florence to the Mediterranean and Beyond. Essays in Honour of Anthony Moolbo*, 2009, 120.

⁷ Luck is another wide-ranging concept to which *Machiavelli* gives prominence in his strongly secular view. Luck is an element governed by chance, by the whim of gods and by the daring of conquerors of dreams. I can only hint to it briefly in this theoretical thinking, in order not to forget that our objective is to look for a possible theoretical convergence between *Machiavelli* and *Suárez*, whereas the concept of luck is one of the elements on which the ideas of the two thinkers differ most.

⁸ *Pontano*, *De Prudentia*, I, XIII.

⁹ *Ibid.*, I, XIX c.

¹⁰ Cf. *Santoro*, *Fortuna, ragione e prudenza nella civiltà letteraria del Cinquecento*, I, 1967, 32.

¹¹ Cf. *ibid.*, 34.

¹² *Ibid.*

and politics. Prudence hence becomes similar to a positive form of $\mu\eta\tau\iota\varsigma$ ¹³, that does not deny fidelity to God, while remaining strongly tied to mankind because „mors quidem ipsa felicitas est humanae terminus, desinitque statim homo esse, ubi quis fuerit vita functus“¹⁴.

In particular, because of its eminently practical character and simultaneous link to the divine, the prudence of *Pontano* gives a new interpretative momentum, to what had already been done by *Thomas Aquinas*, who understood and studied its importance. In fact, according to *Santoro*'s interpretation

„human virtue is a dress which allows man to act well: all human acts are inspired by two principles, *intellectus* or *ratio*, and *appetitus*; therefore every human virtue is perfective of one of these principles; consequently every virtue is *intellectualis* if it is perfective of speculative intellect, while it is *moralis* if it is perfective of *appetitus*: hence prudence is an intellectual virtue and, at the same time, it goes with the moral virtues *prudentia secundum essentiam suam, est intellectualis virtus; sed, secundum materiam, convenit cum virtutibus moralibus: est enim recta ratio agibilium*.“¹⁵

Not by chance, according to *Thomas Aquinas*, prudence is not a dianoetic virtue¹⁶ – as *Aristotle* thought – but rather a virtue in-between intellectual and moral ones, but it is also true that the Thomistic concept „*prudentia est virtus maxime necessaria ad vitam humanam*“¹⁷ is interpreted in a totally new way in *Pontano*'s work, where *prudentia* is connected to *vita humana* and ensuing *actiones*. Prudence, mediator between reason and reality, becomes the most concrete virtue; it is considered a positive virtue which commits man in a constant and dramatic struggle in which *ratio* dominates, but is always will, which sustains tenaciously and fights actively the struggle.¹⁸

¹³ With reference to this, I consider it necessary to make a short digression on the Greek deity of prudence, *Mῆτις*. In some versions it appears in a negative connotation, however, this deity personifies the capability to adapt to reality and the capability to sense changes which allow future evolution. According to the myth, *Mῆτις* was one of the first lovers/wives of *Zeús*; she gave him the potion which *Kρόνος* had to take in order to vomit the children he had swallowed. *Mῆτις* also advised *Zeús* to swallow her in turn, not to give birth to a son more powerful than all Gods. In fact, this would have endangered newly reached peace with the removal of most of the Titans and Giants. However, the myth also says that, after swallowing *Mῆτις*, *Zeús* gave birth to *Αθηνᾶ*. Cf. *Grimal*, headword *Meti*, in: *Cordié* (ed.), *Enciclopedia della Mitologia*, 1999. I will not dwell further on the myth which has many symbolic implications, but rather I would draw the reader's attention to only one of the many suggestions. Prudence has been swallowed by the king of gods, because it was outside him; once internalised, prudence (*Mῆτις*) would give birth to wisdom (*Αθηνᾶ*). Hence, wisdom is never completely motherless; it is rather the fruit of the sacrifice of prudence passing through a male reason, a *ratio* which can spread and evaluate instances enabling it to give birth again. This suggestion may help to understand the change of the concept of prudence during the Humanism, praising the role of *Mῆτις* as advisor and capability to adapt which generates future and (political) wisdom.

¹⁴ *Pontano*, *De Prudentia*, I, 168, as mentioned in *Santoro*, *Fortuna, ragione e prudenza nella civiltà letteraria del Cinquecento*, I, 1967, 33-34.

¹⁵ *Santoro*, *Fortuna, ragione e prudenza nella civiltà letteraria del Cinquecento*, I, 1967, 43, who, in this respect, mentions *Thomas Aquinas*, *Summa Theologiae*, with Latin text, Bologna 1949, IaIIae, q. LVIII, art. III.

¹⁶ Cf. *Aristotle*, *Nicomachean ethics*, transl. by Crisp, Cambridge 2014, I 13, 1103 a.

¹⁷ *Thomas Aquinas*, ST, IaIIae, q. LVII, art. V.

¹⁸ *Santoro*, *Fortuna, ragione e prudenza nella civiltà letteraria del Cinquecento*, I, 1967, 50–51. Therefore, prudence is a positive virtue, which involves a schematic distinction between *res expetendas et fugiendas*, it finds them in reality, and, consequently, operates safe choices.

At this point I think we may move on to *Machiavelli's* point of view to show how the concept of prudence changes from *Pontano's* treatise to political sensibility of the Florentine secretary. To that end it is useful to focus on the above-mentioned statement of *Aquinas* in which prudence is described as *recta ratio agibilium*.¹⁹ This expression, though somehow modified, can be found again in a letter sent by *Machiavelli* to *Ricciardo Becchi*,²⁰ in which he speaks of the friar *Girolamo Savonarola*.

The historical issue and the relationships between the friar, the Signoria of Florence and the Papacy lies outside the scope of this research. However the above information gives us opportunities to reflect. In fact in that letter *Machiavelli* expressed his point of view on what was happening in Florence, quoting accurately some parts of a speech given by *Savonarola* in San Marco on the first Sunday of Carnival.²¹

In this letter the Florentine secretary takes the opportunity to express his politic and laic views relating to the administration of the city and above all to the idea of keeping out of domestic affairs any political authority, including the political power of the Church of Rome, that ended by interfering and influencing domestic policy decisions of the Signoria through its most faithful priests and apostolic authorities. In order to express his thought *Machiavelli* writes that *Savonarola*, before explaining the passage of the Exodus, chosen for that Sunday of 1498, informed the audience about the reason why he had moved from Santa Reparata to San Marco:

„and before he came to the explanation of these words, he showed for what reason he had drawn back and said ‘Prudence is straight thinking in practical matters’.“²²

This is obviously a learned quotation: the *recta ratio* of *Thomas Aquinas* recalls the wider concept of created nature and order appearing in the universe, whereas the Dominican friar speaks about a *retta cognitio*, perhaps alluding to a direct knowledge and comprehension, which in general seems to relate to an active comparison of human events when they happen²³ rather than to a predictable finalism. The Florentine secretary strengthens the spirit of renaissance of man and the connection with happiness and wellbeing to be reached in life, which began with *Pontano*. So prudence is the quality which enables the prince to evaluate whether the advice requested to his ministers for the administration of the State is good or not. In fact, this in particular refers to an understanding of the event and a factual ability to overcome the event itself which is at the basis of *Machiavelli's* concept of prudence.

In other words, with this further interpretative passage, prudence becomes practical wisdom and evaluation of events. It is no more *φρόνησις*; it acquires the modern mean-

¹⁹ *Thomas Aquinas*, ST, IaIIae, quot., q. LVIII, art. III.

²⁰ *Ricciardo Becchi*, apostolic secretary of papacy in Florence, for many years had tried to settle the quarrel between *Savonarola* and the papacy, without, however, succeed.

²¹ In that letter *Machiavelli* writes that the friar, following advice or having heard rumours, had moved from the church of Santa Reparata to the church of San Marco since it had increased the number of his enemies from the Holy See as well as that of his followers. See *Machiavelli*, The letters, edited by Gilbert, Chicago, 1988.

²² *Ibid.*, 86. Also see *Machiavelli*, Lettera Ricciardo Becchi 9 marzo 1498, in: *id.*, Tutte le opere, by Martelli, Florence 1997: „et prima che venissi alla dichiarazione di queste parole, monstrò per qual cagione egli s'era ritirato indreto, et disse: *prudencia est retta cognitio agibilium*“.

²³ *Recta ratio* of *Thomas Aquinas* is surely more comprehensive and wider and had perhaps already been acquired, whereas *Savonarola's retta cognitio* had to be implemented and not yet acquired, as *Machiavelli's* text shows.

ing of cautiousness, capability of evaluating circumstances and of adapting to facts. It thus becomes, little by little, *μῆτις*. According to *Machiavelli's* interpretation, prudence becomes something between common sense and cunning. It is not an aspiration, but something more than the mere capability of always adapting to reality, because it could even provoke events. The Florentine secretary focuses on the role of prudence in creating his ideal prince:

„it is necessary for him to be prudent as to know how to avoid the infamy of those vices that would take his state from him and to be on guard against those that do not, if that is possible; but if one cannot, one can let them go on with less hesitation.“²⁴

Hence, prudence has a strategic importance in the administration of a State. It is its essence, and therefore *Machiavelli* recommends his prince to seek for advice only from wise men²⁵ whenever he deems it necessary, since „(...) good counsel, from wherever it comes, must arise from the prudence of the prince, and not the prudence of the prince from good counsel“.²⁶ *Machiavelli's prince* is a man capable of grasping changes and even of changing his own nature. He knows the most miserable as well as noblest instincts of the mass, observes in depth the human soul and the relationships between men, and this knowledge enables him to administer and govern the State.

Prudence is therefore an active virtue just as it is in *Machiavelli*. More precisely, it is linked to that Roman *virtus*²⁷ which, in its actions, also implies taking risks. Thus, virtue and prudence are realised in unitary and energetically vital behaviour.²⁸ Prudence becomes the real capability of facing external events with courage and boldness, dominating, changing and modifying not only one's own nature, but also the nature of events which befall. In this sense, if continuously applied, prudence would result in the capability of choosing the right moment to fight or to retreat. It's a typical political virtue that serves to govern a state, an activity which is always dangerous.

We could also say that the

²⁴ *Machiavelli*, *The Prince*, translated with an introduction by Mansfield, 2nd ed. 1998, ch. XV, 62. See also *Machiavelli*, *Il Principe*, E. N. Girardi, 1974, ch. XV, 169: „li è necessario essere tanto prudente, che sappi fuggire l'infamia di quelle [bad qualities] che li torrebbono lo stato, e da quelle che non geneano togliano guardarsi, se elli è possibile; ma non possendo, vi si può con meno rispetto lasciare andare“.

²⁵ Cf. *Machiavelli*, *The Prince*, ch. XXIII.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, ch XXIII, 95. See also *Machiavelli*, *Il Principe*, ch. XXIII, 227: „(...) li buoni consigli, da qualunque venghino, conviene naschino dalla prudenza del principe; e non la prudenza del principe da' buoni consigli“. The aporia previously investigated by *Aristotle*, according to whom prudence is explained only by the example of a prudent man, is found in all its theoretical strength also in *Machiavelli*. However, according to the Florentine, prudence is not a virtue already acquired, but it must grow and develop, and therefore self-develop. Cf. *Taranto*, *La virtù della politica. Civismo e prudenza tra Machiavelli e gli antichi*, 2003, 125.

²⁷ The Greek *aretè* is perhaps more static and contemplative than Roman *virtue*, which implies the concept of the heroic action of the soldier and the strategy of the great politician. *Virtus* is therefore the concept which better suits to the interpretation of the Florentine secretary. However, we can hint only briefly at this idea in order to make clear the theoretical nodal links on which this short essay develops.

²⁸ Cf. *Feroni*, *Machiavelli, o dell'incertezza. La politica come arte del rimedio*, 2003, 87-90.

„prudent man, that is capable of knowing natural things and penetrating in the effectual reality, has a knowledge which is totally different from the knowledge of the civil body, i.e. the mass that is the kernel of the life of the republic in which virtue is practiced.“²⁹

This is *Ferroni's* opinion; he considers prudence as a complex of virtues to which Romans eagerly aspired. In fact, he goes on:

„the virtue of the prince, of the founder, of the leader of a republic is transparent in itself, is supported by a knowledge which clearly distinguishes truth from falsehood, reality from appearances, knows conditions of natural life; the virtue of people is the virtue of one who doesn't know things and draws energy and vitality from appearances and fictitious truth, that prudent man manipulates for the good of the State. Here, as well as elsewhere in *Machiavelli's* thought, we find an instance of double truth which has ancient roots and will evolve in many different ways in theory, in practice, in social life and in politics of modern times: this is suggestive of a sharp distinction among people who are aware of the true structure of reality, its empty and desperate finitude, the absence and the death of God, mechanisms operating in collective life and the sense of exercising of power (that will be called by Leopardi a philosophy which unveils illusions), and people who can bear the same reality conforming with the principles of civil life, only as long as they are unaware of things and of illusions and ignoring the truth about events and human relations.“³⁰

In order to govern a State, a leader needs to have „boldness accompanied by prudent thinking, wisdom and impetus“.³¹ Therefore, the prince has to play the role of a centaur,³² *Machiavelli's* point of view is a real innovation as compared with the thought and tradition of the Middle Ages. Referring to prudence as „virtutum omnium comes et magistra“, the Florentine secretary associates this concept with the concept of justice. The connection between prudence and justice is a strong theoretical relationship, which would be repeatedly demonstrated by others in future times. *Machiavelli* considers this connection so ductile because it proves that prudence is a virtue as well as a special skill.³³

As mentioned above, prudence and justice are both included among cardinal virtues; however it is no theological reference when we understand that prudence is often practised mainly in judging, in doing justice. In this sense *Machiavelli* recovers this connection to serve the purpose of his laic political thought, according to which justice, or better the right action, coincides with the useful effect and hence prudent effect. *Machiavelli's* prudence seems to revert to the origins, swinging between rational expectations and intuition.³⁴ If we consider it a skill, prudence is the ability to imagine the future, that is to see or anticipate, in a form of real knowledge, as *Machiavelli* writes

„and it happens with this as the physicians say of consumption, that in the beginning of the illness it is easy to cure and difficult to recognize, but in the progress of time, when it has not been recog-

²⁹ Ibid., 93.

³⁰ Ibid., 93–94.

³¹ *Taranto*, La virtù della politica. Civismo e prudenza tra Machiavelli e gli antichi, 2003, 110.

³² Ibid.

³³ See *Taranto*, La virtù della politica. Civismo e prudenza tra Machiavelli e gli antichi, 2003, 121.

In this respect we remind you of what was said about the letter to *Ricciardo Becchi* in which *Machiavelli*, quoting a statement by *Savonarola*, called prudence *retta cognitio agibilium*.

³⁴ Ibid., 123, where reference is made to *Aristotle*. In fact I think that *Machiavelli*, more than any other author, succeeded in giving energy and vitality to the concept of prudence which, though theorized by *Aristotle*, had remained somehow static.

nized and treated in the beginning, it becomes easy to recognize and difficult to cure. So it happens in affairs of state, because when one recognizes from afar the evils that arise in a state (which is not given but to one who is prudent), they are soon healed; but when they are left to grow because they were not recognized, to the point that everyone recognizes them, there is no longer any remedy for them.³⁵

Hence prudence always aims to the good, and also what is “wrong” can be chosen with good intentions. Decisions taken for the good do not always have positive results, and therefore prudence can help to choose what looks like the „lesser of evils“³⁶ since also evil deeds may thus lead to the good. In conclusion, according to *Machiavelli's* political ideas, prudence operates not only in politics, struggling with events and dominating over them, but also in a legislative-constitutional field enhancing an architectural skill for politics itself, i.e. *Machiavelli* expands the semantic field of prudence to the whole sphere of legislation.³⁷ The Florentine secretary thinks that it is good for the State to maintain its wholeness and practicing prudence guarantees a timely intervention to remedy the evils of the State, safeguarding its stability. In this sense prudence, as a reference point, acquires a positive value, besides being essential to the constitution of the State.

Until now particular attention has been laid on the new interpretation of the concept of prudence in Machiavellian Humanism; however this concept continued to develop in many ways, during the Counter-Reformation and thanks to the thinkers of the second scholasticism who resumed the study of *Summa Theologiae* by *Thomas Aquinas*. Though awaking new moral and spiritual interest, *Machiavelli's* works, which had a great importance in the creation of modern states (and still have nowadays), were savagely criticized. However, criticisms to political realism come from political realism itself, take advantage of it and therefore in the end are originated by it. In this respect also criticism by *Francisco Suárez*, who regarded it wrong to consider politics independent from morals,³⁸ does not seem to add anything new to previous criticisms. In fact *Suárez* usually employed different terms in *ideological* criticism.³⁹

In fact, the political thought of the Jesuit relating to the concept of prudence seems to be inspired by the point of view of *Machiavelli*. According to *Suárez*, prudence, considered as a quality, is not a characteristic of any man in particular, such as can be the legislator or a member of the government of the city, but is connatural to man himself, since it takes the shape of a mere or simple prudence which helps the person who acts to take the right direction in his human relations, and this interpretation appears far from *Machiavelli's* views. However, the man conceived by *Suárez* cannot be imagined, divided up and analysed separately from his fellow creatures; in this respect he seems to

³⁵ Cf. *Machiavelli*, *The Prince*, ch. III, 12. See also *Machiavelli*, *Il Principe*, ch. III, 83: „Et interviene di questa come dicono s' fisici dello etico, che nel principio del suo male è facile a curare e difficile conoscere, ma, nel progresso del tempo, non l' avendo in principio conosciuta né medicata, diventa facile a conoscere e difficile a curare. Così interviene nelle cose di Stato, perché conoscendo discosto, il che non è dato se non a uno prudente, e' mali che nascono in quello si guariscono presto; ma quando, per non averli conosciuti, si lasciano crescere in modo che ognuno li conosce, non vi è più rimedio“.

³⁶ Cf. *Taranto*, *La virtù della politica. Civismo e prudenza tra Machiavelli e gli antichi*, 2003, 122, where a passage of the comedy *The Mandrake* is quoted.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 126.

³⁸ Cf. *C. Giacon*, *Machiavelli, Suárez e la ragion di Stato*, cit., 190.

³⁹ It should be noted both the case of king James I, openly criticized by *Suárez*.

have many things in common with the man imagined by *Pontano* and, from this point of view, also by *Machiavelli*.

Hence, if the main difference with *Machiavelli's* concept lies in the idea that man is very attached to his Creator and finds in Him also a political model, considering *Pontano's* idea, such difference decreases, because *Suárez* shares conceptual sources with *Pontano*. In fact, according to *Suárez*, as well as to *Pontano*, the concept of prudence passes through the filter of an in-depth study of the texts by *Aristotle* and *Thomas Aquinas*. However, we do not find a treatise on *prudentia* in *Machiavelli's* works, as this theme is dealt with by the Spanish Jesuit whenever it is *prudent* to make reference to it. Therefore *Suárez* develops the concept of prudence in the treatise on *human deeds*,⁴⁰ in the third *disputatio* entitled *de virtutibus in genere*.

The theological context is important, because this treatise does not relate only to a fruitless classification of human deeds, but rather contains a reasoning and a reconstruction regarding virtues, passions, vices and mistakes which lead man respectively to salvation, to ask for forgiveness or to damnation. Hence in this work *Suárez* aims to clarify not only the aspects closest to man for practising the virtues given to him when he was created, but also which virtues exist to enable man to achieve perfection in life. In particular, in the third *sectio* of the above mentioned *disputatio*, *Suárez* deals with the problem of classification of virtues traditionally called *intellectuales*, which help to distinguish exactly *verum a falso*, according to *Aristotle's* principles.⁴¹

According to the traditional classification made by the philosopher from Stagira and diffused by *Thomas Aquinas*,⁴² intellectual virtues are *intellectus*, *sapientia*, *scientia*, *prudentia et ars*. These virtues are then in turn subclassified in speculative and practical virtues. The study of *Aristotle's* works is once more completed by the analysis of the *Doctor Angelicus*: the first three virtues – *intellectus*, *sapientia et scientia* – will be considered speculative virtues, whereas the other two – *prudentia et ars* – will be considered practical virtues.

This is the traditional classification. However, *Suárez* objects that prudence and art can lead to a better exploitation of speculative virtues, claiming that

„quia non sunt proprie cognoscitivae, sed veluti dirigentes et imperantes, itaque volunt prudentiae munus non esse iudicare quod verum sit, sed post illud iudicium imperare, quid agendum sit: et similiter artis prout a scientia distinguitur, non esse docere quomodo faciendum sit opus, illud enim efficere scientias practicas.“⁴³

Nevertheless, *Suárez* comes to the conclusion that prudence and art

⁴⁰ This posthumous work is the result of the courses which took place at Collegio Romano in 1583 and repeated in following years in Spain where Doctor Eximius taught theology. Texts by *Suárez* are often an answer to requests, instances and doubts arisen during the lessons, therefore these are clear and exhaustive enough to be considered handbooks of theology, metaphysics or politics.

⁴¹ Cf. *Suárez*, *De actibus, qui vocantur passiones, tum etiam de habitu, praesertim studiosis, ac vitiosis*, Parisiis 1856, in: *Opera Omnia*, IV, IV, III, III § 2, 483.

⁴² „Dividit Aristoteles 6, Ethicorum, cap. 3, intellectualem virtutem in quinque species, *intellectum*, *sapientiam*, *scientiam*, *prudentiam et artem*, de qua divisio multa dicit D. Thomas 1, 2, q. 57“, *ibid.*, IV, III, III § 1, 482.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, IV, III, III § 2, 482.

„in intellectu scilicet non posse esse actum, qui non sit vel cognitio, vel locutio, atque adeo intellectum non dirigere, nec imperare nisi iudicando quid sit agendum.“⁴⁴

Therefore, the only thing we can do is to try to understand, as clearly as possible, what the difference between prudence and art is.

Suárez once more makes reference to *Aristotle*, and it is possible to claim briefly but effectually that the difference between these two practical virtues can be explained as follows:

„prudentia[m] vero agibulum, id est, internam electionum, non est enim putandum prudentiam, nullo modo versari in operibus externis. (...) ars enim praecipue intendit informare opus externum, internum vero solum in quantum habet vim movendi ad opus.“⁴⁵

However, prudence more than art is often misused, since its ultimate aim is modified and it becomes a *virtus simpliciter* such as „prudentia militaris or mercatoris“.⁴⁶ But in this respect *Suárez* puts an end to any objection and theoretical conflict by saying:

„Actus prudentiae, quatenus procedunt ad intellectu, non sunt per se boni moraliter, sed solum quatenus a voluntate pendent, quia per se non sunt liberi: ergo nec ipse habitus erit per simpliciter virtus.“⁴⁷

The answer is that those acts, i.e. acts committed in particular situations such as those experienced by a soldier, or a merchant etc., are not *per se et intrinsece bonitate morale[s]*.⁴⁸

Reverting to real cases, to what happens in worldly life, *Suárez* has doubts on what *Thomas Aquinas* writes about the *honestum* end of man; he breaks the link existing according to the Dominican between action and end, and between end and intrinsic goodness. However the Jesuit, following the Thomistic principle, claims that prudence is an objectively peculiar virtue, as it applies both to universal and to particular situations. Therefore, this apparent aporia and theoretical conflict between master and pupil find a solution in what *Thomas Aquinas* claimed.

„Hujusmodi est prudentia, quae etiam si non eliciat formaliter bonos moraliter; est tamen regula eorundem actuum, et id esse infallibiliter movetur ad honestum, et optime disponit ad operationes humanas, ut in specie et modo constitutas, et ideo virtus simpliciter censetur.“⁴⁹

Suárez expresses his point of view clearly, and will do it even better in the short treatise *De voluntario et involuntario*,⁵⁰ when, speaking about ignorance which can be considered a justification of human actions, says „est enim prudentia optima regula humanorum actuum“.⁵¹

According to the Jesuit, we can say that prudence may include both universal and particular, and can effectually apply to particular circumstances provided that

⁴⁴ Ibid., 483.

⁴⁵ Ibid., § 5, 483.

⁴⁶ Ibid., § 7, 483.

⁴⁷ Ibid., § 8, 483.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ *Suárez*, *De voluntario et involuntario in genere, de que actibus voluntariis in speciali*, Parisiis 1856, in *Opera Omnia*, IV, I.

„judicium illud practice practicum de honesto eligendo, procedere a consilio, quod quidem consilium requirit, et inquisitionem et inventionem mediorum, propter quae adjunguntur prudentiae eubolia, synesis et gnomi, scilicet ad inveniendum media ad judicandum per inferiores, vel superiores causas, vel ad judicandum secundum communes regulas, vel secundum extraordinarios eventus (...).“⁵²

This logical link shows even more clearly that *Suárez* penetrated in the thought of *Thomas Aquinas* to change its meaning effectually. In fact, if the *Doctor Angelicus* thinks that the practical virtue of prudence is connected to intellect, or better to the active faculty of rationality, it *est enim recta agibilium*, according to *Suárez* prudence establishes a connection with the judgment of human deeds which could not be properly found in the definition of *lex*.

To clarify this point, the assonance between the definition of law given by *Aquinas*, „*lex est regula et mensura actuum*“⁵³, and the definition of prudence given by *Suárez*, „*est enim prudentia optima regula humanorum actuum*“⁵⁴ is evident. This assonance is even more evident if we think about the meaning of the words *eubolia*, *synesis* and *gnomi*, used by the Jesuit to explain how prudence helps to give the right judgment relating to human deeds. Prudence is therefore associated with *eubolia*, i.e. good advice⁵⁵ (as stated by *Thomas Aquinas*), *synesis*, i.e. shrewdness, and *gnomi*, i.e. goniometer, a precision instrument used to calculate the width of angles and also to evaluate inclinations on the skyline. These characteristics on the whole suggest that, according to *Suárez*, prudence is not only a virtue rooted in theology. It is also an instrument used to decode that world full of contradictions and continuous stimulus which is the reality that otherwise could not be understood and accepted.

Machiavelli's prudence, as a human active virtue, is brought by *Suárez* back into the field of theological interpretation, from which it had strayed; it is no more neither only a cardinal virtue, nor simply a *virtus romana*. In other words, *Suárez* tries to put into practice, into theology, what the Florentine secretary had conceived only in theory, into policy, for a good government and for the prince. *Suárez* multiplies the fields of application of prudence, giving a practical sense, which *Machiavelli* described in his works as the *behaviour of the prudent prince*. In this sense prudence is connected with justice and justice is not seen as a cardinal virtue, but as an earthly and worldly means of administering and rendering justice.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, d. IV, III § 29, 232. In particular the Jesuit focuses on examining the matter to understand if *diligentia* may be considered sufficient *ad indicandam inadvertentiam inculpabilem*. In order to reconstruct cases, we read: „*si homo prius quam libere eligat, seu amet objectum propositum, faciat mediocrem diligentiam juxta capacitatem suam, ut prudenter de tali actione, vel objecto judicet, tunc inconsideratio remanens erit involuntaria: sivero pro qualitate negotii imprudenter se gerat, temereque se exponat periculis practice errandi, tunc non excusabitur, et inconsideratio durans erit indirecte voluntaria(...). homo prudenter se gesserit, et utrum fuerit in morali potestate ejus amplius facere*“.

⁵² *Suárez*, De actibus, d. III, III, § 9, 484.

⁵³ *Thomas Aquinas*, ST, IaIIae, q. XC, art. 1.

⁵⁴ *Suárez*, De voluntario et involuntario, d. IV, III § 29, 232.

⁵⁵ This word, which brings to mind *Aristotle*, is drawn from the text in which *Thomas Aquinas* criticizes the politics of the philosopher from Stagira who mentions the example of Eubolo, the good advisor of the city. However, *Aristotle* thinks that *eubolia* is just „good advice“, whereas *Thomas Aquinas* considers it a fundamental component of prudence, as if it were its potential part. *Thomas Aquinas*, ST, IaIIae, q. XLVIII.

Consequently the reference to theology completes what *Machiavelli's* legislator (prince) should have done to maintain his position for a long time; hence according to *Suárez* prudence becomes essential to strive for perfection. In particular, when *Suárez* speaks about the union existing between man and God, we can see that in the creature there is something of the Creator. It is evident that God's thought is a thought which commands, it gives orders and creates life. It is immediate creation, and it is expressed in a unique moment, nothing else is necessary for it to be perfect. In its perfection the divine thought always transfers something of its nature innermost in his creation, and therefore we can think that this could occur also if we consider the Creator only in his role of legislator, i.e. the Creator transfers his role of legislator to man, and consequently man can be studied in his role of legislator, analysing how he can arrive to issue a rule.

Unlike the creative thought of God, the thought of *homo legislator*⁵⁶ imagined by *Suárez* is complex, necessarily imperfect, surely perfectible and composed of two specific moments. In the first moment, which can be called constitutive, the effectiveness of a positive law is evaluated on the basis of its admissibility in the *communitas*. In the second moment, which can be called the moment of disclosing or perfecting the rule, such a rule is issued⁵⁷. Both moments require prudence and rationality, which can be measured on the basis of concrete effects: „Hoc manifestum est, quia sine tali iudicio non potest lex prudenter et rationaliter ferri.“⁵⁸

More specifically, the ideal man-legislator envisaged by *Suarez* might be expected to perform a specific operation that balances the use of reason, or better of the intellect and, thus, of the logic, with experience, because „as in any private person prudence is required for commanding single actions to oneself or to others, also in the prince“⁵⁹ is required „prudentia politica, seu architectonica ad leges ferendas“.⁶⁰

The importance of the role of authority is evident. Unlike what happens with private persons, the leader's responsibility is not only commensurate to daily acts and to relations with other men, but it is crucial for such acts and relations. The conduct of the legislator is judged by the acts of his subjects. Therefore, the actions of the latter are balanced also thanks to the law chosen by the legislator; consequently it can be said that the law is right. The same subjects, on one hand, represent the continued application of the protection of the many facets of life, and on the other hand they are the real test bench of the endurance and of the effectiveness of the rules conceived by the sovereign.

The term *architectonicus*⁶¹, of evident Aristotelian origins, suggests that it is possible to be open to ideas suggesting to conceive a new kind of city (*polis*) organized with prudence, that is with practical and experienced wisdom, together with ductility which entails both accepting all differences within the fundamental unifying structure, and

⁵⁶ Definition by the author.

⁵⁷ The two moments forming the human thought are more exhaustively described by *Morta Figuls* in *La causa proxima de la obligaci3n de la ley humana segun Su3rez*, 1949, 18 ff., and also by *Faraco*, *Obbligo politico e libert3 nel pensiero di Francisco Su3rez*, 2013, 65–67.

⁵⁸ *Su3rez*, *Tractatus de legibus*, I, IV § 6, 16.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Cf. *Su3rez*, *Trattato delle leggi e di Dio legislatore*, I, edited by De Bertolis, introduction by Todescan, 2008, 74. In this respect see note 12, where *De Bertolis* clearly explains that the term „architectonic“ refers to the sphere of knowledge organizing notions drawn from another subject; this can be said about mathematics, for example, as compared with physics, since mathematics organizes notions belonging to a different subject (i.e. physics) in mathematical terms.

being capable of creating concrete situations. It can be useful to explain the concepts we are speaking about by imagining the city as an architectonic structure, in particular like a Greek temple.⁶² We should conceive a city which must be capable of accepting alternatives and exceptional events (i.e. exceptional situations) whereby introducing prudence does not affect the compactness and organicity of foundations, but it integrates them by giving suitable openness to the regulations of the city, which are the throbbing heart of the city itself.

I will therefore describe briefly every part of this imaginary temple,⁶³ so that every part of the structure corresponds to a concept which is essential to the life of the city. This hazardous metaphor will thus be clearer. The colonnade represents high aspirations and supports the outer front of the temple, but, at the same time, it may be considered a sign of openness to the outside world. The temple is solid, and it is firmly grounded on a basis which has become an extension of the ground on which it rests. This suggests that the temple is linked also conceptually to the nerve centre of creation. Light and air coming in show the compactness of the structure and also its flexibility. In this highly imaginative description naos, i.e. the place where the image of the divinity is situated, is the container of the constituent parts of the city, which attracts and connects with natural law existing in the world.

Is it possible to draw a parallel with *Machiavelli*? In *Machiavelli* the principle of effectuality notably replaces natural law. In *Suárez* the reference to a static solid architecture disappears. In place of this theory, there is a vitalistic dynamism where man or, rather, men form the social community. Therefore it is not necessary to refer to the city as a mechanical structure; it should rather be considered a body having a soul⁶⁴ in which „rectum autem ac sanum prudentiae iudicium maxime pendet ex sapienti consilio“⁶⁵, because the most difficult task is to govern the State.

By quoting what *Johannes Chrysostom* wrote in his letter to Ephesians, *Suárez* refers to the original and laic statement by *Machiavelli*, in which, after all, the prince's prudence gives the right advice to follow: „(...) good counsel, from wherever it comes, must arise from the prudence of the prince, and not the prudence of the prince from good counsel“.⁶⁶ Furthermore, *Suárez* claims that whenever life requires a choice or a judgment, or if one has a particular public office,

⁶² The choice of the image of the temple is justified in a more extensive reasoning which you can find in *Faraco*, *Obbligo politico e libertà nel pensiero di Francisco Suárez*, 2013, 76–80.

⁶³ Cf. *Morolli*, *Le membra degli ornamenti. Sussidiario illustrato degli ordini architettonici con un glossario dei principali termini classici e classicisti*, 1986.

⁶⁴ In the first book the reference to the structure of the city is more peculiar, also because in particular the theoretical aspects of *lex* are analysed. Starting from the second book, *Suárez* focuses on man as *legislator* and as user of *lex*.

⁶⁵ *Suárez*, *De Regula societate Jesus*, Parisiis 1860, in: *Opera Omnia*, XIV bis, 893. The sentence quoted is taken from the book dealing with the profession of faith, and in particular from the chapter entitled *De voto audiendi consilia generalis*.

⁶⁶ *Machiavelli*, *The Prince*, ch. XXIII, 95. Cf. also *Machiavelli*, *Il Principe*, ch. XXIII, 227: „(...) li buoni consigli, da qualunque venghino, conviene naschino dalla prudenza del principe; e non la prudenza del principe da' buoni consigli“.

„in quibus prudentia opus est ad ponendam, et periculi, et nocimenti gravitatem ex una parte, et ex alia qualitatem actionis prohibitaе et circumstantias ejus ut ita rationabiliter judicari possit, an in tali eventu obligatio censurae, et prohibitio cessent“.⁶⁷

Prudence, which is again *recta ratio* though practical as a *recta cognitio agibilium*, suggests that

„ratio autem est, quia bonum ex integra causa etc, prudentia autem, recta ratio, ut actus bene fiat, non solum judicat de objecto, sed etiam de circumstantiis omnibus actus, et objecti semper pendet mediocritas, et ex quibus fere honestas objecti ut hic et nunc appetendi“.⁶⁸

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⁶⁷ Suárez, *De censuris*, Parisiis 1861, in: *Opera Omnia*, XXIII, 183. Reference is made to the disputation entitled „*De effectibus censurae*“.

⁶⁸ Suárez, *De Malitia*, Parisiis 1856, in: *Opera Omnia*, IV, 396.