

Correspondence

I AM glad to see *The Machiavellian Moment* noticed in *The New Zealand Journal of History*, and I should like a little space in which to comment on R.G. Mulgan's 'Machiavelli, Aristotle and Pocock—A Question of Evidence', published in your issue of April 1981. Mulgan finds my style very difficult to read (I am sorry about this) and in consequence finds it hard to be sure what interpretations I am putting forward from time to time; I fancy he suspects that I don't always know myself. In a further series of consequences, however, he attributes to me some statements I am fairly sure I did not make, and I believe it can be shown that his account of the position which I take up, and which he thinks I fail to support with evidence, is in some respects mistaken.

To start with the specific, and proceed to the more general charges: I quite certainly did not say that Aristotle 'was concerned with the problem of unifying a society of individuals, each of whom has different, or potentially different interests' (Mulgan, p.63). To say this would have been to present Aristotle as a kind of eighteenth-century liberal, and would have provoked the rage of philosophers and the scorn of scholars; but I think Mulgan will fail (as I do) to find the word 'interest' in the passage under discussion (*Machiavellian Moment*, pp.66-76). What I believe I said was that individuals and categories of individuals in Aristotle's society pursued a diversity of 'goods', i.e., material and moral ends, and realized them in differing degrees and combinations; and that Aristotle was concerned with the problem of unifying these citizens in the pursuit and practice of a common good, to be pursued in ways facilitated by their pursuit of particular goods. For Mulgan to inform me that Aristotle's 'ideal society was unified in the pursuit of a common ethical ideal' (Mulgan, loc. cit.) is to tell me what I already knew and my whole argument entails.

I also think that Mulgan inadvertently misrepresents me (Mulgan, pp.64-65) as denying or ignoring the importance of arms in Aristotle's political theory. Of course his citizens are to bear arms; of course they are to display the military virtues. But it does not seem to be the case that arms and military virtue define the distinctive good which the 'many' are to contribute to political life, or furnish them with their principal mode of political action; and this does seem to be the case with Machiavelli. I selected for attention Aristotle's view of the 'many' (*Machiavellian Moment*, pp.71, 73, 153, 519, 521) as possessing an ability to pool their knowledge so as to know things which the reflective 'few' might fail to know, and I identified as found in Aristotelian theory, and ancient republican theory in general, an ideal aristo-democratic relation between the wisdom of the few and the experience of the many. I said that this was part of Aristotle's doctrine of the *politeia*, and I do not think my statement is contradicted by the fact

that at another point (Mulgan, p.63) he describes the *politeia* as a relation between the wealthy and the less wealthy. However, the essential antithesis I wished to draw was that between Aristotle's view of the 'many' as contributing experience, common sense and custom, and Machiavelli's view of the *popolo* as contributing armed *virtù*, military discipline and political aggressiveness. On p.203 I pointed out this antithesis, emphasized the Roman rather than Aristotelian character of Machiavelli's perception, but sought to show that his view and Aristotle's could be brought into combination. This was intended to lead on to Donato Giannotti's observation that 'virtù militare . . . è propria della moltitudine' (p.296, n.59) coupled with his insistence that his doctrine was founded upon Aristotle's (p.295 and n.). Machiavelli, however, insists on the warlike character and political turbulence of the armed people, and it is this which may be Livian but is not Aristotelian.

The real issue between us, however, is that Mulgan either does not understand or does not accept—or, just possibly, both misunderstands and rejects—what I was trying to do on pp.66-76 of *The Machiavellian Moment*. What is presented there is explicitly stated to be one among a number of possible interpretations of Aristotle's *Politics*. I think Mulgan understands that he is not required to find it the best interpretation, or accept it as a definitive account of what Aristotle sought to achieve in writing (if he did write) that text. When he offers criticisms of it as an account of Aristotle's doctrine, he does so with the further intention of asking what evidence I have that Machiavelli or any other Florentine read Aristotle's text in this particular way. He finds that I offer none, and accuses me of making unsubstantiated assertions. But I submit that a closer reading of my text would have revealed that I do not in fact make the assertion which he says I fail to document. There is in fact remarkably little about Aristotle in my two chapters on Machiavelli, and nothing whatever about my supposed reading or interpretation of Aristotle by Machiavelli. And there is less than nothing—in the sense that I repudiate the notion and have never employed it—about any 'influence' which Aristotle is supposed to have exerted upon Machiavelli; the only author singled out as a demonstrable presence in Machiavelli's text is Polybius, and even of him the word 'influence' is not employed.

What then is the point of the interpretation of Aristotle presented on pp.66-76? It is an interpretative device, and at the same time a historical generalization. That is, it is intended to suggest the interpretation of Aristotle which might have presented itself to the mind of a Florentine persuaded of the primacy of the *vita activa* and the *vivere civile*; and it is intended to suggest a way of reading Machiavellian texts in an Aristotelian context, and the importance of that context to the reading of those texts. I did not offer evidence that Machiavelli had read or interpreted Aristotle in any particular way, because I did not see any signs that he was drawing direct on Aristotle's text or adapting it to his purposes, as (in the *Discourses on Livy*) he is manifestly doing with Polybius. On the other hand, I did not feel obliged to offer evidence that Aristotle entered in various ways into the formation of Machiavelli's mind as he received his education in the 1480s, because it is really unthinkable that he did not. Aristotle is part of the 'deep background' to every trained mind of the later Middle Ages and the Renaissance, as Giannotti's earlier-mentioned remark reminds us. I was pleased to cite Giannotti because he informs us that a Machiavellian could consider himself to be an Aristotelian. This reinforces my general contentions that (a) Machiavelli could be then and can be now read in an Aristotelian context, (b) Aristotelian ideas about

citizenship and the polity entered into the general equipment of the civic humanist mind, out of which Machiavelli discernibly was writing. These contentions do not involve any assertion that he read Aristotle in any particular way, or that Aristotle was the cause of his making any particular statement. I did not make any such assertions—not even regarding Giannotti, who does aver a relation between Aristotle's writings and his—and Mulgan cannot therefore accuse me of failing to provide evidence for them. I am still unsure, however, whether Mulgan means that I *did* make such assertions and fail to document them, or that I *ought to have* made such assertions *and* documented them.

The history of systematic thinking about politics is currently conducted by establishing the 'language', 'context', or 'vocabulary' in which a given thinker did his thinking—he may in fact have done it in several contexts at a time—and then seeing how he made use of his context and modified it in saying what he did say. Contexts vary in their immediacy to texts, and one must therefore be content with varying degrees of specificity in how one describes the relations between them; as Aristotle reminds us, we must be content with whatever specificity the evidence offers. It is one thing to say that Machiavelli has been reading a text of Polybius and is doing things with it; another to say that he is living in an Aristotelian universe and that his thought can be interpreted as modified by Aristotelian thought-patterns and as carrying out modifications upon them. Both statements are historical, but they vary in their specificity and in their appeal to evidence. It is also certain that, once one begins to think of 'languages', 'contexts', or 'thought-patterns', particular texts (even the greatest and most authoritative) serve as means of transmitting these systems as well as authorities in their own right; and the transmission is the result of how the text is interpreted as well as of what the author put into it. This is why it is imprudent to speak of one author 'influencing' another, and altogether impossible to demand that a 'correct' interpretation of a text be given before it can be shown to have 'influenced' a reader. There clearly could be a reading of Aristotle performed by some actor in history which Mulgan would consider altogether wrong; but this would not refute the proposition that it was performed. (I am reminded of a recent entertaining essay—it might be unkind to give the reference—which purports to show that Burke had no 'influence' on the writers of the European Counter-Revolution, the argument being that though they all read him and made use of him, none of them understood him correctly; therefore he had no influence.)

Mulgan may reply that the question is not whether Machiavelli interpreted Aristotle correctly, but whether he interpreted him at all. As I have tried to show, I am not saying that he did interpret him, but I am still saying that there are ways in which Aristotle can be made historically relevant to the thought of Machiavelli. Parts of *The Machiavellian Moment* are written in longer perspective and deeper background than others, and consist in such propositions as that when 'Aristotelian' ideas were repeated under Roman conditions, the result was Polybius—though I believe it is difficult to show that Polybius ever read Aristotle—or that when Aristotelian (and Polybian) ideas were reiterated under Florentine conditions, the result was Machiavelli or some things that Machiavelli says. I believe I do offer evidence to support these contentions, though sometimes one must fall back on the assertion that the interpretations they entail are historically plausible and possible. In the last part of his critique, Mulgan suggests a way of rendering Machiavelli's relation with Aristotle closer and more specific than I did; he suggests that Machiavelli may have made use of Aristotle's analysis of political

change. (I hope he does not think I meant that Aristotle had no such concept; all I said was that Aristotelian metaphysics were used by medievals to suggest that change was metaphysically trivial.) I find his suggestion interesting, however, because the relevant passages of the *Politics* include Aristotle's advice to tyrants on how to rule; and there is evidence that some readers who had been shocked by Machiavelli's chapter on this subject were then shocked by Aristotle's, and concluded that Aristotle was to blame for Machiavelli writing as he did. One such was Tommaso Campanella, at the beginning of the next century, who specifically declared that Aristotle led the way to Machiavelli's anti-moralism. Campanella may have had in mind some Paduan or Latin-Averroist reading of Aristotle, which supported the doctrine that the moral truths of politics were of another kind than the moral truths of religion, or he may simply have decided that to repeat Aristotle's doctrine of the self-sufficiency of politics in a Christian universe led inescapably to Machiavellian conclusions. This is the kind of thing *The Machiavellian Moment* is all about, and I could wish I had followed up the line of enquiry that Mulgan here suggests; but it could not have been done by asking whether this or that reading of Aristotle is correct, or whether Machiavelli relied on one reading rather than another.

J.G.A. POCKOCK

Johns Hopkins University

L'ART ET L'ARCHÉOLOGIE à la Société des Océanistes

ARCHÉOLOGIE D'UNE VALLÉE DES ÎLES
MARQUISES. *Évolution de l'habitat à Ua Huka.*
par Marimari Kellum-Ottino.
Fig., cartes, 192 p., 1971.

ARCHÉOLOGIE DES NOUVELLES-HÉBRIDES. *Contri-
bution à la connaissance des îles du Centre.*
par José Garanger.
Fig., cartes, 156 p. + 304 ill., fotogr., 1972.

PEINTRES ABORIGÈNES D'AUSTRALIE
par Karel Kupka.
Ill. n-b et coul., 245 p., 1972.

Commandes: Société des Océanistes, Musée de l'Homme,
75116 Paris.