

PICTURING PERFECT GOVERNMENT¹

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My topic is the cycle of frescoes painted by Ambrogio Lorenzetti in the Palazzo Pubblico in Siena between 1337 and 1339.² But I ought to confess at the outset – although this will become obvious as I go along – that I am not an art historian. I am an historian of ideas, more especially of social and political ideas, and one of the concepts that particularly interests me is European republicanism. Let me begin by saying a word about that general theme.

Although the European nation-states all began life either as monarchies or as parts of empires, most of them by the twentieth century had become republics, so that there is a large shift of political allegiance and sensibility to be traced and explained. One element in the explanation is that, throughout the era of monarchical regimes, the European political imagination was haunted by the contrasting ideal of self-government, the ideal of the *civitas*, the *vivere libero*, the republic. This was partly a classical heritage. Ancient Rome had risen to greatness as a republic, and the question of whether Rome had declined and fallen in spite of, or because of, abandoning its republican form of government was part of what turned the history of Rome into a subject of endless fascination in early modern Europe. There were also actual republics during this period. The most inspiring were those of northern Italy: Lucca, Padua and the larger territorial states of Florence, Venice and Siena. The Dutch also succeeded in founding a republic in the early seventeenth century; so did the English after 1649, although it was short-lived.

I need to say a word more about the republic of Siena. The city maintained its standing as a self-governing commune – and one of notably anti-aristocratic leanings – from the

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² The information contained in this lecture is basically taken – although with many revisions and additions – from the much fuller discussion in Quentin Skinner, *L'artiste en philosophie politique: Ambrogio Lorenzetti et le Bon Gouvernement* (Paris, 2003). Any reader needing precise references to the sources discussed in the lecture will find them in this book. For permission to reproduce the illustrations, thanks are due to the Cambridge University Press.

early twelfth century until it was finally swallowed up into the Grand Duchy of Tuscany in 1557. The republican heyday of the city coincided with the constitution prevailing between 1287 and 1355, when the government was vested in an elected magistracy – the membership of which rotated every two months – known as the Nove Signori, the Nine.

Siena and the other Italian city-republics were highly anomalous, since in law they were fiefs of the Holy Roman Empire, although in fact they were independent and self-governing communes. Because they were anomalous, they stood in particular need of a legitimising ideology, and from an early date we duly find them celebrating as well as defending themselves in a distinctive political literature. This was largely based on a number of Roman texts that had never been lost in the medieval period. One was Cicero's defence of republican government in his *De officiis*; another was Sallust's in his histories. Both writers were celebrated for claiming that civic *gloria*, which they took to be the proper goal of communities, depends on the maintenance of *libertas*, independence and self-government. Also of deep influence were various Roman accounts of the virtues that are needed to uphold self-government. Here too the influence of Cicero's *De officiis* was paramount, but Seneca's *Epistulae morales* was also important, as were various Christian adaptations, especially Prudentius's *Psychomachia* with its dramatisation of the battle between the vices and virtues.

The qualities most admired in the Roman tradition were the four so-called *virtutes cardinales*: courage, prudence, temperance and justice. To this list Seneca adds magnanimity, the virtue that is crowned with greatness and dispenses lavishly. These values were subsequently discussed by the early-Renaissance republican writers in two distinctive genres. From a remarkably early date there appear neo-Ciceronian and neo-Senecan treatises in defence of republics, the most widely known being the concluding section of the *Livres du trésor* of Brunetto Latini, Dante's teacher, written in the 1260s. But a further way in which the Italian city-republics gave publicity to republican values was by presenting them directly to the people through the medium of painting and sculpture, and it is on this aspect of their cultural tradition that I now want to concentrate.

Perhaps the most famous sculpture in the entirety of western art is part of this ideology, namely the David of Michelangelo, commissioned by the republic of Florence and completed in 1506. Why David? The statue can be read as a warning, placed in the Piazza della signoria to assure potential Goliaths – that is, France and the Holy Roman Empire – who might be thinking of invading Florence that, although apparently vulnerable, the republic would prevail.

The chief medium in which republican values were explored and celebrated was in the political paintings that many of the city-republics commissioned to adorn their public palaces. Vasari records that Giotto painted such a cycle in the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence, but it must at some point have been painted over or destroyed. However, even today there are two great survivors of this early Renaissance genre. One is Giotto's representation of the virtues and vices in the Cappella degli Scrovegni in Padua, completed in 1305. The other is Ambrogio Lorenzetti's fresco cycle in the Council Chamber of the Nine – known as the Sala dei Nove – in the Palazzo Pubblico in Siena. These are the two works of art I should now like to talk about, focusing in particular on Lorenzetti's frescoes.

To stand in the Sala dei Nove is in a sense to stand inside Lorenzetti's masterpiece, for it is in effect a three-dimensional work of art. One of the points I want to try to establish is how deeply this cycle is indebted to Giotto. The point is historiographically important, because the Sienese and Florentine schools of painting have sometimes been too sharply distinguished from each other. One sign of Giotto's influence is that each of the three walls of Lorenzetti's cycle continually refers us to the other two walls, so that we have to find our way around the work, just as we have to do in the Cappella degli Scrovegni. As I shall attempt to show, this three-dimensionality is most strongly evident in Lorenzetti's treatment of the virtues and vices. He constantly presents them in psychomachic terms, seeking to show us that – as Prudentius had argued – every good quality does battle with a corresponding vice.

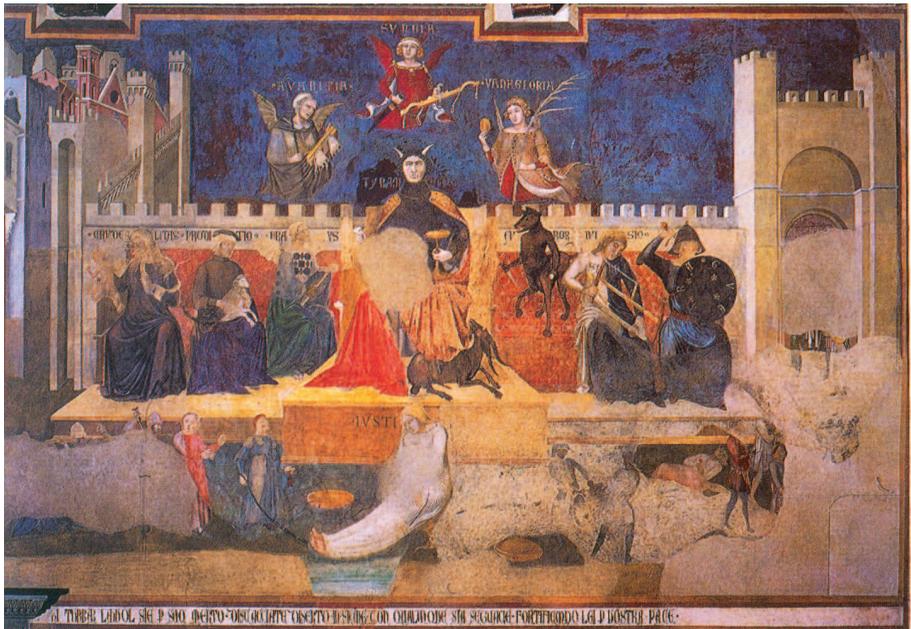
It goes without saying that Lorenzetti's paintings are far from being mere illustrations of a theory. Their themes and organisation also raise a number of purely visual questions and difficulties, and any properly art-historical appraisal would need to take these fully into account. But they were also designed as mediums of instruction, and it is on this aspect of the cycle that I want to concentrate. The frescoes were intended as texts to be read, and you were expected to be able (to cite Seneca's distinction) to profit as well as receive delight from reading and grasping their political significance. Some of these messages are literally written, in that the paintings are covered in words in Latin. But really the whole cycle is, in the sense in which I am interested, a series of messages written in Latin, and what I want now to do is to try to translate them.

Many scholars have already attempted this task, and I need to be very tentative and circumspect as I try once more. This is not because I think that the paintings lack determinate political messages, or that we cannot hope to decode them. It is more that, over the centuries, some messages that may once have been plain have become puzzling, while others may even have been designed as puzzles in the first place. Some of my interpreta-

tions are moderately confident; but, as we shall see, the cycle contains at least two episodes that are profoundly enigmatic, and it is about these that I principally want to speak.

Before narrowing my focus, let me begin by surveying the cycle as a whole. When we read, in the western tradition, we read from left to right, so this is what we should do in this case. We need, that is, to imagine ourselves standing with the one unpainted wall of the Sala dei Nove behind us. If we stand in this way, we are facing north, contemplating the other three walls, all of which are frescoed in their entirety. If we then read from left to right, our point of departure will be with the western wall.

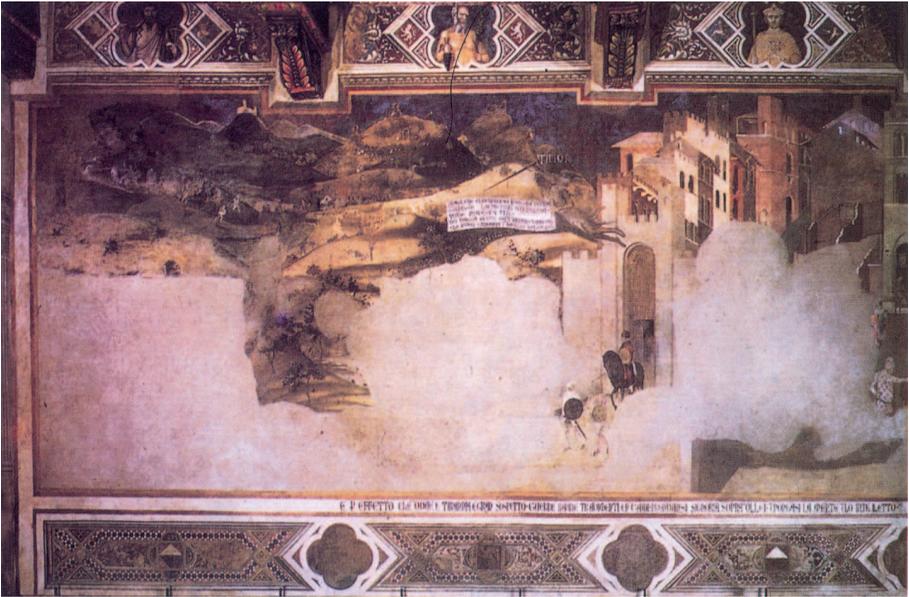
As we turn to it, we need to remember that we are reading in Latin, and that in Latin the word for left is *sinister*. Looking at the western wall, we undoubtedly find ourselves confronting the sinister side of Lorenzetti's political vision. We see a tableau of nine figures, the central one identified with a *titulus* that reads *Tyranny*.³ The figure is diabo-



Ill. 1. *The rule of tyranny* (western wall)

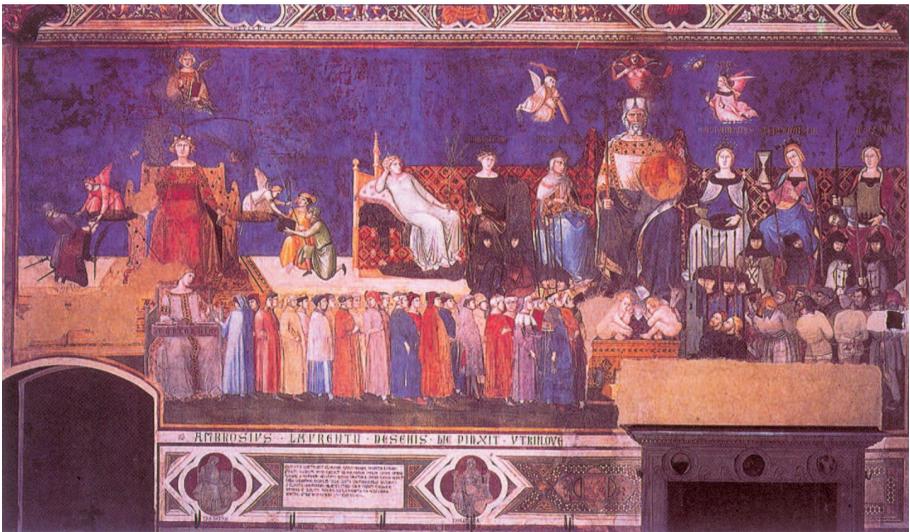
³ Here, as in all subsequent cases, I have translated the Latin *titulus* into English.

lical, with horns and fangs, enthroned in the style of a king, but wielding a dagger instead of a sceptre. His foot rests on a goat, symbol of lust, and above him hover *Avarice*, *Pride* and *Vainglory*, often described by moralists of this period as the leading enemies of human life. The presiding spirit is *Pride*, universally regarded as the most malign of the vices. Ranged on either side of *Tyranny* are the elements of force and fraud that keep tyrannical governments in power: to his right *Cruelty*, *Treachery* and *Fraud*; to his left the outright violence of *Fury*, *Civil Discord* and *War*. Lorenzetti also depicts the effects that tyrannical government has upon civic life. We see injustice and, more specifically, violence against women; we see the collapse of prosperity, with the armourer's shop the only one still in business. At the same time we see the further effects of tyranny in the countryside. The figure of *Fear* presides; everyone rides out armed; troops are on the march; agriculture is neglected; villages burn.



III. 2. *The city and countryside under tyranny* (western wall)

Let us continue reading from left to right. This brings us to the central or northern wall. This is also the central symbolic section of the frescoes, and where the painting is magnificently signed: “Ambrogio Lorenzetti painted what you see on all sides.” At the heart of this section sits a white-robed female figure, identified by her *titulus* as *Peace*, whose depiction embodies a series of psychomachic contrasts with *War*. The figure of *War* sits on *Tyranny*’s extreme left, and thus in the most sinister position of all. By contrast, *Peace* sits in the middle of the middle tier of the middle painting of the entire cycle, and thus at the heart of civic life. *War* sits in a posture of alert, with shield at the ready and sword upraised. *Peace* sits in an answering posture of repose, reclining on a cushion with an olive branch in her hand. As the psychomachic tradition requires, she is also shown triumphing over *War*, her elbow pressing down on a suit of armour while her feet trample a helmet and shield.



Ill. 4. *The rule of virtuous government* (northern wall)

Below *Peace* and to the left sits another female figure, who is marked *Concord*. Here too we see a series of psychomachic contrasts with the figures on *Tyranny*’s left. The closest companion of *Tyranny* is the monster *Fury*, a brutish creature representing the rage of the mob, armed with a dagger and ready to throw a stone. *Tyranny*’s other companion is *Civil Discord*, whose tunic is marked *Yes No* to emphasise her confused state. Her hair is un-

bound and dishevelled, and she holds a carpenter's saw with which she is lacerating herself, a horribly literal rendering of Sallust's remark in his *Bellum Catilinae* that a city divided against itself will be torn in pieces. By contrast, *Concord* is shown seated with a placid expression, her hair neatly plaited down her back. She too is holding a carpenter's tool, for she is balancing a large plane across her knees. The plane suggests her willingness to prevent disorder "by smoothing out inequities and establishing that concord and equity form the twin foundations of civic life". That is a quotation from Cicero's *De officiis*, but Lorenzetti is also quoting it in his own way.

Above *Concord*, a further and larger female figure sits enthroned, the *titulus* around her head informing us that she represents *Justice*. The *titulus* reads: "Love Justice You Who Judge the World." Here Lorenzetti contrives an even sharper psychomachic contrast with his portrayal of tyrannical government. There too we see *Justice*, but in disarray: hurled to the ground, her feet shackled, the cords of her balance severed. By contrast, *Justice* on the northern wall is shown raised to the level of *Peace*. Her balance is held aloft by a cherubim figure marked *Wisdom*, and one cord from each of its pans passes into the hand of *Concord*. She in turn entwines the cords to form a twin rope of concord or *vinculum concordiae* – Cicero's phrase, picked up in St. Augustine's *De civitate dei* – and this rope is handed to a procession of twenty-four richly clad citizens who stand equably next to her.

Above this procession, and to the right of *Peace*, we come upon a yet stronger echo of Lorenzetti's depiction of tyrannical government. There we saw *Tyranny* enthroned at the heart of an ensemble of nine vices. Here we see an identically symmetrical group, but in this case an ensemble of virtues. Above in the empyrean hover the cherubim figures of the "theological" virtues, *Faith*, *Hope* and *Charity*, while on the same level as *Peace* sit five female figures representing the virtues in exactly Seneca's scheme. We see *Magnanimity*, just as Seneca describes her, crowned and dispensing lavishly, throwing gold coins from a large dish. She is placed in the company of the four cardinal virtues singled out by Cicero in *De officiis*. Reading from left to right, we see *Courage*, who appears in full armour and with mounted attendants. Next we see *Prudence*, who as Cicero says lights the way to the other virtues, and who duly carries a lamp inscribed "*Past, Present and Future*". The inscription embodies a further reference to Cicero, who had described Prudence as the virtue that foresees the future by knowing the past. Next comes *Temperance*, here shown as the quality of those who know how to behave with timeliness, and who therefore holds an hourglass. Last comes *Justice* – that is, justice as a characteristic of persons and actions, not, as we have already seen, a quality of law and government. She is seen, as always, with her sword.



Ill. 5. *Siena as Supreme Judge of the Siennese* (detail of Ill. 4)

At the heart of this ensemble, a regal figure sits enthroned. This figure is not titled, but scholars have found no difficulty in identifying what is represented here, because of the explanatory verses on the dado beneath this part of the cycle. The opening lines, as usually translated, read as follows:

Wherever this holy virtue [Justice] rules
She induces many souls to unity
And those brought together in this way
Create for themselves a common good as their signor.

What we are being told, to quote a classic article by Nicolai Rubinstein, is that the common good must be raised to the position of our ruler if good government is to be maintained. The regal figure is taken, in short, to be a representation of the ideal of the *bonum commune*, the common good.

This interpretation has come to be widely accepted, but I must confess that I find it hard to accept. I want to return to this doubt, for this is one of the two enigmas I mentioned at the outset. For the moment, however, I want to continue with my survey of the cycle, still reading from left to right, and so passing from the northern to the eastern wall.

As I do so, I need to draw attention to one further fact about the figures of the virtues. With one exception, they return the gaze of the viewer. The exception is *Peace*, who looks across and to her left. What is *Peace* looking at? Following her gaze, we find that she is contemplating a bustling cityscape. The angle of vision from which we see it is very high, high above the city wall, although the painting is not in linear but in multiple perspective, and we are also looking straight into the city itself. The heart of the cityscape is occupied by a group of nine dancers who move around a tenth figure who is singing and playing a tambourine. Not only are these figures centrally placed, they are also enlarged in scale beyond any others in the scene, thereby conveying the strong impression that they must bear some correspondingly central symbolic significance. This brings me to the second puzzle I want to talk about, on which more ink has been spilled than on any other iconographical question in *trecento* painting. What is the symbolic significance of this group?

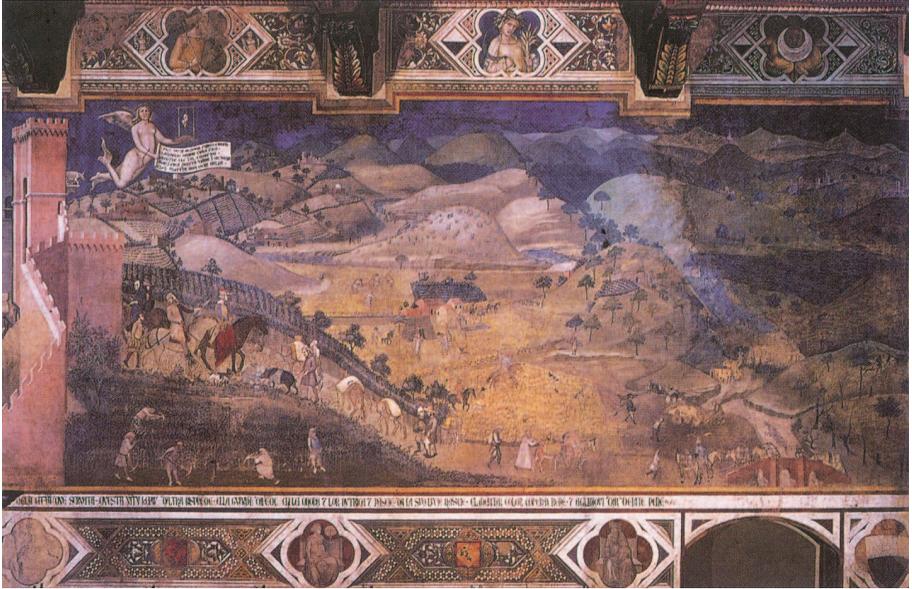
I want to propose a solution for you to consider, but before doing so I want to examine the dancers in their setting, that of the city life flourishing around them. To the right you see various forms of *negotium* or business: different trades are being carried on, a new building is nearing completion, a doctor of law (recognisable by his gown) is addressing his



Ill. 6. *The effects of virtuous government in the city* (eastern wall)

students. To the left there is more emphasis on the life of *otium* or leisure: a group of men and children talk and play, while two women idly watch a coroneted lady and her attendants riding by.

Let us turn finally to the right of the city gate. Here we behold the effects of peaceful government on the Sienese countryside. As in a Book of Hours, the work of the different seasons is simultaneously displayed. We see the farmers sowing their crop, but also hoeing it, reaping and threshing it, carrying it to the mill and ploughing after the harvest. We also see some grander figures, notably a lady in a sumptuous habit riding forth from the city gates, her attendants unarmed and unafraid. The figure of *Security* presides over the scene, holding up a hanged man for us to contemplate, together with a *cartouche* promising that “everyone shall go forth freely without fear”. The hanged man is the price of security, but the contrast that interests Lorenzetti is with the figure of *Fear* we have already encountered on the opposite wall. The two images bear a remarkable resemblance, possibly a reminder that all government, good and bad, must rest on some measure of violence. There is thus a sense in which we end where we began.



Ill. 7. *The effects of virtuous government in the countryside* (eastern wall)

There, then, is Lorenzetti's narrative, and I fear that what I have so far said about it will strike you as obvious. But I also hope that this is so, for in fact the overall interpretation I have been putting forward is a highly contentious one. The consensus among scholars has been that Lorenzetti is presenting us with a visual realisation of scholastic political philosophy, inspired above all by Aquinas's reinterpretation of Aristotle. But in my explication I have felt no need even to mention Aristotle, or scholasticism, or Aquinas. What I have tried to show is that, insofar as Lorenzetti's cycle constitutes a text in political theory, it is essentially a text of Roman and neo-Roman republican thought – most of all indebted to Latini and his study of Cicero and Seneca – and not a text of Greek provenance at all.

I am still left with the two specific puzzles I have highlighted. Let me now turn to them, beginning with a reconsideration of the massive figure enthroned on the northern wall. As I have said, he has generally been identified as a representation of the common good as *signore*. To me, however, the image not only seems more complicated, but to some degree ambiguous or at least bivalent in character.

One of its significations – not captured by the usual interpretation – is that it appears to be an attempt to symbolise the *commune* itself. The figure lacks an explanatory *titulus*, unlike the corresponding figure of *Tyranny*, but he does have around his head the letters C.S.C.C.V. The second “C” is an interpolation, however, and if we discount it we are left with C.S.C.V., the initials of the city’s official name, *Commune Senarum Civitas Virginis*, the commune of Siena, city of the Virgin.

There are further signs that the figure is intended to symbolise the city itself. He is dressed in black and white, then as now the heraldic colours of the Sienese commune. At his feet a she-wolf suckles a pair of twins, at once a psychomachic contrast with the goat at the feet of *Tyranny* and a reminder of the ancient Roman republic whose insignia the Sienese had adopted in 1297. On his shield can still faintly be discerned an image of the Virgin Mary, chosen by the Sienese as their special patron on the eve of their victory over the Florentines at Montaperti in 1260. Perhaps most significantly, the regal figure is portrayed as grey-bearded, white-haired, and thus as a *persona sena* – as an old person, but at the same time as *Sena*, the Latin name for Siena.

While the regal figure appears to be a representation of the *commune*, he is also, and more obviously, a representation of a *signore*, and more specifically a supreme judge. He is sitting enthroned on a seat of judgement; he is holding a sceptre, symbol of sovereign authority; and he is carrying a shield to defend his people. Lorenzetti also shows us that, like all judges, he is “tied” or “bound” to the performance of justice, for the rope of concord emanating from the figure of *Justice* is knotted around his wrist.

What Lorenzetti has done, it seems to me, is to fuse together an image of Siena with an image of a supreme judge. More exactly, what he offers us is an image of Siena *as* a supreme judge. What he is illustrating, I suggest, is the pivotal contention of the numerous treatises on city government circulating in early *trecento* Tuscany. As Latini had summarised in his *Livres du trésor*, “the common good requires that *signorie* should be held by the commune itself”. This I take to be the final message conveyed by the huge enthroned figure. Lorenzetti is similarly telling us that, if Siena is to promote the common good, the supreme ruler and judge of Siena will have to be the Sienese themselves.

But what about the verses on the dado beneath? Surely they tell us that the people “create for themselves a common good as their *signor*” (“un ben comun perlor signor sifanno”) and thus that the figure must after all represent the common good. But *is* that what the verses say? This reading requires that the crucial word “per” be translated as “for” or “as”. But it seems to me that it should be translated as “by means of” or “through”. Both mean-

ings of “per” were current in the *trecento*, but my reason for preferring “by means of” is that this remained the basic meaning in Latin, and seems to have remained the basic meaning in the relevant *volgare* texts as well. So my preferred translation of the crucial line would read: “Create by means of their *signor* a common good for themselves”. This constitutes a remarkably precise summary of what, I have been arguing, we actually see: a portrait of the kind of *signor* or *signoria* – that is, the kind of communal or republican government – by means of which the common good can best be attained.

Let me turn finally to consider the deepest enigma of the frescoes, the nine dancing figures at the heart of the cityscape. The first point to be made is that, although they have



Ill. 8. *Dancers in the city* (detail of Ill. 6)

usually been identified as women, the gendering of this public space has I think been misunderstood. Their costumes strongly suggest that these are intended as representations of young men. But the main point I want to make is that, in order to understand their significance, we need to pay attention to two pictorial effects that have rarely been noticed.

One is that the space in which the dancers move constitutes the painted light-source of the cityscape as a whole. If you look at the left-hand side of the building to the left of the piazza, you find that it is in shadow, while the entrance facing the piazza is brighter. The light is shown, in other words, as falling from the right, and thus from the direction of the piazza. But if you look at the cobbler's shop at the piazza's right-hand corner, you find that the front of the shop is in shadow while its side is again more brightly lit. So the light in this instance is shown as falling from the left, and thus from the direction of the piazza once more. The same pattern is repeated with only minor contradictions across the whole cityscape. It is, in short, the glowing centre of the city itself which constitutes the fictive light source of the picture as a whole. So one question to ask is: what is the significance of that very dramatic effect?

The other point to notice about the dancers has I think never been discussed, and to appreciate it we need to look closely at the garments worn by the two central figures, which are very strange. The costume of the figure on the right is in tatters, while the costume of the figure on the left is moth-eaten, with many holes through which the black undergarment can be seen. Furthermore, the costume of the dancer on the right is decorated all over with worms, while the costume of the dancer on the left is decorated with four-winged insects, that is, not flies but some species of dragonfly or moth. The large one looks like a dragonfly, but the others look more like moths, and I think that the representation intended by Lorenzetti must in fact be of moths. I say this partly because the garment is so clearly shown as moth-eaten, but also because, in this period, moths carried a special symbolic significance, above all when seen in the company of worms.

The significance was that moths and worms were used jointly to symbolise *tristitia*, the vice of despondency or moroseness. This symbolism can ultimately be traced to a passage from the old Vulgate version of the Book of Proverbs (Ch. 25, v. 20). There we are told that "just as a moth destroys a garment and worms destroy wood, so *tristitia* destroys the heart of man", a passage cited and glossed by many of the preachers and moralists of Lorenzetti's time.

You might well wonder why these symbols of sloth and despondency appear at the centre of Lorenzetti's bright and bustling picture of civic life. But we can begin to resolve the paradox if we recall that Lorenzetti's is a psychomachic portrayal of the virtues and vices, one in which each virtue is paired with a contrasting vice and does battle with it. Among Lorenzetti's contemporaries, the specific quality always singled out to do battle with *tristitia* was *gaudium*, joyfulness.

We can go further in explaining the moths and worms if we reflect that *gaudium* was not only held to be the means to hold *tristitia* at bay; it was also regarded as the natural response to blessings and benefits, above all the benefit of *pax* or civil peace. One source of this argument was Biblical, but again the Roman moralists are crucial here, and especially Seneca. Seneca in his *De beneficiis* defines a benefit as a well-intentioned act that brings *gaudium* to its recipient, to which he adds in his *Epistulae morales* that one of the situations in which we most naturally experience *gaudium* is when contemplating the peaceful well-being of our native land.

A number of Roman writers add that the reason why we ought to feel *gaudium* at justice and peace is because it is only through these means that we can hope to attain what, as I noted at the outset, they regard as the highest goal of civic life, the achievement of *gloria e grandezza*, civic glory and greatness. The authority always cited in this connection is Sallust, especially his declaration in the *Bellum Iugurthinum* that living in concord enables small cities to rise to greatness, while discord causes even the greatest cities to collapse. Latini paraphrases the passage when he tells us in his *Trésor* that “a city governed according to right and truth will not only live for ever in good peace but will multiply in glory and wealth”.

This ideal of the glory and greatness of cities was always represented by metaphors of light. One source is again Biblical: Christ is hailed in the Gospels as the king of glory, but also, especially by St. John, as the light of the world. But here too the metaphor is no less deeply rooted in Roman moral theory. Cicero, for example, uses the same phrase when speaking of the city of Rome, which he describes as “a light to the whole world”. Latini once more picks up the thought. “When good works are done in the government of a comune,” he declares, “they shine forth throughout the world like the brightness of the sun.”

There is a natural way, several of these writers add, of expressing the joy or *gaudium* that we feel at the attainment of civic glory and greatness. This consists of taking part in a *tripudium*, a solemnly festive dance in which (as the name implies) the dancers move in triple time. Seneca assures us in his *De tranquillitate animi* that the act of dancing the *tripudium* offers us the best means of banishing *tristitia*. “Even the warlike Scipio enjoyed dancing in the style of the *tripudium*, the manly style. ... This not only helped his mind to relax, but held at bay those feelings of weariness and *tristitia* that are otherwise liable to overwhelm us.”

This association of dancing with joy, and especially joy in civic achievements, can be found everywhere in Lorenzetti’s Italy. Perhaps the most memorable instance appears in Giotto’s frescoes in the Cappella degli Scrovegni. Around the dado of the Cappella, in



III. 9. Giotto, *Justice*, fresco (southern wall, Cappella degli Scrovegni, Padua)

psychomachia style, Giotto depicts seven vices to the left (or “sinister”) side of the entrance, with seven virtues opposing them. The two central portraits are of Injustice and Justice. The figure of *Justice* is shown, as in Lorenzetti, holding a balance in front of her, each hand supporting a diminutive figure. Still more strikingly, Lorenzetti adopts a number of details from Giotto’s narrative composition on the base of Justice’s throne. Lorenzetti’s depiction of the lady riding forth from the city gates closely echoes Giotto’s painting, as does the fact that, like Giotto, he makes his central image that of a dance.

The significance of the dance is spelled out for us in a Latin poem beneath Giotto’s painting:

Perfect justice
Weighs everything in an equal balance:
In crowning good men
She wields a sword against the vices
And all express *gaudium*.
If she is able to reign freely
Everyone accomplishes with pleasure
Whatever they desire.

Here again, dancing expresses the *gaudium* we naturally feel at the rule of justice and its happy effects.

With these considerations in mind, I can return to Lorenzetti’s dancers and perhaps suggest some answers to the questions I raised about them. Why is the space in which they are dancing pictured as the source of light? By showing us the heart of the city as radiant and illuminating, Lorenzetti aims, I think, to convey a sense of Siena’s *gloria e grandezza*, the glory and greatness that come from living peaceably under a just form of government. Why are the garments of the two central dancers decorated with moths and worms? Lorenzetti is suggesting, I take it, that we need to banish *tristitia* if we are to live a useful life, and that the act of dancing the *tripudium*, and thereby arousing *gaudium*, is a means to ensure that *tristitia* is overcome. Finally, what is the significance of the dance itself? The nine figures are surely dancing for joy, expressing their *gaudium* at the life of peace, glory and greatness by which they are so magnificently surrounded.

You might still want to ask why there are *nine* dancers in the group around the musician. Scholars have repeatedly raised the question, and have come up with various answers: the nine muses, perhaps; or the theatrical arts; or nine plus one as the perfect number. But you could just as well ask why there are nine figures in the ensemble of *Justice* and *Concord* on

the northern wall. Or why there are nine virtues surrounding the figure of the city as judge. Or why there are nine vices surrounding the figure of *Tyranny*. Or why there are nine crenellations on the roof of the Palazzo Pubblico, constructed a decade earlier. Or why there are nine sections in the famous brick pavement in front of the palazzo, completed in 1347.

The answer, I think, must be the same in every case: these must be allusions to The Nine, the *Nove Signori*, the ruling council of Siena, who commissioned and paid for Lorenzetti's frescoes, just as they commissioned and paid for the rebuilding of the Palazzo Pubblico and the pavement outside. Not unnaturally, they wanted their signature on everything, and their signature was the number nine.

Perhaps I can carry the argument one step further by asking a final question about the dominant figure whom I earlier identified as a representation of Siena as its own supreme judge. Who, when these frescoes were painted, claimed to be the supreme judge of the Sienese in virtue of being the elected representatives of the citizens of Siena? Once again, the answer is the Nine. In portraying Siena as judge of the Sienese, Lorenzetti is at the same time offering a representation of the power held by the Nine as elected representatives of the citizens as a whole. So the joy expressed by the nine dancers at the civic peace and glory surrounding them is in turn a celebration of the achievement of the Nine, the bringers of all these beneficial effects.