



Discourses on Strauss
Revelation and Reason in Leo Strauss and his Critical Study
of Niccolò Machiavelli

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All the hopes that we entertain in the midst of the confusions and dangers of the present are founded positively or negatively, directly or indirectly on the experiences of the past. Of these experiences the broadest and deepest, as far as we Western men are concerned, are indicated by the names of the two cities Jerusalem and Athens. Western man became what he is and is what he is through the coming together of biblical faith and Greek thought. In order to understand ourselves and to illuminate our trackless way into the future, we must understand Jerusalem and Athens. . . .

Leo Strauss, "Jerusalem and Athens"

. . . the clear grasp of a fundamental question requires understanding of the nature of the subject matter with which the question is concerned. Genuine knowledge of a fundamental question, thorough understanding of it, is better than blindness to it, or indifference to it, be that indifference or blindness accompanied by knowledge of the answers to a vast number of peripheral or ephemeral questions or not. . . .

Leo Strauss, "What Is Political Philosophy?"

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Abstract

The importance of the revelation-reason question in the works of Leo Strauss is central to an understanding of his thought. This central question poses two fundamental alternatives—religion and philosophy—for understanding the good life. This thesis will seek to demonstrate that the elucidation of these alternatives and their shared opposition to modernity are key themes in Strauss's oeuvre, particularly in his critical study of Niccolò Machiavelli's teaching.

Part One offers a close reading of Strauss's idea of history and his conception of the revelation-reason question. Chapter One shows why he thought it critically important to undertake the study of the history of political philosophy. Chapter Two, which examines how Strauss considered revelation and reason as fundamentally different worldviews, refutes arguments that his position on the authority and truth of religion was basically atheistic.

Parts Two and Three explore Strauss's critical study of Machiavelli's teaching. Exploring Strauss's thesis that Machiavelli is neither Christian nor pagan, Part Two examines Machiavelli's teaching on the nature and efficacy of religion. Chapter Three focuses on his critique of Christianity, while Chapter Four focuses on Strauss's response to Machiavelli's critique of religion in general. Chapters Five to Seven explicate Strauss's thesis that Machiavelli's teaching on morality and politics is a revolt against not only Biblical religion but also classical political philosophy as found in Plato and Aristotle. Strauss's effort here is to demonstrate that Machiavelli based his notions of goodness, virtue and governance in the "effectual truth" of all things, in the empirical realm, not in the abstract realm of eternal verities.

The close examination of Strauss's critical study of Machiavelli's teaching in Parts Two and Three shows that Strauss identified his work as a commentary on classical political philosophy. Nonetheless, as a critical engagement with the precepts of Biblical religion, it was a contribution to philosophical tradition. Strauss's open, if not precarious, stance with respect to these two traditions is fundamental to understanding his critique of modernity. Strauss maintains that the "crisis of our time" is the apogee of a modernity that has its point of origin in Machiavelli's rejection of biblical and classical morality as a guide to the efficacy of political virtue.

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text of the thesis. I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University library, being made available for photocopying and loan.

Signed

Kim Sorensen

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Abbreviations used in footnotes

Works by Leo Strauss

<i>AAPL</i>	<i>The Argument and Action of Plato's Laws</i>
AE	"An Epilogue"
CCM	"Correspondence Concerning Modernity" (exchange of letters with Karl Löwith)
CCWM	"Correspondence Concerning <i>Wahrheit und Methode</i> " (exchange of letters with Hans-Georg Gadamer)
CM	<i>The City and Man</i>
COT	"The Crisis of Our Time"
CPP	"The Crisis of Political Philosophy"
ET	"Exoteric Teaching"
Exi	"Existentialism"
FMM	"Freud on Moses and Monotheism," in <i>JP</i>
GA	"A Giving of Accounts," in <i>JP</i>
GH	"Greek Historians"
GN	"German Nihilism"
HBSGP	"How To Begin To Study <i>The Guide of the Perplexed</i> "
<i>HPP</i>	<i>History of Political Philosophy</i> 3rd ed.
HSMP	"How to Study Medieval Philosophy"
HSS	"How to Study Spinoza's <i>Theological Political Treatise</i> ," in <i>JP</i>
IEHC	"Introductory Essay to Hermann Cohen, <i>Religion of Reason out of the Sources of Judaism</i> ," in <i>JP</i>
<i>IPP</i>	<i>An Introduction to Political Philosophy</i>
JA	"Jerusalem and Athens," in <i>SPPP</i>
<i>JP</i>	<i>Jewish Philosophy and the Crisis of Modernity</i>
<i>LAM</i>	<i>Liberalism Ancient and Modern</i>
LCGP	"The Literary Character of the <i>Guide for the Perplexed</i> ," in <i>PAW</i>
LE	"Letter to the Editor," in <i>JP</i>
LHK	"Letter to Helmut Kuhn"
LRK	"The Law of Reason in the <i>Kuzari</i> ," in <i>PAW</i>
<i>LSPS</i>	<i>Leo Strauss on Plato's Symposium</i>

MCL	“Machiavelli and Classical Literature”
MITP	“The Mutual Influence of Theology and Philosophy,” Part III of “POR?”
MP	“Marsilius of Padua, <i>circa</i> 1275-1342,” in <i>HPP</i>
MSPS	“Maimonides’ Statement on Political Science,” in <i>WIPP?</i>
NCS	Notes on Carl Schmitt, <i>The Concept of the Political</i>
NM	“Niccolo Machiavelli, 1469-1527,” in <i>HPP</i>
NMBK	“Notes on Maimonides’ <i>Book of Knowledge</i> ,” in <i>SPPP</i>
NMLA	“Note on Maimonides’ <i>Letter on Astrology</i> ,” in <i>SPPP</i>
NPN	“Note on the Plan of Nietzsche’s <i>Beyond Good and Evil</i> ,” in <i>SPPP</i>
NRH	<i>Natural Right and History</i>
OCPH	“On Collingwood’s Philosophy of History”
OCPP	“On Classical Political Philosophy,” in <i>WIPP?</i>
OFKW	“On a Forgotten Kind of Writing,” in <i>WIPP?</i>
OIG	“On the Interpretation of Genesis,” in <i>JP</i>
OIR	“On the Intention of Rousseau”
ONI	“On a New Interpretation of Plato’s Political Philosophy”
ONL	“On Natural Law,” in <i>SPPP</i>
OPS	“The Origins of Political Science and the Problem of Socrates”
OT (rev.ex)	<i>On Tyranny</i> , revised and expanded edition
PAW	<i>Persecution and the Art of Writing</i>
PGS	“Perspectives on the Good Society,” in <i>JP</i>
PHPW	“Preface to <i>Hobbes Politische Wissenschaft</i> ,” in <i>JP</i>
PIH	“Preface to Issac Husik, <i>Philosophical Essays</i> ,” in <i>JP</i>
PL	<i>Philosophy and Law</i>
POG	“Preliminary Observations on the Gods in Thucydides’ Work”
POR?	“Progress or Return?,” in <i>IPP</i>
PPH	“Political Philosophy and History,” in <i>WIPP?</i>
PRS	“Philosophy as Rigorous Science and Political Philosophy,” in <i>SPPP</i>
PS	“The Problem of Socrates”
PSCR	“Preface to <i>Spinoza’s Critique of Religion</i> ,” in <i>JP</i>
RCPR	<i>The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism</i>

Rel	“Relativism,” in <i>RCPR</i>
RHH	Review of <i>The History of History</i> , Vol.1, by James T. Shotwell
RSW	“Replies to Schaar and Wolin” (no.2)
SA	<i>Socrates and Aristophanes</i>
SCR	<i>Spinoza’s Critique of Religion</i>
SPPP	<i>Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy</i>
SR	“Some Remarks on the Political Science of Maimonides and Farabi,” trans. Robert Bartlett
SSH	“Social Science and Humanism,” in <i>RCPR</i>
SVC	“The Strauss-Voegelin Correspondence, 1934-64” (exchange of letters with Eric Voegelin)
TM	<i>Thoughts on Machiavelli</i>
TPPH	<i>The Political Philosophy of Hobbes</i>
TWM	“The Three Waves of Modernity,” in <i>IPP</i>
UP	“An Unspoken Prologue,” in <i>JP</i>
WILE?	“What Is Liberal Education?”, in <i>LAM</i>
WIPP?	“What Is Political Philosophy?”, in <i>WIPP?</i>
<i>WIPP?</i>	<i>What Is Political Philosophy?</i>
WWRJ	“Why We Remain Jews,” in <i>JP</i>
XA	“Xenophon’s <i>Anabasis</i> ”
XS	<i>Xenophon’s Socrates</i>
XSD	<i>Xenophon’s Socratic Discourses</i>

Works by Martin Heidegger

AF	“The Anaximander Fragment,” in <i>EGT</i>
BPP	<i>The Basic Problems of Phenomenology</i>
BT	<i>Being and Time</i>
EB	<i>Existence and Being</i>
EGT	<i>Early Greek Thinking</i>
ID	<i>Identity and Difference</i>
IM	<i>An Introduction to Metaphysics</i>
N(1)	<i>Nietzsche, Vol.1: The Will to Power as Art</i>
N(2)	<i>Nietzsche, Vol.2: The Eternal Recurrence of the Same</i>

- N(3) Nietzsche, Vol.3: The Will to Power as Knowledge and as Metaphysics*
- N(4) Nietzsche, Vol.4: Nihilism*
- PLT Poetry, Language, Thought*

Introduction

Leo Strauss on the Permanent Problems and the Predicaments of Modernity

Whether in his interest in medieval Jewish and Arabic philosophers, his exegeses of ancient Greek philosophers, or his accounts of the moderns, the revelation-reason question is never far away in Leo Strauss's oeuvre. The same is true for his numerous journal articles, book reviews, private letters (especially to Voegelin¹), and even the courses he gave while at the University of Chicago on natural right, political philosophy and on thinkers ranging from Aristophanes to Heidegger.² The revelation-reason question puts forward the two fundamental alternatives of religion and philosophy to understanding the good life. The elucidation of each alternative, that the alternatives are immiscible and the path they both offer out of the morass of modernity are key themes for Strauss. This is especially true in his critical study of Niccolò Machiavelli's teaching, as this thesis will demonstrate.

Strauss was a scholar with a particular interest in the history of political philosophy. As Bolotin explains, "the primary field of his work was not philosophy simply, but more narrowly *political* philosophy, or rather the *history* of

¹ "The Strauss-Voegelin Correspondence, 1934-1964," in *Faith and Political Philosophy: The Correspondence Between Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin, 1934-1964*, ed. and trans. Peter Emberley and Barry Cooper (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993), pt. I. See also Ernest L. Fortin and Glenn Hughes, "The Strauss-Voegelin Correspondence: Two Reflections and Two Comments," *Review of Politics* 56, no.2 (Spring 1994): 337-357.

² For a roster of courses Strauss taught in the Political Science Department, at the University of Chicago, from 1949 to 1967, see George Anastaplo, "Leo Strauss at the University of Chicago," in *Leo Strauss, The Straussians, and The American Regime*, ed. Kenneth L. Deutsch and John A. Murley (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999), pp.13-18. "I cannot vouch personally for all of the transcripts or transcript-subjects recorder here," Anastaplo stresses. "But I can affirm that there are many gems in those often ragged transcripts, long-neglected gems illuminating an abundance of authors and issues." *Ibid.*, p.13.

political philosophy. . . . the most important purpose of his *historical* writings was to . . . revitalize classical political philosophy . . .”³ Miller notes that “Strauss is a political philosopher and not just a historian of political philosophy,” and that the scope of his “writings” bespeaks a “philosophical intent.”⁴ “[H]e was too modest,” though, as Bloom points out, to describe himself as “a philosopher.”⁵ In “Why We Remain Jews” Strauss stated, “everyone is a specialist, and my specialty is (to use a very broad and nonspecialist name) social science rather than divinity. . . .” At the opening of his lecture, “On the Interpretation of Genesis,” Strauss explained, “I want to begin with the remark that I am not a biblical scholar; I am a political scientist specializing in political theory.” He continued: “Political theory is frequently said to be concerned with the values of the Western world. These values, as is well known, are partly of biblical and partly of Greek origin. The political theorist must, therefore, have an inkling of the agreement as well as the disagreement between the biblical and the Greek heritage.” At the close of Part II of his lecture, “Progress or Return?”, Strauss reflected: “it seems to me that the core, the nerve of Western intellectual history, Western spiritual history, one could almost say, is the conflict between the biblical and the philosophic notions of the good life. . . . [I]t seems to me that this unresolved conflict is the secret of the vitality of Western civilization.” In his lecture, “Jerusalem and Athens,” Strauss stated: “We are

³ David Bolotin, “Leo Strauss and Classical Political Philosophy,” *Interpretation* 22, no.1 (Fall 1994), p.130 (original emphases).

⁴ Eugene F. Miller, “Leo Strauss: The Recovery of Political Philosophy,” in *Contemporary Political Philosophers*, ed. Anthony de Crespigny and Kenneth Minogue (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1975), p.68.

⁵ Allan Bloom, “Leo Strauss: September 20, 1899-October 18, 1973,” *Political Theory* 2, no.4 (November 1974), p.376: “Leo Strauss was a philosopher. He would have never said so himself, for he was too modest and he had too much reverence for the rare human type and the way of life represented by that title to arrogate it to himself, especially in an age when its use has been so cheapened.”

confronted with the incompatible claims of Jerusalem and Athens to our allegiance.

We are open to both and willing to listen to each. . . .”⁶

This thesis argues that by carefully examining Strauss’s critical study of Machiavelli’s teaching one learns that Strauss was indeed himself open and willing to listen to both “Jerusalem” and “Athens.” In explicating Strauss’s thoroughgoing reflection on those fundamental alternatives, Parts Two and Three of this thesis emphasize his critical study of Machiavelli over his other works.⁷ That emphasis is not for brevity or economy alone, though. The density of religious *and* philosophic themes in Strauss’s critical study⁸ make the study a particularly useful example for an examination of how Strauss dealt with the revelation-reason question.⁹ Before outlining in further detail the particular subject matter of the chapters of this thesis, it is needful to make an excursion into issues regarding how Strauss has been, and continues to be, criticized, understood and read.

Strauss and his critics

Whether critics or students, Strauss’s readers are compelled to come to terms with the gravity of his lifework.¹⁰ Recent vociferous critics of the supposed

⁶ WWRJ, p.312; OIG, p.359 (cf. PIH, esp. pp.246-47, 257); POR?, p.289 (see also pp.265, 289-90); JA, p.149 (see also p.147). With regard to Strauss’s description of himself a scholar, see FMM, p.285; OIG, p.359; see also GA, *PHPW*, *PSCR*, and *UP*.

⁷ Bloom divides Strauss’s corpus into three periods: early, middle and later. The first period is characterized by works on Zionism and Judaism; the second period is “dominated by his discovery of esoteric writing”; and the third period is distinguished by the “complete abandonment of the form as well as the content of modern scholarship. . . .” The third period begins with *Thoughts on Machiavelli*. For Bloom’s tripartite division, see his “Leo Strauss,” pp.379-87; see also Michael P. Jackson, “Leo Strauss’s Teaching: A Study of *Thoughts on Machiavelli*” (Ph.D. diss., Georgetown University, 1985), pp.9-13.

⁸ I wish simply to say here, as I discuss the matter in ch.3, intro., that by Strauss’s ‘critical study’ I mean not the whole of *Thoughts on Machiavelli* but, rather, its final chapter, “Machiavelli’s Teaching.” For a guide to the structure of that chapter, see below, appendix.

⁹ Cf. Jackson, “Strauss’s Teaching,” pp.245-49.

¹⁰ See Susan Orr, *Jerusalem and Athens: Reason and Revelation in the Work of Leo Strauss* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 1995), p.7.

influence of his lifework, reducing the range of their interest to the influence of his scholarly output on American conservatism, fail to understand him on his own terms. The controversy that enveloped Strauss “during his lifetime . . . [was] primarily on issues such as how to read Machiavelli or the appropriate way to approach the study of the social sciences. . . .” Since his death in 1973 he has been described “[i]n both scholarly and popular venues . . . as the alleged father of an anti-democratic cult at odds with the principles of American democracy. . . .”¹¹ Yet despite heated and often *ad hominem* debates about Strauss’s work, an abiding interest with the study of the history of political philosophy characterizes his oeuvre.

With regard to the influence exerted by Strauss over American political life, Drury claims in her *Leo Strauss and the American Right* that Strauss and his followers have given American neoconservatism “its sense of crisis, its aversion to liberalism, its rejection of pluralism, its dread of nihilism, its insistence on nationalism, its populism, its religiosity, and more.”¹² Drury’s claim offers a convenient but simplistic analysis of Straussian misgivings about modernity. Jaffa observed in his 1965 book, *Equality and Liberty*: ““All men are created equal” is called a self-evident truth. What does this mean? Not that all men are equal in intelligence, virtue, strength, or beauty.” Jaffa went on to explain: “They are equal in certain “rights,” and the meaning of these rights can perhaps be most easily

¹¹ Gregory Bruce Smith, “Leo Strauss and the Straussians: An Anti-democratic Cult?”, *PS, Political Science and Politics* 30, no.2 (June 1997), p.180 (col.1). The best or most informative recent accounts about the influence of Strauss’s work can be found in Deutsch and Murley, eds., *Leo Strauss, the Straussians, and the American Regime*; Kenneth L. Deutsch and Walter Nicgorski, eds. and intro., *Leo Strauss: Political Philosopher and Jewish Thinker* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 1994); David Novak, ed., *Leo Strauss and Judaism: Jerusalem and Athens Critically Revisited* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 1996); Orr, *Jerusalem and Athens*, ch.1.

¹² Shadia B. Drury, *Leo Strauss and the American Right* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997), p.xi.

expressed today in this negative way: there is no difference between man and man—such as there is between man and other animals of other species—which makes any man, that is, any normal adult human being, the natural ruler of any man.”¹³ Foreshadowing Jaffa, Strauss wrote in 1953, in *Natural Right and History*:

Liberal relativism has its roots in the natural right tradition of tolerance [or in the notion that everyone has a natural right to the pursuit of happiness as he understands happiness; but in itself it is a seminary of intolerance.

Once we realize that the principles of our actions have no other support than our blind choice, we really do not believe in them any more. We cannot wholeheartedly act upon them any more. . . . The more we cultivate reason, the more we cultivate nihilism: the less are we able to be loyal members of society. The inescapable practical consequence of nihilism is fanatical obscurantism.¹⁴

According to Drury’s critique in her *The Political Ideas of Leo Strauss*, described by Emberley and Cooper as a “bizarre splenetic,” Strauss was inveterately contemptuous of morality, believing the philosopher to be a near godlike being who is beyond good and evil and not subject to moral or legal norms. Thus for Drury, Strauss was basically a nihilist.¹⁵ Of the charge leveled at Drury by Emberley and Cooper, Lampert writes: “Such mindless dismissals excuse their authors from facing the fact that Drury’s book contains many fine skeptical readings of Strauss’s texts and acute insights into Strauss’s real intentions.” However, Lampert concedes: “Still, Drury’s work is less effective than it might have been because of its own missionary tone . . . the chief shortcoming of her book is its explicit refusal to examine the question of the truth or falsity of Strauss’s thesis of esotericism . . .”¹⁶

¹³ Harry V. Jaffa, *Equality and Liberty: Theory and Practice in American Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), p.176. Cf. *NRH*, p.1.

¹⁴ *NRH*, p.6.

¹⁵ Shadia B. Drury, *The Political Ideas of Leo Strauss* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1988), esp. chs.9 and 11; Peter Emberley and Barry Cooper, “Introduction,” in *Faith and Political Philosophy*, ed. and trans. Emberley and Cooper, p.xv n2.

¹⁶ Laurence Lampert, *Leo Strauss and Nietzsche* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp.132-33n5. I address the above “thesis” in ch.1, in the section titled “Turning to history.”

In Holmes's reckoning, a mindset of non-Marxist antiliberalism links Strauss with theorists such as Alasdair MacIntyre, Christopher Lasch and Roberto Unger. That mindset can be traced back, Holmes suggests, to Carl Schmitt, Martin Heidegger and the "[n]ineteenth century enemies of the Enlightenment," Joseph de Maistre and Friedrich Nietzsche.¹⁷ "They all engage in *Kulturkritik*, for example, and their criticisms of modern culture follow a fairly standardized format whereby "disparagement of liberalism forms part of a general lamentation over the moral and spiritual degeneration of modern society."¹⁸

Holmes's views were quoted in Francis W. Coker's essay, "Some Present-Day Critics of Liberalism," published in the March 1953 issue of the *American Political Science Review*.¹⁹ Holmes's use of this essay to describe Strauss is curious, for Coker did not mention Strauss. Furthermore, Coker stated in the conclusion to his essay that criticism of liberalism is necessary: "Liberalism needs criticism. A liberal may have exaggerated notions of man's capacity and disposition to think and act justly and intelligently. . . ." Coker further explained: "Tolerance may degenerate into indifference and irresponsibility. . . . Liberalism, which began with strong moral convictions, has no less need for them now Liberals should also recognize that in their openmindedness they may have exaggerated notions of the possibilities of freedom and variety."²⁰

¹⁷ Stephen D. Holmes, *The Anatomy of Antiliberalism* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989), p.xi.

¹⁸ *Anatomy of Antiliberalism*, p.5. Cf. Werner J. Dannhauser, "The Problem of the Bourgeois," in *The Legacy of Rousseau*, ed. Clifford Orwin and Nathan Tarcov (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), p.15.

¹⁹ *American Political Science Review* 47, no.1 (March 1953), p.12. Cf. Ronald Lora, *Conservative Minds in America* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1971; Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1976), pp.177-78.

²⁰ "Critics of Liberalism," p.25.

Of Holmes's claim that Strauss belongs to an antiliberal tradition of thought, Spragens notes: "participation in a tradition surely must be constituted by adherence to shared goals and not simply by sharing one common adversary. Politics makes strange bedfellows, as the saying goes; but every group of bedfellows doesn't add up to a tradition."²¹ It would be a mistake, according to both Berkowitz and McClay, to place Strauss in an antiliberal tradition. McClay points out that Strauss's "defense was somewhat indirect and circumscribed Still and all, he did not feel liberal democracy was entirely hopeless. . . ." ²² Berkowitz observes, "Holmes' decision to analyze Strauss as an antiliberal is a strange one. For—as Holmes grudgingly acknowledges in the very last footnote of his chapter on Strauss—the fact is that Strauss defended liberal institutions. . . ." ²³ Indeed, in "Progress or Return?" Strauss wrote:

It is very far from me to minimize the difference between a nation conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal, and the nations of the old world, which certainly were not conceived in liberty. I share the hope in America and the faith in

²¹ Thomas A. Spragens, Jr., Review of *The Anatomy of Antiliberalism*, by Stephen Holmes, *Journal of Politics* 57 no.4 (November 1995), p.1200.

²² Wilfred M. McClay, "The Party of Limits," Review of *Revolt Against Modernity: Leo Strauss, Eric Voegelin, and the Search for a Postliberal Order*, by Ted V. McAllister, *Reviews in American History* 25, no.1 (March 1997), pp.97, 98. With regard to Berkowitz's and McClay's observations about Strauss on liberalism, see also, e.g., Nasser Behnegar, "The Liberal Politics of Leo Strauss," in *Political Philosophy and the Human Soul: Essays in Memory of Allan Bloom*, ed. Michael Palmer and Thomas L. Pangle (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 1995): 251-267; Thomas L. Pangle, "Editor's Introduction," in *RCPR*, pp.xxiii-xxvii; Steven B. Smith, "Destruction or Recovery?: Leo Strauss's Critique of Heidegger," *Review of Metaphysics* 51, no.2 (December 1997), pp.364f; Ronald J. Terchek, "Locating Leo Strauss in the Liberal-Communitarian Debate," in Deutsch and Murley, eds.: 143-156. Cf. Drury, *Strauss and the American Right*, pp.170-78. But cf. also Heinrich Meier, *Carl Schmitt and Leo Strauss: The Hidden Dialogue*, including Strauss's Notes on Schmitt's *Concept of the Political* and Three Letters from Strauss to Schmitt, trans. J. Harvey Lomax (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p.84: "the critique of liberalism . . . is for Strauss part of a train of thought guided by the requirement . . . to seek a further, more comprehensive horizon beyond liberalism. . . ."

²³ Peter Berkowitz, "Liberal Zealotry," Review of *The Anatomy of Antiliberalism*, by Stephen Holmes, *Yale Law Journal* 103, no.5 (March 1994), p.1375. I would add that nowhere in that endnote, *Anatomy of Antiliberalism*, pp.281-84n6, does Holmes refer to any work by Strauss. I would also add that Holmes only mentions Strauss twice in the text proper of his "The Permanent Structure of Antiliberal Thought," in Nancy L. Rosenblum, ed., *Liberalism and the Moral Life* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989): 227-253—for those mentions, see pp.245, 246—and three times in the endnotes—see pp.288n62, 289n77, 290n98.

America, but I am compelled to add that that faith and that hope cannot be of the same character as that faith and that hope which a Jew has in regard to Judaism and which the Christian has in regard to Christianity. No one claims that the faith in America and the hope for America is based on explicit divine promises.²⁴

In the introduction to *Thoughts on Machiavelli* Strauss noted, “The United States of America may be said to be the only country in the world which was founded in explicit opposition to Machiavellian principles. . . . At least to the extent that the American reality is inseparable from the American aspiration, one cannot understand Americanism without understanding Machiavellianism which is its opposite.” In “Perspectives on the Good Society” Strauss claimed, “Only a society in which everyone can be what he is or can develop his unique potentialities is truly free and truly great or excellent. . . .” The “ills” that afflict America are represented precisely, and chiefly, by “the tendency toward homogeneity or conformism, that is, toward the suppression by nonpolitical means of individuality . . .”²⁵

Any scholar attempting to comment on Strauss’s legacy runs the risk of being accused of partisanship; to interject into heated debates about Strauss is to risk being branded a Straussian or an anti-Straussian. Indeed, to be branded a Straussian would appear in some academic circles to imply that such a person holds conservative, illiberal and anachronistic views.²⁶ According to one commentator, though, “whatever the relation of Straussianism to American conservatism . . . the relation is

²⁴ POR?, p.257.

²⁵ *TM*, pp.13, 14; *PGS*, pp.433-34.

²⁶ See the works by Drury cited above. See also Richard Rorty, “Straussianism, democracy, and Allan Bloom, I: That Old-Time Philosophy,” *New Republic* 198, no.14 (4 April 1988): 28-33; Stanley Rothman, “The Revival of Classical Political Philosophy: A Critique,” *American Political Science Review* 56, no.2 (March 1962): 341-352; John H. Schaar and Sheldon S. Wolin, “A Critique,” Review of *Essays on the Scientific Study of Politics*, ed. Herbert J. Storing, *American Political Science Review* 57, no.1 (March 1963): 125-150; David Spitz, *The Real World of Liberalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), pp.199-202, 210-11.

neither one of subservience nor of identity.”²⁷ As another commentator observes, against the charge of Straussian illiberalism:

One could construct a political program for today’s circumstances based on Strauss’ diagnosis [of the ills of liberalism]. It would shore up liberalism in practical ways. For example, strengthening religiously based self restraint on the passions, promoting economic innovation and abundance, encouraging independent private institutions, supporting sub-political ‘mediating structures’, and defending political decentralisation, national independence and patriotism over against cosmopolitanism and even larger political aggregations. Such practical measures would aim to preserve the tensions within liberal principles as much as possible, and thereby preserve the practice of liberal democracy against the destructive practical consequences of its own principles.²⁸

In a less vehement tone, the critiques offered by both Devigne and McAllister provide a contrast to the bleakly denunciatory tones of the critiques penned by Drury and Holmes. As Smith writes of Devigne’s *Recasting Conservatism*, “The author’s treatment of Oakeshott and Strauss is fair and even-handed throughout, neither defensively partisan nor angrily recriminatory.” As McCarl writes of McAllister’s *Revolt Against Modernity*, “His reading of both Strauss and Voegelin is nonpartisan, fair, and perceptive.” According to Richert, though, McAllister’s book “is thoroughly Straussian . . .”²⁹

Contemporary American conservatism does draw from Strauss’s diagnosis of America’s ills, Devigne explains. Moreover, such conservatism is a response to, and

²⁷ André Liebich, “Straussianism and Ideology,” in Anthony Parel, ed., *Ideology, Philosophy and Politics* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press for the Calgary Institute for the Humanities, 1983), p.226.

²⁸ Gary D. Glenn, “Speculations on Strauss’ Political Intentions Suggested by *On Tyranny*,” *History of European Ideas* 19, nos.1-3 (1994), p.175.

²⁹ Steven B. Smith, Review of *Recasting Conservatism: Oakeshott, Strauss, and the Response to Postmodernism*, by Robert Devigne, *American Political Science Review* 88, no.4 (December 1994), p.972; Steven R. McCarl, Review of *Revolt against Modernity: Leo Strauss, Eric Voegelin and the Search for Political Order*, by Ted V. McAllister, *American Political Science Review* 91, no.2 (June 1997), p.438 (col.1); Scott P. Richert, Review of *Revolt Against Modernity: Leo Strauss, Eric Voegelin, and the Search for a Postliberal Order*, by Ted V. McAllister, *Review of Metaphysics* 50, no.3 (March 1997), p.676. McCarl’s review misstates the title of McAllister’s book.

a reaction against, what in the 1980s and 1990s came to be labeled postmodernism. The postmodern environment is characterized by “societies in which common civil practices are not assumed to be norms corresponding to an existing independent reality; individual identities are fractured and lack stability . . . and political theories have lost all faith, not only in God, but in the human power of transcendence as well.”³⁰ However, by the 1960s and 1970s, Strauss’s followers increasingly had grown alarmed at the ascendancy in the American academy, and the wider social and political landscape, of the notion that politics is nothing more than the will to action and the pursuit of power for its own sake. The effect of their alarm was to lead Straussians to turn from their studies, Devigne points out, “to become political commentators and contributors to a new American conservative political theory.”³¹ Straussians and neoconservatives alike advocate a theory dedicated to “the development of public policies and institutions that conduce to public standards of a political and moral good and bad.”³²

It is true, Smith notes, that “A number of Strauss’s students (or students of his students) went into government service during the Reagan and Bush years But it is unclear to what extent Oakeshottians and Straussians actively shaped the conservative agendas of their respective governments or simply took advantage of them.”³³ Smith’s comment about Devigne’s book applies equally, I would suggest, to McAllister’s book. McAllister claims that because of their critique of modernity and advocacy of a return to the classics Strauss and Voegelin can be interpreted as

³⁰ Robert Devigne, *Recasting Conservatism: Oakeshott, Strauss, and the Response to Postmodernism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), p.xi.

³¹ *Recasting Conservatism*, p.58.

³² *Recasting Conservatism*, p.64.

³³ Review of *Recasting Conservatism*, p.972.

having provided American conservatism with its key intellectual and philosophical underpinnings.³⁴ Although conceding that Strauss and Voegelin were not in any sense active proponents of the resurgence of American conservatism in the late 1960s and early 1970s, McAllister stresses that they were given “honorary memberships . . .”³⁵ McAllister fails, however, as McCarl points out, “to show the influence of Strauss and Voegelin on specific conservative thinkers; rather, he considers them to be vital philosophical critics of modernity and therefore sources of clarifying insight for conservatives.”³⁶

The critique of modernity

Leaving in abeyance the continuing debates regarding Strauss’s influence on American conservatism, Schall and others have focussed critical appraisal on Strauss’s core concern with the predicament inherent in modernity. According to Schall, Strauss’s “very project is to attack the roots of precisely the ideological structure of modern thought over against faith and reason.”³⁷ As Jaffa reflects, “No one can guarantee happiness. But one can deserve it. If success could be guaranteed . . . no one would deserve it. . . . The abolition of the possibility of failure may be said to be the heart of the Machiavellian project. Strauss rejected this project with all his heart, and all his soul, and all his mind.”³⁸ To Deutsch and Nicgorski,

³⁴ Ted V. McAllister, *Revolt Against Modernity: Leo Strauss, Eric Voegelin, and the Search for a Postliberal Order* (Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 1996), esp. pp.13, 270.

³⁵ *Revolt Against Modernity*, p.13.

³⁶ Review of *Revolt Against Modernity*, p.438 (col.1).

³⁷ James V. Schall, *Christianity and Politics* (Boston, MA: St. Paul Editions, 1981), pp.254-55. See also Schall’s *Another Sort of Learning* [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988], pp.80ff.

³⁸ Harry V. Jaffa, “Dear Professor Drury,” *Political Theory* 15, no.3 (August 1987), p.325. See also Jaffa’s *The Conditions of Freedom: Essays in Political Philosophy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), pp.4f.

Strauss's "research, whether into medieval or ancient thought, was given focus and meaning by his concern with the modern context that he saw enveloping himself as well as his listeners and readers. . . ." In a memorial article on Strauss, Storing wrote: "Strauss's constructive project was to recover sight of the ends of political life for a profession that had blinded itself to such considerations. . . ." In particular, "he opened up the great alternative of classical political philosophy."³⁹ According to Orr, Strauss's critique of modernity is a critique of the "malaise" produced by the collapse of political philosophy and "Western Civilization" into uncertainty, relativism and nihilism. Orr goes on to explain: "It was amidst the intellectual wreckage of modernity that Leo Strauss made his contribution to the field of political science by uncovering the roots of modern political science and the intellectual barrenness of the remains of the modern project."⁴⁰ Paradoxically, Orr's portrayal of Strauss's legacy implies that Strauss is an ally of the postmodernists, but only insofar as he foresaw their critique of modernity.⁴¹

Reflections on the core problems of modernity can be found throughout Strauss's corpus. "The concern with historicism and cultural relativism stands at the very beginning of *Natural Right and History*, and it is the concern that pervades that book," Arkes observes. "Indeed, it is hard to pick up any book of Strauss's [*sic*], from the writings on Spinoza and Machiavelli, to the writings on Jerusalem and

³⁹ Kenneth L. Deutsch and Walter Nicgorski, "Introduction," in Deutsch and Nicgorski, eds., p.23 (see also pp.9, 19-20, 23-24); Herbert J. Storing, in Walter Berns et al, "The Achievement of Leo Strauss," *National Review* 25, no.49 (7 December 1973), p.1349. See also, e.g., Werner J. Dannhauser, "Leo Strauss as Citizen and Jew," *Interpretation* 17, no.3 (Spring 1990), p.445; and the works cited above, n11.

⁴⁰ *Jerusalem and Athens*, p.4.

⁴¹ With regard to my observation, cf. Allan Arkush, "Leo Strauss and Jewish Modernity," in Novak, ed., pp.126-27; Gregory Bruce Smith, "The Post-Modern Leo Strauss?", *History of European Ideas* 19, nos.1-3 (1994): 191-197; Catherine H. Zuckert, *Postmodern Platos: Nietzsche, Heidegger, Gadamer, Strauss, Derrida* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp.1-8, 200-3, 261-76. Cf. also Frederick G. Lawrence, "Leo Strauss and the Fourth Wave of Modernity," in Novak, ed., pp.131-48.

Athens, in which this question [of the fundamental inadequacy of historicism and relativism] is not present. If it is not at the center, it is a concern that hovers over everything.”⁴² In Part One of his *Spinoza's Critique of Religion* Strauss examined the historical study of the Bible and the predecessors to Spinoza, Uriel da Costa, Isaac de la Peyrère and Thomas Hobbes, while in Part Two he examined Spinoza's critiques of orthodoxy, Maimonides and Calvin; Strauss's effort in those two parts was, essentially, to show as untenable Spinoza's attempt at a historically-minded critique of revealed religion.⁴³ In the opening paragraph of the introduction to *Philosophy and Law* Strauss wrote: “To awaken a prejudice in favor of this view of Maimonides [that he represents “the true natural model” of “rationalism”] and, even more, to arouse suspicion against the powerful opposing prejudice [voiced by Enlightenment thinkers], is the aim of this present work.”⁴⁴ Chief among Strauss's writings on Machiavelli is *Thoughts on Machiavelli*,⁴⁵ the final chapter of which is a critical analysis of Machiavelli's rejection of revelation and philosophy, of Biblical religion and classical political philosophy. Toward the beginning of Chapter Five of *Persecution and the Art of Writing* Strauss stated, “we cannot help noticing that the most fundamental issue—the issue raised by the conflicting claims of philosophy and revelation—is discussed in our time on a decidedly lower level than was customary in former ages.”⁴⁶ Thus, says Jackson, the revelation-reason question “is therefore constantly a part of his discussion of ancient and moderns.” Jackson adds:

⁴² Hadley Arkes, “Strauss on Our Minds,” in Deutsch and Murley, eds., p.83.

⁴³ See *SCR*, pp.35, 37, 52, 107-9, 144-46.

⁴⁴ *PL*, p.21. See also Eve Adler, “Translator's Introduction: The Argument of *Philosophy and Law*,” in *PL*, pp.1-2; “Leo Strauss's *Philosophie und Gesetz*,” in Alan Udoff, ed., *Leo Strauss's Thought: Toward a Critical Engagement* (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1991), pp.184, 186, 194-95.

⁴⁵ Strauss's other writings on Machiavelli are *MCL* and *NM*; discussions of Machiavelli can also be found in *NRH*, *OT* (rev.ex.), *TWM*, and *WIPP?*

⁴⁶ *PAW*, pp.142-43.

“In fact, the theme of ancients and moderns is not at all an issue like reason and revelation, the problem of virtue, free will, and the like. In Strauss, the theme of ancients and moderns includes all of these issues, and many others. It is a term for his whole philosophic work; it is his way of organizing the history of political philosophy.”⁴⁷

It is worthwhile to consider here the general features of modernity as outlined by Strauss in mapping its terrain against the larger backdrop of western political thought. I say ‘general features’ because Strauss’s critical study of Machiavelli’s teaching, of the ‘specific features’ of Machiavelli’s originary contribution to modernity,⁴⁸ will be examined in Parts Two and Three of this thesis. Strauss proposed in his essay, “The Three Waves of Modernity,” that endemic to the whole of modernity is precisely Machiavelli’s root-and-branch rejection of both biblical and classical morality as fundamentally untenable; Machiavelli and Hobbes initiated the first wave of modernity, Rousseau the second wave and Nietzsche the third wave.⁴⁹ “Machiavelli had completely severed the connection between politics and natural law or natural right, i.e., with justice understood as something independent of human arbitrariness.” The restoration of that severed connection, Strauss then noted, was Hobbes’s contribution to modernity. “One can describe the change effected by Hobbes as follows: whereas prior to him natural law was understood in the light of a hierarchy of man’s ends in which self-preservation occupied the lowest place, Hobbes understood natural law in terms of self-preservation alone”⁵⁰ From the

⁴⁷ “Strauss’s Teaching,” p.250.

⁴⁸ Harry V. Jaffa, in Berns et al, “The Achievement of Leo Strauss,” p.1353 (col.1) (latter emphases mine): “it was Strauss who, in a long series of works, culminating in *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, laid bare the Machiavellian roots of modernity and of the *specific teachings* of the great moderns. . . .”

⁴⁹ With regard to the “three wave” thesis, see also WIPP?, pp.40-55.

⁵⁰ TWM, p.88.

Hobbesian emphasis on self-preservation “[e]ventually we arrive at the view that universal affluence and peace is the necessary and sufficient condition of perfect justice.” Thus the target of Rousseau’s criticism was “the degrading and enervating doctrines of his predecessors; he opposed both the stifling spirit of the absolute monarchy and the more or less cynical commercialism of the modern republics.”⁵¹

For Strauss, Rousseau’s legacy is the modern “concept of history.” “In post-Rousseauan language, man’s humanity is due not to nature but to history, to the historical process, a singular or unique process which is not teleological The concept of history, i.e., of the historical process as a single process in which man becomes human without intending it, is a consequence of Rousseau’s radicalization of the Hobbesian concept of the state of nature.”⁵² That radicalization consisted in Rousseau’s claim that the fundamental irrationality of man’s nature can be overcome only by that habituation which is induced by living in “civil society” and in strict accordance with “the general will.”⁵³ Rousseau is explicit in Book Four, Chapter Two, of the *Social Contract*: “The citizen consents to all the laws, even to those that are passed against his will, and even to those which punish him when he dares to break any one of them. The constant will of all the members of the state is the general will; it is through it that they are citizens and free.”⁵⁴ In *A Discourse on Inequality* Rousseau stated: “Once a people is accustomed to masters, it is no longer in a condition to do without them. If such peoples try to shake off the yoke, they

⁵¹ TWM, p.89. See also OIR, pp.457-58, 460; PSCR, p.138.

⁵² TWM, p.90. For a recent critical appraisal of Rousseau’s non-teleological understanding of nature, see Laurence D. Cooper, *Rousseau, Nature, and the Problem of the Good Life* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999). See also Orwin and Tarcov, eds., *Legacy of Rousseau*, pt.II.

⁵³ TWM, pp.90, 91.

⁵⁴ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, trans. Maurice Cranston (London: Penguin Books, 1968), p.153.

remove themselves even further from liberty; for as they mistake for liberty an unbridled license which is the opposite of freedom, their revolutions almost always deliver them into the hands of seducers who multiply their chains.”⁵⁵

Strauss continued: “Just as the second wave of modernity is related to Rousseau, the third wave is related to Nietzsche. . . .” Of the change introduced by Nietzsche Strauss explained: “The third wave may be described as being constituted by a new understanding of the sentiment of experience: that sentiment is the experience of terror and anguish rather than of harmony and peace, and it is the sentiment of historic existence as necessarily tragic . . .”⁵⁶ Elsewhere Strauss noted that Rousseau’s “passionate and forceful attack on modernity in the name of what was at the same time classical antiquity and a more advanced modernity was repeated, with no less passion and force, by Nietzsche, who thus ushered in the second crisis of modernity—the crisis of our time.”⁵⁷ The difference between the second and third waves of modernity is evidenced by “the discovery of history; the century between Rousseau and Nietzsche [the century in which Hegel lived] is the age of historical sense. . . .” Articulating a “secularized” notion of “Christianity,” Hegel perceived the course of history as “progressive” and moving toward a final “end.”⁵⁸ But to Nietzsche, as Strauss noted, “The insight that all principles of thought and action are historical cannot be attenuated by the baseless hope that the historical sequence of these principles is progressive or that the historical process has an intrinsic meaning, an intrinsic directedness. . . .”⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *A Discourse on Inequality*, trans. Maurice Cranston (London: Penguin Books, 1984), p.58.

⁵⁶ TWM, p.94. With regard to the above “understanding,” see also OPS, pp.136-38.

⁵⁷ *NRH*, pp.253-54. I examine that “crisis” in ch.1, in the section titled “Turning to history.”

⁵⁸ TWM, p.95.

⁵⁹ TWM, pp.95-96.

History and philosophy

For Strauss, the modern study of history is this-worldly in its focus. Such study rejects philosophic and religious supra-historical considerations on the basis that they are inimical to the use of history for life.⁶⁰ The pointedness of Strauss's concern with modernity and history is evident in the introduction to his book, *The City and Man*, published in 1964, twenty-three years after *Persecution and the Art of Writing*. Strauss opened the introduction to his 1964 book with the forthright statement: "It is not self-forgetting and pain-loving antiquarianism nor self-forgetting and intoxicating romanticism which induces us to turn with passionate interest, with unqualified willingness to learn, toward the political thought of antiquity. We are impelled to do so by the crisis of our time, the crisis of the west."⁶¹ In *Socrates and Aristophanes*, published two years after *The City and Man*, Strauss observed: "Our Great Tradition includes political philosophy and thus seems to vouch for its possibility and necessity. According to same tradition, political philosophy was founded by Socrates. . . ." Also in the introduction he declared: "the return to the origins of the Great Tradition has become necessary because of the radical questioning of that tradition, a questioning that may be said to culminate in Nietzsche's attack on Socrates or on Plato."⁶² According to Lowenthal, "Strauss certainly does want to help guide the "practice" of the modern world. But what motivates him is the wish not simply to do this, or even to save the West: it is to discover the true principles required for the guidance of human life—principles that

⁶⁰ Cf. *OT* (rev.ex.), pp.210-12; Jacques Maritain, "On the Meaning of Contemporary Atheism," *Review of Politics* 11, no.3 (July 1949), pp.275-76, et passim.

⁶¹ *CM*, p.1 (emphases deleted).

⁶² *SA*, pp.3, 6.

must necessarily be related to an understanding of realities beyond human life. . . .” Similarly, King comments that Strauss “offered his services as an indispensable guide. . . . His immediate concern was to understand the past, but his ultimate object was simply to attain a genuine philosophical understanding *per se*, independent of historical accident.”⁶³

It is instructive to remember here that Strauss devoted the latter years of his life to exegeses of Aristophanes, Aristotle, Plato, Thucydides, and Xenophon. According to one commentator, “The mature Strauss’s lifework . . . seems to be built around the attempt to recover the experiences out of which philosophy initially grew. Those experiences are alternately designated pre-scientific, pre-theoretical or “natural.””⁶⁴ An abiding concern with this approach to history, namely, the necessity of painstakingly studying the classics, is a key leitmotif in Strauss’s oeuvre.⁶⁵ His views emerged through lifelong reflection, and did not take the form of a complete, final and absolute doctrine or philosophy of history.

Such a philosophy originated in the seventeenth-century belief that the role of the historian is to elucidate the causes of historical phenomena and to discover (or

⁶³ David Lowenthal, “Leo Strauss’s *Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy*,” Review of *Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy* by Leo Strauss, *Interpretation* 13, no.3 (September 1985), p.306 (see also Zuckert, *Postmodern Platos*, pp.126-27); Preston King, “Introduction,” in Preston King, ed., *The History of Ideas: An Introduction to Method* (London: Croom Helm; Totowa, New Jersey: Barnes and Noble, 1983), p.16 (original emphases).

⁶⁴ Gregory Bruce Smith, “Athens and Washington: Leo Strauss and the American Regime,” in Deutsch and Murley, eds., p.107. See also King, “Introduction,” pp.15-16; McAllister, *Revolt Against Modernity*, p.31; Zuckert, *Postmodern Platos*, pp.130, 133. The above books in question are: *CM* (1964), *SA* (1966), *XSD* (1970), *XS* (1972), *AAPL* (1975), and *LSPS* (2001).

⁶⁵ See Bloom, “Leo Strauss,” pp.376-77; Kenneth L. Deutsch, “Leo Strauss, the Straussians, and the American Regime,” in Deutsch and Murley, eds., pp.56f; Emberley and Cooper, “Introduction,” pp.xxiii-xxv; Smith, “*Destruktion* or Recovery?,” p.357; Nathan Tarcov, “On a Certain Critique of “Straussianism,”” *Review of Politics* 53, no.1 (Winter 1991), pp.13-17; Dana R. Villa, “The Philosopher versus the Citizen: Arendt, Strauss, and Socrates,” *Political Theory* 26, no.2 (April 1998), p.162; Zuckert, *Postmodern Platos*, pp.116-18, 127. Cf. Raymond Aron, *History, Truth, Liberty: Selected Writings of Raymond Aron*, ed. Franciszek Draus (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), p.354; Robert B. Pippin, “Being, Time, and Politics: The Strauss-Kojève Debate,” *History and Theory* 32, no.2 (1993), pp.140, 146, 148, 154ff; Strauss, LHK, passim; *NRH*, pp.21-22, 192; *WIPP?*, p.266; Strauss to Voegelin, 10 Dec. 1950, Letter 35 in SVC.

formulate) historical laws.⁶⁶ As Löwith explains, “The term “philosophy of history” was invented by Voltaire, who used it for the first time in its modern sense, as distinct from the theological interpretation of history. In Voltaire’s *Essai sur les mœurs et l’esprit des nations* the leading principle was no longer the will of God and divine providence but the will of man and human reason.”⁶⁷ According to Stanford, though, the “substantive or speculative philosophy of history” articulated by “writers like Hegel and Marx did at least attempt to grapple with some of the big questions of history-as-event,” whereas present-day scholars “have turned to the ‘second-order’ activity of questioning and criticizing the ways in which historians work. This is philosophy of history with all the facts left out.” In contrast to Stanford’s twofold division of philosophy of history, Ankersmit proposes a threefold division:

Philosophy of history comprises three areas: historiography, speculative philosophy of history, and critical philosophy of history. Historiography describes the history of the writing of history itself through the ages. The speculative philosopher of history looks for patterns or rhythms in the historical process as a whole; one thinks of the speculative theories of history devised by Hegel, Marx, and Toynbee. Critical philosophy of history, finally, is a philosophical reflection on how historical judgments are formed.

Since the second World War speculative philosophy of history has been an issue of debate in philosophy of history only to the extent that its purpose and feasibility have been consistently questioned. . . . In the post-war period . . . emphasis has come to lie on historiography and critical philosophy of history.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ See *NRH*, p.320; *OCPH*, pp.559-86; *PS*, p.326; *RHH*, p.126; *TWM*, pp.95-96; *WIPP?*, pp.53-54, 58. Cf. G.P. Grant, “Tyranny and Wisdom: A Comment on the Controversy Between Leo Strauss and Alexandre Kojève,” *Social Research* 31, no.1 (Spring 1964), pp.53-54; Thomas L. Pangle, “Platonic Political Science in Strauss and Voegelin,” in Emberley and Cooper, eds. and trans., pp.323-24, 341ff. Cf. also Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949), pp.1-2, 60; W.H. Walsh, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of History*, 3rd (rev.) ed. (Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1976), pp.13-14, 118-19.

⁶⁷ *Meaning in History*, p.1.

⁶⁸ Michael Stanford, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of History* (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 1998), pp.5, 6 (see also Stanford’s *A Companion to the Study of History* [Oxford: Blackwell, 1994], pp.230-47); F.R. Ankersmit, *The reality effect in the writing of history: the dynamics of historiographical topology* (Amsterdam: Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen, 1989), p.5. Cf. Thomas J.J. Altizer, “The Theological Conflict Between Strauss

Strauss's own idea of history, I wish to propose, is akin to a philosophy of history of the "second-order" or "critical" sense, insofar as he critically questions, and finds wanting, speculative theories of history. Perhaps that is the point Jaffa is making when he explains: "to put Leo Strauss among those who thought that history was primarily a subject of thought, and not at all one of action, would be to put him among those who held a view of history like that of Marx."⁶⁹ By employing the very term *idea of history* I do not mean to place Strauss in the company of R.G. Collingwood. It is a matter of record that Strauss took issue with the underlying concept in Collingwood's 1946 book, *The Idea of History*, regarding the nature of thinking on history. In his review of that book Strauss suggested:

The deficiencies of Collingwood's historiography can be traced to a fundamental dilemma. The same belief which forced him to attempt to become a historian of thought, prevented him from becoming a historian of thought. He was forced to attempt to become a historian of thought because he believed that to know the human mind is to know its history, or that self-knowledge is historical understanding. But this belief contradicts the tacit premise of all earlier thought, that premise being the view that to know the human mind is something fundamentally different from knowing the history of the human mind. Collingwood therefore rejected the thought of the past as untrue in the decisive respect. Hence he could not take that thought seriously, for to take a thought seriously means to regard it as possible that the thought in question is true. . . .⁷⁰

Regardless of whether one speaks of Strauss's *idea* or *philosophy of history*, they are terms that he did not employ to describe his lifework. According to his

and Voegelin," in Emberley and Cooper, eds. and trans., pp.269-70; Maurice Mandelbaum, *The Problem of Historical Knowledge: An Answer to Relativism* (New York: Liverlight Publishing Corporation, 1938), pp.307-23; Alfred Stern, *Philosophy of History and the Problem of Values* ('S-Gravenhage: Mouton, 1962), pp.65-70; Strauss, Exi, pp.305-6.

⁶⁹ Harry V. Jaffa, "Leo Strauss's Churchillian Speech and the Question of the Decline of the West," *Teaching Political Science* 12, no.2 (Winter 1985), p.62 (col.2); see also p.65 (col.2). Cf. Hwa Yol Jung, "Leo Strauss's Conception of Political Philosophy: A Critique," *Review of Politics* 29, no.4 (October 1967), pp.495, 514; Walsh, *Philosophy of History*, pp.154-56.

⁷⁰ OCPH, p.575. Cf. W.J. van der Dussen, *History as a Science: The Philosophy of R.G. Collingwood* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981), pp.96-97.

well-known dictum, one ought to, and must, understand thinkers as they understood themselves. In his "Political Philosophy and History" Strauss stated: "An adequate interpretation is such an interpretation as understands the thought of a philosopher exactly as he understood it himself."⁷¹ Elsewhere he explained: "It was known before the discovery of "history" that a man who wants to understand the opinions of other men, either living or dead, must start from, and merely admit as an afterthought, those men's "loud assertions," rather than from doctrines which they failed to assert."⁷² Therefore, one's focus when discussing Strauss's oeuvre, if one takes heed of his advice, should surely be guided by an effort to amplify his understanding of his oeuvre. That understanding is encapsulated by what he called the "theological-political problem."⁷³ As the meaning of that term will be examined in Chapter Two, I will simply say here that it represents what Strauss regards as the challenge of the fundamental alternatives, revelation and reason.

Yet it is entirely appropriate to employ the term *idea of history* because Strauss did have such an idea. He regarded the study of the history of political philosophy as critically important in modern, contemporary times. I will argue that Strauss had an idea of what history is and how and why one studies it.⁷⁴ At times my argument may seem to be less an argument than a statement of the obvious, a reflection of the surface of the matter. But as Strauss said in *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, "There is no surer protection against the understanding of anything than taking for granted or otherwise despising the obvious and the surface. The problem

⁷¹ PPH, p.66.

⁷² WIPP?, p.267.

⁷³ PHPW, p.453.

⁷⁴ Cf. OCPH, pp.572-73, 585-86; RHH, p.126 (paragraph beginning "There are"). With regard to Strauss's *turn to history*, see James F. Ward, "Political Philosophy and History: The Links Between Strauss and Heidegger," *Polity* 20, no.2 (Winter 1987): 273-95, esp. pp.274, 277, 287-89.

inherent in the surface of things, and only in the surface of things, is the heart of things.” In *The City and Man* he wrote: “Let us then return once more to the surface. Let us abandon every pretense to know. Let us admit that the Platonic dialogue is an enigma—something perplexing and to be wondered at. The Platonic dialogue is one big question mark.”⁷⁵

Commentators have interpreted of such statements that Strauss is cautioning readers: readers who delve too deeply into the depths of a text without also carefully explicating that which first comes to sight in a text—its surface, its form—may fail to grasp the substance and scope of the author’s meaning.⁷⁶ Indeed, several pages before the above statement in *The City and Man*, Strauss proposed: “One cannot separate the understanding of Plato’s teaching from the understanding of the form in which it is presented. One must pay as much attention to the How as to the What. At any rate to begin with one must even pay greater attention to the “form” than to the “substance,” since the meaning of the “substance” depends on the “form.””⁷⁷

Studying Strauss ‘between the lines’

When studying Strauss’s own texts the reader is confronted with a “twofold problem.” As Orr has noted, “his writing is usually in the form of a commentary on

⁷⁵ *TM*, p.13; *CM*, p.55. With regard to *CM*, p.55, see also *OPS*, pp.171, 180.

⁷⁶ Seth Benardete, *The Argument of the Action: Essays on Greek Poetry and Philosophy*, ed. Ronna Burger and Michael Davis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p.409; Kenneth Hart Green, *Jew and Philosopher: The Return to Maimonides in the Jewish Thought of Leo Strauss* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1993), pp.7, 145n2, 147-48n4; Jackson, “Strauss’s Teaching,” pp.40, 140; Robb A. McDaniel, “The Illiberal Leo Strauss,” in *Community and Political Thought Today*, ed. Peter Augustine Lawler and Dale McConkey (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1998), p.195; Susan Orr, Review of *Jew and Philosopher*, by Kenneth Hart Green, *Interpretation* 23, no.2 (Winter 1996), pp.307-8; *Jerusalem and Athens*, p.24; Stanley Rosen, “Leo Strauss and the Possibility of Philosophy,” *Review of Metaphysics* 53, no.3 (March 2000), pp.543-44, 554-55; Stewart Umphrey, “Natural Right and Philosophy,” in Deutsch and Nicgorski, eds., pp.275-77, 289, 293-95.

⁷⁷ *CM*, p.52. See also *OPS*, p.182.

a given text, written to bring the ideas within that text to life. It is, therefore, difficult at times to distinguish between his elucidation of any given text and his own thought, to separate the philosopher being analyzed from the analyzing philosopher.” Orr continues: “The second problem is the one for which Strauss and his school have been most excoriated: his teaching on esotericism, or reading between the lines.”⁷⁸

Burnyeat likewise maintains that there are “two ways” to read Strauss. However, he recommends neither of them. The first is to read Strauss’s “fourteen books and . . . [his] multitude of learned papers . . .”; the second, Burnyeat caustically remarks, is to “sign up for initiation with a Straussian teacher”⁷⁹ Burnyeat then proceeds to heap scorn upon Strauss’s rediscovery of the exoteric-esoteric distinction: “It was Maimonides who started it. It was from him that Strauss drew his idea of “esoteric literature.” . . . Strauss’s fantastical supposition is that, whether we are dealing with the allusiveness of Machiavelli and other Renaissance writers . . . or with the dialogues of Plato and Xenophon, in each case Maimonides’ instructions to his twelve-century readers will unlock a secret teaching.”⁸⁰

Like Burnyeat, Orr regards esotericism as a key theme for Strauss. Also like Burnyeat, Orr points out that the idea is part of “his appeal.” However, unlike Burnyeat, Orr does not take Strauss to task for the idea: “Strauss consistently showed his contemporaries that in their failure to read texts carefully they had, in

⁷⁸ *Jerusalem and Athens*, pp.7-8. Cf. Drury, *Political Ideas of Leo Strauss*, p.9.

⁷⁹ M.F. Burnyeat, “Sphinx Without a Secret,” Review of *Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy*, by Leo Strauss, *New York Review of Books* 32, no.9 (30 May 1985), p.30 (col.1). Cf. Joseph Cropsey et al, “The Studies of Leo Strauss: An Exchange” (responses to Burnyeat, “Sphinx Without a Secret), *New York Review of Books* 32, no.15 (10 October 1985): 41-44.

⁸⁰ “Sphinx Without a Secret,” p.33. Cf. David Lawrence Levine, “Without Malice But with Forethought: A Response to Burnyeat,” *Review of Politics* 53, no.1 (Winter 1991), pp.208ff.

fact, misunderstood many philosophers. . . .” Orr goes on to explain: “Fundamental to Strauss’s teaching on reading between the lines is that only a few will be sufficiently intelligent and diligent enough to discover any hidden meaning in a text.

As he states in *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, “to speak the truth is sensible only when one speaks to wise men.”⁸¹ Elsewhere, in response to Maimonides’ goal in his *Guide of the Perplexed* to explain the secrets of the Law in the Torah, Strauss explains, “they may only be explained in private and only to such individuals as possess both theoretical and political wisdom as well as the capacity of both understanding and using allusive speech . . .”⁸² Yet, Strauss states, “After Lessing, who died in the year in which Kant published his *Critique of Pure Reason*, the question of exotericism seems to have been lost sight of almost completely . . .”⁸³ The keyword here is “almost”—Strauss too had great interest in that same question.⁸⁴

The obstacles attendant upon studying Strauss represent something of a Gordian Knot: should one painstakingly unravel the knot or simply cut through it in one clean sweep? Mindful, it would seem, of such a consideration, Green observes: “In unraveling the mysteries of Leo Strauss, we may perhaps be quite well-advised to proceed first through the obvious perplexities . . .”⁸⁵ Critics who accuse Strauss of harboring Machiavellian, atheistic doctrines on religion and morality⁸⁶ and critics

⁸¹ *Jerusalem and Athens*, pp.8, 9. Orr’s quotation is from *TM*, p.34.

⁸² *HBSGP*, p.xiv.

⁸³ *ET*, p.55.

⁸⁴ See, e.g., Bloom, “Leo Strauss,” pp.380-81, 383-84. I address that “question” in ch.1, in the section titled “Turning to history.”

⁸⁵ Green, *Jew and Philosopher*, p.147n4.

⁸⁶ See, e.g., Shadia B. Drury, “The Esoteric Philosophy of Leo Strauss,” *Political Theory* 13, no.3 (August 1985): 315-337; “The Hidden Meaning of Strauss’s *Thoughts on Machiavelli*,” *History of Political Thought* 6, no.3 (Winter 1985): 575-590.

who depict Strauss as a godfather of the American conservative revolt against (post)modernity cut through and, in the case of the former persuasion of critic, rent asunder the Gordian Knot but at the cost of marginalizing the core of his project, namely, his heartfelt contemplation of the revelation-reason question. Condemning Strauss as a closet Nietzschean or as an antiliberal is to employ the tactic of “guilt by association.”⁸⁷ Such a tactic has more in common with innuendo, conjecture and *reductio ad absurdum* than a reasoned attempt to do full justice to his œuvre.

According to Novak, a reader encounters a thinker as a disciple, student, or opponent. Novak continues:

The disciple believes that everything (or almost everything) this thinker says and writes is the truth. What the disciple does not understand is what is not *yet* true for him or her; the present lack of understanding is his or her own problem, and it is hoped that it will be only temporary. The student, on the other hand, believes that some of what the thinker says and writes is true and some of it is not true. Even what the student does not believe is true in the words of the thinker is still respected as a challenging alternative that calls for a respectfully reasoned response. Finally, there is the opponent who believes that nothing or almost nothing that the thinker says or writes is true. The response of the opponent is usually one of dismissal, often involving personal ridicule or contempt.

For instance, Drury insists that “Straussian scholarship” is characterized by such “proclivities” as “purposeful obfuscations, cold-blooded lies, and fearful mediocrity.” Novak goes on to explain:

. . . . Among those who have learned from Strauss, there are disputes over what exactly is true in Strauss’s teaching and can be accepted, and what is not true in it. As for Strauss’s opponents . . . the usually categorical character of their dismissal of him does not seem to admit enough doubt for there to be internal disputes among them.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Smith, “Strauss and the Straussians,” p.188n4 (col.2).

⁸⁸ David Novak, “Philosophy and the Possibility of Revelation: A Theological Response to the Challenge of Leo Strauss,” in Novak, ed., pp.173 (original emphasis), 174; Shadia B. Drury, Review of *Carl Schmitt and Leo Strauss: The Hidden Dialogue*, by Heinrich Meier, *American Political Science Review* 90, no.2 (June 1996), p.411.

As a contrast to Drury’s denunciation, consider the biting raillery in Condren’s depiction of Strauss: “So large has loomed the tradition [of political theory] in the minds of some theorists that

Of the intra-Straussian “disputes,” Orr explains: “As if understanding Strauss’s writing were not challenging enough, the difficulty is compounded by dissension among his students, all claiming to be carrying on the tradition begun by Strauss . . . The split between the West Coast and the East Coast Straussians is much more than a geographical division. It is a dispute over ideas, over the legacy of Leo Strauss.” According to Orr, “His East Coast students, such as Allan Bloom and Thomas Pangle, have collapsed the distinction between ancient and modern philosophy, claiming that the real dispute is between philosophy and poetry, poetry being simply the code word for the spiritual realm or revelation.”⁸⁹ Orr aligns herself with Jaffa, a West Coast Straussian; she stresses that “[f]or Jaffa, Strauss may have been a skeptic, but he was anything but a dogmatic skeptic. . . . there are passages in Strauss’s work that suggest that Jaffa’s interpretation is correct. . . .” Yet Orr admits: “we cannot turn to Strauss’s students—at least immediately—to obtain an accurate understanding of him. . . .”⁹⁰ Instead, to understand Strauss one must read his works “carefully,” paying particular attention to “what he writes, the order in which he considers items, and what he fails to mention . . . Only then can we hope to understand what Strauss himself can teach us.”⁹¹ Though it may seem strange to cite Bloom here given Orr’s categorical disagreement with him, what Bloom says of the effort required to understand Machiavelli can, I would suggest, be said of reading Strauss, “One must constantly stop, consult another text . . . and walk around the

they have drawn little distinction between it and political civilization itself: thus Leo Strauss, distressed at the decadence of the modern world, stood togaed for a generation in the image of a latter-day Cato and bemoaned the abandonment of classical political theory.” Conal Condren, *The Status and Appraisal of Classic Texts: An Essay on Political Theory, Its Inheritance, and the History of Ideas* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1985), pp.58-59.

⁸⁹ *Jerusalem and Athens*, p.9.

⁹⁰ *Jerusalem and Athens*, p.12.

⁹¹ *Jerusalem and Athens*, p.18.

room and think. One must use a pencil and paper, make lists, and count. It is an unending task . . .”⁹²

Re-reading Strauss

This thesis discusses and examines Strauss’s contemplation of the revelation-reason question and is divided into three parts. Before exploring in detail how Strauss dealt with that question in his critical study of Machiavelli’s teaching, this thesis explores the thematic background to Strauss’s delineation of the two fundamental alternatives, ‘revelation’ and ‘reason.’ Part One addresses two key leitmotifs in Strauss: his abiding concern with history and his conception of the revelation-reason question. Titled “Leo Strauss’s Idea of History,” Chapter One examines two aspects in his approach to the study of the history of political philosophy: the speculative and the analytical; the former aspect pertains to what history is, the latter aspect pertains to how one studies it.

Chapter Two is titled “Revelation and Reason in Leo Strauss.” It begins by discussing how Strauss defined the fundamental alternatives—he employed terms such as “theology,” “philosophy,” “justice,” “nature,” and “law.” The chapter then examines his depiction of the revelation-reason question in terms of an either/or choice; Strauss regarded the two fundamental alternatives as mutually exclusive and spoke against the efficacy and possibility of a synthesis. Paradoxically, he maintained that an adherent of one fundamental alternative must be open to the challenge of the other alternative. However, some commentators claim that Strauss’s being a philosopher means he was atheist. Yet Strauss regarded atheism as the

⁹² “Leo Strauss,” p.391.

[antithesis not only of religion but also of philosophy. His understanding of philosophy, as Chapter Two further explains, is inextricably linked with reflection on what it means to be a Jew in the modern world.

Parts Two and Three of this thesis examine Strauss's critical study of Niccolò Machiavelli's teaching—Part Two examines Machiavelli's teaching on religion and Part Three examines his teaching on morality and politics. To examine one or the other or both of Machiavelli's teachings is to travel over well-worn and oft-debated ground. Yet no work hitherto written has comprehensively and thematically examined Strauss's critical study of Machiavelli specifically with a view to understanding how Strauss grappled with the revelation-reason question. My use of the word grappled is not without precedent; as Bartlett says of Strauss, "it was surely Maimonides who aided him most in *grappling* with the "theological-political problem," with the incompatible claims of Faith and Reason as to the best way of life."⁹³

The original goal of this thesis was to examine, in the light of the revelation-reason question, the whole of Strauss's seminal 1958 book, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*. After learning of Michael P. Jackson's (unpublished) Ph.D. dissertation, "Leo Strauss's Teaching: A Study of *Thoughts on Machiavelli*" (Georgetown University, 1985), I recast my focus to Strauss's critical study, in Chapter IV, of Machiavelli's teaching. Jackson's study apportioned a chapter each to the introduction and four chapters of Strauss's book, and "aimed merely to produce what Strauss calls an "historical study," eschewing to the extent possible all philosophic pronouncements."⁹⁴ In contrast, Parts Two and Three of this thesis,

⁹³ Robert Bartlett, "Translator's Note," in SR, p.3 (emphasis mine).

⁹⁴ Jackson, "Strauss's Teaching," p.29.

respectively, address the underlying religious and philosophic pronouncements in Strauss's critical of Machiavelli's teaching as they relate to both Machiavelli and Strauss. My close focus on Strauss's critical study is not without precedent: Susan Orr's Ph.D. dissertation, "'Jerusalem and Athens': A Study of Leo Strauss" (Claremont Graduate School, 1992), painstakingly examined each of the forty-one paragraphs of Strauss's 1967 lecture, "Jerusalem and Athens: Some Preliminary Reflections."⁹⁵ The method of analysis in Parts Two and Three of this thesis is a mean between Orr's close focus and Jackson's broader approach; Jackson examined *Thoughts on Machiavelli* section-by-section, while Orr examined "Jerusalem and Athens" paragraph-by-paragraph.

As mentioned above, Part Two examines Strauss's critical study of Machiavelli's teaching on religion.⁹⁶ Chapter Three begins by addressing Strauss's thesis that Machiavelli is neither Christian nor pagan. The chapter then surveys Machiavelli's critique of Christianity, particularly his charge that its otherworldliness has made men weak and servile and left them prey to the flux of life. The chapter then examines Strauss's analysis of Machiavelli's reflections on Biblical/Christian theology; one learns from the analysis that central in Machiavelli's rejection of Christianity is his rejection of the doctrines of divine providence and creation *ex nihilo*.

⁹⁵ I discuss JA below, in ch.2. Orr's dissertation was published in 1995 as *Jerusalem and Athens: Revelation and Reason in the Work of Leo Strauss*. Orr's book has been described as "a meticulous analysis . . ." (Germaine Paulo Walsh, Review of *Jerusalem and Athens*, by Susan Orr, *Journal of Politics* 58, no.2 [May 1996], p.589), written in "true Straussian fashion . . ." (Douglas Kries, "Faith, Reason, and Leo Strauss," Review of *Jerusalem and Athens*, by Susan Orr, *Review of Politics* 58, no.2 [Spring 1996], p.354), "a truly Strauss-like reading of Strauss's essay . . . that is, an exceedingly close reading . . ." (Arkes, "Strauss on Our Minds," pp.78, 79), and "one of a relatively small but rapidly increasing number of attempts to read and understand the writings of Leo Strauss as Strauss read and understood the writings of political philosophers before him." (Michael Palmer, Review of *Jerusalem and Athens*, by Susan Orr, *American Political Science Review* 90, no.2 [June 1996], p.412 [col.2].)

⁹⁶ The appendix to this thesis and the section headings in chs.3 to 7 draw upon Jackson's analysis of *TM*, ch.IV; see also Jackson, "Strauss's Teaching," p.295n18.

Chapter Four further probes, as depicted by Strauss, Machiavelli's hostility to religion. Having explained that Machiavelli is anti-Christian and that he articulates an anti-theological animus, Strauss proceeds to explicate the other half of his thesis that Machiavelli is neither Christian nor pagan. Strauss maintains that evidenced in Machiavelli's judgments on cosmology and the utility of religion is (apart from his instrumental views on the limited usefulness of religion) a fundamental opposition to all religion, not simply Christianity alone. Strauss claims, for instance, that Machiavelli replaces God with *Fortuna* as the divine being and, in turn, replaces *Fortuna* with mundane chance.

Part Three turns to philosophical matters and focuses upon Strauss's critical study of Machiavelli's teaching on morality and politics. Chapter Five explains that Strauss regards Machiavelli as having defined and articulated his notion of virtue against the classical conception of moral virtue. Whereas Aristotle defined virtue as the mean between the two extremes (or vices) of too much and too little, Machiavelli spoke of a mean between virtue and vice; his mean varies in accordance with exigencies of circumstance, *Fortuna* and mundane chance. Set against the backdrop of Machiavelli's intertwined notions of free will, necessity and chance, Chapter Five further examines his resolutely temporal notion of virtue.

Machiavelli's notion of what virtue is and how it shapes human action is further examined in both Chapters Six and Seven. As will be seen in these two chapters, Machiavelli propounded an anthropocentric and decidedly political, temporal idea of the *telos* of man: he directs the common good and governance not toward a higher—transcendent and otherworldly—good but toward realizing man's own will and desires.

Together, Parts Two and Three closely examine Strauss's critical of Machiavelli's teaching with a view to elucidating Strauss's "presuppositions," religious and philosophical. As one reviewer of *Thoughts on Machiavelli* wrote of the underlying ideas in the book:

On the very first page of the book the author professes himself to be of the "oldfashioned" opinion that Machiavelli was a teacher of evil. In his concluding remarks he contrasts true philosophy, which "transcends the city," with Machiavelli's thought in which nothing suprapolitical is allowed and "beast man" becomes the symbol instead of "God man." Though this summary of the complex tapestry of ideas contained in the work is much foreshortened, it is clear that Strauss's approach is not only at variance with modern scholarship (no modern work on Machiavelli is cited), but that it is also based upon certain philosophical presuppositions.⁹⁷

As another reviewer wrote,

According to Mr. Strauss Machiavelli indicates through *The Prince* that he is a new Moses, bringer of a new code, and through *The Discourses* that he wants to destroy the authority of the Bible and is imitating Jesus . . . It comes as something of a shock when, after having struggled in the maze of speculations and carefully contrived abstractions which Mr. Strauss presents as Machiavelli's "true meaning," one returns to the reading of the originals.

The question left—and it is a question that makes Mr. Strauss's book significant—is to explain why Mr. Strauss arrived at this strange interpretation of the meaning of the writings of the great Florentine. In the conclusion of his book, Mr. Strauss shows his deep concern for the fatal course which the modern world and particularly the twentieth century has taken. . . .⁹⁸

The principal argument in both Parts Two and Three is that by closely examining Strauss's critical study of Machiavelli's teaching one learns how Strauss dealt with the revelation-reason question. Relating that argument to the additional proposition that examining Strauss's critical study casts light on his understanding of modernity is the fundamental objective of this thesis. Strauss maintains that modernity has its point of origin in Machiavelli; that historicism, the quintessentially modern

⁹⁷ George L. Mosse, in *American Historical Review* 64, no.4 (July 1959), p.954.

⁹⁸ Felix Gilbert, "Politics and Morality," *Yale Review* 48, no.3 (March 1959), pp.468-69.

philosophy of history, seeks to replace nature with history; and that modernity has culminated in the “crisis of our time,” a crisis that can be seen most noticeably in radical historicism.⁹⁹

⁹⁹ With regard to both historicism and the above “crisis,” see below, ch.1.

PART ONE

Approaching Leo Strauss

Chapter One

Leo Strauss's Idea of History

It is not self-forgetting and pain-loving antiquarianism nor self-forgetting and intoxicating romanticism which induces us to turn with passionate interest, with unqualified willingness to learn, toward the political thought of classical antiquity. We are impelled to do so by the crisis of our time, the crisis of the West.

Leo Strauss, *The City and Man*

What has taken place in the modern period has been a gradual corrosion and destruction of the heritage of Western civilization. The soul of the modern development, one may say, is a peculiar "realism," the notion that moral principles and the appeal to moral principles—preaching, sermonizing—is ineffective . . .

Leo Strauss, "Progress or Return?"

Introduction

It would be no exaggeration to say that Strauss felt impelled to lead his perplexed contemporaries away from the paralyzing condition of atheistic, nihilistic unbelief and towards reconsidering the possibility of both revelation and reason—the two fundamental alternatives that disclose knowledge of what it truly means to be. To accomplish the task of directing his contemporaries towards recognizing these alternatives, and because he believed it necessary to clarify the meaning of history, Strauss needed an idea of history.¹

¹ Cf. Jürgen Gebhardt, "Leo Strauss: The Quest for Truth in Times of Perplexity," in *Hannah Arendt and Leo Strauss: German Émigrés and American Political Thought After World War II*, ed. Peter Graf Kielmansegg, Horst Mewes and Elisabeth Glaser-Schmidt (Washington, D.C.: German Historical Institute; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995): 81-104; Green, *Jew and Philosopher*, pp.100, 169n13; Thomas L. Pangle, "Introduction," in *SPPP*, pp.1-2; "Platonic Political Science," p.322. For the above quotations, see *CM*, p.1 (original emphases); *POR?*, p.268.

Strauss's idea of history contains two aspects, I wish to propose: the speculative and the analytical. One is entitled to speak of a speculative, theoretical aspect because reflection on the meaning of history pervades Strauss's critique of the ontological dimension in historicism. One is entitled to speak of an analytical, practical aspect because Strauss's hermeneutic advice is concerned with the necessary, adequate and proper study of the history of political philosophy. Reflection on the meaning of history can be seen throughout Strauss's critical study of Machiavelli's teaching, as will be seen in Parts Two and Three of this thesis. For the purpose of this present chapter I will argue that the two aspects of Strauss's idea of history correspond to the two levels on which he examines historicism: the ontological and the methodological. The first section of this chapter focuses on the speculative aspect of Strauss's idea of history, while the second section focuses on its analytical aspect.

Historicism on the meaning of history

When Strauss dealt with historicism, which he defined as the doctrine that *the ground of thought is not nature but history*, his intent was not to provide an encyclopaedic account of its genesis and development, but to elucidate its tenets and lay bare their inadequacies.² In a letter to Eric Voegelin dated 17 March 1949 Strauss remarked, "Your surmise regarding my article "Political Philosophy and History" is correct: the article is to be thought of as one of the introductory chapters of a publication on classic principles of politics." Strauss's article, a precis of

² See below and LHK, p.23; Richard H. Kennington, "Strauss's *Natural Right and History*," in Udoff, ed., pp.228-29; Nathan Tarcov and Thomas L. Pangle, "Epilogue: Leo Strauss and the History of Political Philosophy," in Strauss, *HPP*, p.912; Umphrey, "Natural Right and Philosophy," esp. pp.278, 287, 291; Villa, "Philosopher versus the Citizen," p.159. For the above definition of historicism, see *NRH*, p.12, and cf. *LSPS*, pp.2-3; *OPS*, p.136; *PS*, p.325.

modern political philosophy and historicism, was published in the January 1949 issue of the *Journal of the History of Ideas*, and reprinted in 1959 as Chapter II in *What Is Political Philosophy?* In his letter to Voegelin Strauss continued: “But heaven only knows if I will manage with this publication: on the decisive questions, there are no preliminary studies, so that one would have to first lay the groundwork through a series of specialized investigations.”³

Such groundwork can be found in *Natural Right and History*. Strauss described his book, in its preface, as “an expanded version of six lectures which I delivered at the University of Chicago in October, 1949 . . .” In an undated letter to Helmut Kuhn Strauss wrote, “I myself regard the book as a preparation to an adequate philosophic discussion rather than as a treatise settling the question (cf. the end of the Introduction and of Chapter 1). Such a preparation is necessary because the very notion of natural right has become completely obscured in the course of the last century.”⁴ In a letter to Alexandre Kojève dated 18 January 1950 Strauss wrote, “I have begun to prepare six public lectures on Natural Right and History. . . . I am working on the first lecture, a summary criticism of historicism (=existentialism).”⁵ Given the date of his letter to Kojève, Strauss is clearly referring to a different set of lectures than those on which *Natural Right and History* was based.

To examine historicism is to examine both its methodology (its approach) towards historiography) and its ontology (its concept of historicity and fundamental concept of History).⁶ Debates about the methodology of historicism invariably turn

³ Letter 23, in SVC, p.59.

⁴ LHK, p.23; *NRH*, vi.

⁵ In *OT* (rev.ex.), p.249.

⁶ With regard to the above division of the terms historiography, historicity and History, see Michael Murray, *Modern Philosophy of History: Its Origin and Destination* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970), p.13. See also Strauss, *Exi*, pp.313-14; *OCPH*, p.559; *TPPH*, p.85; with regard to “History,” see also *OT* (rev.ex.), pp.208-12.

into debates about its ontology, Cooper notes. Furthermore, “Strauss compressed the two dimensions of the question. Historicism, he said, is ‘the assertion that the fundamental distinction between philosophical and historical questions cannot in the last analysis be maintained.’”⁷ To reiterate, the present section of this chapter focuses on Strauss’s critique of the ontological dimension in historicism.

Historicism, though, is more than an “assertion.” Hallowell would say that historicism is a doctrine or philosophy of principles on the nature of history, reason, knowledge, and existence. According to Stern, “Historicism may be defined by the formula *veritas et virtus filiae temporis*—truth and value are daughters of time, daughters of history.”⁸ Yet according to Popper, historicism is “an approach to the social sciences which assumes that *historical prediction* is their principal aim, and which assumes that this aim is attainable by discovering the ‘rhythms’ or the ‘patterns’, the ‘laws’ or the ‘trends’ that underlie the evolution of history.”⁹ The methodological emphasis of Popper’s definition of historicism, in his *The Poverty of Historicism*, obscures the metaphysical aspect of his critique, Page explains. Page continues: “The impression that history is something with an order of its own that

⁷ Barry Cooper, *The End of History: An essay on modern Hegelianism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), p.47. Cooper’s accompanying endnote, p.335n4, refers to *WIPP?*, p.57. With regard to the methodological-ontological understanding of historicism, see also F.R. Ankersmit, “Historicism: An Attempt at Synthesis,” *History and Theory* 34, no.3 (1995), pp.143-46; Jung, “Strauss’s Conception of Political Philosophy,” pp.501-2, 510.

⁸ John H. Hallowell, *Main Currents in Modern Political Thought* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1950), pp.258-62, 274-77; Stern, *Philosophy of History*, p.138. See also Thomas Albert Howard, *Religion and the Rise of Historicism: W.M.L. de Wette, Jacob Burkhardt, and the Theological Origins of Nineteenth-Century Historical Consciousness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp.12-17; Georg G. Iggers, *The German Conception of History: The National Tradition of Historical Thought from Herder to the Present* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1968), pp.29-43, 287-90, et passim; *Historiography in the Twentieth Century: From Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1997), pp.23-35; Friedrich Meinecke, *Historicism: The Rise of a New Historical Outlook*, trans. J.E. Anderson (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), pp.liv-lxi, et passim; Strauss, *NRH*, p.12.

⁹ Karl R. Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960), p.3 (original emphases).

overrules the actions and purposes of individual human agents is at the metaphysical core of the historicism to which Popper objects.”¹⁰

Strauss contested the far-ranging nature of the ontological historicist insight. This insight affirmed the autonomous existence and character of History, and proclaimed as true the inexorable and absolute quality of historicity. At the very end of the introduction to *Natural Right and History* Strauss stated: “Present-day social science rejects natural right on two different, although mostly combined, grounds; it rejects it in the name of History and in the name of the distinction between Facts and Values.” In his lecture, “The Crisis of Political Philosophy,” he observed: “There are two powers which are the recognized authorities in the Western world—in any Western country, especially in this country [America]—which one can call positivism and historicism.”¹¹ Notwithstanding Strauss’s excoriation of Popper, an excoriation amplified by Voegelin,¹² one could argue that it is to historicism, over positivism, that Strauss attached the most weight. Miller points out that “[a]lthough he is probably known best among social scientists for his critique of positivism, Strauss himself does not regard positivism as his primary opponent.”¹³

¹⁰ Carl Page, *Philosophical Historicism and the Betrayal of First Philosophy* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), pp.18-19, 20.

¹¹ *NRH*, p.8; *CPP*, p.91. See also *CM*, pp.6-7; *Exi*, pp.309, 311, 314; *LSPS*, pp.1-2; *OPS*, pp.130-37; *Rel*, pp.21-22.

¹² Strauss to Voegelin, 10 Apr. 1950, Letter 29 in *SVC*, pp.66-67: “May I ask you to let me know sometime what you think of Mr. Popper. He gave a lecture here, on the task of social philosophy, that was beneath contempt: it was the most washed-out, lifeless positivism trying to whistle in the dark, linked to a complete inability to think “rationally,” although it passed itself off as “rationalism”—it was very bad.” The tone of condemnation of Popper in Voegelin’s reply to Strauss, dated 18 Apr. 1950, went even further than Strauss’s harsh words; of *The Open Society and Its Enemies* Voegelin wrote, for example: “this book is impudent, dilettantish crap. . . . Briefly and in sum: Popper’s book is a scandal without extenuating circumstances; in its intellectual attitude it is the typical product of a failed intellectual; spiritually one would have to use expressions like rascally, impertinent, loutish; in terms of technical competence, as a piece in the history of thought, it is dilettantish, and as a result is worthless.” Letter 30 in *SVC*, pp.67, 68-69.

¹³ “Leo Strauss,” p.94. See also S.J.D. Green, “The Tawney-Strauss Connection: On Historicism and Values in the History of Political Ideas,” *Journal of Modern History* 67, no.2 (June 1995), pp.265-69; Hwa Yol Jung, “Two Critics of Scientism: Leo Strauss and Edmund Husserl,” *Independent Journal of Philosophy* 2 (1978), pp.81, 85; McAllister, *Revolt Against Modernity*, p.287n30; Smith, “Strauss and the Straussians,” pp.184-85; Strauss, *COT*, p.50; Zuckert,

Strauss's "opponent" is historicism; as he said in "Political Philosophy and History," "historicism is not just one philosophic school among many, but a most powerful agent that affects more or less all present-day thought. As far as we can speak at all of the spirit of a time, we can assert with confidence that *the spirit of our time is historicism.*" Echoing Strauss, Altizer states: "Nothing so determined Strauss's mature thinking as his opposition to historicism, a historicism he believed to be *the spirit of our time*, and a historicism he identified as the forgetting of eternity."¹⁴

In Chapter I of *Natural Right and History*, shortly after having said that "[t]he genesis of historicism is inadequately understood," Strauss ventured the observation: "The historical school emerged in reaction to the French Revolution and to the natural rights doctrines that had prepared that cataclysm."¹⁵ Historicism has its roots in the historical school's perception of "the need of preserving or continuing the traditional order. . . ." The original inspiration of "the founders of the historical school" was the effort to protect the belief that knowledge of "universal principles" is possible. Accordingly, they claimed, Strauss points out, that "what is actual here and now is more likely than not to fall short of the universal and unchangeable norm."¹⁶ Strauss then states (again not naming names): "By denying the significance, if not the existence, of universal norms, the eminent conservatives

Postmodern Platos, pp.171-72. I address Strauss's critique of positivism in the following section of this present chapter.

¹⁴ PPH, p.57 (emphases mine); Altizer, "Theological Conflict," p.268 (emphases mine). With regard to the above observations regarding historicism, cf. the similar observation in Georg G. Iggers, "Historicism," in *Dictionary of the History of Ideas: Studies of Selected Pivotal Ideas*, Vol.1: *Despotism to Law, Common*, ed. Philip P. Wiener (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973), p.462 (col.1, paragraph beginning with bold type).

¹⁵ *NRH*, p.13. Cf. GN, p.372; Carl Becker, *The Declaration of Independence: A Study in the History of Political Ideas* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1953), pp.256-73.

¹⁶ *NRH*, p.13. Cf. GN, pp.370-71; *NRH*, pp.13n5, 295ff, 316.

who founded the historical school were, in fact, continuing and even sharpening the revolutionary effort of their adversaries.”¹⁷ In his essay in Chapter VI on Edmund Burke, Strauss explains that Burke was compelled to articulate his principles in response to the wake of the French Revolution. However, as Lenzner notes, “Neither the word “historicism” nor any of its derivatives is used in the Burke essay.”¹⁸

This shift or weakening of faith in knowledge, Strauss explains in Chapter I, yielded a modification of the notion of the natural held by the French revolutionists. That notion had equated nature with individuality, but had situated the rights of the individual within “[l]ocal and temporal variety” so as to avoid the dangers of “antisocial individualism and unnatural universality.” The modification enacted by the historical school consisted not in the emphasis placed on the variety of laws, but, rather, in the argument “that the local and the temporal have a higher value than the universal. . .”¹⁹ But, Strauss states, “By denying the significance, if not the existence, of universal norms, the historical school destroyed the only solid basis of all efforts to transcend the actual.”²⁰

¹⁷ *NRH*, p.14. Cf. Maurice Mandelbaum, *History, Man, and Reason: A Study in Nineteenth-Century Thought* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1971), pp.61, 387n26.

¹⁸ Steven J. Lenzner, “Strauss’s Three Burkes: The Problem of Edmund Burke in *Natural Right and History*,” *Political Theory* 19, no.3 (August 1991), p.381n5. I would add that the essay in question can be found in *NRH*, pp.294-323.

¹⁹ *NRH*, pp.14, 15. On p.15 Strauss observes: “The effort of the revolutionists was directed against all otherworldliness . . .”; in an accompanying footnote, p.15n6, he instructs (and the brackets therein are his): “As regards the tension between the concern with the history of the human race and the concern with life after death, see Kant’s “Idea for a universal history with cosmopolitan intent,” proposition 9 (*The Philosophy of Kant*, ed. C.J. Friedrich [“Modern Library edition”], p.130). Consider also the thesis of Herder, whose influence on the historical thought of the nineteenth century is well known, that “the five acts are in this life” (see M. Mendelssohn, *Gesammelte Schriften, Jubiläums-Ausgabe*, III 1, pp.xxx-xxxii.)” Shell notes of Kant’s essay on history: “To be both of the world and beyond it—that is the challenge and dilemma with which the entire discourse of the *Universal Natural History* is bedeviled. . . .” Shell goes on to explain: “Rousseau convinces Kant that the end of reason lies not in knowing nature . . . but in striving morally to reform or transcend it.” Susan Shell, “Rousseau, Kant, and the Beginning of History,” in Orwin and Tarcov, eds., pp.49, 54.

²⁰ *NRH*, p.15. Cf. Strauss to Voegelin, 9 May 1943, Letter 9 in *SVC*, p.18. With regard to history as “the local and the temporal,” see also *NRH*, p.314.

In its effort to formulate “historical principles” that would be “objective” yet “relative to particular historical situations,” the historical school turned to “historical studies . . .”, Strauss notes. Such studies either “assumed” that every nation (*Volk*) is characterized by its own distinctive “folk minds[et],” that historical changes proceed on the basis of “general laws . . . or . . . combined both assumptions. . . .”

When those “assumptions were abandoned, the infancy of historicism came to its end.” Thus, “Historicism now appeared as a particular form of positivism . . .”, as it eschewed “theology and metaphysics” for the “empirical sciences.”²¹ According to Hobsbawm, though, positivism of that era was not entirely empirical:

The weakness of positivism (or Positivism) was that, in spite of Comte’s conviction that sociology was the highest of the sciences, it had little to say about the phenomena that characterize human society, as distinct from those which could be directly derived from the influence of non-social factors, or modelled on the natural sciences. What views it had about the human character of history were speculative, if not metaphysical.²²

In his lecture, “Why We Remain Jews,” Strauss noted:

Science, as the positivist understands it, is susceptible of infinite progress. . . . But how can science be susceptible of infinite progress if its object does not have an inner infinity? In other words, the object of science is everything that is—being. The belief admitted by all believers in science today—that science is by its nature essentially progressive, and eternally progressive—implies, without saying it, that being is mysterious.²³

Early historicism did not turn to “the methods of natural science” for empirical knowledge of reality, Strauss continues in Chapter I of *Natural Right and*

²¹ *NRH*, p.16. Cf. *WIPP*, pp.50-55, 60-61. Cf. also Richard J. Evans, *In Defence of History* (London: Granta Books, 1997), p.16; Iggers, *Historiography*, p.2

²² Eric Hobsbawm, *On History* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1997), p.144.

²³ *WWRJ*, pp.328-29. With regard to historicism’s belief in progress as being a latent or regressive tendency to view nature in a theistic or deistic manner, cf. Iggers, *German Conception of History*, pp.124-27; Meinecke, *Historicism*, pp.59-60, 144-45, 167-69; Strauss, *NRH*, pp.10n3, 15-16, 39 (cf. Luc Ferry, *Political Philosophy*, Vol.1: *Rights—the New Quarrel between the Ancients and the Moderns*, trans. Franklin Philip [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990], pp.30-33, 50).

History. For historicism, truly empirical knowledge could be acquired only from “history,” which is to say, “from knowledge of what is truly human,” and not from natural science, which historicism saw as being underpinned by the dubious assertion of universality. Early historicism began by aping the methods of science but later disavowed the purpose and fundamental premises of science.²⁴

Early historicism was itself, however, riddled with problems. As Strauss indicates, there was a marked disjunction between its assumptions, aspiration and results.²⁵ The aspiration to educe “norms from history” was a failure, Strauss points out. He reasons that “[t]he historical school had obscured the fact that particular or historical standards can become authoritative only on the basis of a universal principle which imposes an obligation on the individual to accept, or to bow to, the standards suggested by the tradition or the situation which has molded him.” Strauss adds: “Yet no universal principle will ever sanction the acceptance of every historical standard or of every victorious cause: to conform with tradition or to jump on “the wave of the future” is not obviously better” From the point of view of “the unbiased historian,” the course of history is shown by “the meaningless web spun by what men did, produced, and thought”, and one sees in history “only standards . . . of a purely subjective character” Yet to thus affirm the existence of subjective standards over universal standards renders impossible,

²⁴ *NRH*, pp.16, 17. Cf. Jurgen Herbst, *The German Historical School in American Scholarship: A Study in the Transfer of Power* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1965), pp.56-57; Iggers, *German Conception of History*, pp.124-27, 135; “Introduction: The Transformation of Historical Studies in Historical Perspective,” in George G. Iggers and Harold T. Parker, eds., *International Handbook of Historical Studies* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1979), p.4; Mandelbaum, *Historical Knowledge*, pp.120ff.

²⁵ *NRH*, p.17.

Strauss retorts, "the distinction between good and bad choices. Historicism culminated in nihilism."²⁶

Strauss means to say, I would suggest, that early historicism led to nihilism but was not itself wholly nihilistic.²⁷ For instance, he notes in Chapter I that early historicism, though it declaimed universal standards, lingered over the idea that the course of history is underpinned by stages of ever-increasing improvements in humanity, society, technology, and civilization.²⁸ In Chapter II Strauss states: "Weber, who regarded himself as a disciple of the historical school . . . parted company with the historical school, not because it had rejected natural norms, i.e., norms that are both universal and objective, but because it had tried to establish standards that were particular and historical indeed, but still objective. . . . It is the recognition of timeless values that distinguishes Weber's position most significantly from historicism."²⁹ It seems that Strauss regarded Weber's "recognition of timeless values" as consisting of his recognizing the possibility that revealed religion does convey truth about what it means to be: "Weber . . . took the possibility of Revelation seriously; hence his writings, even and especially those dealing with science as such, possess a depth and a claim to respect . . . this particular open-mindedness was ultimately the reason why he was not a new political scientist."³⁰

By claiming that all thought is circumscribed by the historical situation of its era, early historicism had, in effect, replaced the consideration of universal norms

²⁶ *NRH*, pp.17, 18 (see also pp.42f, 48f). Cf. Iggers, *German Conception of History*, pp.249, 270; Alan Mittleman, "Leo Strauss and Relativism: the Critique of Max Weber," *Religion* 29, no.1 (January 1999), pp.17ff.

²⁷ On this point, cf. Drury, *Political Ideas of Leo Strauss*, p.163.

²⁸ See *NRH*, pp.15-16, 18-19, 22-23. Cf. *GN*, pp.357ff, 361; *NRH*, pp.15-16; *POR?*, pp.258-67; *WIPP?*, p.26 (lines 22-24). Cf. also Hallowell, *Main Currents*, pp.129-35, 291-92.

²⁹ *NRH*, pp.36-37, 39.

³⁰ *RSW*, p.153 (col.2).

with a belief in the experience of history.³¹ Kennington observes that “[t]he immediate reason for the emergence of radical historicism was the perception of the self-contradiction within naive historicism. The latter had said all human thought is historical but had inconsistently exempted itself from its own verdict . . .”³² Strauss, in his own terms, makes Kennington’s observation in this forceful manner: “*The historicist thesis is self-contradictory or absurd.* We cannot see the historical character of “all” thought—that is, of all thought with the exception of the historicist insight and its implications—without transcending history, without grasping something trans-historical.”³³ Shortly afterwards Strauss states: “The radical historicist refuses to admit the trans-historical character of the historicist thesis. At the same time he recognizes the absurdity of unqualified historicism as a theoretical thesis. He denies, therefore, the possibility of a theoretical or objective analysis, which as such would be trans-historical, of the various comprehensive views or “historical worlds” . . .”³⁴ The “radical historicist” Strauss has in mind here is Nietzsche; referring to his *Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben*, Strauss explains that Nietzsche’s denial of the theoretical focus of early historicism signals the emergence of radical historicism.³⁵

In his essay Nietzsche wrote: “This, precisely, is the proposition the reader is invited to meditate upon: *the unhistorical and the historical are necessary in equal*

³¹ See *NRH*, pp.19-24, 31-32.

³² “Strauss’s *Natural Right and History*,” p.235. Kennington gives an in-text reference to *NRH*, p.25.

³³ *NRH*, p.25 (emphases mine).

³⁴ *NRH*, p.26.

³⁵ *NRH*, p.26 (for the reference to Nietzsche, see p.26n9). Cf. Hilail Gildin, “Introduction,” in *IPP*, pp.xviii-xix; Iggers, *German Conception of History*, pp.243-47.

measure for the health of an individual, of a people and of a culture.”³⁶ History must serve life, Nietzsche insisted. He proceeded to identify three approaches to the study and use of history. The *monumental* approach sees in history monuments of great deeds performed by men of action, deeds that can instruct men in the present who desire to be great but have no teachers to guide them. The *antiquarian* approach seeks to protect the past because it provides a source of identity for the masses, who lack the strength of mind and will to be inspired by the present. The *critical* approach also seeks to engender and serve life, but it fulfills that aim by laying bare the truth of human existence, namely, its violence and instability.³⁷

Following on from his precis about the uses of history, Nietzsche explained: “modern man drags around with him a huge quantity of indigestible stones of knowledge”³⁸ Elsewhere in his essay Nietzsche again warned against a surfeit of reflection on history, especially reflection on the very meaning or nature of history: “It has, in fact, for long been high time that the excesses of the historical sense, the immoderate revelling in the process at the expense of being and life . . . were assaulted by all the militia satirical malice can summon”³⁹ Nietzsche’s ire,

Howard points out, was targeted at “*a priori* claims of knowledge among theologians and philosophers alike.”⁴⁰

³⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, “On the uses and disadvantages of history for life,” in *Untimely Meditations*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p.63 (original emphases). (This chapter hereafter cited as “Uses.”)

³⁷ See “Uses,” pp.67-77. See also Walter Kaufman, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, 4th ed. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1974), p.144; Catherine Zuckert, “Nature, History and the Self: Friedrich Nietzsche’s Untimely Considerations,” *Nietzsche-Studien* 5 (1976), pp.59-64.

³⁸ “Uses,” p.78.

³⁹ “Uses,” p.112.

⁴⁰ *Religion and the Rise of Historicism*, p.168. Cf. “Uses,” pp.112-13.

For Nietzsche, then, the purpose of the historian is not to promulgate self-forgetting and all-encompassing theories of historical, natural laws. Countering Plato's "mighty *necessary lie*" of an eternal order of nature with the "necessary truth" of history, Nietzsche claimed that one is without life and cannot live a full or liberated life if one does not recognize the inexorable chaos or flux of existence.⁴¹ Such recognition or submission is, however, prevented by the "excess of history." The remedy for that excess being the interplay between "*the historical and the suprahistorical. . .*" By the ^{former} latter Nietzsche meant science and by the latter he meant art and religion. Science, he said, regards as paramount scientific knowledge and also knowledge of "things historical," not things artistic and religious; science "hates forgetting, which is the death of knowledge, and seeks to abolish all limitations of horizon and launch mankind upon an infinite and unbounded sea of light whose light is knowledge of all becoming."⁴²

Nietzsche doubted, however, the efficacy of that scientific aspiration. He insisted that life must rule over science, not science over life. "Thus science requires superintendence and supervision."⁴³ Nietzsche's effort here was to emphasize that knowledge, however scientific in its scope scientists or historians regard it to be, must be situated within the ambit of life, of existence. As Strauss explains, a key characteristic of radical historicism is precisely the claim that "[a]ll understanding, all knowledge, however limited and "scientific," presupposes . . . a horizon, a comprehensive view within which understanding and knowing take place."⁴⁴

⁴¹ "Uses," pp.118-19 (original emphases), 119-23. Cf. Strauss, *CM*, pp.102-3; *NPN*, pp.176-77; *NRH*, pp.26, 27; *Rel*, pp.25-26.

⁴² "Uses," p.120 (original emphases).

⁴³ "Uses," p.121.

⁴⁴ *NRH*, p.26.

Strauss located the roots of radical historicism in Nietzsche but emphasized Heidegger's role in determining the substance and shape of radical historicism. In a letter to Karl Löwith dated 15 August 1946 Strauss stated that "Heidegger gives merely a refined interpretation of modern historicism, "anchors" it "ontologically." For with Heidegger, "historicity" has made nature disappear *completely*, which however has the merit of consistency and compels one to reflect."⁴⁵ In a letter to Kojève dated 24 March 1950 Strauss asked: "Have you seen Heidegger's *Holzwege*? Most interesting, much that is outstanding, and on the whole bad: the most extreme historicism." In a letter to Kojève dated 26 June 1950 Strauss remarked: "I have once again been dealing with Historicism, that is to say, with Heidegger, the only radical historicist . . ."⁴⁶ The epigrammatic thread of the critique of Heidegger—as radical—made by Strauss in the epistolary medium is elaborated in Chapter I of *Natural Right and History*:

| the most thoroughgoing attempt to establish historicism culminated in
| the assertion that if and when there are no human beings, there may be
| *entia*, but there cannot be *esse*, that is, that there can be *entia* while
| there is no *esse*. There is an obvious connection between this
| assertion and the rejection of the view that "to be" in the highest
| sense means "to be always."⁴⁷

Though Strauss did not proceed to name Heidegger as the author of the "attempt" in question, it is most likely Heidegger he had in mind, Kennington observes, with an

⁴⁵ In CCM, p.107 (original emphasis). Cf. Rel, p.24.

⁴⁶ *OT* (rev.ex.), pp.250, 251 (original underlining). PRS, p.30: "Existentialism is a "movement" which like all such movements has a flabby periphery and a hard center. That center is the thought of Heidegger." Strauss to Voegelin, 10 Dec. 1950, Letter 35 in SVC, p.76: "Whatever *noein* might mean, it is certainly not *pistis* in some sense. On this point Heidegger in his *Holzwege* (who otherwise says many *adunatotata*) is simply right."

⁴⁷ *NRH*, p.32 (original emphases). See also *NRH*, pp.30-31. With regard to Strauss's above depictions of Heidegger, cf. Rémi Brague, "Radical Modernity and the Roots of Ancient Thought," *Independent Journal of Philosophy* 4 (1983), pp.63ff; Hans Jonas, "Gnosticism and Modern Nihilism," *Social Research* 19, no.4 (December 1952), p.447; James F. Ward, Review of *Leo Strauss and the American Right*, by Shadia B. Drury, *American Political Science Review* 92, no.3 (September 1998), p.680.

endnote adding this quotation from Heidegger's *An Introduction to Metaphysics*:
 "There is no time when man was not, not because man was from all eternity and will be for all eternity but because time is not eternity and time fashions itself into a time only as a human, historical being-there."⁴⁸

For Strauss, Heidegger's answer to the question of what it means "to be" is inimical to traditional philosophical reflections on the very same question. As Strauss explained in his lecture "Existentialism," "Yet while according to Plato and Aristotle to be in the highest sense means to be always, Heidegger contends that to be in the highest sense means to exist, that is to say, to be in the manner in which man is: to be in the highest sense is constituted by mortality." Shortly afterwards Strauss observes: "The great achievement of Heidegger was the coherent exposition of *Existenz*. . . . Kierkegaard had spoken of existence within the traditional horizon, i.e. within the horizon of the traditional distinction between essence and existence. Heidegger tried to understand existence out of itself."⁴⁹

According to Jung, "Because Strauss is preoccupied with *knowledge of the good* as central to the aim of philosophy, he fails to come to grips with the profound implications of Heidegger's ontology . . ." Thus Strauss failed to recognize that "Heidegger's main concern is not epistemology but the disclosure of Being or what it means "to be" as the ground by which knowledge or the theory of knowledge is possible."⁵⁰ Clearly, however, Strauss did recognize that Heidegger's main concern is the elaboration of Being, as was seen above. Given that the purpose of this

⁴⁸ "Strauss's *Natural Right and History*," pp.235-36, 252n4. Kennington's quotation is from *IM*, p.84.

⁴⁹ Exi, p.312 (original emphasis). See also Exi, pp.311, 313; *NRH*, pp.26-34; *PRS*, esp. pp.30ff; *PSCR*, pp.146-51; *Rel*, pp.24-26; *WIPP?*, pp.55, 246-48, 254; Strauss to Voegelin, 17 Dec. 1949 and 10 Dec. 1950, respectively, Letters 26 and 35 in *SVC*.

⁵⁰ "Two Critics of Scientism," p.86 (original emphases).

present section is to discuss and examine the speculative aspect of Strauss's idea of history, I will limit myself in the following to addressing Heideggerian questions and themes that bear on Strauss's depiction of Heidegger as a *radical historicist*.

Whilst explicating what he regarded as the true sense of Being, Heidegger advanced a thesis about the meaning of history and the purpose of philosophy.⁵¹ In section 72 of *Being and Time* he proposed: "To lay bare the *structure of historizing*, and the existential-temporal conditions of its possibility, signifies that one has achieved an *ontological* understanding of *historicality*." Heidegger apparently meant that the meaning of history should be understood in an existential and not a historiological manner. As he stated in section 76, having pointed to Nietzsche's precis of the monumental, antiquarian and critical approaches to history, "Authentic historicality is the foundation for the possibility of uniting these three ways of historiology. But the *ground* on which authentic historiology is founded is *temporality* as the existential meaning of the Being in care."⁵² In his essay, "The Anaximander Fragment," Heidegger asked: "What can all merely historiological philosophies of history tell us about our history . . . if they explain history without ever thinking out, from the essence of history, the fundamentals of their way of explaining events, and the essence of history, in turn, from Being itself?" Shortly afterwards Heidegger gave this answer:

All historiography predicts what is to come from images of the past determined by the present. It systematically destroys the future and our historic relation to the advent of destiny. Historicism has

⁵¹ See, e.g., Bregue, "Radical Modernity," pp.68, 73-74, passim; David Farrell Krell, "Analysis," in Heidegger, *N(1)*, pp.245-57; John Sallis, "Where Does 'Being and Time' Begin?: Commentary on section 1-4," in Frederick Elliston, ed., *Heidegger's Existential Analytic* (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1978), esp. pp.21-25; Herman Philipse, *Heidegger's Philosophy of Being: A Critical Interpretation* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998), pp.151ff, 157-65, 272-76; Ward, "Political Philosophy and History," pp.282, 287ff. Cf. also Heidegger, *AF*, p.17, quoted below.

⁵² *BT*, pp.427, 449 (original emphases).

today not only not been overcome, but is only now entering the stage of its expansion and entrenchment.⁵³

For Heidegger, disciplines of philosophy, theology and history fail to adequately grasp the meaning of Being. In his *Existence and Being* he remarked, "The question as to the nature of truth is not concerned with whether truth is the truth of . . . scientific research or of art, or even the truth of contemplative thought or of religious belief. The essential question disregards all this and fixes its attention on the one thing that is the mark of "truth" of every kind." The question with which one must be concerned is that of Being, for that question focuses on reality, on what-is. In his Anaximander essay Heidegger stated: "Theories of nature and doctrines of history do not dissolve the confusion [about what is truly meant by Being]. They further confuse everything until it is unrecognizable, since they themselves feed on the confusion prevailing over the distinction between beings and Being."⁵⁴

Several themes can thus be seen in Heidegger's conception of Being. First, he bases truth and the meaning of Being in human temporality rather than in general, theoretical representations of beings.⁵⁵ Second, he depicts human temporality as the horizon constituted by the temporalizing projection (the putting into time) of both futural possibilities and past events upon the existential condition of the unceasing flux of the here-and-now present.⁵⁶ Third, he sees in finitude the inexorable facticity

⁵³ AF, p.17.

⁵⁴ *EB*, p.319; AF, pp.57-58.

⁵⁵ AF, pp.36ff; *BPP*, pp.22, 302ff; *BT*, pp.38, 256-73, 370ff, 387ff, 418ff, 423ff (div.II, passim); *EB*, pp.319-51; *EGT*, pp.97-98; *ID*, pp.65ff; *N*(1), pp.67-68; *N*(2), pp.145-47; *N*(3), pp.201-8; *N*(4), pp.52-57, 159-66; *PLT*, pp.36ff, 50ff, 60ff, 70, 81, 123.

⁵⁶ *BT* II.3-6. With regard to temporality, cf. William D. Blattner, *Heidegger's Temporal Idealism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), esp. pp.26-27, 90-106, 116-19; Hubert L. Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger's Being and Time, Division I* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1991), pp.243-45, 270-71; Kurt Mueller-Vollmer, "Introduction. Language, Mind, and Artifact: An Outline of Hermeneutic Theory Since the Enlightenment to the Present," in Kurt Mueller-Vollmer, ed., *The Hermeneutics Reader: Texts of the German Tradition from the Enlightenment to the Present* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p.34; Charles M. Sherover,

and peak of existence.⁵⁷ And fourth, he replaces philosophy in the classical sense—the quest for knowledge regarding first principles—with a philosophy of Being—an ontology that emphasizes the historicity of all thought and life.⁵⁸

Historicist notions about history stand in stark contrast to classical reflections on the matter. The classics did not recognize a field of existence called “History” that was separate and superior to “nature,” Strauss explains in his essay, “Political Philosophy and History.” Neither did the classics recognize a field of study about “History.”⁵⁹ Furthermore, they did not speak of the “the necessity of engaging in historical studies Aristotle succeeded perfectly in clarifying the political ideas obtaining in his age, although he never bothered about the history of those ideas.”⁶⁰ Similarly, in a letter to Voegelin dated 10 December 1950 Strauss observed:

Classical philosophy is “ahistorical” insofar as it is a search for the *aiē ōn*, within which all history has taken or can take place, for the *aiē ōn* in no way opens up through “history”: history is for classical philosophy infinitely unimportant, insofar as the decisive questions, the fundamental questions, necessarily relate to the *aiē ōn*. The fundamental questions—(1) the question of the *archē* or the *archai*, (2) the question of the right life or the *aristē politeia*. . . . Historicizing means the forgetting of eternity. This forgetting must be understood in terms of the rejection of the classical concept of philosophy.

In his letter Strauss goes on to explain that historicism seeks to understand how past events and thoughts came to be; historicism is the doctrine that the ground of human

“The Political Implications of Heidegger’s *Being and Time*: On Blitz’s Interpretation,” *Interpretation* 12, nos.2 and 3 (May and September 1984), pp.370-71, 374-75.

⁵⁷ *BT*, pp.281ff, 287-311, 435-38; *EGT*, p.101; *ID*, pp.30f, 54ff, 70; *PLT*, pp.50, 96-97, 124-26.

⁵⁸ *BT* intro.I-II; *EB*, pp.347-50, 351, 355-92; *EGT*, pp.81-82; *ID*, pp.54-56, 58ff; *N*(4), pp.155-58, 209-13; *PLT*, pp.51, 100ff. See also Blattner, *Heidegger’s Temporal Idealism*, pp.277-79, 289-310; Frederick Copleston, *Contemporary Philosophy: Studies of Logical Positivism and Existentialism* (London: Burns and Oates, 1956), pp.131-33, 178-84; Philipse, *Heidegger’s Philosophy of Being*, pp.78-98, 281-86.

⁵⁹ *PPH*, p.60.

⁶⁰ *PPH*, p.74. With regard to “historical studies,” see also *COT*, pp.52-53; *PPH*, pp.76-77.

thought is history and not nature.⁶¹ Perhaps Strauss has in mind, in both his essay and letter, section 75 of *Being and Time*, for instance, where Heidegger wrote: “even Nature is historical. It is *not* historical, to be sure, in so far as we speak of ‘natural history’; but Nature is historical as a countryside, as an area that has been colonized or exploited . . .”⁶²

The historicist rejects the very notion of “*the truth*,” Strauss explains in “How To Study Medieval Philosophy”: “all philosophers of the past claimed to have found *the truth*, and not merely the truth for their *time*. The historicist however asserts that they were mistaken in believing so. And he makes this assertion the basis of his interpretation.” In “Political Philosophy and History” Strauss states: “we cannot be passionately interested, seriously interested in the past if we know beforehand that the present is in the most important respect superior to the past.”⁶³ Strauss took issue with historicism, for he defended the challenge of the philosophic quest for knowledge and truth,⁶⁴ but he should not be identified as an absolutist, for he regarded absolutism as foreign to the philosophic quest. In *Natural Right and History* he explained:

The variability of the demands of that justice which men can practice was recognized not only by Aristotle but by Plato as well. Both avoided the Scylla of “absolutism” and the Charybdis of

⁶¹ Letter 35 in SVC, p.75. See also HSMP, p.324; HSS, p.193; OT (rev.ex.), p.25; PPH, p.67; PS, p.327.

⁶² BT, p.440 (original emphasis). See also EB, pp.335-37; EGT, pp.97-98; N(4), pp.240-42; PLT, pp.61, 77, 100-3, 106, 109ff, 118-19.

⁶³ HSMP, p.325 (original emphases); PPH, p.67 (emphases mine). See also OCPH, p.586; OFKW, p.227; OT (rev.ex.), p.25; PPH, pp.68, 71.

⁶⁴ See, e.g., HSS, pp.191-96; OFKW, pp.227-28; PL, p.136n2; PRS, pp.30-32; Strauss to Voegelin, 10 Dec. 1950, Letter 35 in SVC. See also Green, *Jew and Philosopher*, p.219n1; Pangle, “Platonic Political Science,” pp.341ff; Smith, “*Destruktion* or Recovery?,” pp.357f; Tarcov and Pangle, “Epilogue,” pp.910-11; Ward, “Political Philosophy and History,” esp. pp.288-89. With regard to Strauss’s defence of philosophy in his “historical studies” (interpretations) of past thinkers, see Jackson, “Strauss’s Teaching,” p.2; Mittleman, “Strauss and Relativism,” pp.25-26n7; Thomas L. Pangle, “On The Epistolary Dialogue Between Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin,” in Deutsch and Nicgorski, eds., p.250n16.

“relativism” by holding a view which one may venture to express as follows: There is a universally valid hierarchy of ends [namely, of moral and intellectual perfection], but there are no universally binding rules of action. . . . The only universally valid standard is the hierarchy of ends. This standard is sufficient for passing judgment on the level of nobility of individuals and groups and of actions and institutions. But it is insufficient for guiding our actions.⁶⁵

It is fitting, then, that the speculative aspect of Strauss’s idea of history be described with the appellation, neither relativistic nor absolutist, as that appellation echoes his definition of philosophy as meaning *quest* for knowledge of the whole, not dogmatic possession of complete or final knowledge of the whole.⁶⁶

Turning to history

Having thus far addressed the speculative aspect within Strauss’s idea of history, I wish now address its analytical, practical aspect. I do not intend, however, to provide an exhaustive analysis of his “rules for reading.”⁶⁷ (Neither, then, do I intend to analyze the numerological side of Straussian hermeneutics; numerology, with its Cabalistic influenced stress upon reading between the lines and divining the significance of numeric patterns, was an ancillary way by which Strauss cast light upon the guidelines and esoteric teachings of the thinkers of the past.⁶⁸)

⁶⁵ *NRH*, pp.162, 163. See also *LSPS*, p.3 *NRH*, pp.5-6, 162-63; *POR?*, pp.282-86; *Rel*, pp.15-17; *SSH*, p.12. Cf. Nasser Behnegar, “Leo Strauss’s Confrontation with Max Weber: A Search for a Genuine Social Science,” *Review of Politics* 59, no.1 (Winter 1997), pp.101-2, 105; Jonas, “Gnosticism and Modern Nihilism,” p.452; Stern, *Philosophy of History*, pp.185-86; Strauss to Voegelin, 10 Dec. 1950 (Letter 35 in *SVC*).

⁶⁶ See above and *CCM*, p.111; *MITP*, pp.292, 297; *NRH*, pp.122ff; *WIPP?*, pp.10-12. See also Timothy Fuller, “Philosophy, Faith, and the Question of Progress,” in Emberley and Cooper, eds. and trans., p.286. Cf. Robert J. McShea, “Leo Strauss on Machiavelli,” *Western Political Quarterly* 16, no.4 (December 1963), pp.787-88; James V. Schall, “A Latitude for Statesmanship? Strauss on St. Thomas,” *Review of Politics* 53, no.1 (Winter 1991), pp.134-35; Stephen P. Turner and Regis A. Factor, *Max Weber and the dispute over reason and value: A study in philosophy, ethics, and politics* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), p.244n6.

⁶⁷ See *PAW*, p.30, where Strauss lists seven “rules.”

⁶⁸ See e.g., *LCGP*, esp. p.87n143; *LRK*, esp. p.105n29. With regard to this matter of Strauss on numerology, see Harvey C. Mansfield, *Machiavelli’s Virtue* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), pp.225-29. See also Bloom, “Leo Strauss,” pp.380-81, et passim; Rémi Brague, “Athens,

Instead, I will canvass the contours of the matter, my argument being that Strauss's hermeneutic advice directs readers towards the fundamental problems of what is good, just, virtuous, best and right.

Strauss's hermeneutic advice comes to sight as advice on how to study the history of political philosophy, and is conveyed in a pointed manner. In a letter to Voegelin dated 29 April 1953 Strauss wrote: "there is a fundamental distinction between the technique of true philosophy and that of modern philosophy." Strauss then pointed out that he had "explained" that distinction in "the essay, "Persecution and the Art of Writing" . . ." ⁶⁹ Strauss's essay was first published in the November 1941 issue of *Social Research*; it was reprinted in 1952 as Chapter 2 in *Persecution and the Art of Writing*. It would be fair to say, then, that the above "distinction" pertains to the different literary and philosophic techniques of premodern and modern thinkers. "Modern historical research . . .", Strauss explained in his essay, "has counteracted or even destroyed an earlier tendency to read between the lines of the great writers, or to attach more weight to their fundamental design than to those views which they have repeated most often." ⁷⁰

According to Cantor, "Strauss's theory of interpretation resulted from a great leap of historical imagination. . . ." That leap consisted of the thesis that writers and philosophers in past eras who lived under "illiberal and intolerant regimes" concealed the true import of their writings so as to avoid persecution and punishment. ⁷¹ For Brague, though, "Strauss's hermeneutical originality does not lie in the claim that

Jerusalem, Mecca: Leo Strauss's "Muslim" Understanding of Greek Philosophy," *Poetics Today* 19, no.2 (Summer 1998), pp.242-45, et passim; Jackson, "Strauss's Teaching," pp.68-71, 73-98.

⁶⁹ Letter 43 in SVC, pp.97-98. See also *CM*, pp.20-21, 141-43; HSS, p.188; OFKW, pp.221-22, 227; *PAW*, pp.23, 24, 27ff, 30-32, 33, 35.

⁷⁰ *PAW*, pp.31, 32.

⁷¹ Paul A. Cantor, "Leo Strauss and Contemporary Hermeneutics," in Udoff, ed., pp.270, 271. See *ibid.*, p.308n8, where Cantor refers (for instance) to two essays of Strauss's, *PAW* and *OFKW*.

there is a difference between (a) levels of readers, more or less gifted and acute, and (b) levels of meaning, more or less superficial. Neither is this originality to be looked for in his asserting that some texts are esoteric.”⁷² Brague goes on to explain that Strauss’s originality consists in the fact that his rediscovery of esotericism is inextricably linked with an Islamic understanding of esotericism; esotericism is not simply a response to “merely exterior causes . . .” (such as persecution), for “[i]t corresponds to inner features of the Islamic conception of Revelation, that is, to the way it conceives of the basic relationship of man to the Absolute. First, Revelation in Islam is a mere fact, a *factum brutum*. . . . Second, its content is a text, a written text, a book. The phenomenon of the Sacred Book is far more peculiar to Islam than to Christianity. . . .”⁷³ Of that difference between Islam and Christianity Brague notes that “Judaism stands midway: Unlike Christianity and like Islam, it does not admit an incarnation, and what is revealed is a law; unlike Islam, however, its sacred writings are not immediately present but mediated through the very process of their reception, discussion, and interpretation.”⁷⁴

Given that further discussion of the link between esotericism and Islam is beyond the scope of this chapter, it is appropriate now to examine the context of Strauss’s hermeneutic advice. Before such an examination, it would be instructive to briefly survey the problems associated with the notion of esotericism and how Strauss meant it should be utilized as an approach to exegesis. “Do we need seven seals to keep an uninspired majority in the dark,” Seeskin asks, “and at what point

⁷² “Athens, Jerusalem, Mecca,” p.243. Cf. Green, *Jew and Philosopher*, pp.115-16, 123-24; Steven B. Smith, “Leo Strauss: Between Athens and Jerusalem,” *Review of Politics* 53, no.1 (Winter 1991), p.95.

⁷³ “Athens, Jerusalem, Mecca,” pp.247, 248. Cf. Green, *Jew and Philosopher*, ch.6, esp. pp.124, 126-32.

⁷⁴ “Athens, Jerusalem, Mecca,” p.248.

does esotericism keep even the inspired minority guessing about the real meaning of the text?" Seeskin explains,

To answer these questions, I propose that we think of esotericism in two ways. The first is what I will call *normal esotericism*. This applies to a book that deals with a complex and demanding subject and requires intense concentration to be appreciated. Although the uninspired majority may not be able to follow it, the book contains no booby traps, blind alleys, or concealed doctrines . . . that the author has put there intentionally. . . .

By contrast, *deep esotericism* applies to a book in which the author hides the true meaning behind hints, clues, or cleverly constructed diversions. . . .⁷⁵

Bagley explains that when the esoteric is different in "form or content" to the exoteric, the exoteric being the teaching a writer presents for public viewing, and (that is to say) when the esoteric and exoteric are written in different texts, then the possibility exists that the esoteric will be identifiable to whomever has access to the esoteric text.⁷⁶ If the guardians of an esoteric text restrict access to the text to initiates, that restriction obviates the possibility of a chance discovery of the text's secret teachings by anyone deemed by the guardians not to be entitled to knowledge of the teachings. When the esoteric resides within the form or content of the exoteric, only initiates will be able to identify the teaching, even if access to the exoteric text is available to non-initiates; initiates exclusively possess the capabilities for identifying the secret teaching concealed within the exoteric text. "[E]xoteric/esoteric literature . . . is designed to present two dissimilar teachings at the same time: one is propounded for the majority of readers, while the other is detected only by those who exercise sufficient effort to discern it. . . ."⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Kenneth Seeskin, "Maimonides' Conception of Philosophy," in Novak, ed., p.89 (original emphases).

⁷⁶ Paul J. Bagley, "On the Practice of Esotericism," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 53, no.2 (April-June 1992), pp.231-35.

⁷⁷ "Esotericism," p.236. See also Brague, "Athens, Jerusalem, Mecca," pp.249-51.

Interestingly, Bagley goes on to explain (having thus far, in his discussion of esotericism, not spoken of Strauss):

First, if Strauss is guilty of anything it is that he wrote esoterically about esotericism; but that fact alone substantiates his thesis that it is possible or sometimes necessary for philosophers to communicate their serious thinking only "between the lines." Second, Strauss nowhere suggests that all "old books" are in need of exoteric/esoteric interpretation or that we should approach texts with the immediate aim of discerning some secret or hidden message in them. Rather he makes it quite plain that readers are obliged to follow certain precepts in their study of books which might contain an esoteric teaching; the prime rule enunciated by Strauss is that "reading between the lines," or an exoteric/esoteric interpretation of any book, "is strictly prohibited in all cases where it would be less exact than not doing so" (*Persecution*, 29-31).⁷⁸

To depict Strauss's hermeneutic advice as a doctrine or philosophy or even as an ideology, as have a number of critics,⁷⁹ would be akin to saying that he was claiming a final or an absolute insight into the meaning of history. By his own account, however, Strauss did not "possess and present a comprehensive doctrine." He describes his "own hermeneutic experience" as "very limited."⁸⁰ It is true, though, that Strauss regards the study of history as needful for the perplexed of the modern era to find their way towards the ahistorical, "natural horizon" of "philosophical thought," of "fundamental problems."⁸¹ Yet although speaking emphatically of the need for recognizing "the trans-temporal truth" of the "fundamental problems," Strauss stresses: "history of philosophy is endangered if

⁷⁸ "Esotericism," p.240n21. With regard to Bagley's first point, cf. Brague, "Athens, Jerusalem, Mecca," pp.237-38; Aryeh Leo Motzkin, "On the Interpretation of Maimonides," *Independent Journal of Philosophy* 2 (1978), p.41.

⁷⁹ See, e.g., Burnyeat, "Sphinx Without a Secret," pp.30, 35-36; Condren, *Classic Texts*, pp.160-61, 232-33; Holmes, *Anatomy of Antiliberalism*, pp.75, 85-86. Cf. McAllister, *Revolt Against Modernity*, pp.86-94; George H. Sabine, Review of *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, by Leo Strauss, *Ethics* 63, no.1 (October 1952): 220-222.

⁸⁰ Strauss to Gadamer, 26 Feb. 1961, in *CCWM*, p.5.

⁸¹ OCPH, p.586. See also Voegelin to Strauss, 12 Mar. 1949, and Strauss to Voegelin, 17 Mar. 1949, respectively, Letters 22 and 23 in *SVC*.

the historian starts from the acceptance of any solution of the fundamental problems: if he knows in advance that a given philosophic doctrine which he is studying is false, he lacks the incentive for studying that doctrine with sympathy or care.”⁸² According to Ward, “Strauss is clear that an interpreter must bring a philosophic intention to his task. The interpreter is to think what is presented in the text under the direction of the philosopher. None of Strauss’s hermeneutic principles, which taken together are not intended as a formal interpretive methodology, absolves the serious interpreter from the need to think for himself.”⁸³

The hermeneutic activity of the interpreter is, to Strauss, a movement toward philosophy or philosophy itself. In his lecture, “Existentialism,” he observed: “The scholar faces the fundamental problems through the intermediacy of books. If he is a serious man through the intermediacy of the great books. The great thinker faces the problems directly.”⁸⁴ With regard to *how* one faces the fundamental problems, Strauss explained in his essay, “How to Study Spinoza’s *Theological-Political Treatise*,” that one moves carefully from interpretation to explanation; interpretation is commentary on a text, whereas explanation aims to impart critical insight about its intent, meaning, significance, teaching, and influence. “By interpretation we mean the attempt to ascertain what the speaker said and how he actually understood what he said, regardless of whether he expressed that understanding explicitly or not. By explanation we mean the attempt to ascertain those implications of his statements of

⁸² OFKW, p.229.

⁸³ “Political Philosophy and History,” p.279. See also Cantor, “Strauss and Contemporary Hermeneutics,” pp.269-70; Nathan Tarcov, “Philosophy and History: Tradition and Interpretation in the Work of Leo Strauss,” *Polity* 16, no.1 (Fall 1983), pp.11-13, 16-18, 20ff, 26; Tarcov and Pangle, “Epilogue,” pp.915-16. Cf. John G. Gunnell, “The Myth of the Tradition,” *American Political Science Review* 72, no.1 (March 1978), pp.130-31.

⁸⁴ Exi. p.306.

which he was unaware.”⁸⁵ Clearly, Strauss is drawing a distinction between literary and philosophic questions.⁸⁶ He did not mean, though, to suggest the heterogeneity of literary and philosophic questions. He means, rather, that one can only properly consider the most important, fundamental questions once one has considered the literary question of the author’s very presentation of the matter at hand: “If the explanation is not based on an adequate interpretation, it will be the explanation, not of the statement to be explained, but of a figment of the imagination of the historian.”⁸⁷

Some commentators suggest that Strauss’s call for a return to the classics, to their texts and “signposts,” is diagnostic and palliative.⁸⁸ By his own account, the return does indeed have propaedeutical, pedagogical and restorative functions: “The signposts which guided the thinkers of the past, must be *recovered* before they can be used.”⁸⁹ According to Lampert, “Strauss’s writings bear the character of a return [to the classics] . . . But Strauss’s movement of return betrays no trace of nostalgia, no sense of longing for the revival of some lost, earlier world. It is a philosophical and not a sentimental voyage.”⁹⁰ According to King, “Although virtually all of

⁸⁵ HSS, pp.181-82.

⁸⁶ See also *CM*, p.52.

⁸⁷ HSS, p.182.

⁸⁸ See Gunnell, “Myth of the Tradition,” esp. pp.124-25. Cf. Deutsch and Nicgorski, “Introduction,” p.19; Fortin and Hughes, “Strauss-Voegelin Correspondence,” pp.337-38; Green, *Jew and Philosopher*, pp.208-9n86; Pangle, “Platonic Political Science,” pp.322, 335; Stanley Rosen, “Politics or Transcendence? Responding to Historicism,” in Emberley and Cooper, eds. and trans., p.262; Bernard Susser, “The Restorative Ontology of Leo Strauss,” in *The Grammar of Modern Ideology* (London: Routledge, 1988): 137-171; Tarcov, “Philosophy and History,” pp.7-9, 24, 28; Umphrey, “Natural Right and Philosophy,” p.287; Ward, “Political Philosophy and History,” pp.274, 279-80. Cf. also Jackson, “Strauss’s Teaching,” pp.233f.

⁸⁹ HSMP, p.325 (original emphasis).

⁹⁰ *Strauss and Nietzsche*, p.133. See also Deutsch and Nicgorski, “Introduction,” pp.19-20; Charles Larmore, “The Secrets of Philosophy,” Review of *The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism*, Essays and Lectures by Leo Strauss, *New Republic* 201, no.1 (3 July 1989), p.32 (cols.2-3); Pangle, “Editor’s Introduction,” p.xxiv; Smith, “*Destruktion* or Recovery?,” pp.353, 356ff, 361ff. Cf. also King, “Introduction,” p.15; Stern, *Philosophy of History*, p.14; Strauss, OPS, p.130; POR?, pp.249-50. With regard to “antiquarianism,” cf. *CM*, p.1; *PAW*, p.8; PPH, p.58; *TM*, p.86. With regard to “romanticism,” cf. GN, p.370; OCPH, pp.576-77.

Strauss's work involves an exercise in the history of ideas, it none the less proceeds from the postulate that there are historical problems and philosophical truths which are 'transhistorical', 'perennial', 'enduring', 'fundamental'."⁹¹ As Strauss forthrightly expressed such observations as those above:

No deliberation about remedies for our ills can be of any value if it is not preceded by an honest diagnosis—by a diagnosis falsified neither by unfounded hopes nor by fear of the powers that be. . . . In thinking of remedies we may be compelled to rest satisfied with palliatives. But we must not mistake palliatives for cures. We must remember that liberal education for adults is not merely an act of justice to those who were in their youth deprived through their poverty of an education for which they are fitted by nature. Liberal education of adults must now also compensate for the defects of an education which is liberal only in name or by courtesy. Last but not least, liberal education is concerned with the souls of men. . . . Liberal education seeks light and therefore shuns the limelight.⁹²

It seems thus, as Deutsch explains, that

liberal education cannot provide a simple defense of natural right or refutation of historicism. For Strauss, it may be necessary to live in a tension between "natural right" and "history" in which we neither adopt natural right or the opinion that historical fate has superseded it. Rather, liberal education can contribute greatly to a person's struggle toward whatever knowledge that would come by transcending these alternatives. Natural right is a problem, not a doctrine. . . .⁹³

The analytical or, as one could thus put it, educative aspect of Strauss's idea of history is conspicuous in his critique of the "crisis of our time." His 1964 lecture of the same title attempted, as he said in the accompanying lecture, "The Crisis of Political Philosophy," "to trace the crisis of our time to the crisis of political philosophy, and . . . suggested that a way out of the intellectual difficulties with

⁹¹ "Introduction," p.16. With regard to the ahistorical orientation in Strauss's defense of philosophy, see also Altizer, "Theological Conflict," p.268; Pangle, "Platonic Political Science," p.341; Umphrey, "Natural Right and Philosophy," p.285n21.

⁹² WILE?, pp.24, 25.

⁹³ "Leo Strauss, the Straussians, and the American Regime," p.56. Cf. John G. Gunnell, "Political Theory and Politics: The Case of Leo Strauss," *Political Theory* 13, no.3 (August 1985), p.358.

which we are beset is a return to classical political philosophy . . .”⁹⁴ Strauss’s essay, “Political Philosophy and the Crisis of Our Time,” an abridged version of the two “Crisis” lectures, “is not only a theoretical critique of the idea of liberal democracy, or its fallen condition, but a response to some of the concrete international and domestic political issues of the 1960s.” Gunnell adds: “We would surely fail to grasp the point, then, if we did not identify it in certain important respects as political commentary.”⁹⁵ Indeed, whereas Spengler’s *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* was published in the wake of WWI, Strauss gave the two “Crisis” lectures at a time of escalating struggles in developing nations against Western colonial powers.⁹⁶

Yet apart from several brief mentions of Spengler, Strauss did not in his first lecture cite any historian or philosopher or thinker who was, like Spengler, drawing attention to the “crisis” and “decline” of the West. Instead, Strauss evoked a *Zeitgeist* of crisis. He explained that the decline, rather than consisting of declining Western economic and military power, consists primarily of the West’s lack of belief in its once strongly avowed purpose of universal society.⁹⁷ He says that the West is also stricken by doubt about the original purpose of modernity. Hobbes called for

⁹⁴ CPP, p.91. See also GN, pp.358ff, 365; NRH, pp.252-53; OT (rev.ex.), pp.23-25; PSCR, pp.137-39; Rel, p.17; TWM, pp.81-98; Hallowell, *Main Currents*, pp.618-50.

⁹⁵ “Political Theory and Politics,” p.357.

⁹⁶ Cf. Holmes, *Anatomy of Antiliberalism*, p.5; Iggers, *Historiography*, p.6.

⁹⁷ COT, pp.42, 43. Ibid., p.43 (emphases mine): “That crisis was diagnosed *at the end of WWI* by Spengler as a going down or decline of the West.” It would be fair to say, then, that Strauss has in mind Spengler’s *Der Untergang des Abendlandes, Gesalt und Wirklichkeit*, 1918; translated by Charles Francis Atkinson as *The Decline of the West* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1926). However, Atkinson’s 1926 translation did not include Spengler’s second volume, published in 1922 as *Der Untergang des Abendlandes, Welthistorie Perspektiven*.

In Exi, p.315 and TWM, p.81, Strauss gives the title in English of Spengler’s book. In COT, p.48, Strauss states: “What has been done on a grand scale, especially by Spengler, has been repeated on a somewhat lower level, but with at least as great effect, by such anthropologists as Ruth Benedict.” WIPP?, p.240: “Imperial Germany went down in defeat and collapsed. At that time people began to talk of the decline of the West.” See also POR?, p.267, where Strauss speaks of the pre-WWI critic “of the idea of progress,” Georges Sorel, and his book, *The Delusions of Progress*.

the conquering of nature so as to relieve the estate of man from the uncertainty of life in the state of nature.⁹⁸ Contemporary social science doubts the efficacy of universal society and the original purpose of modernity, for it claims “that no distinction between good or bad values is rationally possible.”⁹⁹

Strauss declined, however, to then examine at length the “fact-value distinction.” His concern was “with a somewhat broader issue”: how social science today can and must acquire an adequate understanding of “political things.”¹⁰⁰ Similarly, Hallowell explains: “Western civilization is in its Time of Troubles. It is beset on all sides by challenges which threaten to destroy it. It is the kind of response which we make to those challenges, however, rather than the challenges themselves, which will determine the outcome.”¹⁰¹

When Strauss examined the fact-value distinction on earlier occasions, his focus was also upon identifying the untenable features of contemporary thought about politics. According to one commentator, Strauss’s argument in his essay on Max Weber in Chapter II of *Natural Right and History* was that “value-free social science was neither possible nor desirable.”¹⁰² Curiously, nowhere in Chapter II did Strauss use the word “positivism,” though this chapter has the title “Natural Right and the Distinction Between Facts and Values.”¹⁰³ In “What Is Political

⁹⁸ COT, p.49. See also *NRH*, pp.167-202; *SCR*, pp.90-92; *TPPH*, pp.6-29; *TWM*, pp.88-89.

⁹⁹ COT, p.50. See also *CM*, pp.3-4; COT, p.42; *NRH*, pp.1-8, 42, 48-49; *SSH*, p.9; and Strauss’s discussion of the Enlightenment, in *PL*, pp.22-39.

¹⁰⁰ COT, pp.50, 51.

¹⁰¹ *Main Currents*, p.650.

¹⁰² Green, “Tawney-Strauss Connection,” p.268.

¹⁰³ I have been able to find only two instances in the whole of *NRH* where Strauss uses the word “positivism,” and both instances are in Chapter I, pp.10n3, 16—p.10n3: “The legal positivism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries cannot be simply identified with either conventionalism or historicism. It seems, however, that it derives its strength ultimately from the generally accepted historicist premise . . .” With regard to Strauss’s second mention of positivism, see above, in my discussion of his analysis of the development of historicism.

Philosophy?", a series of lectures he gave in December 1954 and January 1955 (published several years later as Chapter I in the work of the same name), Strauss spoke of the necessity to "political action" of an adequate understanding of principles about "the good life."¹⁰⁴ Having then defined political philosophy as the "quest" for truth about "political things," Strauss described contemporary political thought as diametrically opposed to that goal and its "very possibility."¹⁰⁵ Whilst elucidating the reasons for that opposition, Strauss turned to positivistic social science, explaining that it can be faulted on four grounds.¹⁰⁶ First, one cannot "study social phenomena, i.e., all important social phenomena, without making value judgments. . . ." Second, the fact-value distinction is based on an unproven assumption. "The rejection of value judgments is based on the assumption that the conflicts between different values or value-systems are essentially insoluble for human reason. But this assumption . . . has never been proven." Third, to claim "that scientific knowledge" represents *the* peak of human knowledge is to claim, and assume, that "pre-scientific knowledge" is inherently deficient. By focussing exclusively upon gathering empirical data about social phenomena, positivism blinded itself to "the whole political or politico-social order" in which the phenomena occur. Fourth, "Positivism necessarily transforms itself into historicism. . . ." Positivistic social science, because it claims that each era is characterized by

¹⁰⁴ WIPP?, p.10.

¹⁰⁵ WIPP?, pp.12, 13, 17.

¹⁰⁶ "It is not necessary to enter here and now into a discussion of the theoretical weaknesses of social science positivism," Strauss maintains. Instead, "It suffices to allude to the considerations which speak decisively against this school." WIPP?, pp.20-21. See also *CM*, pp.9-10; *COT*, pp.53-54; *OPS*, pp.130-36; *PPH*, pp.66-67; *Rel*, pp.22-26. Cf. Aron, *History, Truth, Liberty*, pp.354-60; Behnegar, "Strauss's Confrontation with Weber," passim; Kennington, "Strauss's *Natural Right and History*," pp.237-38; Clark A. Merrill, "Spelunking in the Unnatural Cave: Leo Strauss's Ambiguous Tribute to Max Weber," *Interpretation* 27, no.1 (Fall 1999): 3-26; Eugene F. Miller, "Leo Strauss: Philosophy and American Social Science," in Deutsch and Murley, eds., pp.91-100, 102; Strauss, *Rel*, pp.13-26; Turner and Factor, *Max Weber*, pp.208-13, 220-24.

distinctive cultural, historical and social phenomena, must view itself as a phenomenon. However, such rumination on the bases, background and genesis of “social science . . . leads to the relativization of social science and ultimately of modern science generally.”¹⁰⁷

Strauss proceeded to list several characteristics that distinguish radical historicism from positivism. First, radical historicism rejects the fact-value distinction on the basis that “every understanding, however theoretical, implies specific evaluations.” Second, it rejects faith in “the authoritative character of modern science,” and claims that science is but one “form,” not the highest form, of human knowledge. Third, it does not consider “the historical process as fundamentally progressive, or, more generally stated, as reasonable.” Fourth, “It denies the relevance of the evolutionist thesis by contending that the evolution of man out of non-man cannot make intelligible man’s humanity.”¹⁰⁸

The adequate approach to understanding and studying “political things” that contemporary political science must acquire cannot be acquired through surveying the “history of political philosophy,” Strauss stated in “The Crisis of Our Time.” An example of the surveying-like approach is “that famous work by Sabine . . .”; it suffices to say that Strauss has in mind Sabine’s textbook, *A History of Political Theory*. Strauss goes on explain: “It is, strictly speaking, absurd to replace political philosophy by the history of political philosophy. . . .” Sabine, Strauss argues, “replace[s] a doctrine which claims to be true by a survey of errors”¹⁰⁹ Political philosophy has been rejected and replaced, Strauss notes, by “logic,” which claims

¹⁰⁷ WIPP?, pp.21-26.

¹⁰⁸ WIPP?, p.26. With regard to the first point, cf. CPP, p.91; on the third point, cf. Iggers, *German Conception of History*, p.36.

¹⁰⁹ COT, p.51. See also OPS, pp.131f.

to show that the works of thinkers in the past abound in blunders because they conflated factual judgments with value judgments. “[T]he new dispensation, according to the demands of logical positivism or behaviorial science is [also] concerned with discovering laws of political behavior and, ultimately, universal laws of political behavior.”¹¹⁰ Behaviorialism adopted key concepts of logical positivism, Ball explains: the fact-value distinction; the depreciation of statements pertaining to ethics (for behavioralism, political science should be empirical, not normative); and the differentiation between science and non-science (for behavioralism, political science should be explanatory, not pre-occupied with subject-matter).¹¹¹

According to Strauss, so as to not confuse the political characteristics of past eras with its own era or the characteristics of any past era with those of another past era, “The new political science thus becomes dependent upon a kind of study which belongs to the comprehensive enterprise called universal history. . . .”¹¹² Strauss means by “universal history” the modern enterprise—dating back to ancient Greek, Jewish and Roman historiography—which seeks to describe the history of the world, especially the rise of civilization and the nation state, from beginning to end.¹¹³ According to Löwith, “The notion of a “world history” is actually a misnomer, for world history is universal in a very limited sense only. . . . We do not ask for the meaning of heaven and earth, the stars, the ocean and the mountains . . .

¹¹⁰ COT, p.52.

¹¹¹ Terence Ball, *Reappraising Political Theory: Revisionist Studies in the History of Political Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp.45-46.

¹¹² COT, p.52.

¹¹³ See Raymond Aron, *The Dawn of Universal History*, trans. Dorothy Pickles (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1961), pp.9-11, 57ff; Meinecke, *Historism*, pp.62-42, 322-25; Arnaldo Momigliano, *On Pagans, Jews, and Christians* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1987), pp.31-52; Leopold von Ranke, *Universal History: The Oldest Historical Group of Nations*, ed. G.W. Prothero, rev. F.W. Cornish (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, and Co., 1884), pp.ix-xiv (pref., trans. Prothero).

Our quest seems to be restricted to ourselves and to history as our history.”¹¹⁴ In brief, whereas ancient historiography sought to elucidate in a teleological fashion the course of history, modern historians replace the metaphysical search for transcendent order in history with an empirical effort to discover laws of, and stages in, history.¹¹⁵

Strauss goes on to explain that to differentiate its own era from past eras and to understand the political teaching of its own era as a transformation of an original teaching, a teaching it deems inferior to its own teaching, the new political science must be able “to grasp the original teaching as such. . . .” The new political science must study classical political philosophy. In reflecting on its own background and premises, it “must at least consider the possibility that the older political science was sounder and truer than what is regarded as political science today.”¹¹⁶

Clearly Strauss regards as paramount the return to the classics. The return is “tentative,” though. Towards the end of “The Crisis of Our Time” he indicates that the return to the classics, by which he means the careful study of Plato, Aristotle, Socrates, and Xenophon, “is both necessary and tentative or experimental. . . .” Apparently, Strauss regarded the return as diagnostic in its application and outcome. He closed his lecture by stating:

¹¹⁴ Karl Löwith, “Nature, History, and Existentialism,” *Social Research* 19, no.1 (1952), p.84. Cf. Eric Voegelin, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, Vol.23: *History of Political Ideas*, Vol.V: *Religion and the Rise of Modernity*, ed. James L. Wisner (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1998), pp.223-26; Vol.24: *History of Political Ideas*, Vol.VI: *Revolution and the New Science*, ed. Barry Cooper (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1998), pp.39-40.

¹¹⁵ See Jeffrey Andrew Barash, “The Sense of History: On the Political Implications of Karl Löwith’s Concept of Secularization,” *History and Theory* 37, no.1 (February 1998), pp.71-72, et passim; Paul Corcoran, *Awaiting Apocalypse* (London: Macmillan, 2000), pp.93-107; Arnaldo Momigliano, *Studies in Historiography* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966), p.77; *On Pagans, Jews, and Christians*, pp.31-35. See also Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (London: Penguin, 1992), pp.55-70; George H. Nadel, “Philosophy of History Before Historicism,” in George H. Nadel, ed., *Studies in the Philosophy of History: Selected Essays from History and Theory* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965): 49-73; Strauss, *NRH*, pp.13-17; *TPPH*, pp.77-107 (esp. pp.93, 95, 98-99); *TWM*, pp.90-91, 95-96.

¹¹⁶ *COT*, pp.53, 54. See also *CM*, p.10; *PPH*, p.75.

An adequate understanding of the principles, as elaborated by the classics, may be the indispensable starting point for an adequate analysis, to be achieved by us, of present-day society in its peculiar character, and for the wise application, to be achieved by us, of these principles to our tasks.¹¹⁷

The return to the classics is tentative but not in any sense tentative is the basis or reason for the return. In a letter to Voegelin dated 9 May 1943 Strauss wrote: “An authentic beginning in the social sciences is impossible before the fundamental concepts are clarified, which means an awareness that the fundamental concepts—the very term “political,” for example—are of Greek, and in particular of Greek philosophic origin; all that must be done before the Platonic-Aristotelian philosophy is really understood again.”¹¹⁸ Similarly, Strauss explained in his 1946 essay, “On a New Interpretation of Plato’s Political Philosophy”: “Only if the study of classical philosophy were accompanied by constant and relentless reflection on the modern principles, and hence by liberation from the naive acceptance of those principles, could there be any prospect of an adequate understanding of classical philosophy by modern men. . . .” Elsewhere in his essay Strauss warned: “Modern writers who do not sufficiently reflect on the essential traits of modern thought are bound to modernize, and thus to distort, the thought of the classics.”¹¹⁹

Strauss’s judgment that the return to the classics is tentative is echoed by his apparently equivocal affirmation of classical cosmology. Such cosmology carries with it outmoded ideas about nature and the world; in *Philosophy and Law* Strauss stated: “of Aristotle it is the case that everything he says about the world below the

¹¹⁷ COT, p.54. See also *CM*, p.11; OCPH, pp.585-86.

¹¹⁸ Letter 9 in *SVC*, p.17.

¹¹⁹ *ONI*, pp.328, 355.

lunar sphere is undoubtedly true, while his views about the upper world, especially about the separate intelligences, are in part only probable, and in part actually false.”¹²⁰ However, as Green observes on Strauss’s behalf, “we do not have to be “committed to a specific cosmology” in order to render an account of man in Socratic terms Socrates “viewed man in the light of the mysterious character of the whole””¹²¹ Indeed, refuting the charge that the return to the classics is impossible because of its “antiquated cosmology,” Strauss explained in “What Is Political Philosophy?”:

Whatever the significance of modern natural science may be, it cannot affect our understanding of what is human in man. To understand man in the light of the whole means for modern natural science to understand man in the light of the sub-human. But in that light man as man is wholly unintelligible. Classical political philosophy viewed man in a different light. It was originated by Socrates. And Socrates was so far from being committed to a specific cosmology that his knowledge was knowledge of ignorance. Knowledge of ignorance is not ignorance. It is knowledge of the elusive character of the truth, of the whole. Socrates, then, viewed man in the light of the mysterious character of the whole. . . . This understanding of the situation of man which includes, then, the quest for cosmology rather than a solution to the cosmological problem, was the foundation of classical political philosophy.¹²²

Conclusion

Strauss’s idea of history is an idea of what history is, how one studies it and why it is critically important to do so. When addressing historicism, especially in its radical or Heideggerian variant, he raises an *ontological* notion of what it means to be.

¹²⁰ *PL*, p.108. See also *NRH*, pp.176-77; *PL*, pp.32-34; *PSCR*, pp.144-45; *WIPP?*, pp.36, 38-39. Cf. *CM*, p.42.

¹²¹ *Jew and Philosopher*, p.36. See also Smith, “*Destruktion or Recovery?*”, pp.359-61.

¹²² *WIPP?*, pp.38-39. With regard to the above themes of cosmology and science, cf. Larry Arnhart, “Defending Darwinian Natural Right,” *Interpretation* 27, no.3 (Spring 2000), pp.263-64, 268ff, et passim.

History cannot and ought not to be defined in purely secular and temporal terms; the meaning of history, Strauss would seem to be saying, is not revealed by the historicist exploration of Being.¹²³ In the course of addressing historicism and the “crisis of our time,” Strauss also raises a *hermeneutical* issue, for he advises how one must approach texts written by past thinkers. Yet when he writes about *how* to study the history of political philosophy, his goal is to direct his perplexed contemporaries towards the permanent problems. Thus Strauss seeks to advance philosophic and theological notions of eternal, ahistorical norms regarding the good life. To explicate the philosophical and theological thoughts within Strauss’s idea of history, I wish now to turn to his conception of the revelation-reason question.

¹²³ Cf. *CCWM*, p.7.

Chapter Two

Revelation and Reason in Leo Strauss

Introduction

Revelation and reason are central in Strauss's project. Yet nearly three decades after his death, questions remain to be answered about the essential meaning of this core dimension of his project.¹ Scholarship of recent years has tended to approach his project by situating its position in relation to revelation and reason—to one or the other or both.² Amongst the Straussians, most notably his former students, the view is far from unanimous.³ Bloom and Pangle both claim that Strauss's allegiance was with 'reason,' that is, with Athens and classical political philosophy. But to Jaffa, that Strauss was a philosopher did not preclude him from remaining open to 'revelation,' that is, open to the likelihood that the Bible does indeed convey truth regarding the good life.⁴

Heated debates notwithstanding, one could argue that to see Strauss's project as he would have seen it himself means to view it as the articulation of a response to

¹ Cf. Gregory Bruce Smith, "Who Was Leo Strauss?", *American Scholar* 66, no.1 (Winter 1997), p.95.

² See Emberley and Cooper, eds. and trans., *Faith and Political Philosophy*, pt.III; Kenneth Hart Green, "In the Grip of the Theological-Political Predicament": The Turn to Maimonides in the Jewish Thought of Leo Strauss," in Udoff, ed., 41-74; Green, *Jew and Philosopher*; "Editor's Introduction: Leo Strauss as a Modern Jewish Thinker," in *JP*, 1-84; Jackson, "Strauss's Teaching"; Orr, *Jerusalem and Athens*; Deutsch and Nicgorski, eds., *Leo Strauss*; Deutsch and Murley, eds., *Leo Strauss, the Straussians, and the American Regime*; Emil L. Fackenheim, "Leo Strauss and Modern Judaism," in Emil L. Fackenheim, *Jewish Philosophers and Jewish Philosophy*, ed. Michael L. Morgan (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996); Novak, ed., *Strauss and Judaism*.

³ See, e.g., Harry V. Jaffa, "Crisis of the Strauss Divided: The Legacy Reconsidered," *Social Research* 54, no.3 (Autumn 1987): 579-603.

⁴ See, e.g., Harry V. Jaffa, "Leo Strauss, the Bible, and Political Philosophy," in Deutsch and Nicgorski, eds., 195-210. With regard to Jaffa's opposition to Bloom and Pangle, see Orr, *Jerusalem and Athens*, pp.9-11, 160n24; see also Drury, *Political Ideas of Leo Strauss*, pp.186-90.

what he described as the “theological-political problem.” In the preface to the English translation of his book on Spinoza Strauss explained: “The study on Spinoza’s *Theologico-Political Treatise* to which this was a preface was written during the years 1925-28 in Germany. The author was a young Jew born and raised in Germany who found himself in the grips of the theologico-political predicament.”⁵ In his “Preface to *Hobbes Politische Wissenschaft*,” Strauss wrote: “My study of Hobbes began in the context of an investigation of the origins of biblical criticism in the seventeenth century, namely, of Spinoza’s *Theologico-Political Treatise*. . . . Since then the theological-political problem has remained *the* theme of my investigations.”⁶ Smith explains, “At its simplest level, the theologico-political problem concerns “the all-important question:” *quid sit deus* . . .” According to Jaffa, “What Strauss meant by devoting his “investigations” to the “theological-political problem” was restoring the authority of the moral order common to philosophy and the Bible, and restoring with it the conviction that human life could be well lived only by devotion to the “high.””⁷

Strauss’s response to that “problem” was not given voice through the enunciation of a political program. Strauss was not known, Arkes notes, either to have belonged or given his imprimatur to any political party.⁸ According to Behnegar, “Strauss’s political activity, to the extent one can speak of such a thing,

⁵ PSCR, p.137.

⁶ PHPW, p.453 (original emphasis).

⁷ Smith, “*Destruktion or Recovery?*”, p.369; Jaffa, “Leo Strauss, The Bible and Political Philosophy,” p.208. See also Green, *Jew and Philosopher*, pp.xii-xiv, 111-12; Henry Higuera, “Politics, Poetry, and Prophecy in *Don Quixote*,” in Palmer and Pangle, eds., p.178; Michael L. Morgan, “The Curse of Historicity: The Role of History in Leo Strauss’s Jewish Thought,” *Journal of Religion* 61, no.4 (October 1981), pp.348ff, 358-63; Pangle, “Introduction,” pp.18-23; Smith, “Leo Strauss,” pp.78-83; “*Destruktion or Recovery?*”, pp.369-72; Walter Soffer, “Modern Rationalism, Miracles, and Revelation: Strauss’s Critique of Spinoza,” in Deutsch and Nigorski, eds., pp.143, 170-73.

⁸ “Strauss on Our Minds,” p.70.

was primarily realized in education: his most passionate polemics were directed against trends or tendencies in the academy.”⁹ “In the last analysis,” as Smith states, “Strauss was a partisan of philosophy rather than of any specific regime.”¹⁰ McWilliams notes, “If Strauss had a political project in the ordinary sense of the term, it lay in the effort to restore the speech and spirit of liberal democracy. But Strauss recognized that for education to reanimate the democratic ideal, it would be necessary to address the defects of modernity, and not always *sotto voce*. . . .”¹¹

Central in Strauss’s œuvre is his lifelong interest in delineating the decisive areas of agreement and disagreement between the Bible and Greek philosophy regarding the permanent problems of what is good, just, virtuous, best, and right. Such focus can be seen especially in works in which he specifically addressed the revelation-reason question: “The Mutual Influence of Theology and Philosophy,” “Progress or Return?” and “Jerusalem and Athens,” for example. According to Orr, “These texts, one could argue, are Strauss’s own articulation of the struggle between reason and revelation. For a complete understanding of Strauss’s articulation of this fundamental human problem, it would behoove us to study these texts carefully.”¹²

⁹ “Liberal Politics of Leo Strauss,” pp.251-52.

¹⁰ “Athens and Washington,” p.123.

¹¹ Wilson Carey McWilliams, “Leo Strauss and the Dignity of American Political Thought,” *Review of Politics* 60, no.2 (Spring 1998), pp.244-45. With regard to the above themes about Strauss on politics, see also Bloom, “Leo Strauss,” pp.373, 377, 389; Jackson, “Strauss’s Teaching,” pp.18-19; Alfons Söllner, “Leo Strauss: German Origin and American Impact,” in Kielmansegg, Mewes and Glaser-Schmidt, eds., pp.123-24; Stanley Rosen, *Hermeneutics as Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp.118, 123; “Strauss and Philosophy,” p.550. But see also Strauss, RSW, p.155 (col.1): “Scholarship requires indeed detachment, but detachment is not easily won and easily preserved—scholarship requires attachment to detachment. Yet the attachment to detachment necessarily leads to attachment to the indispensable conditions of detachment and therewith also to firm rejections. In other words, the commitment to scholarship is bound to have political consequences.” Perhaps the “indispensable conditions” Strauss has in mind consist of the freedoms of speech, thought and expression. With regard to Strauss’s attachment to such freedoms, as seen in his defence of liberal institutions, see above, Intro. (in the section titled “Strauss and his critics”), and cf. *NRH*, pp.1-2.

¹² Review of *Jew and Philosopher*, p.315.

This chapter focuses largely on the above “texts,” and refers to his other works to provide points of amplification, comparison and contrast. Taking into account Strauss’s above two prefatory declarations about the basic character of his œuvre, it would not be an exaggeration to suggest that each of his works on ancient, medieval and modern philosophers and philosophy ultimately bears on the revelation-reason question. This chapter endeavors to explicate Strauss’s openness to revelation, for “the key question for the serious student of Strauss to answer is whether or not he held the door open to revelation.”¹³ This chapter argues that his openness is evinced by his heartfelt consideration of, and thoroughgoing but receptive reflection upon, biblical precepts regarding the divine and the nature of good life.

Defining revelation and reason

Faith and belief vs. biblical criticism

Knowledge of “Jerusalem and Athens,” the two fundamental alternatives, is crucial if people in the west are to find their way out of the morass of modernity, Strauss emphasizes in the opening paragraph of Part I of his lecture, “Jerusalem and Athens: Some Preliminary Reflections.”¹⁴ To underscore the contrast, Part I is titled “The Beginning of the Bible and Its Greek Counterparts.” Both the Bible and Greek philosophy claim to represent and embody “true wisdom.”¹⁵ One must, therefore, be open to both Jerusalem and Athens. To Strauss, though, as Fuller notes, “There

¹³ Susan Orr, “Strauss, Reason, and Revelation: Unraveling the Essential Question,” in Novak, ed., p.28.

¹⁴ Quoted above, first epigram to this thesis.

¹⁵ JA, pp.147, 149.

is no “opting” for Jerusalem; one is either with Jerusalem or against Jerusalem.”¹⁶ People who pursue knowledge because they “wish to become wise” side with Athens from the very outset of the quest for “wisdom,” Strauss says, for “[b]y saying that we wish to hear first and then to act to decide, we have already decided in favor of Athens against Jerusalem.”¹⁷

The choice for Athens is characteristic of people who, in seeking after wisdom, feel compelled to “accept the principle” of biblical criticism—“all of us who cannot be orthodox,” who feel unable to continue to be practicing, committed believers.¹⁸ Strauss observes that in the orthodox view, the biblical account of the deeds of God and the prophets is “true and authentic,” whereas to biblical criticism the Bible is an inauthentic and derivative collection “not of “histories” but of “memories of ancient histories,” to borrow a Machiavellian expression.”¹⁹ Strauss used that expression because it encapsulates the spirit of biblical criticism; he has in mind *Discourses* II 5, though he referred to I 16. As Orr points out, “Instead of being about the Bible, this chapter [I 16] is about what happens to a people who, accustomed to living under a prince, find themselves accidentally free.”²⁰

¹⁶ “Philosophy, Faith,” p.282.

¹⁷ JA, p.150.

¹⁸ Cf. the below discussion of Strauss’s Jewishness.

¹⁹ JA, pp.149, 150 (for the below reference itself to *Discourses* I 16, see JA, p.150n1). Cf. OIG, pp.360-61. Cf. also Larry Peterman, “Approaching Leo Strauss: Some Comments on “Thoughts on Machiavelli,”” *Political Science Reviewer* 16 (Fall 1986), pp.329, 346-47.

²⁰ Orr, *Jerusalem and Athens*, p.50. “To find the passage that Strauss actually quotes,” Orr explains, “it is necessary to turn to Book III.5 [*sic*], entitled “Changes of Religion and of Language, together with such Misfortunes as Floods and Pestilences, obliterate the Records of the Past.”” (Ibid., p.51. In an endnote, p.164n46, Orr refers to pp.288-90 of the 1970 Penguin Edition of Leslie J. Walker’s translation of the *Discourses*.) But Orr has given the title of II 5; III 5 is titled (I quote from the 1970 Penguin Edition, p.395): “What it is that causes a Hereditary Prince to lose his Kingdom.” Orr observes: “in III.5 [*sic*], Machiavelli lays out the arguments that Strauss presents in encapsulated form here. In this chapter, Machiavelli attacks the doctrine of creation.” Shortly afterwards, Orr gives a quotation which begins with the words “rude mountain-dwellers” (*Jerusalem and Athens*, p.92; in an endnote, p.164n47, Orr refers to p.290 of Walker’s translation.) By quoting from and speaking in her text proper of III 5, but referring to the page numbers of II 5 (*), Orr is echoing Strauss when he quoted from II 5 but referred to I 16. * The page numbers Orr gives for the

In *Discourses* II 5 Machiavelli speaks of the suppression by the “Christian sect” of “that ancient theology” of the “Gentile sect,” a theology that maintained “the world is eternal.” To establish its supremacy, the “Christian sect”—by which Machiavelli means Christianity in general and the “modes taken by Saint Gregory”—sought by “persecution” to suppress “all the ancient memories.” However, because Christianity failed to replace the Latin language with “a new language,” it was unable to eradicate completely those “memories” and the Gentile theology.²¹

It is therefore to be believed that what the Christian sect wished to do against the Gentile sect, the Gentile would have done against that which was prior to it. And because these sects vary two or three times in five or in six thousand years, the memory of the things done prior to that time is lost; and if, however, some sign of them remains, it is considered as something *fabulous* and is not lent faith to—as happened to the history of Diodorus Siculus, which, though it renders an account of forty or fifty thousand years, is nonetheless reputed, as I believe it to be, a *mendacious thing*.²²

In short, one learns from Machiavelli’s critical reflections in *Discourses* II 5 about Christianity and the biblical account of creation that he regards the Bible as a collection of myths, of fabulous and mendacious memories.²³

Spinoza carried Machiavelli’s reflections further. Strauss states: “Biblical criticism reached its first climax in Spinoza’s *Theological-Political Treatise*, which is frankly anti-theological; Spinoza read the Bible as he read the Talmud and the

title of, and her quotation from, III 5 indicate she has in mind II 5, not III 5; in the 1970 Penguin edition of Walker’s translation, II 5 can be found on pp.288-90.

²¹ Niccolò Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield and Nathan Tarcov (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p.139 (hereafter cited as *Discourses*). See also Edmund E. Jacobitti, “The Classical Heritage in Machiavelli’s Histories: Symbol and Poetry as Historical Literature,” in Vickie B. Sullivan, ed., *The Comedy and Tragedy of Machiavelli: Essays on the Literary Works* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), p.178.

²² *Discourses*, p.139 (emphases mine).

²³ See also my discussion of *Discourses* II 5 in ch.3, in the section titled “Machiavelli’s reflections on Biblical/Christian theology.”

Koran.” He read the Bible as a “poorly” formulated collection “of self-contradictory assertions, of remnants of ancient prejudices or superstitions . . .”²⁴ In the words of Spinoza,

Scripture . . . does not aim at explaining things by their natural causes, but only at narrating what appeals to the popular imagination, and doing so in the manner best calculated to excite wonder Scripture does not explain things by their secondary causes, but only narrates them in the order and the style which has most power to move men, and especially uneducated men, to devotion . . . its object is not to convince the reason, but to attract and lay hold of the imagination.²⁵

Strauss notes that Spinoza was enabled to make that judgment because he “presuppos[ed] the impossibility of miracles” and consigned miracles to the realm of the “sub-rational.”²⁶

Strauss goes on to explain (but without naming names²⁷) that biblical criticism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries goes further than Spinoza’s critique of the Bible: “whereas for Spinoza imagination is simply sub-rational, it was assigned a much higher rank in later times; it was understood as the vehicle of religious or spiritual experience, which necessarily expresses itself in symbols and the like.” Ascribing the status of myth to the biblical accounts of miracles, signs and wonders, later biblical criticism insists “that the Bible contains both “myth and history.”” However, such a distinction between myth and history cannot be found in the Bible.

²⁴ JA, p.150. Cf. OFKW, pp.225-27; SCR, pp.226-28; TM, p.51.

²⁵ *A Theologico-Political Treatise*, in R.H.M. Elwes, trans., *The Chief Works of Benedict de Spinoza*, Vol.1: *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, *Tractatus Politicus* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1883), pp.90, 91.

²⁶ JA, p.150.

²⁷ As Green points out, “This peculiarly modern critique of scriptural religion actually preceded Spinoza . . . and Strauss [in SCR] traces it to such figures as Uriel da Costa, Isaac de la Peyrère, and Thomas Hobbes.” *Jew and Philosopher*, p.71. Howard explains that W.M.L de Wette and D.F. Strauss were prominent among 19th-century biblical critics, and that their differentiation between myth (understood non-pejoratively) and history built on the notion of their 18th-century predecessors (e.g., G.L. Bauer, J.G. Eichhorn, J.A. Ernesti, J.P. Gabler, J.D. Michaelis, H.S. Reimarus, and J.S. Semler), that the Bible contains but is not itself the word of God. *Religion and the Rise of Historicism*, pp.34-43, 78-104.

Strauss observes: "From the point of view of the Bible the "myths" are as true as the "histories": what Israel "in fact" did or suffered cannot be understood except [*sic*] in the light of the "facts" of Creation and Election. . . ."28 Thus biblical criticism fails to understand the Bible as did its immediate and original addressees, namely, as authentic, credible and true.²⁹

But having addressed biblical criticism, Strauss reflects: "It is true that we cannot ascribe to the Bible the theological concept of miracles, for that concept presupposes that of nature and the concept of nature is foreign to the Bible. . . ."30 Strauss likewise explains in "Progress or Return?": "What distinguishes the Bible from Greek philosophy is the fact that Greek philosophy is based on this premise: that there is such a thing as nature, or natures—a notion which has no equivalent in biblical thought."³¹ A similar statement can be found in both the second paragraph of Chapter III of *Natural Right and History* and the second paragraph of his essay, "On Natural Law."³² Strauss's argument in these various passages can be summarized thus: although the Bible does not contain the concept of *nature* as articulated by Greek philosophy,³³ namely, nature as eternal and prior to God, the

²⁸ JA, p.150.

²⁹ See JA, pp.150-51. See also HSMP, pp.323-24; Orr, *Jerusalem and Athens*, p.53.

³⁰ JA, p.151. Cf. Thomas L. Pangle, "The Hebrew Bible's Challenge to Political Philosophy: Some Introductory Reflections," in Palmer and Pangle, eds., pp.67, 70; James V. Schall, *Reason, Revelation, and the Foundations of Political Philosophy* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987), p.213. Cf. also 4 Mac.5:6-9, where Antiochus says to Eleazar (a Hebrew trained in philosophy and law) and others before forcing them to eat the flesh of pigs: ". . . I respect your age and your grey hairs, although to have worn them so long a time, and still to cling to the Jewish religion, makes me think you no philosopher. For most excellent is the meat of this animal which Nature has graciously bestowed upon us . . . Truly it is folly not to enjoy innocent pleasures, and it is wrong to reject Nature's favours. . . ." Eleazar replies: "'We, O Antiochus, having accepted the Divine Law as the Law of our country, do not believe any stronger necessity is laid upon us than that of our obedience to the Law.'" (4 Mac.5:16) *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament in English*, Vol.2: *Pseudepigrapha*, ed. R.H. Charles et al. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913), p.672.

³¹ POR?, p.282.

³² *NRH*, pp.81-82; *ONL*, pp.137-38.

³³ See also *PAW*, pp.96-97n4. Cf. Pangle, "Hebrew Bible's Challenge," pp.72-75, 75ff.

prime mover, the Bible does articulate a concept of divinely revealed prescriptions—commandments, customs, laws and ways—to govern society, prescriptions that are inextricably linked with a creation account of beginnings of the heavens, the earth and the human race.³⁴

Theology in the Bible and Greek philosophy

In Part I of “Jerusalem and Athens” Strauss goes on to explain: “We shall not take issue with the findings and even the premises of biblical criticism. Let us grant that the Bible and in particular the Torah consists to a considerable extent of “memories of ancient histories,” even memories of memories . . .”³⁵ However, by so describing the Bible and the Torah (the body of Jewish laws, teachings and ordinances contained in the Books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy), Strauss did not mean nor did he intend to let go unchallenged the trenchant biblical criticism of Machiavelli, Spinoza and later times. Indeed, toward the end of Part I Strauss provides a reply to biblical criticism by drawing parallels between the notions of the divine enunciated by Aristotle, Plato and the Bible. He explains: “The Aristotelian god like the biblical God is a thinking being, but in opposition to the biblical god he is only a thinking being . . .” The biblical God is both a thinking being and a “creator” being; in contrast, the Aristotelian god does not preside over the world “by giving orders and laws. Hence he is not a creator god: the world is as eternal as god. . . .”³⁶

³⁴ See JA, pp.152-63; POR?, pp.283-94; NRH, pp.82-83; OIG, esp. pp.367-68.

³⁵ JA, p.151. Following on from this, Strauss discusses the biblical account of the beginning of the world. See also JA, pp.163-65, where Strauss “cast[s] a glance” at the poet Hesiod’s *Theogony* and *Works and Days*, and the works of the philosophers Parmenides and Empedocles. With regard to Strauss’s tentativeness in taking issue with biblical criticism, cf. HSS, pp.184-85.

³⁶ JA, p.165. In JA, p.165n12, Strauss refers to *Metaphysics* 1072b14-30, 1074b15-1075a11; *De Anima* 429a19-20; *Nicomachean Ethics* 1141a33-b2, 1178b1-12; *Eudemian Ethics* 1249a14-15.

Implicit to Aristotle's conception of goodness is an account regarding the eternal order of nature. Nature is presided over, though not created, by God. God is the first principle upon which the heavens (the sun, the moon and the planets) and nature (humans, animals and plants) depend; God, the prime mover, sets the heavenly bodies in spatial and circular motion. The good man is precisely that, good, because the object of his thought is not himself; for the good man, unlike the man who is not good, the eternal order of nature is his reference point for his reflection upon virtue and goodness. The good man is a man whose thinking is at one with the object of his thought, for the proper end of thought is the good, and what is good is that which is good by the eternal order of nature. "[B]oth thinking and the act of thought will belong even to one who has the worst of thoughts. Therefore if this ought to be avoided . . . the act of thinking cannot be the best of things. Therefore it must be itself that thought thinks (since this is the most excellent of things), and its thinking is a thinking on thinking."³⁷

Strauss writes in *The City and Man* that Aristotle, like the Bible, "is concerned above all with the truth of religion."³⁸ In contrast, Strauss says in "Jerusalem and Athens" that Plato's notion about the creation "by an invisible God" of the "heaven and earth" is closer to the Bible than is Aristotle's notion of "pure reason." Shortly afterwards Strauss states: "What Plato himself calls *the theology* consists of two teachings: 1) God is good and hence is no way the cause of evil; 2)

³⁷ *Metaphysics* 1074b31-34, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, revised Oxford translation, Vol.2, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984), p.1698. With regard to God as the prime mover, see *Metaphysics* 1071b3-1075a11, and cf. *Movement of Animals*, 699a12-700a25; Moses Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. Shlomo Pines (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), I 69, p.167, II, pp.239-41. With regard to Aristotle and creation/eternity, cf. Seeskin, "Maimonides' Conception of Philosophy," pp.96-99.

³⁸ *CM*, p.34. Cf. *ONI*, p.338; *WIPP*, p.285.

God is simple and hence unchangeable.”³⁹ But, Orr notes, Strauss “gives us no references for these assertions.”⁴⁰ It would be fair to say, I would suggest, that Strauss has in mind the *Republic*, 379a-380c and 380d-383d, where, respectively, Plato imparts his two theological “teachings.”

Plato’s teachings aim to inculcate piety and correct knowledge about God. Whilst discussing the *Republic* in *The City and Man*, Strauss observed: “Piety requires that only the right kind of stories about the gods be told, not the kind told by the greatest poets. To indicate the right kind Socrates lays down two laws regarding what Adeimantus calls “theology.””⁴¹ As Benardete points out,

Theology is a tainted word. It is first used, as far as we know, by Plato, and he puts it in the mouth of Adimantus, whom Socrates is questioning about what myths are to be told the future guardians when young (*Republic*). Theology, then, is theomythy. It precedes any true account of the gods. Socrates’ theology is set in opposition to the stories of Homer and Hesiod.⁴²

Socrates opens his first theological teaching by claiming: “God is always to be represented as he truly is” (379a), namely, as “the cause of a few things only, and not of most things that occur to men. For few are the goods of human life, and many are the evils, and the good is to be attributed to God alone; of the evils the causes are to be sought elsewhere, and not in him.” (379c) Socrates opens his second theological teaching by asking: “what do you think of a second principle? Do you think that God is a magician, and of a nature to appear insidiously now in one shape . . . or is he one and the same immutably fixed in his own proper image?” (380d)⁴³

³⁹ JA, pp.165, 165-66 (emphases mine). Cf. Aristotle, *On the Universe*, 391a1-b9; *Metaphysics* 1026a6-32.

⁴⁰ *Jerusalem and Athens*, p.113.

⁴¹ *CM*, p.98. See also *LSPS*, pp.6-8; *OPS*, p.196.

⁴² Benardete, *Argument of the Action*, pp.3-4.

⁴³ *The Dialogues of Plato*, 4th ed., rev., Vol.2, trans. B. Jowett (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953), pp.223, 224, 225.

Having spoken in “Jerusalem and Athens” of Plato’s theology, Strauss indicates a preference for Plato’s notion of God over Aristotle’s notion: “On the divine concern with men’s justice and injustice, the Platonic teaching is in fundamental agreement with the biblical teaching; it even culminates in a statement that agrees almost literally with biblical statements.”⁴⁴ Strauss’s observation is compelling. Furthermore, his accompanying footnote is itself illuminating: he instructs the reader to compare Plato’s *Laws*, 905a4-b2, with Amos 9:1-3 and Psalm 139:7-10.⁴⁵ Plato and the Bible both proclaim that God watches over, and cares for, humankind, and that His justice is inescapable; God rewards and supports those who lead just lives, and punishes those who are evil and lead unjust lives.⁴⁶ Through the Athenian stranger, Plato explains:

This is the justice of heaven, which neither you nor any other unfortunates will ever glory in escaping, and which the ordaining powers have specially ordained; take good heed thereof, for it will be sure to take heed of you. If you say:—I am small and will creep into the depths of the earth, or I am high and will fly up to heaven, you are not so small or so high but that you shall pay the fitting penalty, either here or in the world below or in some still more savage place whither you shall be conveyed. This is also the explanation of the fate of those whom you saw, who had done unholy and evil deeds . . .
[*Laws* 905a-b]

Psalm 139:7-10 proclaims:

Where can I go from your Spirit?
Where can I flee from your presence?
If I go up to the heavens, you are there;
if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.
If I rise on the wings of the dawn,
if I settle on the far side of the sea,
even there your hand will guide me,

⁴⁴ JA, p.166. With regard to Strauss’s apparent preference for Plato’s notion of God over Aristotle’s notion, cf. Green, *Jew and Philosopher*, pp.47-48, 100-102; Orr, *Jerusalem and Athens*, p.113. Cf. also LHK, p.24; *NRH*, pp.144-45, 146-64; *POR?*, pp.274-80; *TPPH*, pp.139-53; Strauss to Kojève, 28 May and 11 Sept. 1957, in *OT* (rev.ex.), respectively, pp.276-80, 291-94.

⁴⁵ See JA, p.166n13.

⁴⁶ Cf. *PL*, pp.75-79; Orr, *Jerusalem and Athens*, p.113.

your right hand will hold me fast.

In Amos 9:1, the shepherd Amos declares:

I saw the Lord standing by the altar, and he said:
 "Strike the tops of the pillars
 so that the thresholds shake.
 Bring them down on the heads of all the people;
 those who are left I will kill with the sword.
 Not one will get away,
 none will escape."

Towards the end of Book Nine of the *Laws* the Athenian stranger declares: "Now death is not the worst that can happen to men; far worse are the punishments which are said to pursue them in the world below." (881a)⁴⁷

By drawing a parallel between the Bible and Plato regarding their teachings on divine concern with justice, and by giving the above instruction to the reader (I have cited *Laws* 881a as it bears on the parallel), Strauss's point seems, then, to be this: though the Bible does not have a concept of nature, it does articulate a theology of what is first, sacred and ultimate, a theology about what properly constitutes the natural horizon of law, goodness and moral virtue.⁴⁸ By attributing such a theology to the Bible, Strauss has, in effect, modified his earlier statement that the Bible does not have a concept of nature.

Implicit to Strauss's parallel is a twofold pattern. On the one hand, he is acknowledging a Christian understanding of revelation, insofar as he imputes to the Bible a *theology of faith* in divine providence and suggests by that imputation that the core meaning of revelation be defined in a basically theological manner. On the

⁴⁷ *Laws* 881a, 905a-b, in *The Dialogues of Plato*, 4th ed., rev., Vol.4, trans. B. Jowett (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953), respectively, pp.450, 476; Ps.139:7-10, Amos 9:1, New International Version of the Holy Bible (East Brunswick, New Jersey: International Bible Society, 1984), respectively, pp.760, 1161. (Hereafter cited as NIV.)

⁴⁸ Cf. Green, *Jew and Philosopher*, pp.233-36n85; Jacob Klein, "On the Nature of Nature," *Independent Journal of Philosophy* 3 (1979): 101-109; Strauss, LRK; Strauss to Voegelin, 25 Feb. 1951, Letter 37 in SVC.

other hand, underpinning his imputation is a Jewish understanding of revelation as “the legal interpretation” of sacred doctrines that teach the imperative of obedience to divine law.⁴⁹ In the introduction to *Persecution and the Art of Writing* Strauss explained: “Revelation as understood by Jews and Muslims has the character of Law (*torah, shari'a*) rather than of Faith. . . . For the Christian, the sacred doctrine is revealed theology; for the Jew and the Muslim, the sacred doctrine is, at least primarily, the legal interpretation of the Divine Law (*talmud* or *fiqh*).”⁵⁰ In the words of Kaplan: “Does man—erring and sinful man—ever reach the moment in which he is freed from sin and forgiven by God? . . . Man’s hope is his firm “trust” (*emunah*) in God, the merciful and forgiving.” Kaplan goes on to explain:

This “reliance” or “trust” or “fidelity,” as the word *emunah* should be translated, must be distinguished from “faith.” Faith aims at the knowledge of, or participation in, the very *essence* of God, as, for example, faith in the passion and resurrection of Christ. Faith in the sacrament whereby bread and wine are transformed into the body and blood of Christ, even when this is conceived symbolically, implies an act which imitates or participates in the essence of God. Jewish “trust,” however, never refers to the essence of God’s being but to his will and actions *with regard to man* exclusively.

The expression of God’s will toward man is the law, which is therefore the object of “fidelity” and the connecting link between man and God. But the law never prescribes an action intended to imitate or participate in the essence of God, for its aim is not to know but to obey God. . . .

“Trust” in God is thus at the same time “fidelity” to the “lawful,” that is, the ethical act. And the meaning of “trust” is precisely this: from his “trust” in God’s forgiveness, the erring and sinful man gathers strength for the ethical act of self-purification.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Cf. Strauss to Voegelin, 4 June 1951, Letter 39 in SVC, pp.88-89, quoted below, this present section.

⁵⁰ *PAW*, pp.9, 19 (original emphases). See HSMP, p.335; *PL*, p.91. Cf. Robert Gordis, *The Root and the Branch: Judaism and the Free Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), p.28; Maimonides, *Guide*, epistle dedicatory. Cf. also Orr, *Jerusalem and Athens*, pp.128-30; Zuckert, *Postmodern Platos*, pp.110, 158.

⁵¹ Simon Kaplan, “Translator’s Introduction,” in Hermann Cohen, *Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism* (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1972), p.xviii (original emphases).

It seems clear, then, that Strauss is making a case for revelation as meaning primarily the interpretation of biblical precepts on goodness and morality. In Part II of "Progress or Return?" he gives two mentions of "theologians," one mention of "theological," and one mention of "theologian"⁵²; as Strauss employs those terms whilst describing biblical views on morality and law, it would be fair to say that they are cognate terms for "biblical theology."⁵³ In "Preface to *Spinoza's Critique of Religion*" and Part I of "Progress or Return?" Strauss says that in modern times "biblical morality" has been separated from "biblical theology."⁵⁴ In Part III of "Progress or Return?" he draws a distinction between natural theology and revealed theology, for he employs the terms "theologians" and "philosophers," "theology" and "philosophy," "Philosophy" and "Bible," "natural theology" and "revelation" in a mutually exclusive fashion; Strauss speaks also of "unbelievers" and "believers," and of "unbelief" in revelation and "faith" in revelation.

The distinction between revealed theology and natural theology is implicit because nowhere in Part III does Strauss use the term "revealed theology." He uses the terms "revelation," "miracles," "divine wisdom," "divine law," "divine code," "revealed law," "theology," the "biblical way of life," but not the term revealed theology. Also, he speaks of a "theologians" and a "theological" defense of "revelation" and of "biblical views" about creation, miracles and prophecies. But he does not specifically mention revealed theology in the strictly defined sense of a body of systematic principles that prove, defend and explain the existence of God, principles that are built upon divinely revealed knowledge.⁵⁵ In "Thomist-Catholic"

⁵² POR?, pp.274, 289, "theologians"; p.281, "theological"; p.286, "theologian."

⁵³ With regard to the term "biblical theology," cf. *TM*, p.141.

⁵⁴ *PSCR*, p.151; *POR?*, p.265.

⁵⁵ See below and Peter Byrne, *Natural Religion and the Nature of Religion: The Legacy of Deism* (London: Routledge, 1989), pp.1-4; James Richmond, *Theology and Metaphysics* (New York:

parlance, Hick points out, "there are two sets of theological truths: those that are accessible to human reason and that can be established by philosophical demonstration (such as that God exists and that he is one), and those exceeding the scope of reason (such as that God is triune). The former constitute the corpus of natural theology and the latter of revealed theology; and the former are grasped by reason, the latter by faith." In the words of Berns: "natural theology, discourse about god or gods based on natural reason and naturally acquired evidence, is a part of philosophy. It is traditionally and correctly, I believe, distinguished from the supernaturally revealed theology of religion."⁵⁶ Strauss made a similar point in "What Is Political Philosophy?": "We are compelled to distinguish political philosophy from political theology. By political theology we understand political teachings which are based on divine revelation. Political philosophy is limited to what is accessible to the unassisted human mind." In a letter to Voegelin dated 4 June 1951 Strauss wrote:

my distinction between revelation and human knowledge to which you object is in harmony with the Catholic teaching. . . .

It is with some reluctance that I as a non-Christian venture on this intra-Christian problem. But I can do so precisely because I can make it plain to myself that the problem, and the whole problem area, is, exactly, a Christian one and, through an appropriate extension, also a Jewish one; but then precisely it is not a "universal-human" one. That means that it presupposes a *specific* faith, which philosophy as philosophy does not and cannot do.⁵⁷

Schoen Books, 1971), pp.3-4; Strauss, *TPPH*, p.76. With regard to natural theology, cf. ONI, p.334; Augustine, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans*, trans. Henry Bettinson (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1972), 6.5-6, pp.234-39.

⁵⁶ John Hick, *Faith and Knowledge*, 2nd ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966), pp.25-26; Laurence Berns, "The Relation Between Philosophy and Religion: Reflections on Leo Strauss's Suggestion Concerning the Source and Sources of Modern Philosophy," *Interpretation* 19, no.1 (Fall 1991), p.43. See also Robert M. Hutchins, Mortimer J. Adler, Clifton Fadiman, eds., *Gateway to the Great Books*, Vol.1 (Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, 1963), pp.94-96; Voegelin to Strauss, 22 Apr. 1951, Letter 38 in SVC.

⁵⁷ WIPP?, p.13; Strauss to Voegelin, 4 June 1951, Letter 39 in SVC, pp.88-89 (original emphasis). With regard to "faith," cf. also *SCR*, pp.149, 197, 219-20. With regard to WIPP?, p.13, cf. Heinrich Meier, *The Lesson of Carl Schmitt: Four Chapters on the Distinction between Political*

It is clear, the issue of revealed theology aside,⁵⁸ that Strauss defines revelation by identifying what the Bible and Greek philosophy have and do not have in common. In Part II of “Progress or Return?” he explains that “radical disagreement” exists between Greek philosophy and the Bible: whereas the former regards the pursuit of “autonomous” reason as all-important, the latter regards obedience to God as paramount. “Yet this very disagreement presupposes some agreement. . . .” Explicating that agreement, Strauss states that the three key traits of modernity “are rejected explicitly or implicitly by both the Bible and Greek philosophy.”⁵⁹ Those traits consist, Strauss had argued earlier in Part II, of the “anthropocentric” notion that humankind is “the origin of all meaning”; the proclivity to ascribe pre-eminence to “rights” over “duties”; and the insistence that one’s “freedom” is not “radically limited” by “the whole order of nature or creation,” as was claimed in the past.⁶⁰ Strauss does not, however, further examine the opposition of both the Bible and Greek philosophy to modernity. He observes that such “agreement is, of course, only an implicit one, and we should rather look at the agreement as it appeared directly in the text.”⁶¹

Biblical and philosophic moral precepts

Strauss writes, “the Bible and Greek philosophy agree in regard to what we may call, and we do call in fact, morality.” However, although “[t]hey agree” about the “importance of morality . . . they disagree as regards the basis of morality.”

Theology and Political Philosophy, trans. Marcus Brainard (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), pp.xiii-xix, 69-71, et passim; *Schmitt and Strauss*, pp.43-47, 50-51, 75ff.

⁵⁸ However, I return to the issue below, this present chapter.

⁵⁹ POR?, pp.272-73.

⁶⁰ POR?, pp.269-72.

⁶¹ POR?, p.273.

Before examining that disagreement Strauss examines the agreement about morality. He explains that agreement exists between the Bible and Plato's "specific prescriptions for human society . . . what Plato's *Laws* say about this subject agrees fully with what Moses says."⁶² That Strauss employs the phrase "specific prescriptions" indicates that he has in mind the detailed discussions in Books Six to Twelve—and especially Book Ten—rather than the introductory discussions in Books One to Five.⁶³

Plato's specific prescriptions pertain to laws, rules, ordinances, and regulations—what they are and how they are to be implemented. His characters in the *Laws* converse about the election and appointment of eligible men to public office, promulgation of laws,⁶⁴ education of children,⁶⁵ sport and music,⁶⁶ criminal

⁶² POR?, p.274. Strauss's point about the disagreement between the Bible and Greek philosophy will be examined in the following section of this present chapter.

⁶³ In the following I draw upon the *Laws* and Strauss's *AAPL*. The purpose of lawgivers, Plato explains in Book One of the *Laws*, is to instill within the state, the village and the individual all of the virtues—wisdom, temperance, justice, and courage—rather than courage alone, for the predominance of courage will lead to too militaristic a society. Book Two advises that a complete education, of training in both the physical and musical arts, directs the young toward justice and away from injustice. Book Three speaks of the origin and basis of government—lawgivers and statesmen impart laws to enable the proper adaptation of government in the face of exigencies arising from the growth and decline within society that occurs with the passage of time. Book Four recommends that any city be established with a view to securing its geographic, economic, religious, and legislative bases. Toward the beginning of Book Five, Plato proclaims that of all the possessions man has, the soul is the most divine. The role of the legislator is to determine what honors (of the body) are good and noble, as well as evil and base; one must act according to standards set by legislators, for evil and base actions do not bring honor to one's soul.

⁶⁴ Book Six speaks of the election of the guardians of the laws, and the duties of generals (and other military ranks); council members (who are responsible for the day-to-day running of the city); ministers of education (for music and gymnastics); and magistrates (who preside over the courts of law and the dispensing of justice). The second part of Book Six discusses laws with a religious foundation; namely, laws about marriage and procreation. Plato writes: "Let this then be our exhortation concerning marriage . . . a man should cling to immortality, and leave behind him children's children to be the servants of God in his place for ever." (773e-774a, *Dialogues of Plato*, Vol.4, p.341.)

⁶⁵ Book Seven speaks of the rearing of infants, of children of three to six years of age, and of children of six years and over. Gymnastic education for the body consists of dancing and wrestling. Musical education is concerned with the betterment of the soul, and consists of choruses and dancing. Book Seven also sets out regulations regarding the means for education (e.g., school buildings and wages for teachers) and how teachers are to be selected.

⁶⁶ Book Eight outlines regulations for various social, military, and economic aspects of civil life. Plato describes festivals of sport which practice the ways of war, making people rigorous, strong, and fleet of foot, rigorous and strong; he describes festivals of music; and he sets out laws on friendships, marriage, food (and labor), water supplies, artisans, and craftsmen.

offences,⁶⁷ and divine concern with the actions of unbelievers. In Book Ten the Athenian stranger explains that there are three types of unbelievers: those who claim the Gods do not exist (888d-899d); those who claim the Gods do exist but fail to take heed of man (899d-901c); and those who claim that the Gods do exist, with some unbelievers insisting that the Gods can be appeased and others insisting that the Gods pay no heed to small, everyday matters (901c-903b). The remainder of Book Ten addresses methods of persuasion, such as imprisonment, designed to turn unbelievers from their unholy, evil ways.⁶⁸ Books Eleven and Twelve discuss regulations about “dealings between man and man”⁶⁹: Book Eleven discusses property and business transactions, orphans, poisoners, people with mental defects, and public duties, while Book Twelve discusses largely public matters.⁷⁰

Following on from his parallel between Plato and Moses, Strauss draws this further parallel between biblical and philosophic moral precepts: “Those theologians who identified the second table of the Decalogue as the Christians call it with the natural law of Greek philosophy, were well-advised.”⁷¹ By “the second table of the Decalogue” Strauss means both Exodus 20:12-17 and Deuteronomy 5:17-21.⁷² That

⁶⁷ Book Nine speaks of criminal offences (the robbing of temples, treason, and theft), assaults (including murder and the striking of one’s parents) and the corresponding levels of punishment.

⁶⁸ *LSPS*, p.38: “In the tenth book of the *Laws* Plato presents what one might call his theology and also his doctrine regarding gods. It consists in a substitution of the gods of the cosmos for the gods of the city. The impiety which is to be condemned is the impiety against the gods of the cosmos, but not the impiety against the gods of the city, which are merely a figment of the imagination. We can say Plato substitutes a natural theology for a civil theology.”

⁶⁹ *Laws* 913a, *Dialogues of Plato*, Vol.4, p.483.

⁷⁰ See *AAPL*, p.169.

⁷¹ *POR?*, p.274.

⁷² Indeed, in *ONL*, p.142 (original emphases), Strauss explains that to Aquinas, “All moral precepts of the Old Testament (as distinguished from its ceremonial and judicial precepts) can be reduced to the Decalogue; they belong to the natural law. This is true in the strictest sense of the precepts of the Second Table of the Decalogue, *i.e.* the seven commandments which order men’s relations among themselves (*Exodus* 20:12-17). The precepts in question are intelligible as self-evident even to the people and are at the same time valid without exception; compliance with them does not require the habit of virtue (*S.th.* 1 2 q. 100).” Compliance arises from the promise of “divine punishment . . .” With regard to the Decalogue, see also *Summa Theologiae* 1a2æ, q.100; 2a2æ. qq.121, 122. With regard to Strauss on Aquinas, see *NRH*, pp.157-59, 163-64, 185n23, and cf. *JA*, pp.140-43; *LAM*,

he did not mention the first table of the Decalogue—namely, Exodus 20:3-11 and Deuteronomy 5:7-16—is likely because the decisive focus of the first table is not morality but, rather, God. According to Jaffa,

the precepts of the first table of the Decalogue (with the possible exception of the fifth commandment) are not moral commandments at all. They direct our relationship not toward our fellow men, but toward God. The initial commandments establish the identity and authority of God, and it is only in virtue of such authority that the moral commandments become commandments.⁷³

The Christian theologian Strauss probably has in mind is Thomas Aquinas, who explains in his *Summa Theologiae* (1a2æ, q.99, art.5, reply),

duty is of two kinds: that which is determined by reason, and that which is determined by a law. Thus Aristotle [*Ethics* 1134b18] distinguishes two ways of being just, one moral, the other legal. Now a moral duty is of two kinds. For reason directs us to do something either because it is essential to virtuous living or because it contributes thereto. Now it is on this basis that certain of the moral precepts of the Law are expressed as absolute commands or prohibitions. Thus, *Thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not steal* [Exodus 20:13, 15; Deuteronomy 5:17, 19]. These are precepts properly so called. Others, however, are prescribed or forbidden not as matters of absolute duty but because it is better to act to such a way. . . . But to return to Aristotle's division, that kind of duty which is determined by law, when it is in the sphere of human affairs, falls under the judicial precepts, and when it is in the sphere of divine matters under the ceremonial ones.⁷⁴

Strauss continues: "It is as obvious to Aristotle as it is to Moses that *murder, theft, adultery*, etc., are unqualifiedly bad."⁷⁵ Here Strauss clearly is drawing upon the *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1107a9-12 and 1130a16-b6, and the *Eudemian Ethics*, 1220b21-1221b26, though he does not refer to those passages, where Aristotle says

pp.199-200; LHK, p.24; PAW, pp.95-97; SCR, pp.168, 294n214; WIPP?, pp.198, 208-9, 284-86; see also Schall, *Reason, Revelation*, pp.208-11.

⁷³ *Conditions of Freedom*, pp.274-75.

⁷⁴ *Summa Theologiae*, Vol.29: *The Old Law* (1a2æ. 98-105), trans. David Bourke and Arthur Littleale (Blackfriars; London: Eyre and Spottiswoode; New York: McGraw-Hill, 1969), p.49 (hereafter cited as *Summa*, Vol.29). For the above references to Aristotle and the Bible, see *Summa*, Vol.29, respectively, p.48nn11, 12.

⁷⁵ POR?, p.274 (emphases mine).

that the passions are labeled for being excesses or defects of the mean, and that some actions, such as adultery, theft, assault, and murder, are themselves unjust.⁷⁶

Furthermore, Strauss's very words indicate that he has in mind Exodus 20:13-17. In the passage Moses proclaims to the Israelites that God declared:

"You shall not *murder*.

"You shall not commit *adultery*.

"You shall not *steal*.

"You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.

"You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor."⁷⁷

In short, the Decalogue—Exodus 20:3-17 and Deuteronomy 5:7-21—proscribes actions abhorrent to God; Books 21 to 40 of Exodus and Books 6 to 31 of Deuteronomy impart wideranging 'laws' to govern Israelite society.

The Bible and Greek philosophy on the scope of law and justice

Though indicating in "Progress or Return?" that the Bible and Greek philosophy both contain notions of patriarchy, Strauss focuses on their shared notions of law and justice.⁷⁸ His thesis is that the "Bible and Greek philosophy agree in assigning the highest place among the virtues, not to courage or manliness, but to justice. And by justice both understand primarily, obedience to the law. The

⁷⁶ Cf. *Summa Theologiae* 1a2æ, q.100, art.5, response. With regard to adultery, cf. Plato, *Republic* 461a-b, *Laws*, 841e; theft, cf. *Laws*, 857a-b, 941b; assault, cf. *Laws* 877-882; murder, cf. *Laws* 867-868a, 870-874b.

⁷⁷ NIV, p.88 (emphases mine). Deut.5:17-20 (NIV) is identical with Exod.20:13-17 (NIV), with the exception of Deut.5:21 (NIV, p.207):

"You shall not covet your neighbor's wife. You shall not set your desire on your neighbor's house or land, his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor."

⁷⁸ See POR?, p.275. According to Pangle, "Never does the Bible suggest the thesis of Plato's *Republic* and *Laws*, the thesis to the effect that the standard of a truly just society is a society in which the private family and all that it specifically entails is abolished. . . . What is needed over and above the patriarchs, the Scripture teaches, is the rule of law; and what Scripture means by the rule of law is the absolute rule of Divine law—of a code of law made for, but not by, humans." "Hebrew Bible's Challenge," p.72.

law that requires man's full obedience is in both cases not merely civil, penal, and constitutional law, but moral and religious law as well."⁷⁹

To differentiate between, on the one hand, civil, penal and constitutional laws, and, on the other hand, moral and religious laws, is to draw a distinction between *human* law and *divine* law. In *Philosophy and Law* Strauss wrote, "Divine law differs from human laws in that it serves the highest end, the specific perfection of man; the specific perfection of man is knowledge, the knowledge of God. Thus the end of the law is identical with the end of philosophy."⁸⁰ In his essay, "On Classical Political Philosophy," Strauss noted that "[t]he "human things" were distinguished [by Aristotle] from the "divine things" or the "natural things," and the latter were considered absolutely superior in dignity to the former."⁸¹ In short, divine law aims at the welfare of the soul and the inculcation of correct knowledge of God, whereas human law aims at the welfare of the body.⁸²

To support his thesis in "Progress or Return?" that a conception of divine and human law is common to the Bible and Greek philosophy, Strauss draws a series of parallels between the two. He begins by observing: "In the words of the Bible, "It is your life," or "It is the tree of life for those who cling to it"; and in the words of Plato, "The law effects the blessedness of those who obey it.""⁸³ Strauss goes on to explain that Aristotle and the Bible both ascribe "comprehensiveness" to law and justice, and that they both speak of the imperative of obedience to the law; moreover, accord exists between Aristotle's view, "What the law does not

⁷⁹ POR?, p.275. See also POR?, p.291.

⁸⁰ PL, p.90. Cf. PL, pp.123-24; PSCR, pp.167-68; SR, pp.4-5, 16-18, 22. Cf. also Maimonides, *Guide*, pp.384, 510.

⁸¹ OCPP, p.92. Strauss's accompanying footnote, p.92n20, refers, for instance, to *Nicomachean Ethics* 1181b15, 1141a20-b9, 1155b2ff, and 1177b30ff.

⁸² See also SR, pp.20-21 (cf. p.27n13).

command, it forbids” . . .”, and the biblical command, ““Thou shall eat and be full and be fruitful and multiply.””⁸³

Strauss’s very choice of quotations bring to mind the following passages. According to Genesis 1:28, “God blessed them [Adam and Eve] and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”” Deuteronomy 32:46-47 instructs parents to teach their children to “. . . obey carefully all the words of this law. They are not just idle words for you—they are your life.” . . .” Proverbs 3:18 proclaims: “She is a tree of life to those who embrace her; those who lay hold of her will be blessed.” By “She” is meant “wisdom” (3:13), the wisdom that arises from keeping from God’s “commands.” (3:1)⁸⁴ According to Aquinas, “Every law aims at this, to be obeyed by its subjects. . . . leading its subjects into the virtue appropriate to their condition is a proper function of law. Now since virtue is that which makes its possessor good, the consequence is that the proper effect of law on those to whom it is given is to make them good . . .”⁸⁵ In the words of the Athenian stranger: “The Cretan laws are with reason famous among the Hellenes; for they fulfil the object of laws, which is to make those who use them happy; and they confer every sort of good.” (*Laws* 631b) According to the Athenian stranger, “the state in which the law is above the rulers, and the rulers are the inferiors of the law, is preserved, and has every blessing which the Gods can confer.” (*Laws* 715d)⁸⁶ Laws command “some acts” and forbid

⁸³ POR?, p.275.

⁸⁴ Gen.1:28, NIV, p.2; Deut.32:46-47, p.239; Prov.3:18, p.773; Prov.3:1, 13, pp.772, 773.

⁸⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiæ*, Vol.28: *Law and Political Theory* (1a2æ. 90-97), trans. Thomas Gilby (Blackfriars; London: Eyre and Spottiswoode; New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), q.92, art.1, reply, p.43.

⁸⁶ *Dialogues of Plato*, Vol.4, pp.196, 285.

“others,” Aristotle explains; laws command “excellence” and proscribe “wickedness.” (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1130b22-24)⁸⁷

Having perhaps cited such passages as those above, Strauss proceeds to cast additional light on the shared biblical and philosophic claims about the scope of law and justice. He explains: “the greatest prophet of the Bible as well as the most law-abiding among the Greeks are praised for their humility. Law and justice, thus understood, are divine law and divine justice. . . .”⁸⁸ Strauss adds this further parallel between the Bible and Greek philosophy: “Man’s obedience and disobedience to the law is the subject of divine retribution. What Plato says in the tenth book of the *Laws* about man’s inability to escape from divine retribution is almost literally identical with certain verses of *Amos* and the Hundred-and-thirty-ninth Psalm. . . .”⁸⁹ Strauss, as was seen above, made a similar observation in “Jerusalem and Athens,” and directed the reader to compare Plato’s *Laws*, 905a4-b2 with Amos 9:1-3 and Psalm 139:7-10.

Strauss goes on to explain in “Progress or Return?” that the Bible and Greek philosophy “also agree regarding the problem of justice, the difficulty created by the misery of the just and the prospering of the wicked. . . .” By way of example, Strauss points out that a striking similarity exists between “Plato’s description in the second book of the *Republic* of the perfectly just man who suffers what would be the just fate of the most unjust man . . .” and “Isaiah’s description of him who was done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth, yet who was oppressed

⁸⁷ *Complete Works*, Vol.2, p.1784.

⁸⁸ POR?, p.275. Cf. JA, pp.171-72.

⁸⁹ POR?, p.275. Pangle notes, “Perhaps the closest approximation to the biblical conception of law is found in Aristotle’s account of the virtue of justice, centered on lawfulness, in the opening chapters of Book Five of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.” “Hebrew Bible’s Challenge,” p.73.

and afflicted and brought as a lamb to the slaughter.”⁹⁰ Strauss quite possibly has in mind here Isaiah 53:9 and 53:7—in precisely that order. 53:9 explains that the servant of God

. . . was assigned a grave with the wicked,
and with the rich in his death,
though he had done no violence,
nor was any deceit in his mouth.

And as 53:7 proclaims:

He was oppressed and afflicted,
yet he did not open his mouth;
he was led like a lamb to the slaughter,
and as a sheep before her shearers is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.⁹¹

Having cited the similarity between the *Republic* and (evidently) the Book of Isaiah, Strauss notes that the *end* of Plato’s *Republic* and the *end* of the Book of Job both speak of the restoration of prosperity and property to the just.⁹² Clearly Strauss means the *Republic* 608c-613e and Job 42:10-17.

It is clear that Strauss sees in both the Bible and Greek philosophy the affirmation of divine providence and the ends of humankind. The Bible and Greek philosophy agree about the paramount character of divine law, divine justice and divine retribution. To say, as Strauss does, that the agreement between the Bible and Greek philosophy on the importance of morality is closely related to their agreement about the existence of a providential order in the world is to say that the similarity between the two is teleotheological.⁹³

⁹⁰ POR?, pp.275-76, 276.

⁹¹ NIV, p.922.

⁹² POR?, p.276.

⁹³ With regard to this term, teleotheological, cf. *XSD*, pp.148-49.

Either/Or⁹⁴*Revelation and reason as mutually exclusive opposites*

Strauss does not, however, regard the similarity between the Bible and Greek philosophy as extending to agreement about the basis of how morality and law are realized.⁹⁵ He notes that in Greek philosophy, magnanimity accompanies justice: “Aristotle’s *Ethics* has two foci, not one: one is justice, the other, however, is magnanimity or noble pride. . . .” The two foci “comprise all other virtues, as Aristotle says, but in different ways. Justice comprises all other virtues in so far as the actions flowing from them relate to other men; magnanimity, however, comprises all other virtues in so far as they enhance the man himself.”⁹⁶ There are two possible sources for Strauss’s observations about magnanimity: *Nicomachean Ethics* 1123a34-1125a16 and *Eudemian Ethics* 1232a19-1233a30. Aristotle says in both passages that a man is justified in being proud of himself only if he actually is great in each of the excellences of courage, temperance, liberality, and magnanimity.

Aristotle’s approval of magnanimity carries with it, however, a criticism of undue or excessive humbleness: “the *unduly* humble man, being worthy of good things, robs himself of what he deserves, and seems to have something bad about him from the fact that he does not think himself worthy of good things, and seems also not to know himself . . .”⁹⁷ “Dignity,” that is, proper humbleness, “is a mean

⁹⁴ With regard to this section heading as an encapsulation of Strauss’s thought on the relationship between revelation and reason, cf. Christopher A. Colmo, “Reason and Revelation in the Thought of Leo Strauss,” *Interpretation* 18, no.1 (Fall 1990), p.150; Gregory Bruce Smith, “On Cropsey’s World: Joseph Cropsey and the Tradition of Political Philosophy,” *Review of Politics* 60, no.2 (Spring 1998), p.315n12. Cf. also RSW, p.155 (col.2); Meier, *Lesson of Carl Schmitt*, pp.66, 76-77, 86-88.

⁹⁵ See POR?, pp.274, 276.

⁹⁶ POR?, p.276. Cf. XA, pp.122 (paragraph beginning “But we must not”), 139-40. Cf. also Strauss’s description of the “just man” in OPS, pp.145-46.

⁹⁷ *Nicomachean Ethics* 1125a19-22, *Complete Works*, Vol.2, p.1775 (emphasis mine).

between self-will and too great obligingness; the contemptuous man who lives with no consideration for another is self-willed; the man who adapts his whole life to another and is submissive to everybody is too obliging; but he who acts thus in certain cases but in others, and only to those worthy, is dignified.”⁹⁸

Like the “magnanimous man” of Greek philosophy, the “perfect gentleman” described in the Bible claims great honor for himself. Strauss adds: “There occur a few, very few, gentlemen and ladies in the Bible—I hope that this remark is not understood as a criticism of the Bible.”⁹⁹ The examples Strauss then gives are Saul, David, Jonathan, and Michal (daughter of Saul, wife of David); Strauss apparently draws upon the two books of Samuel, and particularly 1 Samuel 15:8-11, 16:13, 18:1-4; 2 Samuel 6:15-16, 23, though he does not provide those references. Saul disobeyed God’s command to destroy the Amalekites, for he spared King Agag and the best of the livestock; the prophet Samuel elected David king when Saul failed to obey God’s command. Jonathan was the son of Saul but a close friend of David, so much so that he did not compete with David over the kingship of Israel. Michal was made barren by God because she mocked David when she saw him dancing before the ark of the Lord.¹⁰⁰

Stressing humility and piety, the Bible instructs that to claim honor for oneself is a sin of vanity because what is good in man is not due to man but to God. A good man repents his shortcomings and accepts his due punishment. Greek philosophy, though, praises magnanimity; it maintains that man can be virtuous due to his own efforts and capabilities, that a good man does not and need not repent his

⁹⁸ *Eudemean Ethics* 1233b34-38, *Complete Works*, Vol.2, p.1954.

⁹⁹ POR?, p.277.

¹⁰⁰ See POR?, p.277.

shortcomings.¹⁰¹ Strauss continues: “Again I quote Aristotle . . . “Sense of shame,” which is such consciousness of human failing, “befits young men who cannot yet be fully virtuous, but not men of mature age who are free not to do the wrong thing in the first place.””¹⁰²

For Strauss, then, the Bible and Greek philosophy both speak about “the importance of justice” but they do not agree about “what completes morality.”¹⁰³ The biblical demand for obedience to God’s commands is accompanied by promises of mercy and redemption for the genuinely repentant, and by promises of punishment for unrepentant sinners. In Greek philosophy, though, the demand for obedience to law is not reinforced by divine sanction. Instead, morality is realized through human reason alone. In their quest for knowledge of first things, philosophers begin with the traditional notion that divine codes can be traced to God or the gods, but transcend that notion in their very ascent from opinion (belief and illusion) to knowledge; philosophers acquire knowledge from demonstration, sense perception and reasoning with regard to the visible and intelligible natural order. The ascent from opinion to knowledge obviates the problem of how one can obey divine law when a multiplicity of ancestral laws and divine codes contradict, and compete with, each other. In response to the multiplicity of laws that purport to be of divine origin the Bible proclaims that God’s Law is the one true divine law. All other codes are fraudulent and God’s Law must be obeyed.¹⁰⁴ The reason for obeying God’s

¹⁰¹ See POR?, pp.277-78. Cf. Strauss’s discussion of Socrates’ perfect gentlemen in WILE?, pp.6-7; XSD, pp.128-33, 148-49, 159-69, 175-77, 184-86, 188, 195, 200-5, 209; and his discussion of magnanimity in TPPH, pp.51-57. Cf. also LSPS, pp.264-64, 265.

¹⁰² POR?, p.278. Cf. *Nicomachean Ethics* 1128a19-21.

¹⁰³ POR?, p.279.

¹⁰⁴ See NRH, pp.82, 84-90, 163-64; POR?, pp.279-86. See also Deut.7:24-25, 12:1-3; Plato, *Republic* 532a-534a; Schall, *Reason, Revelation*, p.208. Cf. Pangle, “Hebrew Bible’s Challenge,” p.77; Strauss, LSPS, p.197; OPS, pp.187-88.

Law is expressed thus by Aquinas: “that which is adequate for the completeness of human law, namely, the prohibiting of offences and the apportionment of penalties, is not adequate for the completeness of the divine law. This latter is required to make men totally equipped to share in eternal happiness—something which can be achieved only by the grace of the Holy Spirit . . .”¹⁰⁵

That the Bible and Greek philosophy are fundamentally divided over the issue of how one finds one’s moral bearings in the world can be traced to their fundamental disagreement about the place of God in the cosmos. In Part II of “Progress or Return?” Strauss explains that Maimonides observes in his *Guide of the Perplexed* that the Bible teaches that the cosmos was created out of nothing by the very word of God, and that Greek philosophy did not articulate such a notion of “divine omnipotence”—to Aristotle, the visible universe is eternal; it is not created by the word of God, the prime mover.¹⁰⁶ In Part I of “Jerusalem and Athens” Strauss states that although the Bible and Greek philosophy both articulate theological principles,¹⁰⁷ the Bible proclaims as true God’s creation of the world, whereas “[t]he Platonic teaching on creation does not claim to be more than a likely tale.” Shortly afterwards Strauss notes that the Platonic God creates the world only “after having looked to the eternal ideas which therefore are higher than he. In accordance with this, Plato’s explicit theology is presented within the context of the first discussion of education in the *Republic* . . .”¹⁰⁸ Evidently Strauss has in mind here 376c-412. Indeed, he proceeds to explain: “in the second and final discussion of

¹⁰⁵ *Summa*, Vol.29, 1a2æ q.98, art.1, reply, p.7.

¹⁰⁶ POR?, p.281. Cf. HBSGP, p.liv; ONI, p.338. See HBSGP, p.xii, where Strauss provides an outline of the *Guide*; the second section, I 71-II 31, is titled “Demonstrations of the existence, unity, and incorporeality of God”; II 13-24, the sixth subsection of section two, is titled “Creation of the world, i.e., defense of the belief in creation out of nothing against the philosophers.”

¹⁰⁷ See JA, pp.165-66. Cf. OIG, pp.367-69; POR?, pp.282-89.

¹⁰⁸ JA, p.166.

education—the discussion of the education of the philosophers—theology is replaced by the doctrine of ideas.”¹⁰⁹ Though Strauss does not cite *Timaeus* 29a, the passage clearly illustrates his point about the “eternal ideas.” According to Plato’s character, Timaeus, “Everyone will see that he must have looked to the eternal; for the world is the fairest of creations and he is the best of causes.” By “he” Timaeus means “the creator” (28a), “the father and maker of all this universe” (28c); by “the eternal” Timaeus means “the pattern of the unchangeable . . .” (29a).¹¹⁰

In the final paragraph of Part I of “Jerusalem and Athens” Strauss summarizes his discussion of the philosophic and biblical notions of the divine by observing: “The least one would have to say is that according to Plato the cosmic gods are of much higher rank than the traditional gods, the Greek gods.”¹¹¹ Through Timaeus, Plato explains that the existence and genealogy of the Greek gods are known only by the handing down of customs from generation to generation.

Oceanus and Tethys were the children of Earth and Heaven, and from these sprang Phorcys and Cronos and Rhea, and all that generation; and from Cronos and Rhea sprang Zeus and Hera, and all those who are said to be their brethren, and others who were the children of these.

Timaeus then observes that the creator of the universe proclaims to the pantheon of the visible and retiring gods: “ ‘Gods, children of gods, who are my works . . . my creations are indissoluble, if I so will.’ . . .” Aristophanes likewise speaks of the gods as being known through traditions and stories, though he adopts a somewhat dim view of the usefulness of cosmic intercessions in human affairs: in *Peace* 404-13

¹⁰⁹ JA, p.166. Cf. Plato, *Republic* 597c-d. With regard to Plato’s doctrine of the ideas, see also *CM*, pp.79, 92-93, 119-21.

¹¹⁰ *The Dialogues of Plato*, 4th ed., rev., Vol.3, trans. B. Jowett (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953), p.714.

¹¹¹ JA, p.166; in a footnote, p.166n14, Strauss refers to the *Timaeus* 40d6-41a5; Aristophanes, *Peace* 404-13; Deut.4:19.

he insists that “the Moon and that villain the Sun” are capricious and care only for themselves, not for the Greeks. However, the heavenly, cosmic bodies are not gods, and must not be revered as such, Deuteronomy 4:19 reminds the people of Israel: “And when you look up to the sky and see the sun, the moon and the stars—all the heavenly array—do not be enticed into bowing down to them and worshipping things the Lord your God has apportioned to all the nations under heaven.”¹¹² At the close of Part I of “Jerusalem and Athens” Strauss observes that the Greek gods are known through the natural faculties, whereas the Biblical God is known through divine revelation: “It goes without saying that according to the Bible the God Who manifests Himself as far as He wills . . . is the only true God. The Platonic statement taken in conjunction with the biblical statement brings out the fundamental opposition of Athens at its peak to Jerusalem: the opposition of the God or gods of the philosophers to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the opposition of Reason and Revelation.”¹¹³ Elsewhere Strauss speaks of a “radical opposition” between the Bible and philosophy, and he describes it thus: “the Bible refuses to be integrated into a philosophical framework, just as philosophy refuses to be integrated into a biblical framework. As for this biblical refusal, there is the often-made remark, that the god of Aristotle is not the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob . . .”¹¹⁴

That Strauss depicted the Bible and Greek philosophy as diametrically opposed to each other indicates that he saw the two as mutually exclusive

¹¹² I have gleaned the above references to Plato, Aristophanes and Deuteronomy from JA, p.166n14, and have taken the quotations from: *Dialogues of Plato*, Vol.3, p.727; Aristophanes, *Peace*, ed. and trans. Alan H. Sommerstein (Warminster, Wiltshire: Aris and Phillips; Chicago: Bolchazy-Carducci, 1985), p.43; NIV, p.205. With regard to the above themes and opposition, see also JA, p.166; SA, pp.143, 158-59; Orr, *Jerusalem and Athens*, pp.115-18; with regard to the *Peace* and its condemnation of the gods, see also OPS, pp.147f, 151.

¹¹³ JA, p.166.

¹¹⁴ MITP, p.295.

opposites. He seems to be saying that elements so opposed should not, cannot and must not be synthesized. Strauss also gives this impression in his lecture, "On the Interpretation of Genesis":

The Bible, therefore, confronts us more clearly than any other book with this fundamental alternative: life in obedience to revelation, life in obedience, or life in human freedom, the latter being represented by the Greek philosophers. This alternative has never been disposed of, although there are many people who believe that there can be a happy synthesis which is superior to the isolated elements: Bible on the one hand, and philosophy on the other. This is impossible. Syntheses always sacrifice the decisive claim of one of the two elements. And I shall be glad if we can take up this point in the discussion.¹¹⁵

Green notes that although "[n]o record, tape, or transcript of the discussion" regarding this issue of the synthesis of the Bible and philosophy has apparently survived, "Strauss's most succinct" discussions of the issue can be found in "Progress or Return?", *Natural Right and History* and *On Tyranny*.¹¹⁶ I would note, however, that Strauss does discuss the issue in his "Introductory Essay to Hermann Cohen, *Religion of Reason out of the Sources of Judaism*." Here Strauss writes that Cohen's book has the appearance of "a philosophic book and at the same time a Jewish book. It is philosophic since it is devoted to the religion of reason, and it is Jewish since it elucidates, nay, articulates that religion out of the sources of Judaism." But, Strauss states shortly afterwards, "Revelation is not "a historical act." For Cohen there are no revealed truths or revealed laws in the precise or traditional sense of the terms."¹¹⁷

It is instructive to note here that Strauss had himself grown up in an era which taught that Jews could concede the superiority of science, history and reason

¹¹⁵ OIG, p.373.

¹¹⁶ Green, in OIG, p.376n21.

¹¹⁷ IEHC, p.267. Cf. PIH, pp.248-51, 252-53; PL, p.50. With regard to Strauss's observation about the Jewish-philosophic character of Cohen's book, cf. MSPS, pp.156-59, 161-62; NMBK, pp.192, 194; NMLA, pp.205f. For Strauss on Cohen, see also JA, pt.II, esp. pp.167-68.

in teleological matters but still adhere to the “substance of the Jewish faith.”¹¹⁸ Strauss himself could not accept that view, though he was drawn to Cohen’s attempt to be both a Jew and a philosopher.¹¹⁹ (Commentators have noted that in the face of the fall of the Weimar republic, the rise of Nazism and the Holocaust, Strauss could not accept Cohen’s optimism in the late nineteenth-century and pre-World War I era that modern Germany provided a meaningful solution to the problem of Jewish identity in German society.¹²⁰) Cohen insisted, Strauss argued, that the grounding of revelation in reason obviated the need for proof of God’s existence by recourse to traditions, miracles, prophecy and the like; human reason provides the true basis for the experience of God. According to Strauss, though, “The religion of reason leaves no place for absolute obedience or for what traditional Judaism considered the core of faith.”¹²¹ Thus Cohen’s synthesis of Judaism and philosophy, in emphasizing reason over obedience, undercut the decisive element of Judaism, namely, the laws revealed by God, through the prophets, prescribing of a life of obedience to God.¹²²

Understanding of goodness, Strauss explains in *Natural Right and History*, is essential to life—to the life of both the individual and community. Yet the Bible and philosophy differ as to how that understanding is achieved: whereas the Bible proclaims as indispensable a life of obedience to divine guidance, philosophy proclaims as indispensable “a life of free insight.”¹²³ Knowledge of goodness is acquired through philosophy *or* under the direction of the Bible. A synthesis is not

¹¹⁸ PSCR, p.145.

¹¹⁹ GA, p.460. Cf. PIH, pp.254-56.

¹²⁰ Green, “Editors Introduction,” pp.19-21, 23-25; Smith, “Leo Strauss,” pp.90-91.

¹²¹ IEHC, p.272.

¹²² IEHC, p.272. See also Orr, *Jerusalem and Athens*, pp.126, 127-28.

¹²³ NRH, p.74.

possible because “in every synthesis however impressive, one of the two opposed elements is sacrificed, more or less subtly but in any event surely, to the other: philosophy, which means to be the queen, must be made the handmaid of revelation or vice versa.”¹²⁴ From the point of view of the believer, a synthesis is quite unnecessary, for “if man knows by divine revelation what the right path is, he does not have to discover that path by his unassisted efforts.”¹²⁵

The challenge of openness between theology and philosophy

In Part III of “Progress or Return?” Strauss states his firm position on these questions. Part III has its origin in his lecture, “The Mutual Influence of Theology and Philosophy.”¹²⁶ Toward the beginning of his lecture Strauss declares that the philosopher must be “open to the challenge of theology” and the theologian must be “open to the challenge of philosophy.”¹²⁷ He did not mean, though, that each must be completely receptive to the other, because such openness would entail a synthesis, which he explicitly rejects. He explains that in their “free quest” for knowledge, “philosophers transcend the dimension of divine codes altogether, the whole dimension of piety and of pious obedience to a pre-given code.” The philosopher seeks wisdom but in that search refuses, in this decisive sense, to affirm wisdom that purports to be final and absolute, which is precisely what divinely revealed wisdom claims to be: final and absolute. For “a philosopher . . . revelation is . . . not more than an unevident, unproven possibility.” The philosopher seeks

¹²⁴ *NRH*, pp.74-75.

¹²⁵ *NRH*, p.85; cf. pp.7-8, 163-66. Cf. also Strauss to Voegelin, 25 Feb. 1951, Letter 37 in SVC.

¹²⁶ This lecture was first published in Hebrew, in *Iyyun. Hebrew Philosophical Quarterly* 5, no.1 (January 1954): 110-126. It was reprinted in an English translation, in *The Independent Journal of Philosophy* 3 (1978): 111-118, and reprinted as Part III of POR?, in *IPP*, pp.289-310.

¹²⁷ MITP, p.290. See also JA, pp.149-50; Smith, “Leo Strauss,” p.79.

knowledge of the whole, but not through a synthesis of revelation and reason; to the philosopher, a synthesis is impossible precisely because it would require a measure of assent to divinely revealed knowledge over knowledge acquired solely through the human faculties. In contrast, the “way of life” spoken of in the Bible is a life of “trust,” “faith” and unhesitating obedience to the revealed word of God.¹²⁸

In claiming to possess *the* truth, believers appeal to what they regard as unimpeachable historical proofs: the biblical accounts of laws, miracles and prophecies. Yet to critics of revelation, Strauss notes, the “events” described in the Bible as miracles and foretold in prophecies “are known only as reported . . .” The critic insists that many of the Biblical events “never happened” and that those which did occurred in a “pre-scientific” age, which is to say, not “in the presence of first-rate physicists . . .”¹²⁹ For the critic, a synthesis of revelation and reason is impossible because it would require assent to events that cannot be historically and scientifically proven; the phenomena of miracles and prophecies cannot be experienced by all people in the clear light of day. In other words, revelation claims authority regarding knowledge of *the* truth on bases the veracity of which philosophy challenges. Philosophy also claims that if “revealed law” is “fully rational,” it need not be accepted as the word of God alone. Philosophy further claims that if “revealed law” is not, in fact, “fully rational,” it is “supra-rational” and thus “the product of human unreason.”¹³⁰ The philosophic campaign against revelation, Strauss admits, “is victorious as long as it limits itself to repelling the attack which theologians make on philosophy with the weapons of philosophy.”¹³¹

¹²⁸ MITP, pp.292-98. Cf. *NRH*, pp.82, 84-90; Novak, “Philosophy and Revelation,” pp.184ff.

¹²⁹ MITP, p.302.

¹³⁰ MITP, pp.301-4.

¹³¹ MITP, p.305.

Strauss then states: "But philosophy in its turn suffers a defeat as soon as it starts an offensive of its own, as soon as it tries to refute, not the necessarily inadequate proofs of revelation, but revelation itself."¹³² "Historical criticism" of revelation is "dogmatic" in its assertion that "an omnipotent God" does not exist. However, to dismiss miracles as "impossible" on the basis that there is no "place" in "the whole" for an omnipotent God "would presuppose that we have perfect knowledge of the whole." To claim to have such knowledge would be tantamount to claiming that one has solved "all riddles," and such a claim is "absurd."¹³³

Strauss does not mean that the quest for knowledge of the whole is absurd. Rather, he means that the claim by critics of revelation to possess complete knowledge of the whole is absurd. To reject the very possibility of miracles involves the claim that "miracles are incompatible with the nature of God" and that divine acts of intercession are redundant to both a "perfect" God and to "human perfection." But to make such claims and thus reject miracles requires a "natural theology" regarding knowledge of the nature of God and His characteristics which says that He is "comprehensible." Yet, Strauss adds, to claim that God is "comprehensible" is to claim to have complete knowledge of the whole.¹³⁴ "Since such a true or adequate, as distinguished from a merely clear and distinct, account of the whole, is certainly not available, philosophy has never refuted revelation. Nor, to come back to what I said before, has revelation, or rather theology, ever refuted philosophy. . . . There seems to be no ground common to both, and therefore superior to both."¹³⁵

¹³² MITP, p.305.

¹³³ MITP, p.306. Cf. *NRH*, pp.30-31.

¹³⁴ MITP, pp.306-9.

¹³⁵ MITP, p.309. Cf. *OIG*, pp.360-61; *PSCR*, p.170.

Dialogue between revelation and reason

Philosophy vs. atheism

Strauss depicts the choice one must make between the two fundamental alternatives of revelation and reason in terms of an either/or choice; he unequivocally rejects a synthesis of revelation and reason.¹³⁶ Though rejecting a synthesis, Strauss did not reject that there can and ought to be accord between revelation and reason. He states: “every one of us can be and ought to be either the one or the other, the philosopher open to the challenge of theology or the theologian open to the challenge of philosophy.”¹³⁷ Schall forcefully expresses the impetus for that openness: “The biblical scholar who knows no philosophy is a dangerous man. The scientist who is unaware of the higher dimensions of philosophy locks himself into an autonomous ideology.”¹³⁸

By his own admission, Strauss was not a theologian.¹³⁹ He did not claim, in other words, to possess the rigor and certitude of a theologian. Instead, he was a philosopher.¹⁴⁰ But by his own reasoning, he could not have been an atheist precisely because a philosopher, in his understanding, is open to the possibility of revelation.¹⁴¹ He also saw himself as a Jew (albeit one who could not believe as his ancestors did¹⁴²), it would be fair to say that Strauss did not regard revealed theology

¹³⁶ See my above section.

¹³⁷ MITP, p.290. Cf. *SCR*, pp.159-60.

¹³⁸ James V. Schall, “Fides et Ratio: Approaches to a Roman Catholic Political Philosophy,” *Review of Politics* 62, no.1 (Winter 2000), pp.70-71.

¹³⁹ See above, introduction to this present chapter, and GN, p.362: “. . . I am not a theologian.”

¹⁴⁰ See above, introduction to this thesis.

¹⁴¹ Cf. Dannhauser, “Strauss as Citizen and Jew,” p.444.

¹⁴² I discuss this point below, this present chapter.

as constituting the principal meaning of revelation. In his lecture, "How To Study Medieval Philosophy," perhaps Strauss makes his clearest identification of the core sense of what it means to be a Jew, and in equally clear terms distinguishes that identification from Christianity: "For the Jew and the Muslim, religion is primarily not, as it is for the Christian, a *faith* formulated in dogmas, but a *law*, a *code* of divine origin. Accordingly, *the* religious science, the *sacra doctrina* is, not dogmatic theology, *theologia revelata*, but the science of the law, Halachah or Fikh."¹⁴³

That Strauss regarded himself as a scholar with a particular interest not in theology but in the history of political philosophy¹⁴⁴ suggests his intention to listen more to reason than to revelation. However, his manifest, professed interest in matters biblical, religious and Jewish was not a scholarly indulgence, nor was it a strategy designed to conceal a purely secular or atheistic orientation. Strauss appears to have been cognizant of problems in interpreting the extent of his own views on revelation. Responding to the accusation made by David Spitz in the October 1959 issue of *Commentary* that he was an atheist, that he rejected God, Strauss retorted: "Such accusations at any rate require proof. My accuser has not even tried to prove his accusation. If he should be induced by this remark to try to prove his accusation, I warn him in advance to keep in mind the difference between revealed theology and natural theology or to make himself familiar with it."¹⁴⁵

Strauss, who believed Spitz's accusation of atheism to be a specious attack, provided an approach for interested parties to address the matter. According to

¹⁴³ HSMP, p.333 (original emphases).

¹⁴⁴ See above, introduction to this thesis.

¹⁴⁵ Quoted by Hilail Gildin, "Déjà Jew All Over Again: Dannhauser on Leo Strauss and Atheism," *Interpretation* 25, no.1 (Fall 1997), p.126. Gildin's endnote, p.133n2, refers to Spitz's "Freedom, Virtue and the 'New Scholasticism': The Supreme Court as Philosopher Kings," *Commentary* 28, no.10 (October 1959): 315. For a more recent accusation, see, e.g., Holmes, *Anatomy of Antiliberalism*, pp.69, 72, 80 (see also pp.65-66, 87), and cf. Berkowitz, "Liberal Zealotry," p.1367.

Gildin, "Strauss's point is clear enough: even if one were to show that he rejects revealed theology (something Spitz by no means does) one would still have to show that he rejects natural theology as well (something Spitz may not realize that he must also do) before one could reasonably conclude that he is an atheist." Strauss penned a reply to Spitz, but he did not send it to the editor of *Commentary*. Instead, it "circulated among many of his students . . ." ¹⁴⁶

Strauss's injunction to his accuser to remember the distinction between revealed theology and natural theology points to this fundamental difference between the two: revealed theology pertains to a life of obedience to divine revelation, while natural theology pertains to the pursuit of unaided human reason in the quest for knowledge of the whole. Strauss did not reject revealed theology, for in the quest for knowledge of the whole, the philosopher must be open to the possibility that revealed theology conveys truths about the whole. Revealed and natural theology *both* pursue knowledge of the whole, though revealed theology is the systematic enunciation of supernaturally based knowledge, of knowledge about God revealing Himself to humankind. Neither did Strauss reject natural theology, for he perceived it to be an integral part of how the philosopher articulates his knowledge, however tentative, of the whole. For Strauss, Schall explains (citing Strauss's essay, "What Is Political Philosophy?"), "philosophy is a quest for a "knowledge of the whole," a knowledge rooted in the capacity of human reason. This same reason cannot arbitrarily exclude what is understandable and claims intelligible content, particularly when revelation itself has turned to philosophy precisely to explain more fully what is revealed." ¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶ Gildin, "Déjà Jew," p.127. See also Green, *Jew and Philosopher*, pp.237-39n1.

¹⁴⁷ "Fides et Ratio," pp.64, 64n30. See also Laurence Berns, "Leo Strauss 1899-1973," *Independent Journal of Philosophy* 2 (1978), pp.2-3.

It is worth noting here, to return to a recurrent theme in this chapter, that “law” is Strauss’s preferred term when he identifies the core differences and similarities between the Bible and Greek philosophy. According to Fradkin, “The preference for the term “law” in place of “revelation” is explained by the fact that revelation is too general a term for a phenomenon that is emphatically particular in its alleged occurrences. It is therefore imprecise. Jewish revelation takes the form of law. Other revelations do not.”¹⁴⁸ Fradkin’s point about the broadness of the term “revelation” notwithstanding, it is well-known that Strauss employed the terms “revelation” and “reason,” as well as “Jerusalem” and “Athens,” to represent—albeit metaphorically¹⁴⁹—the fundamental alternatives represented by the Bible and Greek philosophy.

Strauss clearly did point to a fundamental, unequivocal difference between revealed theology and natural theology. It seems that he maintained, however, that opting for philosophy over religion requires a decision about the certainty of one’s choice that is akin to leap of faith. Towards the end of his lecture, “The Mutual Influence of Theology and Philosophy,” Strauss reflected:

And here when I use the term philosophy, I use it in the common and vague sense of the term where it includes any rational orientation in the world, including science and what have you, common sense. If this is so, philosophy must admit the possibility of revelation. Now that means that philosophy itself is possibly not the right way of life. It is not necessarily the right way of life, not evidently the right way of life, because this possibility of revelation exists. But what then does the choice of philosophy mean under these conditions? In this case, the choice of philosophy is based on faith. In other words, the quest for evident knowledge rests itself on an unevident premise.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁸ Hillel Fradkin, “A Word Fitly Spoken: The Interpretation of Maimonides and the Legacy of Leo Strauss,” in Novak, ed., p.64.

¹⁴⁹ POR?, p.272.

¹⁵⁰ MITP, pp.309-10. Cf. Gildin, “D’jà Jew,” pp.126-27; Green, *Jew and Philosopher*, pp.12, 238n1; David Walsh, “The Reason-Revelation Tension in Strauss and Voegelin,” in Emberley and Cooper, eds. and trans., p.361.

Echoing Strauss, Schall explains:

Revelation thus does not hesitate to engage the philosophic mind and examine its own proposed validity. This might annoy philosophers who want to claim the exclusive turf of reason for themselves. But they cannot maintain this position if the object of the mind is not the mind itself but *what is, all that is*. Philosophy cannot pretend or prove that revelation does not exist and exist as something also directed at itself.¹⁵¹

Also echoing Strauss Novak asks: “What is the challenge of philosophy to theology? And, what can it mean for theology that philosophy admits the possibility of its prime datum, which is revelation?” Shortly afterwards Novak explains: “The insistence that philosophy must admit the possibility of revelation implies that there are philosophers who would deny any such possibility. Who are they?”¹⁵²

In his epilogue to *Essays on the Scientific Study of Politics*, a 1962 collection of four essays edited by Herbert J. Storing,¹⁵³ Strauss explained that the modern intellectual or “scientist” is characterized by a “frank” and “dogmatic atheism.” The disciple of the “new science,” in the guise of a pose of “intellectual honesty,” unashamedly proclaims the rightness of rejecting both the cogency of belief in God and the very possibility of revelation.¹⁵⁴ In his essay, “Restatement on Xenophon’s *Hiero*,” Strauss pointedly wrote: “For someone who is trying to form his taste or his mind by studying Xenophon, it is almost shocking to be suddenly confronted by the more than Machiavellian bluntness with which Kojève speaks of such terrible things

¹⁵¹ Schall, “Fides et Ratio,” p.66 (original emphases).

¹⁵² “Philosophy and Revelation,” p.175.

¹⁵³ Paul F. Kress, “Against Epistemology: Apostate Musings” *Journal of Politics* 41, no.2 (May 1979), pp.528-29: “The Storing volume brought the Straussian analysis to bear on the work of the discipline’s leading figures of the empirical persuasion in the twentieth century, and could be said to have constituted a manifesto of sorts. Its message is captured in Strauss’ epilogue which chides political scientists for a Neronian betrayal of their enterprise, but forgives them on grounds that they know neither that they fiddle nor that Rome burns. . . .” The Storing volume contains essays by Walter Berns, Herbert J. Storing, Leo Weinstein and Robert Horwitz.

¹⁵⁴ AE, p.322. See also MITP, pp.309-10.

as atheism and tyranny and takes them for granted. . . .”¹⁵⁵ Nevertheless, Kojève “does not belong to the many who today are unabashed atheists” A philosopher is animated by a “love” of thinking and learning, and, Strauss stresses, “Kojève is a philosopher and not an intellectual.”¹⁵⁶

Gildin observes: “According to Strauss, Kojève needs a philosophy of nature in which nature is structured or ordered with a view to history. Strauss claims that nature so understood is incompatible with atheism. . . . According to Strauss, Kojève was an atheist but had no right to be one.”¹⁵⁷ Whereas historicism emphasizes the historicity of thought and of life, Kojève, in structuring his philosophy with a view to *the end* of history, admitted the need for teleotheological theories of nature and of history which affirm that history has *purpose*.¹⁵⁸ Gildin continues: “The presence of a cosmic principle supporting what is highest in man stands in the way of atheism.”¹⁵⁹ Gildin’s proposition echoes, I would suggest, a statement Strauss made in Part II of “Progress or Return?”: “One must not forget that even the atheistic, materialistic thinkers of classical antiquity took it for granted that man is subject to something higher than himself, e.g., the whole cosmic order, and that man is not the

¹⁵⁵ In *OT* (rev.ex.), p.185. Strauss’s essay was penned as a reply to the reviews by both Voegelin (*Review of Politics* 11 [1949]: 241-44) and Kojève (*Critique* 6 [1950]: 46-55, 138-155) of the original edition of *OT*, published in 1948. With regard to Kojève’s statements on atheism, see his “Tyranny and Wisdom” (an expanded version of his review of *OT*) in *OT* (rev.ex.), pp.152, 161. See also Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel, Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit* assembled by Raymond Queneau, ed. and intro. Allan Bloom, trans. James H. Nichols, Jr. (New York: Basic Books, 1969), pp.57, 90, 107 (see also Bloom, “Editor’s Introduction,” p.viii); Gildin, “Déjà Jew,” p.128; Green, “Editor’s Introduction,” p.79n80; *Jew and Philosopher*, pp.166n119, 237n1; Zuckert, *Postmodern Platos*, p.106.

¹⁵⁶ *OT* (rev.ex.), pp.185, 186. With regard to philosophy, thinking and learning, cf. OPS, pp.194-95; PIH, pp.240, 245.

¹⁵⁷ “Déjà Jew,” p.128. Gildin’s accompanying endnote, p.133n6, refers to Kojève’s *Introduction à la Lecture de Hegel* (Paris: Gallimard, 1947), p.378, and to Strauss’s *On Tyranny*, ed. Victor Gourevitch and Michael S. Roth (New York: Free Press, 1991), p.237.

¹⁵⁸ See *OT* (rev.ex.), p.186; cf. p.212. With regard to historicism and historicity, cf. Exi, esp. p.313; Green, *Jew and Philosopher*, pp.201n13, 211-13n3.

¹⁵⁹ “Déjà Jew,” p.128. Cf. Shadia B. Drury, *Alexandre Kojève: The Roots of Postmodern Politics* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1992), pp.50, 68.

origin of all meaning.” Also in Part II Strauss states: “Even in Aristotle you will find passages where he speaks of certain very crude notions in Greece which pointed fundamentally to what we know in the Bible in a more developed form, e.g., the notion that maybe it is bad to devote oneself to the philosophical rebellion against God.”¹⁶⁰ Similarly, in *Natural Right and History* Strauss notes: “Political atheism is a distinctly modern phenomenon. No premodern atheist doubted that social life required belief in, and worship of, God or gods.”¹⁶¹ In the words of Schall: “most of the classical atheists believe[d] that a little religion was useful in controlling the masses. It kept them quiet.”¹⁶²

Asking why Werner Dannhauser described Strauss as an atheist, that is, as an undogmatic atheist, and overlooked Strauss’s injunction to remember the difference between revealed theology and natural theology, Gildin suggests that Dannhauser’s reasoning may have been this: “Strauss lived what he taught. He made no secret of the fact that he was not an orthodox Jew. Nor was he a practicing adherent of any other revealed religion. Therefore he rejected all revealed theology. . . .”¹⁶³ Gildin has in mind here Dannhauser’s 1996 essay, “Athens and Jerusalem or Jerusalem and Athens?”¹⁶⁴ Yet as Dannhauser pointed out in an article published in 1990, an

¹⁶⁰ POR?, pp.270, 287. Strauss does not provide a reference to Aristotle, but, Schall points out, he had in mind *Metaphysics* 982b29. Schall, *Reason, Revelation*, pp.209-10. Aristotle explains that to pursue knowledge about life and the world simply for oneself “might be justly regarded as beyond human power; for in many ways human nature is in bondage, so that according to Simonides ‘God alone can have this privilege’, and it is unfitting that man should not be content to seek the knowledge that is suited to him.” *Metaphysics* 928b29-32, *Complete Works*, Vol.2, p.1555.

¹⁶¹ *NRH*, p.169. See also *AE*, p.322, and cf. *POR?*, pp.270, 287; *SCR*, pp.209, 299-300n276; *SPPP*, pp.42-45; *TM*, p.51; *TPPH*, pp.74-75. Cf. also Bolotin, “Strauss and Classical Political Philosophy,” p.141; Victor Gourevitch, “Philosophy and Politics, II,” *Review of Metaphysics* 22, no.2 (December 1968), pp.294-98. But cf. also Harry Neumann, “Civic Piety and Socratic Atheism: An Interpretation of Strauss’ *Socrates and Aristophanes*,” *Independent Journal of Philosophy* 2 (1978): 33-37.

¹⁶² *Christianity and Politics*, p.101.

¹⁶³ “Déjà Jew,” pp.125, 127.

¹⁶⁴ Originally read at a conference about Strauss and Judaism at the University of Virginia, in Charlottesville, 10 and 11 Oct. 1993. Papers from the conference were published in Novak, ed., *Strauss and Judaism*.

article of which Gildin makes no mention, “any crude description of Leo Strauss as an atheist badly misses the mark.” Dannhauser went on to say: “An atheist thinks of religion as an error, an opiate, a delusion. If Leo Strauss was an atheist, one must begin by asking why should he spend so much time and devote so much care to the study of Judaism? . . . Strauss came back again and again to Judaism, as the case of his continuing study of Moses Maimonides shows.”¹⁶⁵ However, Dannhauser later explained, in the essay that Gildin cites: “I have become convinced of what in previous study of Strauss I could not accept, that Leo Strauss was of the party of Athens and not of the party of Jerusalem.”¹⁶⁶

Strauss, Judaism and Zionism

Certainly by his own account, however, Strauss was of “the party of Jerusalem.” In a lecture he gave in 1962, titled “Why We Remain Jews,” Strauss stated: “It is impossible not to remain a Jew. It is impossible to run away from one’s origins. It is impossible to get rid of one’s past by washing it away. . . .” In the same lecture he explained: “I was myself (as you might have guessed) a political Zionist in my youth, and was a member of a Zionist student organization.”¹⁶⁷ In his 1965 autobiographical essay, “Preface to *Spinoza’s Critique of Religion*,” Strauss explained that most Jews in pre-Hitler Germany “assumed that the German state (to say nothing of German society or culture) was or ought to be neutral to the difference between Christians and Jews or between non-Jews and Jews. This assumption was not accepted by the strongest part of Germany and hence by Germany.” Shortly afterwards Strauss noted: “At any rate it could seem that in the

¹⁶⁵ “Strauss as Citizen and Jew,” p.444.

¹⁶⁶ “Athens and Jerusalem or Jerusalem and Athens?,” p.168. In an endnote, p.171n27, Dannhauser refers to his 1990 article.

¹⁶⁷ WWRJ, pp.317, 319.

absence of a superior recognized equally by both parties the natural judge on the Germanness of the German Jews was the non-Jewish Germans. As a consequence, a small minority of the German Jews, but a considerable minority of German-Jewish youth studying at the universities, had turned to Zionism.”¹⁶⁸ In his 1970 exchange with Jacob Klein, titled “A Giving of Accounts,” Strauss reflected: “When I was seventeen, I was converted to Zionism—to simple, straightforward political Zionism.”¹⁶⁹ Klein explained in their exchange that Strauss’s “primary interests” during his time as a university student “were two questions: one, the question of God; and two, the question of politics.”¹⁷⁰

Like the youthful Strauss, the mature Strauss was a supporter of political Zionism, the difference being that the mature Strauss was alert to the problems of a strictly political Zionism. “Political Zionism is problematic for obvious reasons,” he admitted in a letter he wrote in 1957 to the editor of *National Review*. “But I can never forget what it achieved as a moral force in an era of complete dissolution. It helped to stem the tide of “progressive” leveling of venerable, ancestral differences; it fulfilled a conservative function.”¹⁷¹ Elsewhere Strauss observed that political Zionism was a form of Zionism in which “[t]he mind was in no way employed, or even the heart . . . in matters Jewish.”¹⁷² Originating with Leon Pinsker and Theodor Herzl, the desire of political Zionism for the recovery of Jewish pride culminated in the demand for a Jewish state. Political Zionism was characterized by its critics for its lack of stress upon a sense of cultural and historical heritage. However, for

¹⁶⁸ PSCR, p.141. Cf. GN, pp.367-68.

¹⁶⁹ GA, p.460.

¹⁷⁰ GA, p.458.

¹⁷¹ LE, p.414. See also WWRJ, pp.319-20; Green, “Editor’s Introduction,” pp.28-36.

¹⁷² WWRJ, p.319.

Strauss cultural Zionism, the recognition that a Jewish state must be based upon Jewish heritage, was not itself unproblematic: “Did one not completely distort the meaning of the heritage to which one claimed to be loyal by interpreting it as a culture like any other high culture?” By situating itself between a strictly political position and a strictly religious position, cultural Zionism steered itself away from divine revelation, the ultimate basis of Jewish heritage.¹⁷³ “There are folk dances, and pottery, and all that—but you cannot live on that. The substance is not culture, but divine revelation.” The shift to religious Zionism involves a recognition that “the only clear solution” to the problem of being a Jew in the modern era is the “return to the Jewish faith, return to the faith of our ancestors.”¹⁷⁴

Nevertheless, Strauss counted himself among those Jews who feel unable fully to return to the Jewish faith of their ancestors. Strauss asked in his “Why We Remain Jews” lecture, “What shall those Jews do who cannot believe as our ancestors believed?”¹⁷⁵ Such Jews must, Strauss says, continue to regard themselves as Jews. There are two types of “nonreligious Jews,” Strauss explained in “Freud on Moses and Monotheism,” a lecture he gave in 1958.

{ There are those who wish that they had not been born Jews, who regard their Jewish origin as a misfortune; and there are those who do not wish not to be born as Jews or are even perhaps glad to be born as Jews. They feel that the best in them is due to their Jewish origin, or at any rate inextricably linked with that. . . .¹⁷⁶

The second type is better than the first type, Strauss adds, for being a good Jew entails regarding oneself as a Jew. Interestingly, he proceeded to propose “another definition of the good Jew, that is, the nonreligious good Jew. He is a man who

¹⁷³ *PSCR*, pp.141-45. See also *NRH*, pp.7-8; *POR?*, pp.257-59.

¹⁷⁴ *WWRJ*, p.320.

¹⁷⁵ *WWRJ*, p.320.

¹⁷⁶ *FMM*, p.286. For the above observation on the date of this lecture, see Green, in *FMM*, p.306.

knows that he is a Jew, that he belongs to the Jewish people, and that the root of his problem is the fact that he cannot believe what his ancestors believe."¹⁷⁷

Notwithstanding Strauss's proposition and his statements about the political Zionist affiliations of his youth, one could argue that he was not simply a *nonreligious* good Jew. According to Walsh, "He is not just ethnically or culturally Jewish, but spiritually Jewish as well. I am not referring to his own religious practices, but to his understanding of the nature of Judaism and of the Mosaic revelation." Smith points out:

. . . Strauss makes it clear that he did not expect to ever see a perfect philosophic system that could explain the Whole. Hence we will never have perfect knowledge of man's place in the whole. Barring such a perfect philosophic system, Strauss asserted that it may be true that the world could never be perfectly intelligible without the premise of a mysterious God. Thereby, Strauss publicly defended at least one of the tenets of orthodoxy and by extension, the life of the orthodox believer. He defended that life . . . but he did not choose [it] . . . for himself as the central venue of his life. His is the benevolent act of a man on behalf of some of his destiny-mates. But it is also an act of honesty on the part of a man who was committed to the philosophic life while understanding in a deep and penetrating fashion the limits of rationalism.

As Deutsch and Nicgorski explain, "Strauss as a *political* philosopher and a Jew was concerned with both ways of life: that of reason and that of faith."¹⁷⁸ Accounting for the relationship between Strauss's Jewishness and his career as political scientist, Green observes:

As a non-Jew and a careful observer, Anastaplo in his article ["On Leo Strauss: A Yartzheit Remembrance," *University of Chicago Magazine* 67 (Winter 1974): 30-38] keenly appreciates what he regards as the twofold beneficial influence which Judaism exercised on Strauss, and through him on his students both Jewish and non-Jewish. First, it somehow helped make Strauss, as both a thinker and a careful reader, receptive to the premodern idea of philosophy and resistant to certain

¹⁷⁷ FMM, pp.287-88.

¹⁷⁸ Walsh, "Reason-Revelation Tension," p.351; Smith, "Athens and Washington," p.110; Deutsch and Nicgorski, "Introduction," p.11 (original emphasis).

modern ideas. Second, it overflowed through him as a Jewish thinker and scholar so as to leave a deep and vivifying impression on those who encountered him, through his intellectual seriousness about Judaism, and through his human example of devotion to Judaism.¹⁷⁹

Conclusion

Together, revelation and reason provide a way out of the morass that is modernity, Strauss maintains. Central to both the Bible and Greek philosophy is concern with what ought to be, with the permanent problems of what is right, just, good, virtuous, and best. That Strauss himself evidently turned to philosophy does not mean, though, that he was closed to revelation. The final section of this chapter argued that his openness to revelation is illustrated by three intertwined factors: his view that philosophy must be open to the challenge of revelation, in the sense that the philosopher, in the quest for knowledge of the whole, must reflect on the claim to authoritative truth made by theologians; his argument that atheism is anathema to philosophy and not only to revelation; and, finally, by the philosophic-theistic nature of the incontrovertible fact of his fidelity to Judaism.¹⁸⁰ Strauss's fidelity to his Jewish heritage can be seen in his commitment to the serious discussion of what it means to be a Jew in the modern world. His interest in matters biblical, religious and Jewish was not, as some critics have insinuated (Drury, for instance),¹⁸¹ a scholarly predilection designed to conceal an atheistic orientation.

¹⁷⁹ In *JP*, p.476n1.

¹⁸⁰ With regard to my third point, esp. the term theistic, see Green, *Jew and Philosopher*, pp.26-27, 167n127, 237n1; "Theological-Political Predicament," pp.58, 73n121. Cf. Lampert, *Strauss and Nietzsche*, p.143n18. With regard to fidelity, cf. *JP*, p.281; *PSCR*, pp.165, 169; *SCR*, pp.180-81; *WWRJ*, p.320.

¹⁸¹ But cf. Lampert, *Strauss and Nietzsche*, pp.1-3, et passim; Rosen, *Hermeneutics as Politics*, pp.124-27.

PART TWO

**Strauss's Machiavelli on Religion: Neither
Christian nor Pagan**

Chapter Three

Christianity and the Bible

In order to judge properly of Machiavelli's doctrine, we must consider that in the crucial respect there is agreement between classical philosophy and the Bible, between Jerusalem and Athens, despite the profound difference and even antagonism between Athens and Jerusalem. According to the Bible man is created in the image of God . . . righteousness is obedience to the divinely established order, just as in classical thought justice is compliance with the natural order; to the recognition of elusive chance corresponds the recognition of inscrutable providence.

Leo Strauss, "The Three Waves of Modernity"

Introduction

Considering the themes, questions and issues singled out in his critical study of Machiavelli's teaching, Strauss clearly felt the intellectual importance and personal challenge of the revelation-reason question. The present chapter, carried further in Chapters Four to Seven, shows the arguments and the actions in Strauss's critical study tending to side with "Athens" but listening with care to the dictates of "Jerusalem."¹

In a well-known line from the introduction to *Thoughts on Machiavelli* Strauss announced his agreement with "the old-fashioned and simple opinion according to which Machiavelli was a teacher of evil. . . ." Elsewhere in the introduction he proclaimed: "Many of our contemporaries are of the opinion that there are no permanent problems and hence no permanent alternatives. . . . Our critical study of Machiavelli's teaching can ultimately have no other purpose than to

¹ For the above quotation, see TWM, p.86.

contribute towards the recovery of the permanent problems.”² Throughout Chapters I to III Strauss canvassed such themes as Machiavelli’s presentation of new modes and orders, his anti-Christian and anti-theological animus, his corruption of the minds and morals of the young, and his undermining of the authority of the Bible. Strauss’s primary purpose in those three chapters was not, however, the critical study of Machiavelli’s teaching. One is justified in saying that by Strauss’s reflection at the very beginning of Chapter IV: “It would not be reasonable to claim, or indeed to believe, that the preceding observations suffice to elucidate every obscure passage of the *Discourses*. The utmost we can hope to have achieved is to have pointed to the way which the reader must take in studying Machiavelli’s work.”³

Yet, notwithstanding his introduction’s categorical rejection of Machiavelli’s teaching as “evil,” “immoral” and “irreligious,” Strauss’s predominant concern in Chapter IV seems to be to lay bare the inadequacies of Machiavelli’s teaching rather than to reject it *in toto*. Indeed, one commentator goes so far as to suggest: “it seems likely that he quietly agreed with Machiavelli’s criticism of Christian scholasticism for having openly promulgated a teaching that denigrated the political nature of man and that led men to aspire to transcend their need for law . . .”⁴ Given that an analysis of scholasticism is beyond the scope of this chapter, I wish simply to say here that even if Strauss took issue with the scholastics’ denigration of the political or with their attempt to synthesize faith and reason,⁵ such disagreement would not

² *TM*, pp.9, 14.

³ *TM*, p.174. Peterman, “Approaching Strauss,” p.348: “chapter 4 . . . represents a distillation of the specific arguments of the earlier chapters.”

⁴ Clark A. Merrill, “Leo Strauss’s Indictment of Christian Philosophy,” *Review of Politics* 62, no.1 (Winter 2000), p.98. Cf. Zuckert, *Postmodern Platos*, pp.120-21.

⁵ See *NRH*, pp.7-8, 163-64.

vitate his insight into the fundamental inadequacy of Machiavelli's critique of Christianity.

According to both Jackson and Peterman, Strauss's analysis in Chapter IV of Machiavelli's teaching has a twofold appearance: in Part One of the chapter Strauss examines his teaching on religion, and in Part Two Strauss examines his teaching on morality and politics.⁶ Strauss's thesis in Part One is that Machiavelli is neither Christian nor pagan,⁷ while his thesis in Part Two is that Machiavelli's moral-political teaching is not only a revolt against Christianity and all religion but against classical political philosophy as found in Aristotle and Plato.⁸ Also twofold, I would add, is the structure of Part One. Although Strauss does not explicitly demarcate sections,⁹ it is possible to identify two sections in Part One: the first section examines Machiavelli's critique of Christianity and Biblical religion, while the second section examines broader aspects of his teaching on religion, aspects pertaining to cosmology and the utility of religion.¹⁰ The movement between the two sections of Part One is, I would suggest, a movement from the specific to the general bases of Machiavelli's teaching on religion. Whether the movement is an ascent or a descent or a progression will be made clear in Chapter Four. In the meanwhile, I wish to propose that the movement evinces Strauss's aim to explicate

⁶ Jackson, "Strauss's Teaching," pp.41, 204; Peterman, "Approaching Strauss," pp.347f. See also McAllister, *Revolt Against Modernity*, p.100.

⁷ See *TM*, pp.175-76. For a restatement of Strauss's thesis, see Vickie B. Sullivan, "Neither Christian Nor Pagan: Machiavelli's Treatment of Religion in the *Discourses*," *Polity* 26, no.2 (Winter 1993): 259-280; *Machiavelli's Three Romes: Religion, Liberty, and Politics Reformed* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1996).

⁸ See *TM*, pp.232-33. When Strauss speaks of the "classics" and of "classical political philosophy" he largely means Plato, Socrates and Aristotle.

⁹ Jackson, "Strauss's Teaching," p.38: "Strauss did not make the plan of his book obvious . . . he does not employ such conventional literary aids and devices as subtitles, numbered sections, or additional spaces between key transition paragraphs. . . ."

¹⁰ In contrast, Jackson identifies "provisionally" three clusters of paragraphs in Part One: the first cluster addresses Machiavelli's criticism of Christianity; the second his cosmology; and the third his use of religious imagery and terms. "Strauss's Teaching," p.206.

the standpoint from which Machiavelli judges Christianity and religion in general. I wish to further propose that such explication is also evinced by certain digressions or temporary shifts within both Parts One and Two away from the strong emphasis Strauss places on *The Prince* and the *Discourses* in understanding Machiavelli. The first digression is to both the *Florentine Histories* and the *Exhortation to Penitence*; the second digression is to the *Castruccio*; and the third digression is to *La Mandragola*.¹¹

The present chapter examines Strauss's analysis of Machiavelli's judgment regarding the weaknesses of Christianity then proceeds to examine his analysis of Machiavelli's reflections on Biblical/Christian theology, with a view to showing that Strauss took seriously the fundamental alternative of "Jerusalem."

Machiavelli's judgment on Christianity

Christianity and matters of the world

Machiavelli's focus was fixed firmly on the here-and-now, not on venerating God or the gods. Contesting that he was a pagan and a pious one at that, Strauss emphasizes that "[h]e had not reverted from the worship of Christ to the worship of Apollo. . . ."¹² Yet, Strauss says, "it is not misleading to count Machiavelli among

¹¹ For the paragraphic locations of Strauss's digressions, see the appendix to this thesis.

¹² *TM*, p.175. See also *TM*, p.329n2, and cf. pp.109-11. With regard to piety, cf. *CM*, p.20; *OPS*, pp.167-68, 175; *RCPR*, pp.187-98, 203-5; *SPPP*, p.43; Plato, *Euthyphro* 5a-6a, 7a, 14b.

However, both Ridolfi and de Grazia regard Machiavelli a pious Christian. Roberto Ridolfi, *The Life of Niccolò Machiavelli*, trans. Cecil Grayson (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963); Sebastian de Grazia, *Machiavelli in Hell* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989). But, Villari says, Machiavelli was, like other Renaissance political thinkers, "thoroughly imbued with the Pagan spirit, and merely regarded Christianity as a guide to private morality . . ." Pasquale Villari, *The Life and Times of Niccolò Machiavelli*, Popular ed., Vol.2, trans. Linda Villari (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1898), p.92; cf. pp.504-6, 509-11. Cf. Eric Voegelin, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, Vol.22: *History of Political Ideas*, Vol.IV: *Renaissance and Reformation*, ed. David L. Morse and William M. Thompson (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1998), pp.84-86.

“the wise of this world.”¹³ Machiavelli notes in *Discourses* III 30 that Savonarola castigated as impious the desire of “the wise” to discover by astrological means the underlying and ultimate causes of the world. In the same chapter Machiavelli explains that Savonarola’s downfall was caused by his envy towards, and his failure to act decisively against, those opposed to his reordering of Florence. One cannot successfully rule the state if one does not employ the cruel, violent and forceful methods requisite for holding onto power. Machiavelli points out: “Moses was forced to kill infinite men who . . . were opposed to his plans. Friar Girolamo Savonarola knew this necessity very well . . . [but] was not able to conquer it because he did not have the authority to enable him to do it . . .”¹⁴ Strauss continues: “Those “wise of the world” who transcend the limits of political cleverness reject not only the myths of the pagans but above all revelation and the characteristic teachings of revelation on the ground indicated. They are falasifa or “Averroists.””¹⁵

By alluding to a similarity between Machiavelli and the Averroists, the followers of Averroes (1126-1198), the medieval Arabic philosopher and commentator of Aristotle, Strauss is proffering an illuminating observation about Machiavelli’s teaching on religion. Curiously, Strauss does not then move to discuss the teachings of either Averroes or the Averroists, although further on in his critical study he raises the subject of Averroism whilst examining Machiavelli’s reflections

¹³ *TM*, p.175. With regard to Machiavelli and “the wise,” see also *TM*, pp.17-19, 28; J. Patrick Coby, *Machiavelli’s Romans: Liberty and Greatness in the Discourses on Livy* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 1999), pp.157, 316-17n20; and cf. Plato, *Apology* 18b-c, 19b, 20d-e.

¹⁴ *Discourses*, p.280. Cf. *The Prince*, ch.6; *Discourses* I 11, 45, 56. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations I give from *The Prince* are from Harvey C. Mansfield’s translation, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

¹⁵ *TM*, p.175 (original emphasis). See also WIPP?, p.41. Cf. Charles N.R. McCoy, *The Structure of Political Thought: A Study in the History of Political Ideas* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963), pp.127-29; Merrill, “Strauss’s Indictment,” pp.96, 98, 100f.

on Biblical/Christian theology. Strauss continues: “The vulgar understanding of Machiavelli is justified to some extent by his reticences. He does not often speak of theological subjects, the Bible, Biblical characters, Biblical events or Christianity.” Given Strauss’s preceding discussion, it would be fair to say that by “vulgar understanding” he means the notion that Machiavelli was a pious pagan. Machiavelli’s reticence, as Strauss then points out, “does not necessarily prove indifference or ignorance [regarding the Bible and Christianity].”¹⁶ Rather, it proves that he articulated against the Bible a predominantly political outlook on the phenomena of the world, with Christianity having led the world into weakness.

Explicating that thesis, Strauss turns to three instances in the *Discourses* where Machiavelli specifically mentions Christianity: in I pr., II 2 and III 1. Though dealing in countless other passages with the core beliefs of Christianity, Machiavelli does so indirectly, Strauss observes, by comparing the differences “between the ancients and the moderns; for the ancients are primarily the pagan Romans and the moderns are primarily the Christians.”¹⁷ As Machiavelli declares in the Preface to Book I of the *Discourses*, “neither prince nor republic may be found that has recourse to the examples of the ancients.” That lack of recourse is due not to “the weakness into which the present religion has led the world . . .” nor to “the evil that an ambitious idleness has done to many Christian provinces and cities . . .”¹⁸ Apparently, Machiavelli wants to lead his readers to think that Christianity itself is on the whole not responsible for the contemporary failure to learn from, and imitate, the ancients.¹⁹ Yet he proceeds then in the preface to censure a certain modern

¹⁶ *TM*, pp.175-76.

¹⁷ *TM*, p.176.

¹⁸ *Discourses*, p.6.

¹⁹ Cf. Coby, *Machiavelli's Romans*, pp.21-22.

attitude on antiquity. He laments that the “infinite number who read” the histories merely dabble, and attributes that dabbling, the failure or incapacity to learn, to the attitude that modern times differ from ancient times, “as if heaven, sun, elements, men had varied in motion, order, and power from what they were in antiquity.”²⁰ According to Strauss, Machiavelli is arguing that “the Christian religion, and not merely the Christian religion in its alleged present state of decay . . . has led the world into weakness . . . to Machiavelli the decisive reason for the failure to imitate the ancients properly is precisely Christianity, i.e., a phenomenon which he apparently regarded only as a secondary reason. . . .”²¹

Machiavelli’s second explicit statement on Christianity can be found in *Discourses* II 2. In that “central statement . . . Machiavelli speaks, not indeed of Christianity nor yet of “the present religion,” but of “our religion.”” But, Strauss points out, “. . . whereas the first statement had opened with one *Credo*, the second statement opens with two *Credos* and ends with one *Credo*.”²² In the words of Machiavelli:

Thinking then whence it can arise that in those ancient times peoples were more lovers of freedom than in these, *I believe* it arises from the same cause that makes men less strong now, which *I believe* is the difference between our education and the ancient, founded on the difference between our religion and the ancient. For our religion, having shown the truth and the true way, makes us esteem less the honor of the world, whereas the Gentiles, esteeming it very much and having placed the highest good in it, were more ferocious in their actions. . . .²³

Machiavelli is not, it would seem, overtly questioning the truth of Christianity. He is saying in II 2, explains Voegelin, that a “false interpretation rather than Christianity

²⁰ *Discourses*, p.6.

²¹ *TM*, p.177.

²² *TM*, pp.177-78 (original emphases).

²³ *Discourses*, p.131 (emphases mine).

itself” is responsible for the weakness of the present world, for the “diminished love of freedom.”²⁴ Machiavelli judges that if Christianity had been interpreted according to “virtue”—a strong, active, worldly virtue—and not to “idleness,” it would be seen that Christianity “permits us the exaltation and defense of the fatherland . . .”²⁵ Indeed, the small number of republics in the present world and the corresponding decline in the “love of freedom” can be attributed to “[t]hese educations and false interpretations . . .” However, Machiavelli then revises his judgment about Christianity, for he states: “Still, *I believe* the cause of this [decline of republics and freedom] to be rather that the Roman Empire, with its arms and its greatness, eliminated all republics and all civil ways of life. . . .”²⁶ Strauss explains that Machiavelli, despite making that revision, “does not retract what he had said about the superiority of worldly glory to humility, about the ground of the preference generally given to humility, and about the weakness and servility prevailing in the Christian world. . . .” Machiavelli “is not oblivious of the fact that Christianity subordinates the earthly fatherland to the heavenly fatherland and thus subordinates the power temporal to the power spiritual.”²⁷

Machiavelli’s “third statement” in the *Discourses* on the core beliefs of Christianity, Strauss points out, “occurs in the first chapter of the Third Book.”²⁸ In the chapter Machiavelli reflects on the need that “sects, republics, and kingdoms” have for “good institutions” that can be periodically renewed. With “the process of

²⁴ *Collected Works*, Vol.22, p.69.

²⁵ *Discourses*, p.132. For an extended discussion of Machiavelli’s notion of virtue, see Russell Price, “The Senses of *Virtù* in Machiavelli,” *European Studies Review* 3, no.4 (October 1973): 315-145.

²⁶ *Discourses*, p.132 (emphases mine).

²⁷ *TM*, pp.179, 180.

²⁸ *TM*, p.180.

time that goodness [originally common to all three] is corrupted” by the “ambition” and “tumult” of men who forget their fear and memories of punishment, terror, violence, and force. Citing the tumults in the ancient Roman republic and “the state of Florence from 1434 to 1494,” the period of Medici rule, Machiavelli recommends the staging of executions every five to ten years of those who cause, or could cause, tumults because they “corrupt themselves.”²⁹ Strauss indicates that Machiavelli regards restoration, a return to original principles, as another way of dealing with tumults:

Through poverty and the example of the life of Christ they [both Saint Francis and Saint Dominic] restored Christianity in the minds of men from which it had already vanished. Their new modes and orders prevented the immorality of the prelates and of the heads of religion from ruining the religion. “They give the people to understand that it is evil to speak evil of evil and it is good to live in obedience to them and, if they err, to let God chastise them; and thus they do the worst they can for they do not fear that punishment which they do not see and in which they do not believe.”³⁰

Machiavelli disputes the effectiveness of that and of any restoration of Christianity. He insists, Strauss explains, that following the teaching of non-resistance to evil leaves oneself prey to those who desire to acquire dominion over others, and that “[r]esistance to evil is natural to men as well as to any other living being. The counsel against resisting evil can therefore lead only to evasion of that counsel.”³¹

One half of Strauss’s thesis that Machiavelli is neither Christian nor pagan has thus become clearer: Machiavelli’s critique of Christianity is based on a temporal

²⁹ *Discourses*, pp.209-11.

³⁰ *TM*, p.180. *Discourses*, pp.211-12: “with poverty and with the example of the life of Christ they brought back into the minds of men what had already been eliminated there. Their new orders were so powerful that they are the cause that the dishonesty of the prelates and of the heads of the religion do not ruin it. Living still in poverty and having so much credit with the peoples in confessions and sermons, they give them to understand that it is evil to say evil of evil, and that it is good to live under obedience to them and, if they make an error, to leave them for God to punish. So they do the worst they can because they do not fear the punishment that they do not see and do not believe. This renewal, therefore, has maintained and maintains this religion.”

³¹ *TM*, p.180.

understanding of the end(s) towards which religion ought to, and can, be directed. From Strauss's observations about Machiavelli's key statements on Christianity in *Discourses* I pr., II 2 and III 1, one learns that the target of his ire is the modern, Christian failure properly to imitate ancient Roman glories.³² Elsewhere Machiavelli lauds the merits of contemporary weaponry (for instance, canons) but regards his contemporaries, be they Italian, German, French, Spanish, or Swiss, as inferior to the ancient Romans in the grasp of politics and the art of warfare.³³ Generations of incompetent clerics and venal Popes have resulted in the cycle of a politically-militarily irresolute Church hierarchy and a perpetually crisis-riven Italy. Machiavelli's anticlericalism masks, however, this deeper criticism: Christianity itself is responsible for engendering attitudes of neglect and disdain towards matters of the world.³⁴

The tyranny of religious authority

Machiavelli favors political authority over religious authority. Good laws are dependent on good arms, he says. But, he insists, because the very purpose of priests and prophets is not the cultivation of the military arts, they cannot defend their peoples.³⁵ (In Machiavelli's definition, Mansfield notes, "to be *armed* means to have the art of war, a feat of study and intellect rather than of arms."³⁶) According to Strauss, though, "In his judgment on the rule or supremacy of priests

³² Cf. Coby, *Machiavelli's Romans*, pp.7f, 199, 268-74, 341n61.

³³ See *Discourses* I 6, 12, II 6, 12, 16-19, 23-24, III 10, 12, 15; *Art of War* II, III, et passim; *The Prince*, chs.3, 12-14, 20-21, 26. See also *TM*, pp.180-81, 181-82, and cf. Coby, *Machiavelli's Romans*, pp.116-36.

³⁴ See *TM*, pp.182-83.

³⁵ *The Prince*, chs.11-12; cf. ch.6.

³⁶ *Machiavelli's Virtue*, p.4. See also Roger D. Masters, *Machiavelli, Leonardo, and the Science of Power* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996), pp.64-65.

Machiavelli merely follows the classical tradition.”³⁷ In the *Timaeus*, Plato’s character Critias recites a story dating from the days of Solon³⁸ that spoke of the rule of philosophers replacing the rule of the Egyptian priest class (24a-b). Aristotle explains in his *Politics* that observance of religion is an essential aspect in the life of a state, but emphasizes that the most important aspect is the existence of “a power of deciding what is in the public interest . . .” (1328b6-24); the priest class should be drawn from members of the warrior and councilor classes too aged to pursue an “active life” (1329a27-34).³⁹ Averroes notes in his *Commentary on Plato’s Republic* that the best states come to be that way over a prolonged period of time, under the guidance of “a succession of excellent kings In general their influence is more likely to lead to excellent deeds than good convictions . . .” (II 17.3). States “will not improve by convictions <alone> . . .” (II 17.4); “[s]tates that are excellent in deeds alone are called ‘Priestly’. . . .” (II 17.5). Perhaps foreshadowing Machiavelli’s criticism of priestly rule as tyrannical, Averroes notes: “the similarity between the ‘priestly’ and the tyrannical States often leads the ‘priestly’ parts that exist in these States to be transformed into tyrannical ones, thus bringing into disrepute to him whose aim is ‘priestly’ . . .” (III 5.6) The “similarity” is this: “the only aim of the homes and the other kinds of men in the Ideal state is a good purpose for one <kind> of the men, namely the rulers. In this respect they resemble the tyrannical State.” (III 5.3)⁴⁰

³⁷ *TM*, pp.184-85. Strauss’s accompanying endnote, p.330n24, refers to *Timaeus* 24a3-b3; *Politics* 1328b6-24, 1329a27-34; and instructs the reader to compare those references to Averroes, *Commentary on Plato’s Republic*, ed. E.J. Rosenthal, II 17.3-5 and III 5.6. With regard to Strauss’s instruction, see below.

³⁸ Athenian legislator, c.638-c.559 BC.

³⁹ *Complete Works*, Vol.2, pp.2108, 2109.

⁴⁰ *Averroes’ Commentary on Plato’s Republic*, ed. and trans. E.I.J. Rosenthal (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), II 17.3-5, p.205, III 5.3, p.216, III 5.6, pp.216-17.

Evidently Strauss has in mind the above passages from Plato, Aristotle and, particularly, Averroes when he observes, “The chief reason why Machiavelli opposed the direct or indirect rule of priests was that he regarded it as essentially tyrannical and even, in principle, more tyrannical than any other regime.” Citizens in “ecclesiastical principalities” must obey “divine authority” and the commands “derived” from that authority. Thus, the priestly ruling body, “however excellent,” is unaccountable. “But on the other hand, if a government is based on arms and if the citizen body is armed and virtuous, misgovernment can easily be prevented.”⁴¹

Machiavelli’s critique of Christianity thus carries with it an argument about the superiority of political authority to religious authority. His affirmation of political authority gives rise, though, to questions about the factors to which he attributed the successful spread of Christianity throughout the Roman Empire.⁴² Machiavelli insists that the Romans corrupted themselves by allowing their political authority, strength, honor, and power to be ceded to, and overcome by, their enchantment with religious cults from abroad, the most threatening of which would prove to be Christianity. Stepping into the void created by the Roman Empire’s degenerating political vitality, Christianity’s strong emphasis on humility and morality attracted the support of the disaffected peoples of the empire.

Machiavelli further argues, however, contrasting the modern world with ancient Rome, that the moderns, while also adept in not keeping their promises, fail to use cruelty well precisely because their cruelty is pious. His argument is summarized thus by Sullivan: “Christians have so misunderstood mercy that in order to avoid cruelty they take half-measures that produce greater acts of political cruelty

⁴¹ *TM*, p.185.

⁴² *TM*, p.185 (cf. pp.84, 172); Sullivan, *Machiavelli's Three Romes*, pp.142ff.

than those they sought originally to avoid.”⁴³ Machiavelli explains in *Discourses* III 19-23 that unlike contemporary Christian princes, kings and emperors, the ancient pagan Romans knew how to be cruel *or* kind, and not vacillate between the two modes of conduct. The Bible commands that one love one’s neighbor as oneself. The ancient Romans were not restricted by such a command. With the good use of cruel methods, directing the attention of the citizenry totally toward “the fatherland or the common good,” Roman leaders established strong foundations for the republic.⁴⁴

But Machiavelli is not simply accusing Christianity of political weakness or ineptitude. According to Sullivan, “Machiavelli’s hostile engagement with Christianity . . . extends far beyond this accusation that the religion’s promulgation of the doctrine of mercy actually produces cruelty.”⁴⁵ Strauss notes that when censuring Christianity for its pious cruelty and its engendering of feebleness in the world Machiavelli has in mind an ancient scriptural command: “According to the Biblical teaching, love of the neighbor is inseparable from love of God whom one is commanded to love with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his might.”⁴⁶ Quite possibly Strauss is drawing, for instance, upon Deuteronomy 6:5, though he does not refer to the passage, which proclaims: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart with all your soul and with your strength.” Similarly, Mark 12:29-31

⁴³ *Machiavelli’s Three Romes*, p.47. See also Coby, *Machiavelli’s Romans*, pp.8-9; Strauss, *TM*, pp.156-57, esp. p.157 (lines 3-7); Miguel E. Vatter, *Between Form and Event: Machiavelli’s Theory of Political Freedom* (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000), pp.297ff.

⁴⁴ See *TM*, pp.185-87. With regard to *Discourses* III 19-23, see also *TM*, pp.160-65; Coby, *Machiavelli’s Romans*, pp.179-88, 321n62; Harvey C. Mansfield, *Machiavelli’s New Modes and Orders: A Study of the Discourses on Livy* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1979; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), pp.372-86; Sullivan, *Machiavelli’s Three Romes*, pp.148-53. But as will be seen in ch.4, and further on in this present chapter, Machiavelli has a bleak view also of paganism.

⁴⁵ *Machiavelli’s Three Romes*, p.49.

⁴⁶ *TM*, p.187.

declares, ““The most important [commandment] . . . ,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord Our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.””⁴⁷

To reiterate, Strauss regards Machiavelli’s attack on Christianity as an attack on the Biblical teaching that one must love God and one’s neighbor with all one’s heart. Patapan likewise observes: “Machiavelli’s critique of love is at its core a critique of the providence and omnipotence of the God of the New Testament, the God of Love.” In Machiavelli’s judgment, Patapan argues, “The God of Love imposes impossible demands on His children.”⁴⁸

Strauss continues: “We must try to understand what he meant by indicating that the Biblical God is a tyrant. . . .”⁴⁹ Machiavelli means, I would suggest, that actualization of the Biblical teaching to love God and one’s neighbors depends ultimately upon the tyrannical, despotical use of force; a lasting basis for the acceptance of the Biblical teaching derives from the capacity of religious authorities to compel obedience among believers. However, human nature being what it is, rebellious and sinful, “[t]he Biblical command is very difficult to fulfill,” if not impossible. To Machiavelli, Strauss then explains, “it is a most true rule that when difficult things are commanded, harshness, and not sweetness, is needed in order to bring about obedience.”⁵⁰ Those who disobey the Biblical command “deserve

⁴⁷ Deut.6:5, NIV, p.208; Mark 12:29-31, p.1278.

⁴⁸ Haig Patapan, “All’s Fair in Love and War: Machiavelli’s *Clizia*,” *History of Political Thought* 19, no.4 (Winter 1998), p.546; see also *ibid.*, pp.546-47, 547ff. Cf. Robert Faulkner, “*Clizia* and the Enlightenment of Private Life,” in Sullivan, ed., pp.30-31, 40f, 42-47. With regard to Machiavelli’s critique of providence, see the following section of this present chapter.

⁴⁹ *TM*, pp.187-88.

⁵⁰ *TM*, p.188.

infinite pity because they cannot have understood what they did.” The fact remains, though, that disobedience places oneself against God, and the corresponding punishment for the unrepentant is eternal damnation in hell. “The God of Love is necessarily an angry God who “revenge[n]g and is furious” and “reserveth wrath for his enemies,” a consuming fire. . . . the fire of hell . . .” Strauss concludes that “Machiavelli tacitly rejects the very notion of divine punishment.”⁵¹

In an endnote Strauss indicates that Nahum 1:2 is the Biblical passage he is citing when speaking of “fire” and of “hell.”⁵² I would add that the passage proclaims:

The Lord is a jealous and avenging God;
the Lord takes vengeance and is filled with wrath.
The Lord takes vengeance on his foes
and maintains his wrath against his enemies.

Deuteronomy 32:22, likewise speaking of dire punishments, declares: “For a fire has been kindled by my wrath, one that burns to the realm of death below.”⁵³ Strauss continues: “Machiavelli teaches that man’s nature is not bad, originally or as a consequence of sin . . .” The corruption within man can best be countered not by the threat of eternity in hell but, rather, “by the power of a human king . . .”⁵⁴ Curiously, though, Machiavelli also teaches that the Biblical command to love God transmutes into fierce loyalty towards one’s country.⁵⁵

It again becomes clear that Strauss is making the case that Machiavelli’s critique of Christianity evinces a fundamentally temporal interpretation of

⁵¹ *TM*, p.188. Cf. Friedrich Meinecke, “Machiavelli,” in *Perspectives on Political Philosophy*, Vol.1: *Thucydides through Machiavelli*, ed. James V. Downton, Jr., and David K. Hart (New York: Holt, Reinhart and Winston, 1971), p.405.

⁵² *TM*, p.331n35.

⁵³ Nah.1:2, NIV, p.1180; Deut.32:22, p.237. See also, e.g., Exod.24:17; Ps.97:3; Isa.26:11.

⁵⁴ *TM*, p.189.

⁵⁵ See *TM*, p.189 (lines 13-22).

Christianity and its core beliefs. Strauss observes: “When Machiavelli teaches that Christianity has rendered the world weak by commanding men not to glory in their virtue and power, he means also that Christianity has lowered the stature of man by rejecting the seeking of one’s own honor and one’s own glory as such. The distrust of the concern with one’s own honor and glory goes hand in hand with the distrust of one’s own virtue . . .”⁵⁶ In *Discourses* I 11 Machiavelli indicates that a prince must have recourse to religion when ordering the state. Elsewhere, however, he delivers a veiled rebuke to the Biblical injunction that one must trust God: a prince must, instead, rely on *himself*, on *his own* capabilities and judgment. In *Discourses* I 30 Machiavelli reports:

So as to avoid the necessity of having to live with suspicion, or being ungrateful, a prince should go personally on expeditions, as the Roman emperors did in the beginning, as the Turk does in our times, and as those who are virtuous have done and do. For if they win, the glory and acquisition are all theirs; and when they are not present, since the glory is someone else’s, it does not appear to them that they can make use of the acquisition unless they eliminate in someone else the glory that they have not known how to gain for themselves.

In III 3 Machiavelli instructs that a successful outcome on the battlefield requires that “a wise and good captain” prove to his soldiers by augural means and the like that they have the favor of the gods. “Nevertheless, virtue must accompany these things; otherwise they have no value.”⁵⁷

In other words, a successful prince should not, in his actions regarding the welfare of the state, rely on the beneficence of God or the gods. Machiavelli reasons, Strauss observes, that “[t]he sins which ruin states are military rather than moral sins. . . .” Because the world and human life are always in flux, “states cannot

⁵⁶ *TM*, p.189.

⁵⁷ *Discourses* I 30, p.67; III 33, p.286.

choose the true way or the right mean which consists in keeping what one has and in not taking away from others what belongs to them . . .”⁵⁸ However, it is not so much an ever-changing world or man’s proclivity for acquisition as it is an imposed, external factor which drives nations to wage wars against each other. “Heaven’s deficient kindness,” namely, “the fulfillment of the divine command to multiply,” invariably means a nation either starves to death or engages in a war for its very survival.⁵⁹ One should not feel guilt for sinful actions, for to sin is natural and necessary for “everything noble and high.” Rescuing “their fatherland from foreign or tyrannical domination” is the source of “redemption” for “excellent men” who regret allowing themselves and their actions to be dictated to by the natural necessity to sin. An excellent man cannot, either in his public actions or private concerns, allow guilt to overcome his desire for excellence.⁶⁰

Machiavelli’s reflections on Biblical/Christian theology

Theology in Machiavelli

Strauss clearly is showing that Machiavelli’s critique of Christianity bespeaks an essentially temporal reading of Biblical religion. However, remaining to be fully explicated by Strauss is the very standpoint from which Machiavelli censures Christianity for engendering weakness and servility in the world.⁶¹ The argument of the present section of this chapter is that Strauss regards Machiavelli’s standpoint as basically anti-cosmoteleological; Machiavelli addresses theological matters with

⁵⁸ *TM*, p.191.

⁵⁹ *TM*, pp.191-92.

⁶⁰ See *TM*, pp.192-93, 332n43; see also p.190; with regard to sin and conscience, cf. pp.148-149.

⁶¹ Cf. Coby, *Machiavelli’s Romans*, pp.7-8; Mansfield, *Machiavelli’s Virtue*, p.48; Anthony J. Parel, *The Machiavellian Cosmos* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), pp.45, 153ff; Sullivan, *Machiavelli’s Three Romes*, p.38. With regard to Parel, cf. the introduction to ch.4 of this study.

a view to undermining what he regards as the enervating belief in divine providence. A supplementary argument in this section is that what Strauss said of Hobbes's reflections on theology can be said of his analysis of Machiavelli's reflections on theology. In his *Spinoza's Critique of Religion* Strauss stated that Hobbes's "extensive and penetrating preoccupation with theological themes is not to be understood as due to some residue left within him by millennial modes of thought and feeling; but exclusively to the necessity of bringing out the thesis of disbelief in the face of prevailing belief: it is in every sense a compromise . . ."⁶²

Before returning to Strauss's critical study of Machiavelli's teaching it is to note several differing views about the extent of Machiavelli's reflections on Biblical/Christian theology. Some commentators claim that Machiavelli was not in any way preoccupied with theology while some commentators say that he was, though not so much with theology itself as its basic outcomes. Sullivan states, "Machiavelli is concerned not with theological disputation, but with the general and practical effect of Christian doctrine."⁶³ Similarly, Coby explains: "Clearly Machiavelli is displeased with Christianity and from time to time targets its teachings and its principles." However, Coby qualifies his point: "But the *Discourses* presents no sustained assault on Christian principles and is not itself seriously engaged with Christian doctrine; it offers . . . no revisionist retelling of the Sermon on the Mount, where "Turn the other cheek" is discovered to mean "Bloody thine enemy's cheek."'" Likewise, Najemy explains that Machiavelli "gestures toward the subject of Christian truth . . . but never says much about it. . . .

⁶² SCR, p.101.

⁶³ *Machiavelli's Three Romes*, p.206n37. See also Carnes Lord, "Machiavelli's Realism," in Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, ed. and trans. Angelo M. Codevilla (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), pp.119, 123n9.

There is in Machiavelli's writings no extended or serious discussion of the origins of Christianity or of its central beliefs . . ."⁶⁴ According to Villari, "Machiavelli . . . never concerned himself with religious questions," only with "the formation of the modern state."⁶⁵ As Berlin notes, "there is . . . something extraordinary in the fact that he completely ignores the concept and categories . . . in terms of which the best known thinkers of his day were accustomed to express themselves." Shortly afterwards Berlin states: "The absence of Christian psychology and theology—sin, grace, redemption, salvation—need cause less surprise: few contemporary humanists speak in such terms. . . . But, and this is more noteworthy, there is no trace of Platonic or Aristotelian teleology . . . with which the Renaissance thinkers are deeply concerned . . ."⁶⁶ In a twist to the above theses, Nederman claims that Machiavelli drew heavily on medieval Christian theology, though "[w]here he may be said to depart from the medieval framework is in his view that the "salvation" sought by the ruler is political as well as otherworldly."⁶⁷ However, according to Sullivan, "Machiavelli's transformation of Christian doctrine recognizes only earthly punishments and earthly rewards, and therefore this transformation can no longer be termed a religion. . . ."⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Coby, *Machiavelli's Romans*, p.274; John M. Najemy, "Papirius and the Chickens, or Machiavelli on the Necessity of Interpreting Religion," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 60, no.4 (October 1999), p.663.

⁶⁵ *Life and Times*, Vol.2, p.91 (cf. pp.96-97, 116). See also Federico Chabod, *Machiavelli and the Renaissance*, trans. David Moore (London: Bowes and Bowes, 1958), pp.93-95, 143-48, 189-91, 194.

⁶⁶ Isaiah Berlin, "The Originality of Machiavelli," in Myron P. Gilmore, ed., *Studies on Machiavelli* (Firenze: G.C. Sansoni Editore, 1972), p.160. With regard to Berlin's point about Machiavelli and the Renaissance, cf. Hans Baron, *In Search of Florentine Civic Humanism: Essays on the Transition from Medieval to Modern Thought*, Vol.2 (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1988), pp.36-39, 101-51; Parel, *Machiavellian Cosmos*, passim. Cf. also Lev Kamenev, "Preface to Machiavelli," *New Left Review* 15, 3/6 (May-June 1962), pp.39-41.

⁶⁷ Cary J. Nederman, "Amazing Grace: Fortune, God, and Free Will in Machiavelli's Thought," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 60, no.4 (October 1999), p.621. See also Bjørn Qviller, "The Machiavellian Cosmos," *History of Political Thought* 17, no.3 (Autumn 1996), pp.327, 340ff.

⁶⁸ "Neither Christian Nor Pagan," p.279.

The above scholars clearly do, albeit with varying emphases, acknowledge the extent of Machiavelli's departure from Christianity. Nevertheless, the strength of Strauss's analysis is that it links that departure with Machiavelli's thoroughgoing attack on Biblical/Christian theology and relates his rejection of Christianity to a rejection of religion in general.⁶⁹

Abandoning theological certitude about divine providence and the createdness of the world, Machiavelli takes issue with precepts that emphasize a transcendent, otherworldly, final, and absolute end. "He recognizes in fact no theology but civil theology, theology serving the state and to be used or not used by the state as circumstances suggest."⁷⁰ Advancing an out-and-out disbelief in Biblical religion, Machiavelli replaces the imperative of conscience and the belief in divine providence with the imperative of responding to the exigencies of circumstance.⁷¹ One should not be guided by conscience, he argues, because there exists no providential, created order in the world that one can transgress. However, that he censures Christianity for promoting a theology that presupposes a cosmic order as created by God clearly implies a rejection of the account of creation in Genesis and its cosmology. "An account of the creation of the world . . .", Strauss explains in his lecture on Genesis, "necessarily presupposes an articulation of the world, of the completed world, of the cosmos, that is to say, a cosmology. The biblical account of creation is based on a cosmology."⁷²

Conscience

⁶⁹ With regard to Machiavelli's rejection of all religion, see also Sullivan, *Machiavelli's Three Romes*.

⁷⁰ NM, p.314. But cf. CM, p.22.

⁷¹ On this point, cf. PL, pp.35-36; SCR, pp.37, 49, 274n2.

⁷² OIG, p.368. See also JA, pp.151-63, 165-66.

Having addressed Machiavelli's this-worldly rethinking of sin, redemption and divine punishment, Strauss deems it instructive "to survey Machiavelli's teaching regarding conscience." In only a few instances, though, does Machiavelli speak of conscience, and of those instances Strauss observes:

In the *Florentine Histories*, which are almost as long as the *Prince* and the *Discourses* taken together, there occur five mentions of the conscience; four mentions occur in speeches by Machiavelli's characters; the fifth and last mention occurs in Machiavelli's description of Piero de' Medici who was inferior in virtue of the mind and of the body to his father Cosimo and his son Lorenzo.⁷³

Strauss leaves his "survey" at that, thereby echoing Machiavelli's own rare mentioning of the subject of "conscience." Later, whilst examining Machiavelli's critique of providence, Strauss again refers to the *Florentine Histories*, but he does not cite the five mentions of conscience.⁷⁴ Given Strauss's brief reference in this regard it seems appropriate to thus discuss what Machiavelli *does* say in the passages indicated.

The context of the *Florentine Histories* is manifestly Christian. The work was commissioned in late 1520 by Cardinal Giulio de' Medici as a history of Florence. Machiavelli's aim in the work was not, however, simply to narrate the history of Florence from the city's origin and up to 1492; as Mansfield explains, "the object" of the work is not history as "history" but history as meaning the interplay "between virtue and nature or fortune. . . ." In Machiavelli, "History . . . has become a mixture of the two, in which virtue is diminished by its historical condition and fortune is enhanced by a new predictability, even rationality . . ."⁷⁵

⁷³ *TM*, p.193. Strauss has in mind here *Florentine Histories* III 13, VI 20, VII 23. For these references, see *TM*, p.332n44.

⁷⁴ See *TM*, pp.197-98.

⁷⁵ Mansfield, *Machiavelli's Virtue*, pp.127, 136; "Translators' Introduction," in Niccolò Machiavelli, *Florentine Histories. A New Translation*, trans. Laura F. Banfield and Harvey C. Mansfield, Jr. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1988), pp.x, xiv-v. Cf. Markus Fischer, *Well-Ordered License: On the Unity of Machiavelli's Thought* (Lanham, Maryland:

According to Fleisher, though, “Machiavelli is preoccupied not with history, not even with political history, but rather with the history of political greatness—great statesmen and great republics. . . . Machiavelli’s specific concern is with the political renewal of his own Tuscany and this, he believes, can only come about by the recovery of ancient *modi* and *ordini*, the source of *virtù* and prudence.”⁷⁶

When mentioning conscience whilst describing pivotal historical events in the *Florentine Histories*, Machiavelli advances against Christianity an anthropocentric conception of the motivating causes of human action.⁷⁷ He mentions conscience—one such motivating cause—three times in the *Florentine Histories* III 13. However, rather than speaking in his own voice and saying what he himself believes, Machiavelli conveys his thoughts about conscience through a speech given by a member of a Florentine guild. In the words of his plebeian character:

. . . . It pains me much when I hear that out of *conscience* many of you repent the deeds that have been done and that you wish to abstain from new deeds; and certainly, if this is true, you are not the men I believed you to be, for neither *conscience* nor infamy should dismay you, because those who win, in whatever mode they win, never receive shame from it. And we ought not to take *conscience* into account, for where there is, as with us, fear of hunger and prison, there cannot and should not be fear of hell. . . .⁷⁸

It seems that to Machiavelli, a ruler (or an aspiring ruler) cannot and must not be dissuaded by his conscience from performing whatever actions are necessary to ensure success. In the *Florentine Histories* VI 20, Machiavelli’s character, a Milanese ambassador, criticizes a certain count, Francesco Sforza, for reneging on his

Lexington Books, 2000), pp.13-14; Jacobitti, “Classical Heritage,” pp.187-92. With regard to Christianity as the context of the *Florentine Histories*, see Mansfield, *Machiavelli’s Virtue*, pp.144-46, 148; cf. Quentin Skinner, *Machiavelli* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), pp.78-86; Strauss, MCL, p.7.

⁷⁶ Martin Fleisher, “The Ways of Machiavelli and the Ways of Politics,” *History of Political Thought* 16, no.3 (Autumn 1995), p.338 (original emphases).

⁷⁷ Cf. POR?, pp.269-72.

⁷⁸ *Florentine Histories*, p.123 (emphasis mine).

promise to protect Milan. The ambassador concedes that the expectations of the Milanese, that the count would “observe his faith,” were too high, given that he had on other occasions shown he could not be trusted. But the overly high expectations does not excuse the Count’s faithlessness, the ambassador exclaims,

Nor will it keep the just pricking of your *conscience* from tormenting you when the arms that were prepared by us to injure and frighten others will come to wound and injure us, because you yourself will judge yourself worthy of the punishment parricides have deserved. And even if ambition blinds you, the whole world as witness to your wickedness will open your eyes; God will open them for you, if perjuries, if violated faith and betrayals displease Him, and if He does not always wish to be the friend of wicked men, as up to now He has done for some hidden good. So do not promise yourself sure victory, for that will be kept from you by the just wrath of God . . .⁷⁹

Machiavelli’s fifth mention of conscience in the *Florentine Histories* can be found in VII 23. Instead of raising the subject through the speech of a character, he raises the subject by describing a speech given by Piero de’ Medici. Piero feels guilt for not being able to cure Florence of its tumults, Machiavelli explains: “to unburden his *conscience* and to see if he could shame them, he called them all to his house and spoke to them . . .” Piero berates the citizens of Florence for putting their own ambitions before the interests of their fatherland—while the rest of Italy is enjoying peace, Florence is not. Piero ends his speech by proclaiming: “I promise you, by the faith that ought to be given and received by good men, that if you continue to carry on in a mode that makes me repent having won, I too shall carry on in a manner that will make you repent having ill used the victory.”⁸⁰

Three varied messages emerge when the five usages of conscience in the *Florentine Histories* are regarded collectively. First, it is futile for a ruler to ignore

⁷⁹ *Florentine Histories*, p.252 (emphases mine).

⁸⁰ *Florentine Histories*, pp.301 (emphasis mine), 302.

his conscience, ultimately because the inevitable price for wrong actions and wicked behavior is punishment by God. Second, a ruler cannot, however, allow the fear of a bad conscience to stop him from doing whatever needs to be done to achieve great deeds. Third, in some circumstances, the protection of the fatherland, for example, God condones wicked acts, such as murder and deceit. The upshot of Machiavelli's varied messages in the *Florentine Histories* about conscience is that he regards God as a hypocrite⁸¹ and regards Biblical injunctions against evil as inefficacious. As the Apostle Paul stated in Romans 2:12-13, "All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law. For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous." In Romans 3:8 Paul proclaimed: "we are being slanderously reported as saying . . . "Let us do evil that good may result" . . ." As Peter, another of the Twelve Disciples, said in 1 Peter 3:9: "Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing." Quoting Psalm 34:12-16, Peter proclaims in 1 Peter 3:10-12:

"Whoever would love life
and see good days
must keep his tongue from evil
and his lips from deceitful speech.
He must turn from evil and do good;
he must seek peace and pursue it.
For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous
and his ears are attentive to their prayer,
but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil."⁸²

Machiavelli mentions conscience four times in the *Discourses*. His mentions

⁸¹ Cf. *Discourses* III 30; Mansfield, *Modes and Orders*, p.400. Machiavelli's mention of conscience in *Discourses* III 30 will be discussed shortly further on below.

⁸² Rom.2:12-13, NIV, p.1406; Rom.3:8, p.1407; 1 Pet.3:9-12, pp.1511-12.

in I 27 and I 55 take place, Strauss points out, “within a Christian context.”⁸³ Rather than explicating what Strauss says about the context and content of those first two instances I wish simply to note that Machiavelli explains that Christians perform good actions not only because their neighbors observe them doing so but also because God too is a witness to their deeds.⁸⁴ Strauss observes that “[t]he context of the third mention of *coscienza* occurs in a context which is no longer obviously Christian.” Machiavelli speaks in *Discourses* II 14-15 about a conspiracy against Rome attempted by the Latins; the seeming patience of the Romans had caused, or had given arrogance and fearlessness to, the Latins to test the will of, and subsequently conspire against, the Romans. As Strauss explains on Machiavelli’s behalf, “The Latins knew—or, more literally, had awareness (*coscienza*)—of many things which they had done against the will of the Romans.” Believing in their own power but with knowledge also of Roman capabilities, the Latins were not deterred by the fact that the Romans had learned of the conspiracy.⁸⁵

Strauss asks, “Could the conscience in Machiavelli’s opinion be based on true knowledge of the relation of the power of man to the power of God? In that case, the conscience would be prudence modified by the knowledge of the overwhelming power of God who punishes every action done against his will. Certainly one of Machiavelli’s characters identifies the conscience with the fear of hell.”⁸⁶ To answer his own question Strauss turns to the fourth mention of conscience in the *Discourses*—Machiavelli speaks in III 6 of the “stained conscience” of those who

⁸³ *TM*, p.193.

⁸⁴ *Discourses* I 27, p.62; I 55, p.110; Mansfield, *Modes and Orders*, pp.101, 161.

⁸⁵ *TM*, pp.194, 195. See also Mansfield, *Modes and Orders*, pp.230-32. For the above reference itself to *Discourses* II 14-15, see *TM*, p.332n48.

⁸⁶ *TM*, p.195.

plotted to kill Caesar.⁸⁷ It is not clear, though, whether Machiavelli is employing or even has in mind the accepted meaning of conscience as, namely, heartfelt acknowledgment that what one has done is abhorrent in the eyes of God or the gods. Strauss asks, “Was the bad conscience of these ancient Romans [who conspired against Caesar] caused by the suspicion that they did wrong or by fear of detection by human beings? Machiavelli forces us to raise this question but does not answer it.”⁸⁸ Yet neither does Strauss answer the question, for the reason, I would suggest, that he addresses the implications of Machiavelli’s silence about the cause and meaning of “bad conscience” when discussing Machiavelli’s silence about penitence; in any case, Strauss (as Jackson notes) regards as the key element in Machiavelli’s reflections on theology his rejection of creation *ex nihilo* rather than his disavowal of conscience.⁸⁹ Strauss continues: “For the time being we suggest that Machiavelli tried to replace the conscience, or religion, by a kind of prudence which is frequently indistinguishable from mere calculation of worldly gain: “the true way” consists, not in obeying God’s invariable law, but in acting according to the times.”⁹⁰

cf. Strauss
of Machiavelli
Cato 17A
p. 17
on p. 17
p. 17

Strauss clearly means that Machiavelli, in seemingly praising the truth of Livy’s history and affirming the superiority of the Romans over the moderns, is questioning the authority of Biblical injunctions about the imperative of obedience to God’s Law. Indeed, in Chapter III of *Thoughts on Machiavelli* Strauss explained, “To the extent to which Livy expounds pagan theology, Machiavelli can use him for suggesting an alternative to Biblical theology or for sowing doubts regarding Biblical

⁸⁷ *Discourses*, p.230; *TM*, p.196. Walker’s translation of the *Discourses* has Machiavelli saying “bad conscience” (Walker, trans., p.417), whereas Gilbert’s translation has him saying “if your conscience is not clear” (in *Machiavelli: The Chief Works and Others*, Vol.1, trans. Allan Gilbert, [Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1965], p.442).

⁸⁸ *TM*, p.196. Cf. Mansfield, *Modes and Orders*, pp.322, 337; *Machiavelli’s Virtue*, pp.25-26.

⁸⁹ Jackson, “Strauss’s Teaching,” pp.211-12.

⁹⁰ *TM*, p.196; see also pp.148-49.

theology. To the extent to which Livy criticizes Roman theology, Machiavelli can use him as a model for his own criticism of Biblical theology.”⁹¹ Also in Chapter III, Strauss noted that Machiavelli’s “praise of ancient Rome is . . . a mere engine of subversion or of what one might call his immanent criticism of the Biblical tradition. Admiration for ancient Rome was the only publicly defensible base from which he could attack the Biblical religion.”⁹²

Providence

From the subject of conscience Strauss moves in his critical study to address the subject of providence. He begins his analysis of the subject by stating, “It is impossible to excuse the inadequacy of Machiavelli’s argument by referring to the things he had seen in contemporary Rome and Florence. For he knew that the notorious facts which allowed him to speak of the corruption of Italy proved at the same time the corruption of Christianity in Italy.”⁹³ In other words, Machiavelli does not err in speaking of the contemporary situation of Italy reeling constantly from crisis to crisis. Neither does he err in lamenting that Florence is held captive to that condition of crisis. However, he errs in intimating that Christianity is itself the root cause of the crises.

Strauss continues: “It is somewhat worthier but still insufficient to excuse the inadequacy of Machiavelli’s argument by the indescribable misuse of the Biblical teaching of which believers in all ages have been guilty.” Contemporary readers of the Bible “are likely to be less shocked than amazed by Machiavelli’s suggestions,”

⁹¹ *TM*, p.141.

⁹² *TM*, pp.143-44. See also *MCL*, pp.16-18, 24; *TM*, pp.131-32, 148-49. Cf. Sullivan, *Machiavelli’s Three Romes*, pp.9, 39ff, 144-45, et passim.

⁹³ *TM*, p.196.

Strauss observes. “They have become accustomed, not only to distinguish between the core and the periphery of the Biblical teaching, but to abandon that periphery as unnecessary or mythical. Machiavelli was unaware of the legitimacy of this distinction.”⁹⁴ Here is a rare instance where Strauss is seeking to understand Machiavelli better than Machiavelli understood himself. Strauss likewise explains in an endnote:

The distinction between core and periphery has taken the place of the distinction between the original teaching and later distortions; in the earlier distinction, the original means either the explicit teaching of the Bible or else that part of the Biblical teaching of which a combination of philology and psychology proves that it is the original.⁹⁵

The issue of how one should, and must, read the Bible is a leitmotif in Strauss’s corpus. The issue can be seen, for example, in his book, *Spinoza’s Critique of Religion*, and in his lectures, “Jerusalem and Athens” and “On the Interpretation of Genesis.” Strauss’s argument, put in the simplest possible terms, is that people who read the Bible as a book like any other book rather than as the word of God in effect deny the possibility of revelation, of God revealing Himself to humankind.⁹⁶

But to Machiavelli, the Bible should be read like any other book. In *Discourses* III 30 he states: “whoever reads the Bible judiciously will see that since he wished his laws and his orders to go forward, Moses was forced to kill infinite men . . .” Exodus 32:27-29 reports: “Then he [Moses] said to them, “This is what

⁹⁴ *TM*, pp.196-97. Cf. HSS, pp.182-86; *JA*, pp.150-51, 151ff. Cf. also above, ch.2, toward the beginning of the “Defining revelation and reason” section.

⁹⁵ *TM*, p.332n52. Strauss continues:
Moved by the spirit of this higher criticism, Nietzsche asserts that the notions of guilt and punishment are absent from “the psychology of the ‘gospel’.” (This assertion occurs in that section of the *Anti-Christ* which by an amazing accident is the 33d section.) The crucial difference between Nietzsche’s and Machiavelli’s criticism of Christianity is that Machiavelli regards the notions of guilt and punishment as essential to Jesus’ teaching.

Cf. *PSCR*, pp.150-51, 156-57; *SCR*, pp.12-13, 17-18, 172, 174f.

⁹⁶ *OIG*, pp.359-61; see also *JA*, pp.150-51; *SCR*, pp.35, 113ff, 136ff, 144-46, 157-58, 258-68.

the Lord, the God of Israel, says: ‘Each man strap a sword to his side. Go back and forth through the camp from one end to the other, each killing his brother and friend and neighbor.’” The Levites did as Moses commanded, and that day about three thousand of the people died.”⁹⁷ The point of this passage in Exodus, as Fischer notes, is “that those who sin against God shall be justly punished . . .” Machiavelli, however, regards the passage as implying “that founders need to murder those who fail to agree with their vision in order to be effective.”⁹⁸ To Machiavelli, the Bible should be read not with reverence but with, instead, the desire to discover “the effectual truth” of the world, political life and human action.⁹⁹ But as Strauss stated in lecture on Genesis, “If the Bible is the work of God it . . . has to be read in a spirit of pious submission, of reverent hearing.”¹⁰⁰

Continuing with his analysis of Machiavelli’s critique of providence Strauss turns to the *Florentine Histories*. He explains that “Machiavelli’s characters” in the work, believing that the success of one’s cause is positive proof of its justice, attribute the success of their cause, and their enemies’ misfortunes, to God’s favor.¹⁰¹ Strauss adds: “Machiavelli in his own name twice speaks explicitly and

⁹⁷ *Discourses*, p.280; Exod.32:27-29, NIV, pp.102-3.

⁹⁸ Fischer, *Well-Ordered License*, p.183.

⁹⁹ See Angelo Caranfa, *Machiavelli Rethought: A Critique of Strauss’ Machiavelli* (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1978), pp.104, 129; Fischer, *Well-Ordered License*, pp.182-83; Benedetto Fontana, “Love of Country and Love of God: The Political Uses of Religion in Machiavelli,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 60, no.4 (October 1999), p.647n17; John H. Geerken, “Machiavelli’s Moses and Renaissance Politics,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 60, no.4 (October 1999), pp.579-80, et passim; Mansfield, *Modes and Orders*, pp.398, 400-1; Vatter, *Between Form and Event*, pp.280, 289. See also *TM*, pp.51, 114, 147, 163. I have taken the above phrase, “effectual truth,” from *The Prince*, ch.15 (cf. *Discourses* I pr., II pr.). With regard to that phrase, see Lord, “Machiavelli’s Realism,” pp.116-17; John M. Najemy, “Language and *The Prince*,” in Martin Coyle, ed., *Niccolò Machiavelli’s The Prince: New interdisciplinary essays* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), pp.96-99, 104; Strauss, *MCL*, pp.11-12; *SCR*, pp.226-27; Vatter, *Between Form and Event*, pp.31-35.

¹⁰⁰ *OIG*, p.359.

¹⁰¹ *TM*, p.197. Strauss has in mind here—as he indicates in an endnote, *TM*, p.332n53—*Florentine Histories* IV 7, VI 20-21, VII 4, 17, 28, VIII 10, 11.

without qualifying expressions like “it seems,” of God’s taking care of men insofar as God’s providence relates to justice.”¹⁰² In VI 32 Machiavelli notes that Constantinople was taken in 1453 by Turkish forces, while in VI 33 he notes that Christian forces defeated the Turks at Belgrade in 1455. VI 34 is the first of the two examples in the *Florentine Histories* where he speaks in his own name; at the beginning of the chapter Machiavelli states: “But turning to things in Italy, I say how the year 1456 went . . .”¹⁰³ He ponders (Strauss explains) that the storm that engulfed Tuscany in 1456 was intended by God “to threaten rather than chastise Tuscany.” He wished that “this little example should suffice for refreshing among men the memory of his power.”¹⁰⁴ In VIII 19-21, again not speaking through a character, Machiavelli recounts events of 1479-80—the forces of the Italian dukes and princes, united under the papal banner in response to the Turks, were confronted with the grave danger of Turkish forces having landed at Otranto and sacked the surrounding areas. At the close of VIII 19 Machiavelli states: “But God, who in such extremities has always had a particular care for it [i.e. Florence], made an unhoped-for accident arise that gave the king, the pope, and the Venetians something greater to think about than Tuscany.” In VIII 20 Machiavelli speaks of the attack on Otranto by Turkish forces; the troubles besetting Florence, Machiavelli explains in VIII 21, were in actuality an “accident” that presented Florence with the opportunity to atone for its mistakes, proving to God, the Pope and all Christians that it was worthy of regaining its liberty. But, Machiavelli also explains in VIII 21, not everyone recognized that opportunity as a chance for redemption: “the duke in

¹⁰² *TM*, 197-98.

¹⁰³ *Florentine Histories*, p.269.

¹⁰⁴ *TM*, p.198. Cf. de Grazia, *Machiavelli in Hell*, pp.67-68. The following discussion draws on *TM*, pp.198, 332n54.

Siena . . . accused the fortune that with one unhoped-for and unreasonable accident had taken from him the empire of Tuscany. . . . The same chance made the pope change his plan: whereas at first he had never wanted to listen to any Florentine spokesman, he became so much milder that he listened to anyone who would reason about universal peace with him.”¹⁰⁵

Yet having briefly discussed Machiavelli’s mentions of providence in the *Florentine Histories*, Strauss states: “But let us return to the *Prince* and the *Discourses* in which Machiavelli sets forth “everything he knows.””¹⁰⁶ Strauss’s words “But let us return” signals that his discussion of the *Florentine Histories* was a digression.¹⁰⁷ One should remember, though, that shortly before his digression Strauss had proposed that Machiavelli questions the notion of conscience and the belief in divinely providence; Strauss reinforced his proposition by pointing to Machiavelli’s skeptical, depreciatory interpretation in the *Florentine Histories* of God’s providential intercession in human affairs.¹⁰⁸

Strauss’s precis of Machiavelli’s “doctrine regarding providence” is worth

¹⁰⁵ *Florentine Histories*, pp.341, 342.

¹⁰⁶ *TM*, p.198.

¹⁰⁷ *TM*, pp.45, 46. In *TM*, ch.I Strauss wrote: “A typical expression indicating a digression is the remark “But let us return to our subject-matter.”” Shortly afterwards, though, he stressed: “We do regard as a digression however a passage which is presented as an answer to a possible question or objection of the reader.” In ch.II of his study, which examines *TM*, ch.I, Jackson speaks of Strauss’s above definitions of “digression”; see “Strauss’s Teaching,” p.126. Curiously, when examining *TM*, ch.IV, Jackson identifies Strauss’s mentions of the *Castruccio* and *La Mandragola* but not the above mention of the *Florentine Histories*; see “Strauss’s Teaching,” p.207.

Baron speaks of “digressions” but does not perceive in them the significance that Strauss does. Of Machiavelli’s advice in *Discourses* III 6 about “how princes and other rulers must behave in order to successfully suppress conspirators. . . .”—i.e., princes must act against notions of moral virtue—Baron states: “But in the *Discourses* these are digressions, sometimes characterized as such, sometimes splitting up a continuing discussion.” Hans Baron, “Machiavelli: the Republican Citizen and the Author of ‘The Prince’,” *English Historical Review* 76, no.299 (April 1961), p.224; *Florentine Civic Humanism*, Vol.2, p.111. In ch.II of his study, which examines *TM*, ch.I, Jackson speaks of Strauss’s above definitions of “digression”; see “Strauss’s Teaching,” p.126. Curiously, when examining *TM*, ch.IV, Jackson identifies Strauss’s mentions of the *Castruccio* and *La Mandragola* but not the above mention of the *Florentine Histories*; see “Strauss’s Teaching,” p.207.

¹⁰⁸ With regard to conscience, see *TM*, p.196 (lines 30-34); with regard to providence, see p.197 (esp. lines 15-26), and cf. the discussion of miracles in *PL*, pp.29-34; *SCR*, pp.186-91.

quoting in full because it shows that Strauss regards Machiavelli as having comprehensively questioned the efficacy of belief in God's providential rule over the world.

Since man is by natural necessity compelled to be ungrateful to man, he has no reason to be grateful to God. For if there is a natural necessity to sin, one is compelled to ascribe to God the origin of evil; one cannot speak of God as pure goodness or as the highest good which does not contain any evil within itself. Man cannot be expected to be grateful to God for undeserved blessings since he receives with equal abundance sufferings which he does not deserve. Necessity rather than God or necessity governing God or necessity in God, not to say chance, and not human merit or demerit, is the cause of those blessings or sufferings which are not due to man's own prudence or folly. We find just retribution only where just men rule. Every other just government is imaginary. The effective rule of just men depends on good arms, on human prudence and on some measure of good luck. There is no shred of evidence supporting the assertion that chance favors the just more than the unjust. God is not a judge or even an arbiter but a neutral. If it is true that extreme injustice arouses men's hatred, resistance and desire for revenge, it is also true that perfect justice would paralyze the hands of government; states can only be governed by a judicious mixture of justice and injustice. God is with the strongest battalions, which does not mean that he is with the largest number of battalions. Virtue, i.e. man's own virtue, and chance take the place of providence.¹⁰⁹

This precis shows that Strauss perceives in Machiavelli an anti-Biblical theological animus.¹¹⁰ That Machiavelli censures the Biblical teachings regarding providential order and (as will be seen shortly) divine Creation can be interpreted as meaning that he inveighs against Christianity from an anti-cosmoteleological standpoint.

At first glance, however, Machiavelli's entreaty for a prince to come forth and save Italy does not seem amiss. He proclaims in the final chapter of *The Prince* that God has provided Italy with the opportunity for redemption, to save itself from the barbarians. Yet by elsewhere contrasting the moderns, who are Christian, with

¹⁰⁹ *TM*, pp.198-99. With regard to the second sentence of Strauss's precis, cf. *CM*, pp.98-99; *JA*, pp.165-66.

¹¹⁰ Cf., e.g., *TM*, pp.73-74, 132-33, 141-45; Sullivan, *Machiavelli's Three Romes*, pp.51-53.

the ancient pagan Romans, and by speaking favorably of cruel deeds whilst decrying the susceptibility to chance of unarmed ecclesiastical principalities, imagined principalities and imagined republics,¹¹¹ Machiavelli propounds a temporal, prudence-based understanding of the ends towards which human action should be directed. As Strauss points out, “Machiavelli has learned through the comparison of the ancients and the moderns that there is no correspondence between success and justice but only a correspondence between success and prudence in the crude sense.”¹¹²

The successful ruler acts in accordance not with justice nor even with eternity but only with the portentous and providential opportunities presented by the agitations of chance. In Chapter 15 of *The Prince* and *Discourses* III 6 Machiavelli explains that ruin occurs when the prince fails as circumstances demand to abandon such qualities as faithfulness and honesty that are widely regarded as exemplary. Machiavelli, Strauss explains, “does not even allude to the danger of eternal ruin which may be run by those who do not act as they ought to act. The dangers run in a conspiracy, i.e. the dangers of torture and death, “surpass by far every other kind of danger” and therefore, we must add, the danger of damnation.” Strauss is saying that Machiavelli’s focus is fixed firmly on the here-and-now, not the hereafter. Strauss, underscoring such disregard of the hereafter, asks: “Or did Machiavelli believe that the danger of damnation can be averted by repentance and perhaps even by repentance on the deathbed? “Penitence,” he says in his *Exhortation to Penitence*, “is the sole remedy which can wipe out all evils, all errors of men.” He

¹¹¹ *The Prince*, ch.11; cf. chs.6-7, 13. With regard to *The Prince*, ch.26, see *TM*, p.199 (see also pp.55, 63, 67-68, 73ff, 79-80).

¹¹² *TM*, p.200.

does not even allude to this possibility in the *Prince* and the *Discourses*.”¹¹³ Similarly, Strauss explained in Chapter I: “since each of the two works contains everything he knows, he suggests by this silence [about “the devil,” “hell,” and “the soul”] that these subjects are unimportant simply . . .”¹¹⁴ In short, the incorrigibly irreligious nature of Machiavelli’s teaching on religion is evidenced by his very silence in his two pivotal works about the efficacy of penitence.

Like Strauss, Germino regards as significant the fact that elsewhere than in his two major works Machiavelli does speak of penitence and the soul. But against Strauss Germino claims: “Surely it is noteworthy that in the “Exhortation” Machiavelli the alleged blasphemer explicitly condemns blasphemy. He also condemns converting our intellect from an instrument for understanding God’s greatness into a means for speculating about the world.”¹¹⁵ Throughout his work Machiavelli entreats people who are unfriendly to their neighbors, utter impieties and ungracious towards God to be guided by conscience and repent of their wicked ways. At the end of his work, Machiavelli states:

to repent and to know clearly
that everything which pleases the world is

¹¹³ *TM*, pp.200-1. Because the above mentions of the *Florentine Histories* and *Exhortation* both occurred in the context of Strauss examining Machiavelli’s reflections on divine providence, and are separated only by a single paragraph—a paragraph which contains the precis of Machiavelli’s doctrine about divine providence—I would suggest (1) that the digression to the *Exhortation* supplements the digression to the *Florentine Histories*, and (2) that the two digressions can, therefore, be regarded as a single, unified digression.

¹¹⁴ *TM*, p.31.

¹¹⁵ Dante Germino, “Blasphemy and Leo Strauss’s Machiavelli,” *Review of Politics* 53, no.1 (Winter 1991), p.152. See also Marcia L. Colish, “Republicanism, Religion, and Machiavelli’s Savonarolan Moment,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 60, no.4 (October 1999), pp.603-6, 616; Dante Germino, “Second Thoughts On Leo Strauss’s Machiavelli,” *Journal of Politics* 28, no.4 (August 1966), pp.796-803; Parel, *Machiavellian Cosmos*, pp.54-55, 87; Maurizio Viroli, *Machiavelli* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp.24-26; *Niccolò’s Smile: A Biography of Machiavelli*, trans. Antony Shugaar (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000), pp.257-59. Cf. Patapan “All’s Fair,” pp.531ff, 545-47, 547ff; Eric Voegelin, “Review of Strauss’s *On Tyranny*,” in Emberley and Cooper, eds. and trans., p.48.

but a brief dream.¹¹⁶

According to Ciliotta-Rubery, though, certain aspects of the “Exhortation” affirm Strauss’s thesis that Machiavelli is a teacher of evil:

[Machiavelli’s] reduction of the two great Commandments to “...love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul,..” and “...love they neighbor as thyself...” to merely being “grateful” to God and “friendly” to neighbors, compromises the original sentiment and intentions of these commandments. Moreover, his casual and matter of fact approach to penitence also compromises the truly serious nature of both the penitent and the ceremony of penitence.¹¹⁷

Machiavelli’s radical alteration of the two commandments indicates that he “cannot be seen as a true believer who respects God’s word as the highest Truth,” Ciliotta-Rubery stresses. Moreover, that Machiavelli disguised the blasphemous substance of his teaching in the form of a penitential speech, and that he gave such a speech to an audience unaware of the truly diabolical nature of his counsel, shows that he was incorrigibly and fundamentally irreligious. Ciliotta-Rubery states:

The fact that these alterations [to the two commandments] were made before a religious audience that did not suspect Machiavelli’s impiety nor suspect that such impiety would manifest itself in the form of an altered representation of penitence makes his teaching all the more reprehensible. In its best light, Machiavelli’s use of a religious forum for the promulgation of his own earthly teaching proves irreverent and at its worst, suggests his own moral indifference to his audience. For this, one may again be brought to the conclusion that Machiavelli is a teacher of evil.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ Quoted by Germino, in “Blasphemy,” p.152. Germino’s quotation is his own translation from the Italian. “An Exhortation to Penitence,” in *Chief Works*, Vol.1, p.174:

But we are deceived by lust, involved in transgressions, and enmeshed by the snares of sin; and we fall into the power of the Devil. Hence, to get out of it, we must resort to penitence and cry with David: “Have mercy upon me, oh God!” and with Saint Peter weep bitterly, and for all the misdeeds we have committed feel shame

And repent and understand clearly

that as much as pleases the world is a short dream.

“Exhortation,” trans. Gilbert, p.171: “Penitence . . . is the only means for annulling all the ills, all the sins of men . . .”

¹¹⁷ Andrea Ciliotta-Rubery, “Evil Teachings Without Remorse: An Examination Of The Question Of Evil Within Machiavelli’s “Exhortation to Penitence” And “The Life of Castruccio Castracani of Lucca””, Vol.2 (Ph.D. diss., Georgetown University, 1994) pp.403-4 (the above ellipses are the author’s own). The above commandments can be found in Mark 12:29-31.

¹¹⁸ “Evil Teachings,” pp.435, 436 (see also p.182 and ch.III, passim). See also NM, p.312; *TM*, pp.49-52. Cf. Sullivan, *Machiavelli’s Three Romes*, pp.218-19n32.

Creation and miracles

Having shown that Machiavelli regards the doctrines of conscience and providence as untrue, dangerous maxims, Strauss proceeds to examine his reflections on creation. Strauss explains on Machiavelli's behalf: "If all men's being sinners would have to be understood as a consequence of sin, man must have been radically different prior to his original sin from what he is now" ¹¹⁹ Strauss has in mind here Machiavelli's critiques of the Biblical account of creation and "original sin." Each and every person is a sinner because Adam and Eve ate the fruit of the forbidden tree in the Garden of Eden. According to Machiavelli, to teach that everyone is corrupt, as does Christianity, requires unremitting alertness to the unrest and drive for acquiring glory that is caused by man's propensity to sin. Guarding against such unrest requires the capacity to be cruel, to mete out punishment, a capacity that Christianity fails to use well. ¹²⁰

Machiavelli speaks in *Discourses* I 2 of the origins of human civilization. He explains, but omits in the chapter specific mention of Adam and Eve, that people originally lived scattered throughout the earth and gradually gathered together for the purpose of mutual protection—thus, society and civilization were formed. According to Strauss, "Machiavelli's notion of the beginning of the world is not the Biblical but rather the "Epicurean notion" which presupposes the eternity of "matter"; by assuming that matter is uncreated, one could admit the necessity of evil or of sin without derogating from God's goodness." Strauss's accompanying endnote instructs: "Consider Averroes' *Commentary on Plato's Republic*, ed. cit., I

¹¹⁹ *TM*, p.201.

¹²⁰ With regard to Machiavelli's critique of original sin, see Mansfield, *Machiavelli's Virtue*, p.167; Sullivan, *Machiavelli's Three Romes*, pp.165-67. With regard to Machiavelli's critique of Christianity's pious cruelty, see above, this present chapter.

11.3-6 and II 7.”¹²¹

But does Strauss mean to draw a parallel between Averroes and Machiavelli with regard to how they understood God’s role in creating the world? Averroes says in I 11.3:

Such a statement of the dialectical theologians among the men of our time that Good and Evil cannot be imagined in relation to God, but that all actions in relation to him are good, is indeed a sophistical argument, the fallacy of which is self-evident. For according to this opinion Good and Evil have no definite nature in themselves, but they are good or evil by decision. . . .

At the beginning of II 7.1 Averroes states: “But as regards those of our community known as dialectic theologians, their religious speculation led them to <the opinion> that what God wills has no limited nature . . . [that] there is here no <such thing as> beautiful or ugly except by supposition.”¹²² Elsewhere Averroes observes: “it is more appropriate to call someone who makes measured statements about natural phenomena a dialectician than to call him a poet.”¹²³

Is, then, Machiavelli akin to a “dialectical theologian” in the manner in which he elucidates the bases of the knowledge of good and of evil? He explains in *Discourses* I 2 that from people gathering together to form society “arose the knowledge of things honest and good, differing from the pernicious and bad.”¹²⁴ Machiavelli’s discussion in I 2 is paralleled by his statements in *Discourses* I pr., I 11 and I 39 about man, heaven and God. Similar statements, Strauss adds, can be seen in II 5 and III 43. Of II 5 Strauss writes that Machiavelli therein “silently

¹²¹ *TM*, pp.201, 333n64. With regard to Strauss’s comment about Epicurus, cf. *LAM*, pp.78-79, 82-83, 86; *SCR*, pp.38-52.

¹²² *Commentary on Plato’s Republic*, I 11.3, p.126, II 7.1, p.186.

¹²³ *Averroes’ Middle Commentary on Aristotle’s Poetics*, trans. Charles E. Butterworth (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1986), ch.1, ¶6, p.65.

¹²⁴ *Discourses*, p.11.

expresses his view on the creation of the world by refuting an argument advanced against the most famous alternative thesis which affirms the eternity of the world.”¹²⁵ Machiavelli indicated a belief in such a thesis in the Preface to Book II of the *Discourses*: “I judge that the world has always been in the same manner and there has been (always) as much good as there has been evil.”¹²⁶

According to Strauss, “Almost all statements just referred to express mere judgments, i.e., mere conclusions without the reasoning supporting them. The only exception is Machiavelli’s summary refutation of an argument in favor of creation.”¹²⁷ That refutation can be found in *Discourses* II 5. Initially, Machiavelli does not explicitly refute the argument for creation; he opens the chapter by declaring:

To those philosophers who have meant that the world has been eternal, I believe, one could reply that if so great an antiquity were true, it would be reasonable that there should be memory of more than 5000 years—if it were not visible how those memories of the times are extinguished by various causes.¹²⁸

Genesis 1:1-2 proclaims that the world came into existence from nothingness by the action of God: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.”¹²⁹ Though apparently rebutting philosophic arguments regarding the eternity of the world, Machiavelli does not mean to argue in favor of the Biblical account of creation. As Coby notes, “since

¹²⁵ *TM*, p.202; for the above references themselves, see p.333n65.

¹²⁶ Quoted by Strauss, in *TM*, p.202. *Discourses* II pr., p.124: “I judge the world always to have been in the same mode and there to have been as much good as wicked in it.”

¹²⁷ *TM*, p.202.

¹²⁸ Quoted by Strauss, in *TM*, p.202. (Cf. the statements about *Fortuna* in *The Prince*, ch.25.) With regard to the identity of the philosophers in question, a footnote in the Mansfield/Tarcov translation, p.138n1, for the same passage, says: “Aristotle, *Physics*, VIII; *Metaphysics*, XII 6-7; *On the Heavens*, I 9 279a12-28. Also Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, I 28.”

¹²⁹ NIV, p.1. Cf. OIG, pp.362-67.

Machiavelli proceeds to provide alternative explanations for the oblivion of the past . . . he in effect defends those philosophers who proclaim the eternity of the world, and likely he embraces this doctrine himself.”¹³⁰ In the words of Machiavelli: “the Christian sect . . . suppressed all . . . [the pagan] orders and all its ceremonies and eliminated every memory of that ancient theology.”¹³¹ The thesis that Machiavelli affirms teaches that the eternal, pre-existent—but inert—substance of the world was set into motion by the will and the word of the prime mover, namely, God. According to Averroes, “If indeed the world had come into being temporally, it would be more appropriate that it should have come into being, in so far as it was a natural existent, from principles appropriate to natural things, rather than from principles appropriate to artificial things, i.e. the will.” He adds: “Since, however, it is established that the world exists through a First Agent which preferred its existence to its non-existence, it is necessary that this agent should be a willer . . .”¹³²

Echoing an observation he made toward the beginning of his critical study, Strauss explains: “Savonarola mentions contemporary “worldly wise” men who assert that God is not the efficient but the final cause of the world as well as that there is only one soul in all men, i.e., that there is no immortality of individual souls. The men who held these views were the Averroists.”¹³³ For instance, Averroes stated: “the thesis of a numerical plurality of immaterial souls . . . is not a theory acknowledged by the philosophers, for they regard matter as the cause of numerical

¹³⁰ Coby, *Machiavelli's Romans*, p.340n50. See also Mansfield, *Modes and Orders*, pp.202-3. Cf. de Grazia, *Machiavelli in Hell*, pp.77f.

¹³¹ *Discourses*, p.139. With regard to how Machiavelli accounted for Christianity's expunging of “ancient theology,” see the above discussion of *Discourses* II 5, in ch.2, in the section titled “Defining revelation and reason.”

¹³² *Averroes' Tahafut Al-Tahafut (The Incoherence of the Incoherence)*, Vol.1, trans. Simon van den Bergh (London: Luzac and Company, 1969), p.271. Cf. OIG, pp.364-66.

¹³³ *TM*, p.202; cf. pp.175-76. Cf. also Green, *Jew and Philosopher*, pp.73-74, 181n76; Zuckert, *Postmodern Platos*, pp.120, 191-92.

plurality and form as the cause of congruity in numerical plurality. And that there should be a numerical plurality without matter, having one unique form, is impossible.”¹³⁴ In Plato’s estimation, Averroes explained, “the soul is separated from the body, for the soul creates and forms the body, and if the body were the condition for the existence of the soul, the soul would not have created it or formed it. . . .” According to Averroes, “the philosophers do not disagree about the fact that there are in the elements souls creating each species of animals, plants, and minerals that exists . . .”¹³⁵ Averroes rejected creation *ex nihilo*, but as Wolfson notes, “The very same persons who damned him for his heresy—Albertus Magnus, Thomas Aquinas, and even Giles of Rome—followed his example and wrote commentaries on Aristotle in his style and manner; and they constantly quote him.”¹³⁶ Explicating the Averroists’ views is crucial to understanding Machiavelli, Strauss advises: “We must turn to the books of the “Averroists” in order to complete Machiavelli’s intimations and to fill the gaps between the seemingly unconnected denials without which his political teaching as a whole would be baseless.”¹³⁷

Rather than taking his own advice and turning then to the Averroists’ books, Strauss continues with his analysis of Machiavelli’s reflections on creation. For instance, Strauss observes that Machiavelli “may be said to exclude dogmatically all evidence which is not ultimately derived from phenomena that are at all times open

¹³⁴ *Tahafut Al-Tahafut*, p.14.

¹³⁵ *Tahafut Al-Tahafut*, p.358.

¹³⁶ Harry Austryn Wolfson, *Studies in the History of Philosophy and Religion*, Vol.1, ed. Isadore Twersky and George H. Williams (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1973), p.383. See also Wolfson’s *The Philosophy of the Kalam* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1976), pp.455-65, 589-600. Cf. Green, *Jew and Philosopher*, p.230n75. With regard to Averroes’ thesis on eternity, see also Armand A. Maurer, *Medieval Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1982), pp.100-4, 192-207; Strauss, *PL*, pp.91-92, 94-98; Wolfson, *Philosophy and Religion*, Vol.1, pp.11-18, 236, 244, 375-83, 402-29, 574ff, et passim; *Philosophy of the Kalam*, pp.76ff, 358, 373-465 (esp. 376-81), 551-59.

¹³⁷ *TM*, p.203.

to everyone's inspection in broad daylight." Attacking the cognitive and experiential veracity of miracles, though aware of evidence pertaining to the origins of—and evidence—for "revealed religion," Machiavelli regards the evidential phenomena of miracles as being outside the bounds of verification.¹³⁸

— "Whereas Machiavelli does not explicitly discuss the beginnings of Christianity, he explicitly discusses what one may call the beginnings of Judaism," Strauss explains.¹³⁹ In Chapter 6 of *The Prince* Machiavelli equates the state founded by Moses to the states founded by Cyrus, Romulus and Theseus; in the following chapter he indicates that all states, including those founded by the popes, are of human, not heavenly, origin. Elsewhere, he depicts occurrences of miracles, be they Biblical—God speaking to Moses—or pagan—Numa claiming a nymph spoke to him—as phenomena that are inaccessible to the human mind.¹⁴⁰ According to Strauss, "Machiavelli does not believe that there are nymphs nor that one can speak with God: one does not hear the words of God but only the words of men."¹⁴¹ Clearly Strauss has in mind here Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy—four of the five books of the Pentateuch. To give two examples that bear on Strauss's above statement about God: Exodus 3:1-22 explains that God called out from within the burning bush and spoke with Moses, instructing him to lead the Israelites out of their slavery in Egypt; Exodus 4:1-17 explains that God instructed Moses to impart to the Egyptians and Israelites signs to prove that he had indeed spoken with God.

¹³⁸ *TM*, pp.203, 204; cf. pp.145-46.

¹³⁹ *TM*, p.204.

¹⁴⁰ *The Prince*, ch.11; *Discourses* I 11. Cf. *The Prince*, chs.7, 13, 14, 18; *Discourses* II 5, 13, III 20, 22. I have gleaned these references from *TM*, pp.204-5, 205, 335nn.72-74.

¹⁴¹ *TM*, p.205.

Machiavelli on the character of religion

Curiously, having demonstrated that Machiavelli rejects as untenable and false the theological precepts regarding conscience, providence and creation, Strauss does not then state explicitly that Machiavelli rejects the very existence of God.¹⁴² Instead, Strauss points out: “According to Machiavelli, Biblical religion and pagan religions have this in common, that they are of merely human origin. As for the essential difference between them, he is primarily concerned with its political aspects.”¹⁴³ The difference pertains precisely to the primacy in ancient pagan Roman of arms—of soldiers, armies, generals and the pursuit of worldly glory—over the rule of priests. With such primacy of arms the Romans were not as vulnerable to fickle changes in fortune as are modern, Christian republics. Strauss continues: “To repeat Machiavelli’s primary contention, whereas the pagan religion was conducive to the triumph of the world, Christianity has rendered the world weak.”¹⁴⁴ Christianity is epitomized by non-warlike and populist origins, whereas aristocratic warlike origins and preoccupation with political matters characterize paganism. Machiavelli praises the vitality of pagan Roman political life. He defends the plebeian Romans against the charge of fickleness—they would initially support a leader only to later plot and rebel against him. Moreover, he notes approvingly that the plebeians were always vigorous in defending the freedom that was taken from them by the excessive virtue of others.¹⁴⁵

The tenor of Strauss’s analysis of Machiavelli’s critique of Christianity can

¹⁴² Yet as Strauss said in *TM*, p.203, “We would go too far were we to assert that Machiavelli has never heard the Call nor sensed the Presence, for we would contradict his remarks referring to the conscience. But he certainly refuses to heed experiences of this kind.” Cf. *SCR*, pp.126-27.

¹⁴³ *TM*, p.205.

¹⁴⁴ *TM*, p.206. Strauss’s accompanying endnote, p.335n77, refers to his own work, pp.176-77, 184-85; *The Prince*, chs.10, 13, 19; and *Discourses* II 30.

¹⁴⁵ *TM*, pp.206-7. Here Strauss has in mind *Discourses* I 8, 58 and II 2; cf. *TM*, p.335n79.

be thus summarized: Machiavelli praises pagan Rome whilst criticizing the weakness engendered by Biblical religion and Christian clerics. Yet at the beginning of his critical study Strauss had indicated that his thesis is, and therefore that the tenor of his analysis would be, that Machiavelli is neither Christian nor pagan. However, having pointed to Machiavelli's defense of the plebeian Romans, Strauss affirms his original thesis by explaining that Machiavelli regards paganism as inefficacious as Christianity; Strauss notes that for Machiavelli, "Paganism is characterized by satisfaction with the present, with the world and its glory, and therefore by despair regarding the future, the ultimate future . . . Biblical religion is characterized by dissatisfaction with the present, by the conviction that the present, the world, is a valley of misery and sin . . ." ¹⁴⁶

From Machiavelli's underscoring of the difference between paganism and Biblical religion one learns that he regards paganism as inefficacious as Christianity. Machiavelli, despite praising the strong civic focus of the ancient Roman pagan religions, maintains that the most a pagan can hope to achieve is not the succour of an eternity in heaven but merely a brief respite from the anxieties produced by the unceasing flux of the here-and-now present. ¹⁴⁷ Given that Machiavelli has a bleak view of paganism and of the revival of Christianity, it seems curious to say, as do Beiner, Gay and Parel, ¹⁴⁸ that he was seeking to paganize Christianity by interpreting it in the light of pagan virtue.

Strauss goes on to explain: "The peculiar difficulty to which Machiavelli's

¹⁴⁶ *TM*, p.207.

¹⁴⁷ See *TM*, p.207 (lines 14-33).

¹⁴⁸ Ronald Beiner, "Machiavelli, Hobbes, and Rousseau on Civil Religion," *Review of Politics* 55, no.4 (Fall 1993), p.624; Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation*, Vol.1: *The Rise of Modern Paganism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966; New York: W.W. Norton, 1977), pp.256-57 (cf. pp.170-71, 207ff, 216-18); Parel, *Machiavellian Cosmos*, pp.47f, 51-52, 59, 61-62.

criticism of the Bible is exposed is concentrated in his attempt to replace humility by humanity. He rejects humility because he believes it lowers the stature of man. But humanity as he understands it implies the desire to prevent man from transcending humanity or to lower man's goal."¹⁴⁹ Strauss clearly means to say that Machiavelli's attack on the Bible is based on a decidedly political, secular and temporal understanding of what constitutes the *telos* of humankind. However, Strauss then admits: "As for the other elements of his criticism of the Bible, it would be useless to deny that they were implicit in the teachings of Aristotle and developed by those intransigent Aristotelians who knew the Bible."¹⁵⁰ (It is fair to say, given Strauss's previous mentions of Averroism, that the "intransigent Aristotelians" are the Averroists.¹⁵¹) According to Jackson, that Strauss hesitantly acknowledges the link between Machiavelli and Aristotle is because he "disapproves of the shamelessness with which Machiavelli flaunts Biblical morality."¹⁵²

Conclusion

It is evident, from the ground covered thus far by Strauss in his critical study of Machiavelli's teaching, that he regarded Machiavelli as mounting a comprehensive challenge to the efficacy and very truth of Christianity. To Strauss, Machiavelli's attack upon Christianity and his reflections on Biblical/Christian theology evince an incorrigibly temporal conception of what religion is and the ends towards which it should be directed. That Machiavelli rejects the core theological precepts of divine

¹⁴⁹ *TM*, pp.207-8.

¹⁵⁰ *TM*, p.208.

¹⁵¹ See *TM*, pp.175, 203-4; cf. pp.333-34n68. Cf. also Schall, "Latitude for Statesmanship?", pp.143-44.

¹⁵² Jackson, "Strauss's Teaching," p.208. Cf. Schall, "Latitude for Statesmanship?", pp.132-33.

providence and creation indicates that his critique of Christianity is based on an anti-cosmoteleological principle. That principle is further discussed in the next chapter, which examines how Strauss addresses Machiavelli's judgments on cosmology and religion in general.

Chapter Four

Cosmology and the Utility of Religion

Introduction

In a flat rejection of Strauss's thesis that Machiavelli is neither Christian nor pagan, Parel states: "instead of first establishing the ultimate or cosmological basis of his religious thought, critics begin by asking whether he is a Christian or a pagan or an atheist, and so exhaust themselves in the process." Parel adds: "It is not that these questions are irrelevant. They are indeed relevant; but they become so only when set against the background of his fundamental concept of religion as such. And is it our hypothesis that his concept is derived from his cosmology."¹

Strauss's critical study of Machiavelli's teaching is exhaustive, but not in the negative sense that Parel alleges. By beginning his critical study with the examination of Machiavelli's critique of Christianity, Strauss did not thereafter progressively dissipate the force of his analysis. Neither did Strauss ignore Machiavelli's fundamental concept of religion and his cosmology. Instead, he was seeking to carefully elucidate the standpoint behind Machiavelli's critiques of Christianity and religion in general.

The themes and subjects Strauss canvasses in Chapter IV of *Thoughts on Machiavelli* continue the thread of analysis that links together Chapters I, II and III. At the close of Chapter I, having examined the basic affinity between *The Prince* and the *Discourses*, Strauss stated that the perspective of each work should be

¹ *Machiavellian Cosmos*, p.45. See also Parel's "The Question of Machiavelli's Modernity," *Review of Politics* 53, no.2 (Spring 1991), pp.321ff, et passim.

understood by itself and not in the light of the other. In Chapter II Strauss examined Machiavelli's intention in *The Prince*; Strauss proposed at the end of Chapter II that it is necessary to turn to the *Discourses* in order to understand how and why Machiavelli both accounted for the ascendancy of Christianity and hoped to achieve the victory of his own enterprise, namely, the challenge to authority. The key theme Strauss raised in Chapter III is Machiavelli's fundamental challenge in the *Discourses* to *authority*. "Machiavelli is his own authority," Jackson observes on Strauss's behalf, "he bows to no authority other than his own reason. . . . he refused in principal to yield to any human authority in matters of political philosophy and morality. . . ." One sees in Machiavelli a "refusal to bow even to Divine authority."²

Machiavelli speaks in the Preface to Book I of the *Discourses* of his "desire" to discover "new modes and orders." He hopes that his discoveries, "these labors of mine," will be victorious over the parlous state of knowledge of things political, military and governmental that characterizes the present, that is to say, the Christian era.³ There is no reason to doubt the sincerity of Machiavelli's ambition in this regard nor doubt his conviction that his critiques and advice would advance those aims. Machiavelli bases the hoped-for victory of his discoveries on his conviction that parties of the Ghibellines—nominal Christians who support the rule of secular political authority over papal authority—will be won over by the prudence of his teaching. Strauss reflects in the final paragraph of Chapter III: "We have now answered the question of how Machiavelli can hope for the success of his venture."⁴

Strauss proceeds in Chapter IV to give his promised *critical study* of

² "Strauss's Teaching," pp.194, 195.

³ *Discourses*, p.5.

⁴ *TM*, p.172.

Machiavelli's *teaching*.⁵ In the first section of Part One of the chapter Strauss examines Machiavelli's critique of Christianity and Biblical religion. Toward the end of that first section it becomes apparent that Machiavelli's anti-religious ire is, however, targeted not simply at Christianity alone but at religion in general.

In the second section of Part One Strauss examines Machiavelli's critique of religion in general. Strauss first examines the cosmological aspect of that critique⁶; he then reports that the gulf between Aristotle and Machiavelli pertains to the abandonment of teleology in Machiavelli's cosmology.⁷ Second, Strauss surveys how Machiavelli uses religious terms; he concludes by asking what importance, if any, religion has for Machiavelli.⁸ In carefully examining Machiavelli's critiques of the weakness(es) inherent to Christianity and all religion, Strauss came to the conclusion that the critiques are untenable.

In Part Two of his critical study of Machiavelli's teaching Strauss canvasses Machiavelli's views on a series of comprehensive moral-political themes. First, the relation between virtue and goodness. Second, the nexus between free will, on the one hand, and necessity and chance, on the other hand. Third, the relation between the common good and selfishness. Fourth, the best or most efficacious form of government—is it a principality, republic or tyranny? And fifth, the relations between human nature, the common good and the highest good. Following afterwards is a concluding section in which Strauss examines Machiavelli's legacy to the history of political philosophy.⁹

⁵ Cf. *TM*, pp.14, 174.

⁶ See *TM*, pp.208-23.

⁷ See *TM*, pp.221-23.

⁸ See *TM*, pp.225-31.

⁹ To devote the space requisite for adequately understanding Strauss's critical study (*), ch.5 will examine the above first and second sections; ch.6 will examine the third, fourth and fifth sections; and

The movement between the four chapters of *Thoughts on Machiavelli* can thus be described as a movement toward casting light on the standpoint behind both Machiavelli's religious and moral-political teachings. The movement between the two sections of Part One of Strauss's fourth chapter is ultimately in the direction of Machiavelli's standpoint on religion and, therefore, can be best described as a gradual ascent. Taken together, those two sections show that Strauss was open to the possibility of revelation, in the sense that he took seriously the claim to truth and authority in Biblical religion. Before examining how Strauss explicated the standpoint behind Machiavelli's moral-political teaching (one's argument being that Strauss also took seriously the philosophic quest for knowledge), the present chapter examines Strauss's analysis of Machiavelli's critique of religion in general.

Machiavelli's cosmological reflections

Divine attributes: God, heaven and Fortuna

Strauss proposes, "In order to bring out more clearly the difference between Machiavelli and Aristotle, we must consider Machiavelli's doctrine regarding God (and his attributes. . . ." Having then summarized the "explicit" mentions of God in *Discourses* I 11-15, Strauss reflects: "On the whole Machiavelli teaches in the section on the Roman religion that fear of God's or the gods' power and wrath can be very useful; he is silent as to whether God and the gods are powerful or exist."¹⁰ Indeed, according to Coby, "The five chapters from I.11 to I.15 . . . teach us: (1) that religion is the glue of society and is important to national success; (2) that religion is untrue but politically useful to the extent that the rulers feign belief and manipulate

ch.7 will examine the concluding section. * on this point, cf. *TM*, p.234; cf. also Jackson, "Strauss's Teaching," pp.204-5.

¹⁰ *TM*, p.208.

the rites; (3) that the control of the plebeian population is the primary use of religion; and (4) that religion used militarily is helpful but of less certain value.”¹¹ Having cited Machiavelli’s silence about God in I 11-15 Strauss explains, “He can hardly be said to break that silence in the only other reference to God which occurs in the First Book [i.e., in I 58]: “not without cause does one liken the voice of the people to that of God; for a universal opinion visibly produces marvellous effects in its prognostications, so much so that it seems as if the people foresees its evil and its good by an occult virtue.””¹² Machiavelli is also silent about God in II 1, III 1, 2, 23, 29, and 33; he is silent not about the attributes of God, for he speaks of God or the gods watching over and occasionally interceding in human affairs, but he is silent with regard to—or, at the very least, is reluctant to talk about—the efficaciousness of divine intercessions.¹³ With the above chapters in mind, particularly I 58, from which he quoted, Strauss states: “Whereas the *Discourses* are then in the decisive respect silent about God, they make significant assertions regarding heaven.”¹⁴

Strauss’s examination of *Discourses* I 56 and II 29, the two chapters in the work in which Machiavelli raises specifically theological matters, will be examined further on in the present chapter. Nevertheless, one is entitled here to make this observation: by describing as a “doctrine” the mentions in the *Discourses* about the attributes of God, and by underscoring Machiavelli’s reticence in affirming the existence of God, Strauss means to show that Machiavelli’s doctrine is the antithesis of Christian theology and bespeaks an anti-Biblical theological animus.

¹¹ *Machiavelli’s Romans*, p.66. See also *ibid.*, pp.66-77; Najemy, “Papius and the Chickens,” pp.671-78.

¹² *TM*, pp.208-9.

¹³ See *TM*, p.209; I have gleaned the above references themselves from p.335n81.

¹⁴ *TM*, p.209.

Strauss continues: “Following the “astrologers” or “scientists” of his age, and perhaps even going beyond them, Machiavelli replaces God by “heaven.””¹⁵ Strauss does not say exactly who the individuals in question are. He says (in an endnote) that Savonarola inveighed against philosophers and astrologers, and states: “According to Savonarola, even the soul has greater power (*virtù*) than heaven.”¹⁶ Machiavelli too speaks of the influence heaven exerts over human affairs. In *Discourses* I pr., 6, 19, II pr., 6, 19, II pr., 2, and III 1 Machiavelli variously depicts heaven as the celestial body in the sky above, and as a sphere of reality that occasionally deigns to keep an eye on humanity. How Machiavelli goes beyond his contemporaries when he delineates the power of heaven is described thus by Strauss: “There occurs only one passage in the *Discourses* where “heaven” is described as a thinking and willing being, and in that passage “heaven” (*il cielo*) is used interchangeably with the Biblical “the heavens” (*i cieli*). . . .” Given that I turn to the passage in question shortly further on, I will simply say here that it can be found towards the beginning of II 29. Therein Machiavelli, as Strauss continues, “tacitly identifies both [*il cielo* and *i cieli*] with Fortuna. Fortuna is not the same as heaven or the all-comprising vault. Fortuna can be said to the goddess which rules the little world of man in regard to extrinsic accidents.”¹⁷

Interestingly, Strauss’s accompanying endnote instructs the reader: “Cf. *Discourses* III 1 with Dante, *Inferno* 7.67-96.”¹⁸ This passage in the *Inferno* is an exchange between Dante (7.67-69) and Virgil (7.70-96) about Fortune. Dante asks:

¹⁵ *TM*, p.209.

¹⁶ *TM*, p.335n82. For the below references themselves to the *Discourses*, see Strauss’s following endnote, p.335n83.

¹⁷ *TM*, p.209. With regard to the Biblical notion of “the heavens,” cf. Robert Sacks, “The Lion and the Ass: A Commentary on the Book of Genesis (Chapters 1-10),” *Interpretation* 8, nos.2-3 (May 1980), pp.40-41.

¹⁸ *TM*, p.335n85.

‘Master,’ I said, ‘tell me more: this Fortune whom you mention, who is she that holds the world’s possessions tightly in her clutches?’

Virgil replies:

And he to me: ‘O foolish creatures,
what great ignorance besets you!
I’ll have you feed upon my judgment of her:

‘He whose wisdom transcends all
made the heavens and gave them guides,
so that all parts reflects on every part

‘In equal distribution of the light. . . .’

Fortune, Virgil exclaims (7.91-96),

‘. . . is reviled by the very ones
who most should praise her,
blaming and defaming her unjustly.

‘But she is blessed and does not hear them.
Happy with the other primal creatures,
she turns her sphere, rejoicing in her bliss.’¹⁹

In a Dantean-like manner, Machiavelli explains in *Discourses* II 29 that Fortuna caused an accident that precipitated a renewal of virtue in the Roman republic and led Rome back towards its beginnings of discipline and strength, the accident being the invasion of Roman territory by the French. His discussion in III 1 is also about renewal, that is, within “mixed bodies, such as republics and sects . . .” But the similarity between II 29 and III 1 ends there. Though speaking in III 1 of accidents, “extrinsic” and “intrinsic,” Machiavelli does not, as he did in II 29, attribute accidents to the machinations of Fortuna, as would Dante and Virgil, for both of whom Fortuna is a heavenly entity working on behalf of a higher entity. Machiavelli does not speak in III 1 of Fortuna, a thinking and willing entity, as being *the* cause of

¹⁹ Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*, trans. Robert and Jean Hollander (New York: Doubleday, 2000), pp.123, 125.

renewal in the Roman republic; rather than praising Fortuna, he praises “the simple virtue of one man . . .”²⁰ With apparently *Discourses* II 29 in mind rather than III 1, Strauss continues in his text proper: “We shall then say that Machiavelli replaces God, not by heaven, but by Fortuna.”²¹

Prophecy and heavenly signs

From surveying Machiavelli’s mentions in the *Discourses* about the attributes of God, Strauss turns to a discussion of specifically theological matters. Pointing to I 56 and II 29, he states: “Machiavelli has explicitly devoted two chapters of the *Discourses* to what one may call theology as distinguished from religion.”²² For Strauss to employ the term “theology” to describe Machiavelli’s cosmological reflections (particularly in the above two chapters) indicates that he regards such reflections as pertaining not to a general belief in the existence of God or the gods, but rather to the discussion of theoretical and systematically enunciated principles about Fortuna, divination and the interpretation of supernatural phenomena.²³

Machiavelli undercuts the widely held notion that heavenly signs are warnings or prophecies that humankind is to be punished for its shortcomings and sins. He appears at first glance, though, to support that notion. At the beginning of I 56 he writes: “Whence it arises I do not know, but one sees by ancient and by

²⁰ *Discourses*, pp.209, 210, 211. With regard to Fortuna as seen by Dante and Virgil, see Ernst Cassirer, *The Myth of the State* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1946), p.160.

²¹ *TM*, p.209. Cf. Parel, *Machiavellian Cosmos*, pp.41-42. For the above reference itself to II 29, see *TM*, p.335n84. Here Strauss also instructs the reader to compare II 29 with the end of I 10 and the beginning of I 11. I take up Strauss’s instruction in the following paragraphs.

²² *TM*, pp.209-10. But cf. *ibid.*, pp.213, 215, where Strauss modifies the above description; he speaks of Machiavelli’s “quasi-theology.”

²³ With regard to my above observation about the meaning of “theology,” cf. *JA*, pp.150-51, 165-66; *MITP*, pp.306-7; *NM*, p.311; *NRH*, pp.177-80; *TM*, pp.210-15.

modern examples that no grave accident in a city or in a province ever comes unless it has been foretold either by diviners or by revelations or by prodigies or by other heavenly signs.” However, towards the end of I 56 Machiavelli admits: “Yet it could be, as some philosopher would have it, that since this air is full of intelligences that foresee future things by their natural virtues, and they have compassion for men, they warn them with like signs so that they can prepare themselves for defense.”²⁴ For the philosopher whom Machiavelli does not name, the intelligences are compassionate, all-knowing and all-powerful; the intelligences give or cause heavenly signs so as to enable people to prepare themselves for the travails and imminent catastrophes of life. But as Machiavelli then says, at the very end of I 56 and against the unnamed philosopher: “Yet however this may be, one sees it thus to be the truth, and that always after such accidents extraordinary and new things supervene in provinces.”²⁵

For Strauss, Machiavelli’s deprecation of “the heavenly signs” is closely related “to the intention of his whole work . . .” That “intention” is evidenced by his “silence” in both *The Prince* and the *Discourses* about the “devil and hell” and “divine punishment.”²⁶ In an endnote Strauss gives a cross-reference to his own work, and draws this parallel between the Bible and Machiavelli: “The intelligences in the air [mentioned in *Discourses* I 58] may remind us of “the prince of the power of the air” of *Ephesians* 2.2 . . .”²⁷ Strauss’s parallel is a cogent one, for *Ephesians* 2:1-2 proclaims: “As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in

²⁴ *Discourses*, pp.113, 114. *TM*, p.210 (lines 1-3): “In I 56 he teaches that accidents of public importance are always preceded by “heavenly signs” such as divinations, revelations, and prodigies.”

²⁵ *Discourses*, p.114. With regard to the identity of the unnamed philosopher that Machiavelli speaks of, see p.114n7 of the Mansfield/Tarcov translation, which refers to Livy, *De divinatione* I 30.64, and Pietro Pomponazzo, *Tractatus de immortalitate animae* 14. See also *TM*, p.335n88.

²⁶ *TM*, p.211.

²⁷ *TM*, p.335n90.

which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.”²⁸ Given that Chapter Three of this thesis examined the pages pointed to the above cross-reference, I will limit myself to saying here that the pages speak of Machiavelli’s rejection of Biblical injunctions against committing sin.

Fortuna

Strauss clearly is drawing attention to the gravity of Machiavelli’s cosmological reflections. But, he explains, “we must not for one moment forget that Machiavelli does not assert the existence of those intelligences in the air; the only superhuman intelligent and willing being whose existence he asserts in the *Discourses* is Fortuna.”²⁹ Neither must we forget, Strauss goes on to explain, that Machiavelli regards the intercessions of the intelligences not as divine acts of providence but as accidents. Thus Machiavelli blurs the distinction between portents and accidents; by accidents he apparently means calamities precipitated ultimately by human actions, not by God or the gods, nor by Fortuna.³⁰

It is not clear, however, whether Strauss means to ascribe to Machiavelli a *theology* that is specifically about Fortuna. According to Strauss, “Whereas I 56 leads up to a merely hypothetical suggestion belonging to quasi-theology, II 29 promises by its very heading to contain Machiavelli’s assertoric quasi-theology: “Fortuna blinds the minds of men when she does not wish them to oppose her designs.””³¹ By describing both Machiavelli’s “suggestion” and “assert[ion]” as a

²⁸ NIV, p.1457.

²⁹ *TM*, p.211.

³⁰ See *TM*, pp.211-15.

³¹ *TM*, p.213. Cf. *NM*, p.311.

“quasi-theology” Strauss apparently means that his reflections on God and Fortuna resemble, but do not constitute, a theology. Machiavelli’s theology is counterpoised to the Bible, but, to use a term that encapsulates Strauss’s point, *Quod non est biblicum, non est theologicum*.³² Machiavelli’s theology cannot be described as a theology qua theology since he replaces the Biblical God with Fortuna as the supreme being and replaces Fortuna with mundane chance. That replacement will be examined below in this present chapter; in the meanwhile, I wish to propose that for Strauss Machiavelli’s “quasi-theology” is articulated along anti-cosmoteotheological lines.³³

In *Discourses* II 29 Machiavelli initially speaks of heaven in a general, abstract sense. He opens the chapter with the observation: “If how human affairs proceed is considered well, it will be seen that often things arise and accidents come about that *the heavens* have not altogether wished to be provided against.” Shortly afterwards he says: “Because this place [Rome] is very notable for demonstrating the power of *heaven* over human affairs, Titus Livy demonstrates it extensively . . . saying that since *heaven* for some end wished the Romans to know its power, it made the Fabii err . . .”³⁴ Elsewhere Machiavelli indicates that Fortuna is an unkind being. In a letter to Giovanni Vernacci dated 26 June 1513 he wrote:

it is a miracle that I am alive, because my post was taken from me and I was about to lose my life, which God and my innocence have preserved for me. I have had to endure all sorts of other evils, both prison and other kinds. But, by the grace of God, I am well and I manage to live as I can—and so I shall strive to do, until the heavens

³² Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1985), p.256 (original emphases), defines the above term as meaning: “*What is not biblical is not theological.*”

³³ Cf. *TM*, p.165 (line 35). Cf. also *JA*, pp.151-63, 165-66; *OIG*, p.368.

³⁴ *Discourses*, p.197 (emphases mine).

show themselves to be more kind.³⁵

In *Discourses* II 29 Machiavelli goes on, though, to depict heaven as Fortuna, a thinking and active being with her own goals, will and desires. As Strauss describes the thesis of II 29: “Fortuna takes the place of all gods. Not only is the existence of Fortuna more certain than that of the intelligences in the air; she is also more powerful than they might be.”³⁶ Fortuna’s exercise of power over human affairs is neither wholly malevolent nor wholly benevolent—it simply *is*. “[T]he end which Fortuna pursues is unknown, and so are her ways toward that end. Hence, Machiavelli concludes, men ought always to hope, men ought never to give up, no matter what the condition into which Fortuna may have brought them.”³⁷

Though all-powerful, Fortuna is also untrustworthy and fickle in bestowing her favors. Machiavelli notes in *Discourses* II 30 that Fortuna is open to persuasion by men of virtue. In Chapter 25 of *The Prince* he says that one half only of human affairs is governed by the variability of Fortuna—“she leaves the other half, or close to it, for us to govern.”³⁸ Toward the end of Chapter 25 he describes Fortuna as a woman who likes to be beaten down by audacious young men, while toward the end of *Discourses* II 30 he observes: “where men have little virtue, fortune shows its power very much . . .”³⁹ In II 1 Machiavelli explains that victory in war can be gained by “a very great virtue and prudence mixed with fortune.” In II 29, whilst moving from speaking of the heavens (and of heaven) to speaking of Fortuna, he

³⁵ Letter 214 in *Machiavelli and His Friends: Their Personal Correspondence*, ed. and trans. James B. Atkinson and David Sices (DeKalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 1996), p.239.

³⁶ *TM*, p.214.

³⁷ *TM*, pp.214, 215. See also *TM*, p.336n97, where Strauss refers to the *Prince*, ep.ded., ch.7; *Discourses* II pr.; and instructs the reader, “Cf. *Discourses* II 10 near the beginning (the silence about divine benevolence.) In his letter to Vernacci of June 26, 1513 Machiavelli contrasts “the grace of God” with the deficient kindness of “the heavens” (*e’cieli*).”

³⁸ *The Prince*, p.98.

³⁹ *Discourses*, p.202.

writes of the periodic renewal of virtue in Rome. Similarly, he says in III 1 that “sects, republics, and kingdoms” are brought “back towards their beginnings,” and thereby gain “new life and new virtue,” by “either extrinsic accident or intrinsic prudence.” By “extrinsic accident” Machiavelli means both heaven and random accidents, while by “intrinsic prudence” he means the virtue of a single man and the orders that that man enacts through his actions. Machiavelli further explains in III 1 that “extrinsic force” may prove in needful cases to be the best way for drawing a society back to “its beginnings,” albeit too “dangerous” to well-being and security to be considered.⁴⁰

It is fair to say, then, that when discussing the higher, divine power behind how men are governed and are made virtuous, Machiavelli tends to conflate Fortuna and heaven. Strauss observes, “By sometimes identifying Fortuna and heaven, Machiavelli is enabled to present Fortuna not merely as the only superhuman being which thinks and wills, or as the only god, but likewise as the all comprehensive order which does not think and will, or as nature.”⁴¹

Fortuna and nature

Yet to that observation Strauss immediately adds this question: “What then is the relation between Fortuna and nature?”⁴² Drawing upon *Discourses* I 37, II pr. and II 5, Strauss explains that for Machiavelli, Fortuna is but *a part* of nature; *the whole* of nature is presided over by heaven. “But if one looks more closely,” Strauss states, “one sees that in the most important cases “the cause of (good) fortune” is

⁴⁰ I have taken the above quotations from the *Discourses*—II 1, p.127; III 1, pp.209, 212—but have gleaned the references themselves from *TM*, pp.215-16, 336nn100-102.

⁴¹ *TM*, p.217.

⁴² *TM*, p.217. With regard to this question, cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1072b5-15, 1073a1-b31.

not Fortuna but human virtue and good institutions, i.e., the work of prudence and art. Rome owed her greatness decisively to her virtue and not to Fortuna.”⁴³ Machiavelli explains in *Discourses* I 2, 4, 11, III 9, and 29, and in Chapters 6 and 7 of *The Prince* that chance events and accidents do hold some sway over human affairs. In *Discourses* II 1 he argues that good fortune must be combined with virtue if a republic is to be great. However, he also argues that the greatness of Rome was due more to virtue than to fortune, that is to say, the virtue of an active populace, a collective virtue; the accidents in Rome arose not from random acts of chance but from the tumults between the peoples and nobles.⁴⁴

Machiavelli thus seems to be saying that Fortuna does not possess an all-pervasive and unchallengeable power. By asking how Machiavelli defined the relation between Fortuna and nature, Strauss means to establish whether Machiavelli believes that the Fortuna and her chance accidents, on the one hand, or the qualities within men, on the other hand, decisively determine the path of human action.⁴⁵

To Machiavelli, the outstanding individual is one who possesses the willingness, ability and qualities (intrinsic, not extrinsic, qualities) to both change the times and adapt himself as circumstances demand. In the *Florentine Histories* VIII 36 Machiavelli links the “untimely” death of Lorenzo de’ Medici with the fall of Italy. With reference that chapter, and also *Discourses* III 9 and Chapter 25 of *The Prince*, Strauss explains that in Machiavelli’s estimation, “the agreement between the

⁴³ *TM*, p.217. For the above references themselves, see *TM*, p.336n103. With regard to fortuna as a part of nature, cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1074a17-30; *Nicomachean Ethics* 1141a33-b2; *On the Heavens*, 286a3-b9, 293a1-10, 296a25-b24, 308a13-33; Plato, *Timaeus* 40b-d; Strauss, *JA*, p.165.

⁴⁴ See *TM*, pp.217, 336n105.

⁴⁵ See *TM*, p.218. See also *TM*, p.336n109; here Strauss instructs: “Cf. *Discourses* III 33 and pages 215-216 above.” Pointing to *The Prince*, chs.6 and 26, Strauss adds: “Machiavelli replaces the distinction between “fortuna-occasion-matter” and “form-virtue” by the distinction between “matter-occasion” and “form-virtue.””

nature of an individual and his times, and hence his good fortune, is caused by Fortuna, by chance.”⁴⁶ Accidents in a republic that are due to deficiencies in human virtues and institutions can be rectified, insofar as outstanding men of virtue exists in a republic. Machiavelli says in *Discourses* III 31: “The virtue and the vice that I say are to be found in one man alone are also found in a republic . . .”⁴⁷ Machiavelli means here that the foundation of greatness in a republic is a military, composed of the people, that is well-trained, provisioned and armed, and lead by capable, spirited commanders. The basis of the Roman “state was the people of Rome,” Machiavelli stresses in II 30, “the Latin name, the other partner towns in Italy, and their colonies, from which they drew so many soldiers that with them they were sufficient to combat and hold the world.”⁴⁸

Chance, accidents and the natural order of the world

It seems that to Machiavelli, chance is not the underlying principle in human affairs, nor should chance be thought of as rooted in the agitations of fortuna.⁴⁹ According to Strauss, “By substituting “accidents” for “chance,” he deliberately blurs the distinction between nature and chance in order to indicate the common origin of both belief in gods and knowledge of nature.”⁵⁰ People tend on the whole to “arrive at making foreseeable the unforeseeable and at transforming the simply unintended into something intended.” Due to “the minds of unwise and undisciplined men,” who are “frightened by the extraordinary or new as such,” there

⁴⁶ *TM*, p.218; for the (above) references, see p.336nn106, 107. Cf. my discussion in ch.3 of *TM*, pp.197-98 (§17), Strauss’s digression to the *Florentine Histories*.

⁴⁷ *Discourses*, p.281.

⁴⁸ *Discourses*, p.201.

⁴⁹ See *TM*, p.218 (paragraph beginning “The most important”).

⁵⁰ *TM*, pp.218-19.

arises a tendency in most men to “identify the extraordinary with the grave.” Regardless of whether an accident is truly grave or truly accidental, men invariably see in accidents signs of the extraordinary. “An event brought about intentionally is an accident for those men who did not intend it or foresee it. Let us now call “new accidents” such accidents as are not in themselves grave.”⁵¹ Pointing to *Discourses* III 14, Strauss explains that Machiavelli makes a distinction between accidents that truly are “grave” and accidents that are “fabricated”: grave accidents are signs from heaven, whereas new accidents happen genuinely or through the contrivance of a captain. So as to interpret a genuine and especially grave accident to his own benefit, a captain must prevent people “from discovering its true cause.”⁵² Thus, depending on one’s ability to foresee future possibilities, accidents are anticipated or not anticipated, and can be rendered either consequential or inconsequential. In the words of Machiavelli: “As to seeing new things, every captain ought to contrive to make one of them appear while the armies are hand to hand, which gives spirit to his men and takes it away from the enemy; for among the accidents that give you victory, this is the most efficacious.”⁵³

Machiavelli certainly does speak forcefully of the influence that chance and accidents have over human affairs. Nevertheless, divine beings are largely absent from his conception of cosmic order. Strauss states: “In the *Prince*, in which Machiavelli never speaks of “we Christians,” he never mentions the gods or heaven.” But Machiavelli’s silence about God is selective. Strauss explains that although “. . . he asserts in the *Prince* the existence both of God and of Fortuna as a

⁵¹ *TM*, p.219.

⁵² *TM*, p.220.

⁵³ *Discourses* III 14, p.252.

willing and thinking being, he never refers there to any demonstration of the existence or power of Fortuna.”⁵⁴ Machiavelli maintains in Chapter 20 that Fortuna desires to make new princes great. However, in Chapter 8 Machiavelli had said that Agathocles’s greatness and virtue are due not to good fortune but his own capabilities, while in Chapter 6 he had explained that “the result of becoming prince from private individual presupposes either virtue or fortune . . . nonetheless, he who has relied less on fortune has maintained himself more.”⁵⁵ In Chapter 25, Machiavelli “hardly sheds further light on Fortuna, or on chance, by saying at the end of the chapter that Fortuna is like a women who can be vanquished by the right kind of man. For if Fortuna can be vanquished, man would seem to be able to become the master of the universe.” Strauss adds: “Certainly Machiavelli does not recommend that Fortuna be worshipped: she ought to be beaten and pounded.”⁵⁶

Yet having examined Machiavelli’s varied observations about Fortuna, Strauss reflects: “We have stated the reasons which may induce one to think that Machiavelli’s cosmological premises were Aristotelian.”⁵⁷ Strauss has come full circle to the point at which he began: examining Machiavelli’s cosmological reflections in order to explicate *the* difference between Machiavelli and Aristotle. But upon returning to that originary juncture, Strauss travels forward again,

⁵⁴ *TM*, p.220. Shortly afterwards Strauss provides an accompanying endnote; see *TM*, p.337n112, where he instructs the reader to compare chs.20 and 6 of *The Prince*, and adds: “As for the context of both statements, cf. pages 58-60 above. See also pages 74 and 187-188 above.” I would point out, then, that the context consists of Machiavelli’s aim “to uproot the Great Tradition” (p.59).

⁵⁵ *The Prince*, p.22.

⁵⁶ *TM*, p.221.

⁵⁷ *TM*, p.221. Strauss’s accompanying endnote, p.337n113, instructs: “Cf. pages 201-203 above.” In these pages Strauss spoke, for instance, of the commonality between Machiavelli and the Averroists on their respective views about the eternality of the world. Interestingly, on p.208 Strauss drew attention to a commonality between Machiavelli’s “criticism of the Bible” and the views of “Aristotle and . . . those intransigent Aristotelians . . .”, namely, Averroes and the Averroists. Strauss also stated that “Aristotle tacitly denies cognitive value to what is nowadays called religious experience” and that Machiavelli shared this attitude; on p.208f Strauss examined Machiavelli’s cosmological premises so as to identify the difference between Machiavelli and Aristotle.

explaining: “Yet there is no place in his [Machiavelli’s] cosmology for a ruling mind.” It is not sufficient to say Machiavelli rejects the doctrine of “a ruling Mind,” because “that doctrine has been understood in greatly different ways.”⁵⁸ With regard to those “ways” Strauss’s accompanying endnote instructs: “Cf. e.g. Cicero, *De natura deorum* I 33-35 and *Acad. Post.* I 29.”⁵⁹ In *De natura deorum* I 33-35 Cicero speaks of the confusing and confused notions about the corporeality (or otherwise) of God raised by Aristotle, Plato, Xenocrates, Heraclides of Pontus, Theophrastus, and Strato. (If by *Acad. Post.* Strauss means *Academica Posteriora* and not *Academica Priora*, it is curious that he said I 29 and not II 29.) Of God as a providential, ruling mind, Cicero writes in *Academica* I 29: “and this force they say is the soul of the world, and is also perfect intelligence and wisdom, which they entitle God, and is a sort of ‘providence’ . . .” With regard to how one conducts oneself in all aspects of life, Cicero says in *Academica* II 92 that “[n]o faculty of knowing absolute limits has been bestowed upon us by the nature of things to enable us to fix exactly how far to go in any matter . . .”⁶⁰

For Strauss, Machiavelli’s cosmological premises are non-teleological. Drawing upon *Discourses* I 2, Strauss argues: “Machiavelli indicates his fundamental disagreement with Aristotle’s doctrine of the whole by substituting “chance” (*caso*) for “nature” in the only context in which he speaks of “the beginning of the world.”⁶¹ Strauss argues further that whereas Polybius says that regimes change in a cyclical, natural manner, Machiavelli claims (in *Discourses* I 2, 6 and III 1) that

⁵⁸ *TM*, pp.221-22.

⁵⁹ *TM*, p.337n114.

⁶⁰ In *De natura deorum* and *Academica*, trans. H. Rackham (London: William Heinemann, 1933), pp.439, 585.

⁶¹ *TM*, pp.221, 222. Cf. my discussion in ch.3 of *TM*, pp.202-203, 208.

regimes change not because of nature but because of chance. Interestingly, Strauss then indicates that Machiavelli's holding such a view of chance places him in Limbo. Strauss explains: "Among "the philosophic family" surrounding Aristotle in Dante's Limbo, we find "Democritus who ascribes the world to chance."⁶² By implying that Machiavelli belongs in Limbo, the first circle of Hell, Strauss is placing him in esteemed philosophic company. In the words of Dante:

When I raised my eyes a little higher,
I saw the master of those who know,
sitting among his philosophic kindred.

Eyes trained on him [Aristotle], all show him honor.
In front of all the rest and nearest him
I saw Socrates and Plato.

I saw Democritus, who ascribes the world
to chance, Diogenes, Anaxagoras, and Thales,
Empedocles, Heraclitus, and Zeno.⁶³

But unlike his companions in Limbo Machiavelli believes that random, chance accidents do not occur under the aegis of a purposeful, transcendent and divine necessity such as Fortuna. According to Strauss,

. . . . the movement of fundamental thought which finds expression in both books [*The Prince* and the *Discourses*] consists in a movement from God to Fortuna and then from Fortuna via accidents, and accidents occurring to bodies or accidents of bodies, to chance understood as a non-teleological necessity which leaves room for choice and prudence and therefore for chance understood as the cause of simply unforeseeable accidents.⁶⁴

Having discussed the basically anti-teleological direction of his cosmological reflections, Strauss explains: "Machiavelli has indicated his fundamental thought also in his *Life of Castruccio Castracani*." Yet shortly afterwards Strauss states: "In

⁶² *TM*, p.222; in an accompanying endnote, *TM*, p.337n116, Strauss refers to the *Inferno*, 4.136.

⁶³ *Inferno* 4.130-138, p.69.

⁶⁴ *TM*, pp.222-23. Cf. Parel, *Machiavellian Cosmos*, pp.45, 84-85. With regard to Polybius, see also chs.5 and 6 of my study.

considering the *Castruccio*, one must be mindful of the distance between the books in which Machiavelli expresses “everything he knows” and all his other utterances.”⁶⁵ Given the strong emphasis Strauss places on both *The Prince* and the *Discourses* in understanding the gravity of Machiavelli’s teaching, it seems odd at first glance that he turns, even if only temporarily, to Machiavelli’s other works.⁶⁶ But as Chapter Three explained, Strauss’s digression to the *Florentine Histories* and the *Exhortation to Penitence* did indeed cast light on the fundamentally irreligious character of Machiavelli’s teaching on religion; Strauss’s digression to the *Castruccio* likewise illuminates Machiavelli’s teaching.

Strauss observes that of the thirty-four pithy sayings towards the end of the *Castruccio*, thirty-one are adapted by Machiavelli from the *Lives of the Famous Philosophers* by Diogenes Laertius.⁶⁷ For Strauss, the significance of Machiavelli’s thirty-four sayings in the *Castruccio* consists, I would suggest, both in the form and the content of those sayings. By “form” I mean that Machiavelli, rather than stating what he himself believes, puts the sayings into the mouth of Castruccio, the tyrant of Lucca. By “content” I mean the subject matter of the sayings: the need for heartfelt repentance of one’s sins. Strauss explains that whereas Diogenes Laertius notes that Bion, a self-professed atheist, repented on his deathbed, asking to be forgiven for his impious, wicked ways, Machiavelli’s description of Castruccio’s deathbed speech makes no mention of God.⁶⁸ According to Caranfa, “From

⁶⁵ *TM*, p.223. Cf. *MCL*, p.8.

⁶⁶ Cf. Theodore A. Sumberg, “Machiavelli’s *Castruccio Castracani*,” *Interpretation* 16, no.2 (Winter 1988-89), p.285.

⁶⁷ *TM*, p.224. See also *MCL*, p.9. Ciliotta-Rubery explains that “one aphorism dealing with the subject of choosing a wife, comes directly from [Niccolo] Tegrini’s work,” *Vita Castrucci Antelminelli Castracani* (1496). “Evil Teachings,” p.299.

⁶⁸ *TM*, pp.224, 224-25. See also *The Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers*, trans. C.D. Yonge (London: George Bell and Sons, 1895), p.175; Machiavelli, *The Life of Castruccio Castracani of Lucca*, in *Machiavelli: The Chief Works and Others*, Vol.2, trans. Allan Gilbert (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1965), pp.553-54.

Castruccio's life, Strauss draws the inference that Machiavelli directs our attention to the fact that he prefers Castruccio over Aristotle and Fortune over God; Fortune conquers God and Fortune is conquered by Castruccio's new teachings."⁶⁹ Strauss goes on to explain:

Castruccio, who speaks in his witty sayings and elsewhere of God, mentions Fortuna in his dying speech five times, but never God. Castruccio, who in his witty sayings speaks of the soul, of hell and of paradise, mentions this world once in his dying speech and the next, never. Similarly, when expressing his own thought, Machiavelli mentions this world once in the *Castruccio* and never the next; and he mentions fortuna eight times and God never. . . .⁷⁰

It is worth noting here that the *Castruccio* evinces Machiavelli's strong antipathy towards both religion and philosophy. He holds that philosophy, like religion, is useless for it is concerned with thinking on eternity and transcendent norms of human action. Ciliotta-Rubery explains that because "Castruccio never made any reference to philosophy throughout his life nor found any need for it in carrying out endeavors, one cannot help but conclude that Machiavelli viewed philosophy as a useless interference, in the life of a grand, new founder."⁷¹

The utility of religion

Defining religion

Having examined Machiavelli's cosmological reflections, Strauss examines his claims about the limited usefulness of religion with a view to further explicating his critique of all religion. "Machiavelli uses the term "religion" in two senses," Strauss observes. "He uses "religion" synonymously with "sect" and understands by it a

⁶⁹ *Machiavelli Rethought*, p.26.

⁷⁰ *TM*, pp.224-25.

⁷¹ "Evil Teachings," p.347. Cf. *MCL*, p.10.

mixed body, or a society of a certain kind. "Sect" is used also in the sense of "party," i.e., an association whose end is not identical with the common good of a particular state."⁷² According to Preus, though, Machiavelli regarded religion as "a broad term embracing all human attitudes and actions occurring with references to a divine order. *He did not try to define it*, but in his usage it comprised both inner attitudes and beliefs and outward behaviors and institutions. . . . Machiavelli chose to evaluate religion using norms in no sense intrinsic to religious systems generally, and even antagonistic to the values of Christian believers as he saw them. . . ."⁷³

In his *Florentine Histories* Machiavelli discusses the disturbances of the Guelphs and Ghibellines. In the preface and throughout the first four of the eight books of his work he depicts the fomenting "humors" of, and the internecine conflict between, the Guelphs and Ghibellines as symptomatic of Italy's susceptibility to invasion.⁷⁴ Quite possibly because the Guelfs were supporters of the papacy, Machiavelli uses interchangeably the expressions, "the sect of the Guelfs" and "the Guelf parties." When speaking of the Ghibellines, who supported the emperor, Machiavelli uses the expressions, "the Ghibellines," "Ghibelline humors" and "the party of the Ghibellines."⁷⁵

Strauss goes on to explain that the second sense in which Machiavelli speaks of "religion" is that of "religion" [as being] a part of virtue or one of the virtues."⁷⁶

Strauss does not refer here to the *Republic*. Clearly, though, his very words echo

⁷² *TM*, p.225. Cf. *NM*, p.314..

⁷³ J. Samuel Preus, "Machiavelli's Functional Analysis of Religion: Context and Object," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 40, no.2 (April-June 1979), p.175 (emphases mine).

⁷⁴ Sullivan, *Machiavelli's Three Romes*, pp.28-29. *Ibid.*, p.199n25: "In the *Florentine Histories* Machiavelli links the increasing influence of Christianity and its Roman bishops to the decline of the Roman Empire. . . ." See also Coby, *Machiavelli's Romans*, pp.88, 205-6.

⁷⁵ For these various expression, see the *Florentine Histories* pr., I 15, 21-22, 23, 26-28, II 4, 6-12, 17, 30, III 3-5, 18, 20-21, 25, IV 12, 19, 21, 26, 28.

⁷⁶ *TM*, p.225.

427e-434d, and especially 433b-c; Socrates reflects in the latter passage that justice is both a virtue and the whole of virtue: “to attend to one’s own business . . . may be assumed to be justice. . . . I think that this is the virtuous quality which remains in the State when the other virtues of temperance and courage and wisdom are abstracted; and that this not only made it possible for them to appear, but is also their preservative as long as they remain . . .”⁷⁷ According to Strauss, Machiavelli “may have conceived of the relation between religion as a virtue and religion as a society as parallel to the relation between justice and the other virtues on the one hand and civil society on the other.”⁷⁸

But does Strauss mean to say that Machiavelli regarded religion both as a part of society and as *the* foundation of society? Machiavelli clearly does maintain that religious observances provide a focus for the cultural, political and economic life of society. However, he sees artifice and not a heartfelt belief in religion at the basis of religious observances. In Machiavelli’s estimation, Strauss notes, “the belief which is the foundation of religion is not true belief, i.e. not belief based on firm or reliable experience but belief caused by self-deception and to some extent even by deception.”⁷⁹ Similarly, Fontana explains: “by unveiling the methods used by the founders of pagan religion Machiavelli is simultaneously uncovering the natural and human foundation of revealed religion.”⁸⁰

The use(s) of religion

Machiavelli comprehensively questions the efficacy of religion, Biblical *and*

⁷⁷ *Dialogues of Plato*, Vol.2, pp.285-86.

⁷⁸ *TM*, p.225.

⁷⁹ *TM*, pp.225, 225-26.

⁸⁰ “Love of Country,” p.647.

pagan, but as Strauss stresses, he “was not the first man to assert that religion is both untrue and salutary. Religion is a part of virtue or is a virtue. . . .” Machiavelli explains that Romulus gave Rome its arms but that Numa Pompilius introduced religion into Rome and thereby turned the Romans from their corrupt, ferocious and uncivilized ways. For Machiavelli, Strauss points out, “Religion was the cause of the well-being of the Roman republic.”⁸¹ Machiavelli says in *Discourses* I 19: “he who is like Numa will hold it [the state] or not hold it as the times or fortune turn under him, but he who is like Romulus, and like him comes armed with prudence and with arms, will hold it in every mode unless it is taken from him by an obstinate and excessive force.”⁸² In short, religion is indispensable to a republic, but only insofar as civic, public observances of religion serve to inculcate fear of God, for such a fear forestalls disquiet amongst the people and nobles.

Religion has a similarly pivotal role in kingdoms, though not in kingdoms ruled by the prince who inculcates in his subjects a fear of his rule that replaces fear of God. The prince also enacts modes and orders to counter the problem of hereditary succession. Machiavelli warns in *Discourses* I 2: “as the prince began to be made by succession, and not by choice, at once the heirs began to degenerate from their ancestors . . .”⁸³ By adopting a son of like qualities the prince ensures the ascension of a capable successor.⁸⁴ To Machiavelli, Strauss notes, “a virtuous prince is not so much a prince possessing moral virtue as a prince of strong mind and will who prudently uses his moral virtue and vice according to the requirements of the situation.” Shortly afterwards Strauss observes: “Machiavelli does not resist the

⁸¹ *TM*, p.226.

⁸² *Discourses*, p.53.

⁸³ *Discourses*, p.12. See also *Discourses* I 11, 17.

⁸⁴ See *Discourses* I 9, I 20.

temptation to say on one occasion that the appearance of religion is more important for the prince than anything else. On the other hand, it seems to be highly desirable that his soldiers should possess fear of God.”⁸⁵

But where is that “one occasion”? Strauss’s accompanying endnote⁸⁶ refers to Chapters 12, 14, 15, and 18 of *The Prince*; interestingly, his preceding endnote refers to *Discourses* I 10, 11, 13, and 55, and instructs the reader to compare the title of I 12 with the chapter proper.⁸⁷ I 12 is titled “Of How Much Importance It Is to Take Account of Religion, and How Italy, for Lacking It by Means of the Roman Church, Has Been Ruined.”⁸⁸ In the chapter Machiavelli speaks of the great importance of religion to princes: “princes of a republic or of a kingdom should maintain the foundations of the religion they hold; and if this is done, it will be an easy thing for them to maintain their republic religious and, in consequence, good and united. All things that arise in favor of that religion they should favor and magnify, even though they judge them false”⁸⁹ Machiavelli gives two “incontrovertible” explanations to counter “the opinion that well-being of the cities of Italy arises from the Roman Church The first is that because of the wicked examples of that court, this province has lost all devotion and all religion . . . for as where there is religion one presupposes every good, so where it is missing one presupposes the contrary.” The “second” reason for the “ruin” of Italy “is that the church has kept and keeps this province divided. And truly no province has ever been united or happy unless it has all come under obedience to one republic or to one prince, as

⁸⁵ *TM*, pp.227, 227-28.

⁸⁶ *TM*, p.338n124.

⁸⁷ *TM*, p.338n123.

⁸⁸ *Discourses*, p.36.

⁸⁹ *Discourses*, p.37.

happened to France and to Spain.”⁹⁰

Machiavelli pointedly explains in Chapters 12, 14, 15, and 18 of *The Prince* what a prince must do to unite his province. In these four chapters, respectively, Machiavelli advises that the prince must cultivate his own arms and not hire mercenaries, for mercenaries tend to be fickle; that the prince should assiduously practice the military arts; that the prince should focus on learning about the way the world truly is; and that the prince should not worry about breaking his word if it is advantageous or necessary that he not keep to his promises. For instance, Machiavelli says in Chapter 18: “A prince should . . . appear all mercy, all faith, all honesty, all humanity, all religion. And *nothing is more necessary to have than this last quality*. . . . Everyone sees how you appear, few touch what you are; and these few dare not oppose the opinion of [the] many . . .”⁹¹

Machiavelli seems, therefore, to be advising the virtuous prince to use religion lest his disaffected subjects turn to religion as a counter-authority to his rule and claim that he is acting contrary to the manner in which he should be acting. Religious faith and conformity are not of essential importance to a virtuous prince; what is important is the manifest, observable appearance of religion. If the prince’s soldiers fear the gods, he can use the interpretation of signs and auguries to maintain his hold over his soldiers by arguing that the gods favor his rule.⁹²

Republics, though, have a need for religion that kingdoms do not.⁹³ In Machiavelli’s judgment, Strauss explains, pointing to *Discourses* I 12, keeping a republic free from corruption depends upon the republic both possessing and

⁹⁰ *Discourses*, pp.37, 38.

⁹¹ *The Prince*, pp.70-71 (emphases mine).

⁹² *TM*, pp.227-28.

⁹³ On this point, see also *NM*, p.314.

keeping close to its foundations in religion. In I 13, 33-45 and 46-59, Machiavelli notes that the prudent use by the Roman nobility of political means, combined with a corresponding disregard of religion, protected the well-being of the republic.⁹⁴ Of I 33-45 Mansfield says, “Machiavelli considers chiefly the dictator and the Decemvirate, or more generally, the means used by the Romans to anticipate emergencies . . .” “In I 45-59, a section of fourteen chapters on the character of peoples, Machiavelli explains how . . . the fear of a prince . . . could serve as a substitute for religion.”⁹⁵ Elsewhere in the *Discourses* Machiavelli indicates that the prince must rely on his own virtue rather than the virtue of the gods, and explains that fear of other humans is a far more useful way than is religion for shaping soldiers into dogged fighters.⁹⁶ Machiavelli also advises that religion be used to buttress political authority and safeguard social harmony; chaos reigns when people no longer feel compelled to obey oaths of allegiance to the republic and promises to each other.⁹⁷

Strauss reflects, “Observations like those just mentioned make one wonder whether Machiavelli was convinced that religion fulfills an important role.”⁹⁸ But what does Strauss mean? Clearly, he has shown that Machiavelli draws attention to the important role of religion. That is to say, Machiavelli frequently speaks about both the advantages and disadvantages of religion for the life and well-being of states, princes, societies and individuals. He claims, says Cassirer, that “religion is indispensable. But it is no longer an end itself; it has become a mere tool in the

⁹⁴ *TM*, pp.228-29. For the above references themselves, see *TM*, p.228.

⁹⁵ Mansfield, *Modes and Orders*, pp.110, 139.

⁹⁶ See *TM*, p.229. Strauss’s accompanying endnote, p.338n127, refers to *Discourses* I 11-15, II 16, III 12, 32; *Art of War* IV; and Machiavelli’s quotations from Livy in *Discourses* III 36 and 38.

⁹⁷ See *TM*, pp.229-30.

⁹⁸ *TM*, p.230. Cf. Sullivan, *Machiavelli’s Three Romes*, pp.7-8.

hands of political rulers.”⁹⁹ Perhaps Strauss meant that it is precisely and only the temporal usefulness of religion that defines the extent of Machiavelli’s support of religion. He goes on to explain on Machiavelli’s behalf:

Society would be in a state of perpetual unrest . . . if men were not made incorrupt by religion . . . Religion as reverence for the gods breeds deference to the ruling class as a group of men especially favored by the gods and reminiscent of the gods. And vice versa, unqualified unbelief will dispose the people not to believe in what they are told by venerable men. The ruling class will not be able in the long run to elicit this kind of deference if it does not contain men, and especially old men, who are venerable by virtue of their piety. The venerable old men are not necessarily identical with the prudent old men, the repositories of political wisdom.¹⁰⁰

Strauss closes his critical study of Machiavelli’s teaching on religion in the next paragraph by anticipating possible criticism that he had devoted too much space to the analysis—and had thus overemphasized the importance—of Machiavelli’s utterances on religion. Strauss argues: “We no longer understand that in spite of great disagreements among these thinkers [in the centuries after Machiavelli], they were united by the fact that they all fought one and the same power—the kingdom of darkness, as Hobbes called it; that fight was more important to them than any merely political issue.”¹⁰¹ Strauss means that the attack against Christianity and religion in general is a core element of the project launched by Machiavelli and elaborated by following generations, that project being the fight against (what modernity regards as) ignorance, otherworldliness and superstition.¹⁰² As Strauss explained in *Natural Right and History*: “When trying to understand the thought of Machiavelli, one does well to remember the saying that Marlowe was inspired to

⁹⁹ *Myth of the State*, p.138.

¹⁰⁰ *TM*, pp.230-31.

¹⁰¹ *TM*, p.231. Cf. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, pt.IV. Cf. also Spinoza, *Theologico-Political Treatise*, pref. and ch.VII.

¹⁰² Cf. *SCR*, pp.46-47; Lampert, *Strauss and Nietzsche*, p.144.

ascribe to him: "I . . . hold there is no sin but ignorance."¹⁰³ In the *Jew of Malta*,

Marlowe's insinuatingly named character, Machevill, exclaims:

To some perhaps my name is odious,
 But such as love me, gard me from their tongues,
 And let them know that I am *Machevill*,
 And weigh not men, and therefore not mens words.
 Admir'd I am of those that hate me most:
 Though some speake openly against my bookes,
 Yet will they reade me, and thereby attaine
 To *Peters* Chayre: And when they cast me off,
 Are poyson'd by my climbing followers.
 I count Religion but a childish Toy,
 And hold there is no sinne but Ignorance.

[Prologue, lines 5-15]¹⁰⁴

Conclusion

Machiavelli's view of religion is fundamentally temporal. Neither Christian nor pagan, condemning both Biblical religion and paganism for leading the world into weakness, Machiavelli favors the pursuit of worldly matters. Denying the existence of God or the gods, Machiavelli leaves no decisive scope for divine influence upon human affairs. As Strauss said toward the beginning of his critical study, "Paganism is a kind of piety and one does not find a trace of pagan piety in Machiavelli's work. He had not reverted from the worship of Christ to the worship of Apollo."¹⁰⁵ When Strauss digressed from the strong emphasis he placed on both *The Prince* and the *Discourses* in understanding Machiavelli, he amplified his thesis that Machiavelli is neither Christian nor pagan. As Chapter Three explained, Strauss digressed to the *Florentine Histories* and *Exhortation to Penitence*, and as was explained above, he

¹⁰³ *NRH*, p.177. See also *TM*, p.13.

¹⁰⁴ In *The Complete Works of Christopher Marlowe*, Vol.1, ed. Fredson Bowers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), p.263 (original emphases).

¹⁰⁵ *TM*, p.175.

also digressed to the *Castruccio*. In revealing Machiavelli's teaching on religion as being fundamentally irreligious and untenable, it seems that Strauss was aiming to move towards recovering the horizon obscured by Machiavelli and his successors, namely, the Biblical horizon of understanding of what is good, just, virtuous, best, and right.¹⁰⁶ In that sense one can say that Strauss was open to the possibility and challenge of revelation, even though, as will be seen in Part Three, he sided with classical political philosophy against Machiavelli's insistence that morality and politics not be directed toward the false and unsalutary quest for knowledge of the best life, the life which is lived in accordance with the highest good.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Merrill, "Strauss's Indictment," pp.98, 104-5.

PART THREE

**Strauss's Machiavelli on Philosophy: Political
Virtue**

Chapter Five

Moral Virtue and Human Action

Machiavelli's admiration for the political practice of classical antiquity and especially of republican Rome is only the reverse side of his rejection of classical political philosophy. He rejected classical political philosophy, and therewith the whole tradition of political philosophy in the full sense of the term, as useless: Classical political philosophy had taken its bearings by how man ought to live; the correct way of answering the question of the right order of society consists in taking one's bearings by how men actually do live. Machiavelli's "realistic" revolt against tradition led to the substitution of patriotism or merely political virtue for human excellence or, more particularly, for moral virtue and the contemplative life. . . .

Leo Strauss, *Natural Rights and History*

There is no holy god for Aristotle and the Greeks generally. Who is right, the Greeks or the Jews? Athens or Jerusalem? Perhaps it was this unresolved conflict which has prevented Western thought from ever coming to rest. Perhaps it is this conflict which is at the bottom of a kind of thought which is philosophic indeed but no longer Greek: modern philosophy. It is in trying to understand modern philosophy that we come across Machiavelli.

Leo Strauss, "Niccolo Machiavelli, 1469-1527"

Introduction

From explicating Machiavelli's thoroughgoing irreligiousness, arguing that he is neither Christian nor pagan, Strauss moves to demonstrate that he mounted a radical challenge to classical political philosophy. The question Strauss answers is the extent of Machiavelli's revolt against philosophic ideals about the good life. He shows that Machiavelli rejected the ideal that standards of human action ought to be based upon teleological moral norms. Machiavelli enunciated an atheistic notion of

what constitutes, and how one acquires knowledge of, the good life. According to Strauss, Machiavelli linked virtue not with *imagined* ideas of what *ought* to be but with the “effectual truth” in the realm of what *is*, and he regarded the calculation of the exigent needs of the state as the root of virtue.¹

Strauss states, “We are entitled to make a distinction between Machiavelli’s teaching regarding religion and his teaching regarding morality since he himself makes a distinction between *religion and justice* or between *religion and goodness*.”² I would add here that the distinction drawn in *Discourses* I 55 is between goodness and religion: “having first taken an oath to pay the fitting amount [of tax], he throws into a chest so designated what according to his conscience it appears to him he ought to pay. Of this payment there is no witness except him who pays. Hence it can be conjectured how much *goodness* and how much *religion* are yet in those men.” The distinction drawn in *Discourses* III 1 is between religion and justice: “Speaking of republics, this return toward the beginning is done through either extrinsic accident or intrinsic prudence. As to the first, one sees that it was necessary that Rome be taken by the French, if one wished that it be reborn and, by being reborn, regain new life and new virtue, and regain the observance of *religion* and *justice*, which were beginning to be tainted in it.”³

¹ With regard to the term, “effectual truth,” see ch.3. For the above quotations, see *NRH*, p.178; *NM*, p.297.

² *TM*, p.231 (emphases mine). Strauss’s accompanying endnote, p.338n130, refers to *Discourses* I 55 and III 1.

³ *Discourses* I 55, pp.110-11; III 1, p.209 (all emphases mine). As Walker translates the above passage from III 1 (Walker, trans., p.386): “This return to its original principles in the case of a republic, is brought about either by some external event or by its own intrinsic good sense. Thus, as an example of the former, we see how it was necessary that Rome should be taken by the Gauls in order that it should be re-born and in its re-birth take on alike a new vitality and a new virtue, and also take up again the observance of religion and justice, both of which had begun to show blemishes.” Preus, “Machiavelli’s Functional Analysis of Religion,” p.177: “Change was the law of life; everything must change, either for better or for worse. This observation was the basis of Machiavelli’s law of renewal: the original ordering principle was also the principle to which any religious or political group must return in order to be renewed. The rule is discussed in the first chapter of the *Discourses* III . . .”

Strauss goes on to explain that Machiavelli's deliberations on morality, like those on religion, consist of "a foreground of "first statements" which reproduce accepted opinions and a background of "second statements" which are more or less at variance with accepted opinions."⁴ First statements mitigate the radical qualities of the second statements. Strauss continues: "But the explicit discussion of religion occupies much less space than the explicit discussion of morality. . . ." When speaking of religion Machiavelli is more circumspect, in both affirming and dissenting from traditional viewpoints, than he is when speaking of morality. According to Strauss, by appearing to combine "morality into religion," Machiavelli leads the reader to think "that morality appears to be less comprehensive and hence less fundamental than religion."⁵

Against Machiavelli's seeming subsuming of morality into religion, Strauss turns the matter on its head: he states that "[i]f one desires not to lose one's way," and if one wants to understand the gravity of Machiavelli's enterprise, "one must start from Machiavelli's claim, raised at the beginning of the *Discourses* and in the middle of the *Prince*, that his teaching which is comprehensive or concerns the foundations is new."⁶ As Machiavelli wrote in the Preface to Book I of the *Discourses*, "driven by that natural desire that has always been in me to work, without any respect, for those things I believe will bring common benefit to everyone, I have decided to take a path as yet untrodden by anyone . . ."⁷ Similarly acknowledging Machiavelli as a "discoverer," Coby observes: "He announces that he will travel a heretofore untrodden path; but he does not further explain the novelty

⁴ *TM*, p.231. With regard to the above distinction, see also HSS, pp.212-13; *TM*, p.43.

⁵ *TM*, p.232.

⁶ *TM*, p.232. Cf. Gilbert, "Politics and Morality," pp.467-68.

⁷ *Discourses*, p.5.

of his endeavor or whether the path he enters upon is the same as or different from the modes and orders he has (or has not) discovered.”⁸ Strauss explains, with Chapter 13 of *The Prince* and the Epistle Dedicatory and Preface to Book I of the *Discourses* in mind, that Machiavelli’s “claim to novelty” pertains to his teaching in its moral-political aspect rather than its religious aspect. However, as Strauss emphasizes, “In his teaching concerning morality and politics Machiavelli challenges not only the religious teaching but the whole philosophic tradition as well.” Machiavelli articulates his “new principle” in opposition to the classical principle that “took its bearings by how one ought to live”⁹ Focussing not on “imagined things” but on what men actually do, Machiavelli shares the disdain for “book learning” and reflection on philosophic issues that “many practitioners of politics” of all eras have felt; his moral-political teaching is animated by a preference for action over contemplation.¹⁰

Yet, Strauss stresses, Machiavelli “is also concerned with “reasoning about everything,” . . . and he also addresses readers who merely try to understand “the things of the world.””¹¹ Machiavelli’s stated enterprise is to impart knowledge of new modes and orders to those willing to learn. At the beginning of *Discourses* I 18 he explained:

⁸ *Machiavelli’s Romans*, p.21 (see also pp.207-10, 213, 325-26n35). Cf. Fleisher, “The Ways of Machiavelli,” pp.332-36, 336ff; Mansfield, *Modes and Orders*, pp.21-23, 25-28; *Machiavelli’s Virtue*, pp.x-xi, 62, 125, 176ff, 233-35; Masters, *Machiavelli, Leonardo*, pp.30-31, 32 (and ch.II, passim).

⁹ *TM*, p.232. With regard to Machiavelli’s “principle,” see also *NM*, pp.229-301; *NRH*, pp.178-79; *OT* (rev.ex.), p.106n5; *TWM*, pp.84, 86-87; *WIPP?*, pp.40f, 46-47; and cf. *MCL*, pp.10, 12. Cf. also Voegelin, *Collected Works*, Vol.22, pp.31, 42, 60-61, 82-83.

¹⁰ *TM*, p.233. With regard to Machiavelli’s critique of the contemplative, philosophic life, cf. Cassirer, *Myth of the State*, pp.151-56, 161-62; Vatter, *Between Form and Event*, pp.157-58; Zuckert, *Postmodern Platos*, pp.118-21.

¹¹ *TM*, p.233. Strauss has in mind here *The Prince*, ch.15 (cf. *Florentine Histories* VII 24); *Discourses* I 18, 58; and Machiavelli’s letters to Vettori of 9 Apr. and 10 Dec. 1513. For these references, see *TM* p.338n131.

I believe it is not beyond the purpose of nor does it fail to conform to the discourse written above to consider whether in a corrupt city one can maintain a free state, if there is one, or, if it has not been there, whether one can order it. On this thing I say that it is very difficult to do either the one or the other; and although it is almost impossible to give a rule for it, because it would be necessary to proceed according to the degrees of corruption, nonetheless, since it is good to reason about everything, I do not wish to omit this.¹²

At the beginning of Chapter 15 of *The Prince* he reflected:

It remains now to see what the modes and government of a prince should be with subjects and with friends. And because I know that many have written of this, I fear that in writing of it again, I may be held presumptuous, especially since in disputing this matter I depart from the orders of others. But since my intent is to write something useful to whoever understands it, it has appeared to me more fitting to go directly to the effectual truth of the thing than to the imagination of it.¹³

Machiavelli pointed to the educative nature of his enterprise in a letter to Francesco Vettori dated 10 December 1513, when he said of his evening discussions with Dante, Petrarch and the ancients:

. . . because Dante says that no one understands anything unless he retains what he has understood, I have jotted down what I have profited from in their conversation and composed a short study, *De principatibus*, in which I delve as deeply as I can into the ideas concerning this topic And through this study of mine, were it to be read, it would be evident that during the fifteen years I have been studying the art of the state I have neither slept nor fooled around, and anybody ought to be happy to utilize someone who has had so much experience at the expense of others. . . .¹⁴

Strauss observes that Machiavelli's "teaching . . . is based not only on extensive practice or experience of contemporary things but on continuous readings of ancient things as well." According to Villari, "In the course of his political meditations Machiavelli never restricted himself to the sole contemplation of the

¹² *Discourses*, p.49.

¹³ *The Prince*, p.61.

¹⁴ Letter 224 in *Machiavelli and His Friends*, pp.264, 265.

Greeks and Romans; he also gave much attention to real life . . .” Strauss notes of Machiavelli’s “teaching” that it “combines “general knowledge” with “particular knowledge” or “practice,” for no science can be possessed perfectly without practice.”¹⁵ In *Discourses* I 47 Machiavelli argues that good judgment is evidenced—and arrived at—only by one’s moving from particular knowledge to general knowledge: “one can soon open the eyes of peoples by finding a mode by which they have to descend to particulars . . .”¹⁶ In III 39 he explains that successful military action depends on the captain combining general and particular knowledge by, that is, applying to new countries his familiarity with a given site or region; such familiarity is acquired through hunting and military training.

Machiavelli inverts the classical precept that knowledge is acquired by proceeding from contemplation of general, universalistic principles to consideration of particular examples. He insists, Strauss explains, that “[t]he proper order is ascent from particular knowledge, the knowledge inherent in practice, to general knowledge. . . .” One ascends from knowledge of one’s own “society . . . [to] general knowledge or “firm science” of the “nature” of society or of the “nature” of the things of the world . . . by recognizing the universal in the particular” Knowledge about the world thus gained is “at least partly preceptive or normative.” But, adds Strauss, “Machiavelli does not oppose to the normative political philosophy of the classics a merely descriptive or analytical political science; he rather opposes to a wrong normative teaching the true normative teaching.”¹⁷

¹⁵ *TM*, p.233; Villari, *Life and Times*, Vol.2, p.154.

¹⁶ *Discourses*, p.98.

¹⁷ *TM*, p.233 (cf. p.11, and see also p.338n132). Cf. Caranfa, *Machiavelli Rethought*, pp.37-44, 129, 138, 145; Vatter, *Between Form and Event*, pp.32ff, 100; Villari, *Life and Times*, Vol.2, pp.95-98; Voegelin, *Collected Works*, Vol.22, p.34n3. With regard to *Discourses* I 47, see also Mansfield, *Modes and Orders*, pp.143-47. With regard to *Discourses* III 39, see also Coby, *Machiavelli’s Romans*, pp.214-15 (cf. p.319n46); Mansfield, *Modes and Orders*, pp.421-23.

Carefully examining Strauss's critical study of Machiavelli's "normative" moral-political teaching reveals that Strauss's aim is to recover *both* the Biblical and classical horizons of the fundamental problems of what is good, just, virtuous, best and right. To reiterate, Strauss regards Machiavelli's moral-political teaching as a revolt against both Biblical religion and classical political philosophy.

Virtue and goodness

The scope of goodness

Machiavelli engages with, and appeals to, classical views on goodness. "He knows that these generally held opinions are not entirely baseless," Strauss explains. "They contain elements which he can preserve. Besides, by reproducing those opinions he furnishes himself with the indispensable "first statements.""¹⁸ By way of example of a first statement Strauss gives this quotation from Chapter 15 of *The Prince*, "I know that everyone will confess that it would be most praiseworthy for a prince to possess all the above-mentioned qualities which are held to be good," and explains that those qualities are "liberality, mercy, fidelity, courage, chastity, sincerity, religion, and so on."¹⁹ But in Chapter I Strauss wrote: "No one, I believe, questions the opinion that Machiavelli did doubt the common view regarding the relation between morality and politics, for every one has read chapters 15 ff. of the *Prince*." In the words of Mosca: "In the fifteenth through eighteenth chapters is found the quintessence of Machiavellianism."²⁰ There certainly can be no doubt that Machiavelli was aware of traditional morality. Men praise goodness and criticize

¹⁸ *TM*, p.234.

¹⁹ *TM*, p.234.

²⁰ *TM*, p.43; Gaetano Mosca, "The Renaissance and Machiavelli," in *A Short History of Political Philosophy*, trans. Sondra Z. Koff (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1972), p.83.

vice, Machiavelli notes in those ‘Machiavellian’ chapters. Men praise a prince for his exemplary actions and conduct, for his being concerned with the good of his subjects. Men detest a tyrant, because such a person is motivated precisely by the pursuit of self-advantage, not by the good of his subjects, of the public as a whole.²¹ Indeed, this common view served as Machiavelli’s criterion for preferring republics over principalities. For Machiavelli, as Strauss points out, “republics are to be preferred to princes because they are morally superior to the latter: they are less given to ingratitude and bad faith than are princes.”²²

Yet at the same time Machiavelli questions the common view. The ‘essence’ of his thought is to deny that moral considerations ought to guide political life. What is ‘new’ in Machiavelli is this decidedly temporal view of goodness. Strauss explains on his behalf: “If goodness consists in dedication to the common good, the good man will be satisfied with having little of his own: the good republic will keep its citizens poor and the commonwealth rich.”²³ In *Discourses* I 37, echoing discussions in I 6, 16, 29, and III 25, Machiavelli attributes the troubles caused in Rome by the conflict between the plebeians and the nobles—conflict over the apportionment of honors, riches and land—to the erosion in the enforcement of the Agrarian laws. Also in I 6, as well as in I 10, Machiavelli says that to be “honest” is to have the praiseworthy virtues, whereas to be “honorable” is to have “extraordinary virtue”; to be truly honorable, one must be conscious of one’s “extraordinary virtue” and conduct oneself accordingly.²⁴

²¹ See *TM*, pp.234-35.

²² *TM*, p.235.

²³ *TM*, p.235.

²⁴ *TM*, pp.235-36. For the above references themselves, see *TM*, p.338nn137, 138.

It is clear that Strauss is examining what can be described as Machiavelli's temporal, anti-classical delimitation of the scope of goodness. Curiously, having cited Machiavelli's notion of "extraordinary virtue," he explains that Machiavelli's "implicit distinction between the honest and the honorable reminds us of the distinction between justice and magnanimity, the two peaks of Aristotle's ethics."²⁵ Magnanimity and justice are peaks of virtue because they are indispensable for guiding people towards excellence. In the words of Aristotle: "Pride . . . seems to be a sort of crown of the excellences; for it makes them greater, and it is not found without them." He goes on to explain: "justice is often thought to be the greatest of excellences and 'neither evening nor morning star' is so wonderful . . . it is complete excellence in its fullest sense, because it is the actual exercise of complete excellence."²⁶ Aquinas also regards justice and magnanimity as peaks of virtue, though not as coequal virtues, as does Aristotle.²⁷ Aquinas observes: "nothing is adorned save by something worthier than itself. But Aristotle speaks of magnanimity as the adornment of justice and all the virtues." In his reply Aquinas states: "When magnanimity is added to justice the goodness of justice is increased. Yet without justice it would not have the character of virtue."²⁸ Elsewhere, Aquinas explains: "Take honour . . . just for itself and thus an object simply in itself it is for the virtue called *philotimia*, i.e., love of honour, but as a challenge to our confidence it is for the virtue of magnanimity."²⁹

²⁵ *TM*, p.236.

²⁶ *Nicomachean Ethics* 1124a1-3, 1129b28-31, *Complete Works*, Vol.2, pp.1774, 1783.

²⁷ On this point as it relates to Aristotle, see ch.2, in the section titled "Either/Or."

²⁸ *Summa Theologiæ*, Vol.37: *Justice* (2a2æ. 57-62), trans. Thomas Gilby (Blackfriars; London: Eyre and Spottiswoode; New York: McGraw-Hill, 1975), q.58, art.12.2, art.12.2 reply, pp.51, 53.

²⁹ *Summa Theologiæ*, Vol.23: *Virtue* (1a2æ. 55-67), trans. W.D. Hughes (Blackfriars; London: Eyre and Spottiswoode; New York: McGraw-Hill, 1969), q.60, art.5, reply, p.113 (original emphasis).

However, Machiavelli avoids describing the pursuit of justice and the accompanying pursuit of magnanimity, of a high-minded generosity and nobility, as the basis of goodness. Modifying his above parallel between Aristotle and Aquinas, on the one hand, and Machiavelli, on the other hand, Strauss states: "It is noteworthy that Machiavelli avoids mentioning justice in the most striking passages." He is silent about justice in Chapter 15 of *The Prince* whilst giving his "most comprehensive enumeration of the praiseworthy qualities."³⁰

Strauss continues: "After having referred to the fact that all men agree in praising goodness or virtue and in blaming badness or vice, and hence in praising the virtuous rulers and in blaming tyrants, Machiavelli notes that the writers, and hence the unwary readers, praise the tyrant Caesar most highly."³¹ He opens *Discourses* I 10 by stating: "Among all men praised, the most praised are those who have been heads and orderers of religions. Next, then, are those who have founded either republics or kingdoms. . . ." Chief among those who "are infamous and detestable" and should not be praised "are destroyers of religions," followed by "squanderers of kingdoms and republics . . ." Shortly afterwards Machiavelli remarks: "no one will ever be so crazy or so wise, so wicked or so good, who will not praise what is to be praised and blame what is to be blamed, when the choice between the two qualities of men is placed before him." Yet people do not blame Caesar for turning the Roman republic into a tyranny; instead, they praise him, for they "are corrupted by his fortune and awed by the duration of the empire that . . . did not permit writers to speak freely of him. . . . Caesar is so much more detestable as he who has done an

³⁰ *TM*, p.236. Strauss's accompanying endnote, *TM*, pp.338-39n139, cites *The Prince*, ch.15; Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1106b33-1108b9; and Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 1 2, q.60.a.5.c.

³¹ *TM*, p.236.

evil is more to blame than he who has wished to do one.”³² Caesar is detestable, Machiavelli goes on to explain, because he destroyed the Roman republic—he “spoil[ed] it entirely” rather than renewing it.³³ As Machiavelli says in *Discourses* I 34, if a dictatorship is necessary to introduce good back into the republic, its citizens should not be afraid of electing a dictator. Similarly, he wrote in Chapter 16 of *The Prince*: “if someone should say: Caesar attained empire with liberality . . . I respond: either you are already a prince or you are on the path to acquiring it: in the first case this liberality is damaging; in the second it is indeed necessary to be held liberal.”³⁴

Machiavelli seems to be saying that although it is fitting that Caesar be praised for having built an empire, people err in praising him as the highest among men who are worthy of praise.³⁵ Having cited Machiavelli’s criticisms of Caesar, Strauss attributes to Machiavelli the notion that “men err more easily regarding what is general than regarding what is particular. . . .”³⁶ As Machiavelli said in *Discourses* I 47, “peoples are deceived generally in judging things and their accidents about which, after they know them particularly, they lack such deception.” Or as he put the point in *Discourses* II 22: “How false the opinions of men often are has been seen and is seen by those who find themselves witnesses of their decisions, which, if they are not decided by excellent men, are often contrary to every truth. . . . Certain accidents also arise about which men who have not had great experience of things are easily deceived . . .”³⁷ That people praise goodness is belied by their deeds. Yet

³² *Discourses*, pp.31, 31-32.

³³ *Discourses*, p.33. See also Coby, *Machiavelli's Romans*, pp.190-91.

³⁴ *The Prince*, p.64. With regard to Machiavelli’s two above points, see also *Discourses* I 18;

³⁵ Cf. Coby, *Machiavelli's Romans*, pp.48-54.

³⁶ *TM*, p.236.

³⁷ *Discourses* I 47, p.98; II 22, p.179.

people express themselves not simply through deeds, through actions, but also through speeches. When given at public gatherings, speeches are invariably flattering; they dwell on the appearance of success. According to Strauss, “Machiavelli’s analysis of morality will therefore begin with the observation of the self-contradictions inherent in what men generally and publicly praise. . . .” Men follow “a middle course” between the outright condemnation and the outright praise of vice; in especial instances, such as war, men will laud the recourse by their ruler to fraud.³⁸

Virtue and the mean

Strauss observes, “The common understanding of virtue had found its classic expression in Aristotle’s assertion that virtue, being the opposite of vice, is the middle or mean between two faulty extremes (a too little and a too much [*sic*]) which are opposed to each other.”³⁹ Though not providing references for that “assertion,” Strauss clearly is drawing upon *Nicomachean Ethics* 1108b11-19:

There are three kinds of disposition, then, two of them vices, involving excess and deficiency and one an excellence, viz. the mean, and all are in a sense opposed to all; for the extreme states are contrary both to the intermediate state and to each other, and the intermediate to the extremes; as the equal is greater relatively to the less, less relatively to the greater, so the middle states are excessive relatively to the deficiencies, deficient relatively to the excesses, both in passions and in actions.⁴⁰

Machiavelli “occasionally” echoes Aristotle’s notion of the mean, Strauss goes on to explain. He adds on Machiavelli’s behalf: “A prince must proceed in such a way that too much confidence does not make him incautious and too much diffidence (or

³⁸ *TM*, p.237; with regard to the mean, see also p.339n141.

³⁹ *TM*, p.237. See also Vatter, *Between Form and Event*, pp.45, 45n40.

⁴⁰ *Complete Works*, Vol.2, p.1750.

too little confidence) does not make him unbearable.”⁴¹ In *Discourses* III 31 Machiavelli defines virtue as consisting of one’s ability to adapt to variations in fate; in the same chapter he describes vice as consisting of becoming intoxicated and insolent by good fortune that one may or may not have possessed in the first place. In Chapter 17 of *The Prince* Machiavelli advises that a prince “should proceed in a temperate mode with prudence and humanity so that too much confidence does not make incautious and too much diffidence does not render him intolerable.”⁴²

But Machiavelli also echoes Livy’s criticism of the mean. In *Discourses* II 23 and III 40, respectively, Machiavelli describes as “harmful” and “pernicious” the middle way criticized by Livy in his account of the battle at the Caudine Forks.⁴³ As Livy, speaking through Herennius Pontius, said of the choice the Samnites had to let go free unharmed or kill to the very last man the Roman army they had pinned down at the Caudine Forks, “a middle course . . . “is in sooth [i.e., in truth] a policy that neither wins men friends nor rids them of their enemies. . . .”⁴⁴ Speaking in his own voice Livy goes on to explain: “Too late and all in vain did they [the Samnites] praise the alternative policies suggested by the aged Pontius, between which they had fallen . . .”⁴⁵

Strauss notes that in Machiavelli’s judgment, “The Roman people kept its place honorably by neither ruling arrogantly nor serving abjectly. Liberty is the mean between principality or tyranny and license.”⁴⁶ Strauss is drawing upon

⁴¹ *TM*, pp.237-38.

⁴² *The Prince*, p.66.

⁴³ *Discourses* pp.184, 300. See also *Discourses* III 41-42.

⁴⁴ Livy, Bk.IX.3.12, trans. B.O. Foster (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1957), p.173.

⁴⁵ Bk.IX.12.2, p.205.

⁴⁶ *TM*, p.238.

Discourses I 58 and Chapter 9 of *The Prince*—in that order. In the former Machiavelli states: “the Roman people . . . never served humbly nor dominated proudly while the republic lasted uncorrupt; indeed, with its orders and magistrates, it held its rank honorably.” In the latter he claims:

one ascends to this [civil] principality either with the support of the people or with the support of the great. For in every city these two diverse humors are found, which arises from this: that the people desire neither to be commanded nor oppressed by the great, and the great desire to command and oppress the people. From these two diverse appetites one of the three effects occurs in cities: principality or liberty or license.⁴⁷

Strauss continues, evidently on Machiavelli’s behalf: “On the other hand, however, people condemn “the middle course” (*la via del mezzo*) as harmful. Mercy and justice despise the undecided, the lukewarm, those who are neither for nor against God. Furthermore, we may add in accordance with what Aristotle has said, justice is not a mean between two vices but is opposed only to one vice . . .”⁴⁸ Justice is opposed to actions that cannot but be considered bad and the antithesis of excellence. According to Aristotle, “not every action nor every passion admits of a mean; for some have names that already imply badness, e.g. spite, shamelessness, envy, and in the case of actions adultery, theft, murder . . . It is not possible, then, ever to be right with regard to them; one must always be wrong.”⁴⁹

But having explained that Machiavelli occasionally echoes Aristotle’s notion of the mean, Strauss observes: “At any rate Machiavelli *tacitly rejects* the view that virtue is a mean between two vices.”⁵⁰ Here it would be fair to say that the crucial

⁴⁷ *Discourses*, p.116; *The Prince*, p.39.

⁴⁸ *TM*, p.238. With regard to liberty as “the mean”, cf. *The Prince*, chs.7, 9; with regard to “*la via del mezzo*,” cf. *Discourses* II 23, III 40. Cf. also Coby, *Machiavelli’s Romans*, p.11.

⁴⁹ *Nicomachean Ethics* 1107a9-14, *Complete Works*, Vol.2, p.1748. With regard to justice and injustice, see *Nicomachean Ethics* 1129a-1131a9.

⁵⁰ *TM*, p.238 (emphases mine).

question for Strauss pertains to both how and why Machiavelli rejects the mean; that Strauss proceeds to examine passages in which Machiavelli obliquely censures the mean indicates that Strauss is seeking to explicate the manner in which Machiavelli's understanding of virtue and goodness initially adopts but ultimately rejects the classical notion of the mean.⁵¹

With Chapter 15 of *The Prince* in mind Strauss explains: "In his most comprehensive enumeration of virtues and vices, each virtue appears as the opposite of a single vice." Strauss adds: "Elsewhere he contrasts the equanimity of the excellent or great man with a single opposite vice of weak men; that vice consists of two "defects," conceit or arrogance on the one hand and vileness or humility on the other. . . ." Machiavelli's argument about the meaning of virtue can be thus put, Strauss states: "The two opposite defects are merely two aspects of one and the same vice which comes to sight in opposite forms in opposite circumstances . . . The virtue in question on the other hand comes to sight as one and the same in all situations . . . it is based on "knowledge of the world. ""⁵²

Machiavelli's differentiation toward the beginning of Chapter 15 of *The Prince* "between the virtue of liberality and the virtue of giving" is, as Strauss points out, related to the differentiation in the Tuscan language "between stinginess and rapacity."⁵³ For Machiavelli to regard "stinginess and rapacity" as constituting "two different vices" indicates that he attributes one virtue to stinginess but another virtue to rapacity. "The stingy man abstains "too much" from using his own; the

⁵¹ But see *TM*, pp.242ff, where Strauss examines passages in which Machiavelli emphatically challenges the mean.

⁵² *TM*, p.238. Strauss's accompanying endnote, p.339n142, refers to *The Prince*, chs.9, 15, 17; *Discourses* I 58, III 31; and instructs, "Cf. Livy IX 3.11 and 12.2." With regard to Strauss's instruction, see my above quotations.

⁵³ *TM*, p.238. Cf. Najemy, "Language and *The Prince*," pp.99-102.

rapacious man desires to acquire by rapine what belongs to others.” The counterpart of the stingy man’s “excess” is the “defect” of “prodigality.” However, “Machiavelli *tacitly* denies this by assigning to liberality only one opposite vice, namely, stinginess. . . . he *tacitly* substitutes the virtue of giving for justice.”⁵⁴ I would note here that Machiavelli contrasts the praiseworthy qualities—for instance, of being a “giver,” “merciful,” “faithful,” “fierce and spirited,” and “humane”—with extreme qualities—of being “rapacious,” “cruel,” “a breaker of faith,” “effeminate and pusillanimous,” and “proud.” Clearly, the extreme qualities correspond with defect or excess. Machiavelli also identifies two types of vice: “those vices that would take his state from him [the prince] . . .”, and “vices without which it is difficult to save one’s state . . .”⁵⁵

According to Strauss, Machiavelli “*alludes* to the fact that liberality has two opposite vices and he *alludes* to justice which is thought to have only one opposite vice. He explains the meaning of these *allusions* partly in the following chapter.”⁵⁶ For Strauss to employ the words “*alludes*” and “*tacitly*” gives rise to two questions. Does Machiavelli *emphatically* reject the mean? And if so, where? Below I will turn to Strauss’s analysis of passages where Machiavelli speaks emphatically against the mean.

Machiavelli warns in Chapter 16 of *The Prince* that adhering to a reputation for liberality invariably leads the prince to impose increasingly onerous and unsustainable economic demands upon his people. Liberality leads only to poverty and rapaciousness and hence to the prince being despised and hated by his subjects.

⁵⁴ *TM*, pp.238-39 (emphases mine).

⁵⁵ *The Prince*, p.62.

⁵⁶ *TM*, p.239 (emphases mine).

Furthermore, if a prince devotes all of his state's resources to lavish displays of liberality, he will not possess the wherewithal to defend his state and subjects in times of war. Therefore, the prince cannot let himself be dissuaded by a reputation for parsimony. "Parsimony necessarily comes to sight as the vice of stinginess but this vice is preferable to the virtue of liberality."⁵⁷

However, Strauss emphasizes, "Machiavelli's conclusion seems to be unnecessarily shocking; he could have limited himself to replacing the virtue of liberality by the virtue of parsimony. More precisely . . . he could have contented himself with saying that the virtue of justice requires the sacrifice of the virtue of liberality." By lauding parsimony Machiavelli is not simply implying that the mean is difficult to follow or that it is an inefficacious standard of human action. Rather, he is implying that the mean is impossible. According to Strauss, "Only by considering his indications regarding justice can we understand why he denies that the virtuous mean is possible."⁵⁸

Machiavelli advises republics to maintain what they have, and refrain from acquisition, because doing so, Strauss explains on his behalf, "is the middle course between taking away from others what belongs to them and losing to others what one possesses."⁵⁹ Yet because all aspects of human life are perpetually in motion, the path recommended by "reason" cannot be followed at all times, if ever. Necessity compels princes to favor "the vice of rapacity" over "the virtue of giving." By acquiring what belongs to others, the prince gains the wherewithal to indulge "the virtue of liberality . . ." Thus for Machiavelli, Strauss notes, "Justice as the stable

⁵⁷ *TM*, p.239.

⁵⁸ *TM*, p.239.

⁵⁹ *TM*, pp.239-40.

mean between self-denial or giving away what one has on the one hand and injustice on the other is impossible; a bias in favor of the latter is necessary and honorable.”⁶⁰

Explicating Machiavelli’s advice to republics and princes regarding the basis of justice, Strauss contrasts Machiavelli with Polybius. He explains: “[it] appears [that] . . . knowledge of justice presupposes positive laws (there is no natural right), whereas knowledge of the honest (the moral) precedes positive laws.”⁶¹ In *Discourses* I 2 Machiavelli observes:

seeing that if one individual hurt his benefactor, hatred and compassion among men came from it, and as they blamed the ungrateful and honored those who were grateful, and thought too that those same injuries could be done to them, to escape like evil they were reduced to making laws and ordering punishments for whoever acted against them: hence came the knowledge of justice.

In his *Histories*, VI.6.6-8, Polybius states:

when a man who has been helped or succored when in danger by another does not show gratitude to his preserver, but even goes to the length of attempting to do him injury, it is clear that those who become aware of it will naturally be displeased and offended by such conduct, sharing the resentment of their injured neighbor and imagining themselves in the same situation. From all of this there arises in everyone a notion of the meaning and theory of duty, which is the beginning and end of justice.⁶²

In short, notes Qviller, “While the idea of justice, according to Polybius, is constituted in human interaction, Machiavelli maintains that it is generated through the establishment of a legal code. . . .”⁶³

Further showing that Machiavelli regards the mean as an inefficacious and impossible standard for human action, Strauss gives this quotation from the end of

⁶⁰ *TM*, p.240.

⁶¹ *TM*, p.339n145.

⁶² *Discourses*, pp.11-12; *The Histories*, Vol.3, trans. W.R. Paton (London: William Heinemann; New York: G.P. Putnam, 1923), p.281.

⁶³ “Machiavellian Cosmos,” p.330.

Discourses I 26: “they take certain middle courses which are most harmful, for men do not know how to be altogether evil nor how to be altogether good, as will be shown in the following chapter by an example.” Shortly afterwards, and with I 27 in mind, Strauss states: “But Machiavelli calls the evil deed which the tyrant did not dare commit—a deed which by its greatness would have overcome every infamy—“honorably evil”; the tyrant’s previous deeds were unqualifiedly evil . . .”⁶⁴ Speaking not in his own name but by describing the observations of “the prudent men who were with the pope,” Machiavelli explains in I 27 that “the cowardice of Giovampagolo”—his failure to kill Pope Julius II, who had visited Perugia escorted by only one guard—“arose from men’s not knowing how to be honorably wicked or perfectly good; and when malice has greatness in itself or is generous in some part, they do not know how to enter into it.”⁶⁵

Strauss proposes that for Machiavelli, “It would seem then that the right way, at any rate for a prince, is indeed a mean—yet not the mean between two opposite vices but the mean between virtue and vice. . . .”⁶⁶ The mode of action of the successful prince is a mean “between humanity and inhumanity” that varies in response to changing times. Such a mean, “between virtue and vice,” is the “true” mean, for it is an imitation of nature, of perpetually variable circumstances.⁶⁷

Strauss goes on to explain:

That the alternation between virtue and vice somehow occurs in all men is generally admitted; what is controversial is the interpretation of this phenomenon: the alternation which Machiavelli calls natural is understood by the tradition which he attacks as the alternation between sin and repentance. The alternation which he praises as

⁶⁴ *TM*, pp.240, 339n146.

⁶⁵ *Discourses*, pp.62, 62-63.

⁶⁶ *TM*, pp.240-41. Cf. *XS*, p.38.

⁶⁷ See *TM*, p.241.

agreeing with nature . . . consists in choosing virtue or vice with a view to what is appropriate “for whom, toward whom, when and where.”⁶⁸

In *Discourses* II 23, 24 and III 21 Machiavelli advises that the prince base the alternation on what is appropriate for the times, especially when times are dangerous and forceful military action is needed to secure his power against his enemies, be they domestic or foreign. In Chapters 17 and 18 of *The Prince* Machiavelli describes the alternation as being led by astuteness—by the astute, prudent appraisal of the exigencies of prevailing circumstances—and maintained by virtuousness—by strength of spirit and body.⁶⁹ In *Discourses* I 41 and Chapter 8 of *The Prince* Machiavelli speaks of the good and bad use by tyrants of both virtue and vice. In *Discourses* I 13 and 15 he observes that the good use of religion was vital in establishing and protecting the Roman republic. Drawing upon the above passages, Strauss notes that in Machiavelli’s estimation, “Whereas the moral virtues and vices (e.g. religion and cruelty) can be well and badly used because their use must be regulated by prudence, prudence cannot be badly or imprudently used.”⁷⁰ However, Machiavelli does warn against the failure by princes to be prudent. In *Discourses* II 26 he states: “I believe that one of the great prudences men use is to abstain from menacing on injuring anyone with words. For neither the one nor the other takes forces away from the enemy, but the one makes him more cautious and the other makes him have greater hatred against you and think with greater industry of how to hurt you.”⁷¹

⁶⁸ *TM*, p.241.

⁶⁹ See *TM*, pp.241-42; for the references themselves, see p.339n149.

⁷⁰ *TM*, p.242; for the above references themselves, see p.339n150.

⁷¹ *Discourses*, pp.191-92.

Strauss continues: “We must emphasize the fact, which Machiavelli has deliberately obscured by his usage, that his doctrine of “virtue” preserves the relevance, the truth, the reality of the generally recognized opposition between (moral) virtue and (moral) vice. This fact affords perhaps the strongest proof of both the diabolical character and the sobriety of his thought. . . .”⁷² That Machiavelli abandons the notion of moral virtue is evidenced by his description, in Chapter 8 of *The Prince*, of Agathocles as a man of crime *and* great spirit. The movement between morality and criminality, Strauss explains on Machiavelli’s behalf, “must be guided by prudence and sustained by virtue.”⁷³

A prudent mean

From Machiavelli’s *tacit* rejections of the mean Strauss turns to his “*emphatic* references” about the mean’s “desirability or possibility . . .” Strauss explains: “If one examines his remarks on this subject more carefully, one sees that he favors a “certain middle course” rather than the extremes in question.”⁷⁴ Of those “remarks” Strauss points out (but in an endnote) that *Discourses* II 23 is the only chapter title in that work which speaks of the “middle course.”⁷⁵ In fact, that chapter is titled: “How Much the Romans, in Judging Subjects for Some Accidents That Necessitated Such Judgment, Fled from the Middle Way.” In the chapter Machiavelli explains that in taking the Latium towns under its control so as to increase the size of the Roman republic, Rome “either benefited them or eliminated them. . . .” Rome did

⁷² *TM*, p.242.

⁷³ *TM*, p.242. With regard to Agathocles, see also *TM*, p.339n151; cf. p.47. With regard to my following observation about virtue, cf. *OPS*, pp.189-90.

⁷⁴ *TM*, p.242 (emphasis mine).

⁷⁵ *TM*, p.339n152.

not “ever use the neutral way in affairs of moment.”⁷⁶ Strauss points out that in Book I of the *Art of War*, Machiavelli “recommends the middle course between pure compulsion and pure volunteering in recruiting soldiers . . . In *Florentine Histories* IV 1 he in fact recommends liberty as the mean between servitude and license.”⁷⁷ Machiavelli opens IV 1 by explaining: “Cities, and especially those not well ordered that are administered under the name of republic, frequently change their governments and their states not between liberty and servitude, as many believe, but between servitude and license.” Liberty depends upon a mean between the two humors of servitude and license. If a city sides with one humor or the other, it will be unable to maintain its freedom. Yet, Machiavelli admits (having described nobles as “the ministers of servitude” and men of the people as “the ministers of license”):

True, when it happens (and it happens rarely) that by the good fortune of a city there rises in it a wise, good, and powerful citizen by whom laws are ordered by which these humors of the nobles and the men of the people are quieted or restrained so that they cannot do evil, then that city can be called free and that state be judged stable and firm: for a city based on good laws and good orders has no necessity, as have others, for the virtue of a single man to maintain it.⁷⁸

In *Discourses* I 47 Machiavelli also speaks of the sharing of public office by nobles and plebeians, while in III 2 he speaks disapprovingly of the man of quality (a philosopher⁷⁹) who seeks a mean—of neutrality—between genuine friendship and open conflict with princes:

It is true that some say that with princes one should not wish to stand so close that their ruin includes you, nor so far that you would not be in time to rise above their ruin when they are being ruined. Such a middle way would be the truest if it could be observed, but because I believe that it is impossible, one must be reduced to the two modes

⁷⁶ *Discourses*, pp.181, 182.

⁷⁷ *TM*, p.339n152.

⁷⁸ *Florentine Histories*, p.146.

⁷⁹ Mansfield, *Modes and Orders*, p.308.

written above—that is, either to distance oneself from or to bind oneself to them. Whoever does otherwise, if he is a man notable for his quality, lives in continual danger.⁸⁰

One must feign friendship, Machiavelli seems to be saying. Indeed, shortly after having condemned the mean in III 2, he advises: “one must play crazy, like Brutus, and make oneself very much mad, praising, speaking, seeing, doing things against your intent so to please the prince.”⁸¹ In sum, that Machiavelli condemns the classical notion of the mean precisely for its lack of judiciousness and farsightedness implies that he is advocating a mean that is based on the prudent use of guile, power and force.⁸²

But, Strauss continues, “We still have to consider whether the apparently unqualified rejection of the middle course does not convey an important message. Machiavelli is an extremist in the sense that he challenges the whole religious and philosophical tradition. . . .”⁸³ One could argue that Strauss already has considered what that “message” is. In Chapter III of *Thoughts on Machiavelli* he wrote of *Discourses* II 23: “Machiavelli censures a half measure once taken by Florence . . .”⁸⁴ I would simply say here that in II 23 Machiavelli praised the Roman senate for not following the mean “in affairs of moment,” and stated: “Princes ought to imitate this judgment.”⁸⁵ But the Florentines, as Machiavelli then remarked, failed to fully imitate the judgment. When Arezzo rebelled against Florence in 1502, the Florentines exiled (or fined) the Arentines, and stripped them all of their former

⁸⁰ *Discourses*, pp.213-14.

⁸¹ *Discourses*, p.214.

⁸² Cf. *TM*, p.340n152.

⁸³ *TM*, pp.242-43.

⁸⁴ *TM*, p.156.

⁸⁵ *Discourses*, p.182.

honors and offices; in other words, rather than destroying Arezzo, Florence was merciful. Strauss went on to explain: "We see that Machiavelli silently passes over from the indictment of a "middle way" to the indictment of an extreme way—of a way of thinking which allows of nothing but love or charity and is therefore incompatible with the nature of things." Shortly afterwards Strauss noted that to Machiavelli, "The first extreme . . . is the Christian teaching which forbids resistance to evil; the second extreme is the "natural" teaching . . . the middle way between these two extremes can be presumed to the combination of non-resistance to evil with resistance to evil . . ." According to Strauss, "Machiavelli knew that the Bible teaches not only love but fear as well. But from his [i.e., Machiavelli's] point of view the Biblical combination of love and fear, as distinguished from the natural combination . . . necessarily leads to all extremes of pious cruelty or pitiless persecution."⁸⁶

Machiavelli's "important message" is, then, that the classical mean and its Biblical equivalent provide a dangerous and impossible standard for human action. He insists that the mean fatally tends to distract peoples' attention from the exigencies of the times. To furnish a readily recognizable and accepted basis for his message Machiavelli appealed to commonly accepted views on virtue and goodness. Thus Machiavelli, as Strauss goes on to explain, "is compelled to conceal the full extent of his innovation and to suggest frequently what is in fact a compromise between his view and traditional views. The indictment of the middle course as such is necessary to counteract Machiavelli's own accommodations."⁸⁷

⁸⁶ *TM*, pp.156-57.

⁸⁷ *TM*, p.243.

Virtue vs. goodness

Machiavelli takes exception to the Good in its traditional meaning of that which is best at all times, in all places and for all people. Not only does he regard the notion of the Good as undesirable and dangerous, he regards it as an untruth—he claims that good qua the Good, and without evil, is impossible. “Generally stated,” Strauss explains on Machiavelli’s behalf, “there is no good, simple or combined, without its accompanying evil, so much so that all choice can be said to be a choice among evils. If a certain institution appears to be altogether salutary, one can be certain that it will prove to carry with itself an unsuspected evil so that one will be compelled sooner or later to modify or to abolish that institution: one will always be in need of new modes and orders.”⁸⁸ For instance, Machiavelli wrote in *Discourses* III 17: “it is impossible to order a perpetual republic, because its ruin is caused through a thousand unexpected ways.” In III 37 he proposed: “It appears that in the actions of men, as we have discoursed of another time [i.e., in I 6] . . . one finds that close to the good there is always some evil that arises with that good so easily that it appears impossible to be able to miss the one if one wishes for the other. One sees this in all the things that men work on.”⁸⁹

Yet having indicated that Machiavelli’s rejection of the mean is a rejection of good qua the Good, Strauss states: “Still, Machiavelli seems to admit a *summum bonum*; he praises the pagans for having seen the highest good in worldly honor or, more precisely, in “greatness of mind, strength of the body and all other things which are apt to make men most strong.”” Here Strauss gives an endnote that refers

⁸⁸ *TM*, p.243. Strauss’s accompanying endnote, p.340n155, refers to *The Prince*, ch.21; *Discourses* I 6, 49, III 11, 17, 37.

⁸⁹ *Discourses*, pp.257, 294.

to *Discourses* II 2.⁹⁰ “To understand this passage,” Strauss says, “we must return to Machiavelli’s remarks on Agathocles.”⁹¹ I would simply say here that that “passage” in II 2 can be found in the midst of Machiavelli’s second explicit statement on the core beliefs of Christianity in the *Discourses*, which I discussed in Chapter Three. Machiavelli explains in Chapter 8 of *The Prince* that for all of his strength of spirit and his ability to overcome hardship, Agathocles was far too cruel—he did not possess the moral virtues. In *Discourses* III 31 Machiavelli posits that the truly excellent man possesses both the vice and the virtue that are needful for rising above, and prospering in spite of, unfavorable circumstances. Despite the travails of present times, contemporary princes, Machiavelli says in II 18, have failed to show contrition for their deviations from the ancient Roman modes of politics and the arts of warfare. In III 21, having stated that men are motivated in their actions by love *or* by fear, Machiavelli insists that it is impossible to hold to the mean between being loved and being feared if one does not possess the exceptional virtue that is necessary for correcting one’s inevitable deviations from the mean.

Machiavelli’s praise of the excellent man is tempered by his realization, Strauss explains, that “every man, however good, has his specific limitations, or no man partakes of all excellences which can ennoble man: no man is complete; a “universal man” is an imagined being. The most perfect prince or ruler cannot possibly possess the specific excellence of which the people is capable, an excellence

⁹⁰ *TM*, pp.243, 340n156. With regard to Strauss’s use of the phrase *summum bonum*, cf. *TPPH*, p.16. Cf. also Hick, *Faith and Knowledge*, pp.59-61; Voegelin, *Collected Works*, Vol.22, pp.70-71.

⁹¹ *TM*, p.243. See also *TM*, p.340n157, where Strauss refers to *The Prince*, ch.8, directs the reader to compare that chapter with *Discourses* III 31, and directs the reader to compare II 18 with III 21.

not inferior to the excellence of the prince.”⁹² Strauss has in mind *Discourses* I 58, II 24, III 9 and 13, where Machiavelli explains that excellence of the people, by dint of both their diverse natures and living under laws, consists of their love for freedom and their unflagging defense of it. According to Voegelin, though, “when Machiavelli evoked the Prince as the savior who would transform Italy . . . he overrated the possibilities of isolated intelligence and skill.”⁹³ *Discourses* I 55 clearly bears on Strauss’s and Voeglin’s comments about Machiavelli’s realization that no man possesses all of the excellences: in the chapter Machiavelli speaks of the rarity of the man who is excellent in both “brain and authority.”⁹⁴

cf. above text
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In elucidating the temporal, political core of Machiavelli’s normative moral-political teaching Strauss clearly is placing particular emphasis on his departure from the classical conception of the mean. However, having conceded Machiavelli’s affirmation of the excellence of the people, Strauss signals a shift of emphasis in his analysis on Machiavelli’s views about virtue and goodness:

To sum up, Machiavelli rejects the mean to the extent to which the notion of the mean is linked up with the notions of a perfect happiness that excludes all evil and of the simply perfect human being or of the “universal man,” and therefore with the notion of a most perfect being simply which possesses all perfections most eminently and hence cannot be the cause of evil.⁹⁵

Strauss’s shift in emphasis is from the mean to Machiavelli’s understanding of the relationship between freedom and virtuous action. Before proceeding, Strauss explains in an endnote that Machiavelli’s “criticism of the middle course in the *Discourses*” is paralleled by his “criticism of neutrality” in Chapter 21 of *The*

⁹² *TM*, p.244. For the below references themselves, to the *Discourses*, see *TM*, p.340n158.

⁹³ *Collected Works*, Vol.24, p.84.

⁹⁴ *Discourses*, p.112. For further discussion of *Discourses* I 55, see below, this present chapter.

⁹⁵ *TM*, p.244.

Prince; his “criticism of neutrality is based to some extent on faith in the power of justice. In proportion as the faith in the power of justice or in the imitation of Fortuna is weakened, the case for neutrality (or the middle course) is strengthened.”⁹⁶

Free will, necessity and chance

Virtue and free will

From examining Machiavelli’s rejection of the mean, elucidating his anti-classical conception of what constitutes excellence, Strauss then explicates his understanding of the impediments to, and bases for, virtuous action. In the course of explicating that understanding, Strauss addresses a series of issues: first, Machiavelli’s claim that chance, necessity and nature can be controlled by man’s virtue; second, what he means by necessity; third, his assessment of how necessity influences man; fourth, his claim that necessity makes man virtuous *and* good; and fifth, the implications of his judgment about the relation between virtue and necessity.⁹⁷

Strauss observes:

The common understanding of goodness had found its classic expression in Aristotle’s assertion that virtue is the habit of choosing well and that choosing well or ill as well as the habits of choosing well or ill (the virtues or vices) are voluntary: man is responsible for having become and for becoming virtuous or vicious. Man can choose the good or the bad; he possesses a free will. . . .⁹⁸

⁹⁶ *TM*, p.340n159.

⁹⁷ On the first issue, see *TM*, pp.244-47 (§§52-54); on the second, see pp.247-48 (§55); on the third, see pp.248-49 (§56); on the fourth, see pp.249-51 (§§57-58); and on the fifth, see pp.251-53 (§§59-60).

⁹⁸ *TM*, p.244. Not until p.245 (line 14) does Strauss give an accompanying endnote; see p.340n160, where he says: “*Prince* ch.25. Cf. pages 215-221 above.—See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I q.82.a.1.” With regard to *TM*, pp.215-21, see ch.4, in the section titled “Machiavelli’s cosmological reflections.”

Interestingly, the reference Strauss goes on to provide for “Aristotle’s assertion” is from Aquinas, namely, his *Summa Theologica*, I q.82.a.1. Strauss leaves it at that, though, and does not refer to the passage, which states: “rational powers embrace opposites, Aristotle says [*Metaphysics* 1046b4]. But will is a rational power, for as the *De Anima* says [432b3], will is in the reason.” In his response, Aquinas explains: “We are masters of our acts in that we can choose this or that. But we choose, not the end, but *things for the sake of the end*, as we read in the *Ethics* [1111b26].”⁹⁹ Strauss’s own words echo, then, both Aquinas and Aristotle. In his *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle argues: “moral excellence comes about as a result of habit . . . none of the moral excellences arises in us by nature; for nothing that exists by nature can form a habit contrary to its nature.” (1103a16-21) “[W]ill relates rather to the end, choice to what contributes to the end . . . in general, choice seems to relate to the things that are in our own power.” (1111b26, 30) In fact, “if it is in our power to do noble or base acts, and likewise in our power not to do them, and this was what being good or bad meant, then it is in our power to be virtuous or vicious.” (1113b11-14)¹⁰⁰

Machiavelli takes issue with Aristotle and Aquinas, in this sense: he maintains that one can choose one’s own ends—the ends themselves and how one reaches them—*if* one has the virtue. Having spoken of “free will,” Strauss explains, again on behalf of both Aristotle and Aquinas: “This freedom is compatible with the “natural and absolute necessity” through which man is inclined towards the perfect

⁹⁹ *Summa Theologiae*, Vol.11: *Man* (1a. 75-83), trans. Timothy Sutter (Blackfriars; London: Eyre and Spottiswoode; New York: McGraw-Hill, 1970), pp.217, 219 (original emphases); for the above references to Aristotle, see *ibid.*, respectively, pp.217nn3, 4, 218n8.

¹⁰⁰ *Complete Works*, Vol.2, pp.1742, 1755, 1758. See also *Nicomachean Ethics* 1103a20-b26, 1109b30-1112a17, 1113b6-1115a6, 1128b16-35; *Eudemian Ethics* 1220a13-1234b13 (see esp. 1220a37-b4, 1220b26-30, 1222a6-b14); *Politics* 1288a37-b2, 1337a10-b22; *Rhetoric* 1368b33-1369b29.

good . . . But freedom of the will is incompatible with the necessity of compulsion through which a man is literally compelled by other agents to act against his natural inclination. Machiavelli seems to adopt this view. . . .”¹⁰¹ For instance, in Chapter 25 of *The Prince* Machiavelli claims that because Fortuna rules one half of human affairs and leaves the other half to be presided over by free will, Fortuna can be dominated, albeit only by headstrong young men. As Strauss summarizes Machiavelli’s argument, “Man can be the master of his fate.”¹⁰²

Strauss spells out the logical implications: “Yet chance presupposes nature and necessity. Therefore, the question concerns less the relation of freedom and chance than the relation of freedom on the one hand and nature and necessity on the other: can virtue control nature and necessity as it can control chance?”¹⁰³ People prefer to think that they themselves are in control of their lives. However, it is often impossible, due to the power exerted by necessity, for people to act virtuously and in accordance with good laws. When circumstances turn for the worse, people forget the power of necessity, and blame their misfortunes on a prominently and conveniently placed individual, not on the pre-existing corruption within society.¹⁰⁴ For instance, the Romans blamed the fall of the republic on Caesar, not on the unrest created by the Agrarian laws; the economic demands of imperial expansion; and the ingratitude of the republic towards Caesar.¹⁰⁵

One cannot wholly change either the times, as they arise from chance, or chance itself, Machiavelli would seem to be saying. What one can do, though, is to

¹⁰¹ *TM*, pp.244-45.

¹⁰² *TM*, p.245.

¹⁰³ *TM*, p.245.

¹⁰⁴ See *TM*, pp.245, 340nn161, 162.

¹⁰⁵ See *TM*, pp.245-46, 340n163.

be able and willing to adapt as circumstances demand. Yet the capacity to change is limited, Machiavelli suggests, for each person naturally acts in certain ways; the habits or characteristics of an individual arise from his or her own nature and education, and cannot be changed to any significant degree. Only those rare individuals who possess innate virtue and prudence, knowing when and when not to act morally, can rule over chance and the times. In only these few individuals do the “Is” and the “Ought” meet. The majority of people lack the capacity to act wisely, to apply moral precepts astutely.¹⁰⁶

Misfortune will prevail, Machiavelli warns the prince, when he fails to exercise his innate virtue and fails to educate himself and his soldiers in the art of warfare. According to Strauss, “Machiavelli indicates the difficulty [of applying moral precepts] by saying “And above all, a prince ought to contrive to make himself famous by every action of his as a great man and one of excellent mind.””¹⁰⁷ In *Discourses* I 19 Machiavelli advises: “he who is like Romulus, and like him comes armed with prudence and with arms, will hold it [his state] in every mode unless it is taken from him by an obstinate and excessive force.” In I 21 Machiavelli notes: “It is more true than any other truth that if where there are men there are no soldiers, it arises though a defect of the prince and not through any other defect, either of the site or of nature.”¹⁰⁸ In III 8 and 9 Machiavelli explains that an uncorrupt, well-ordered republic rewards good, wise actions and punishes wicked, unwise actions;

¹⁰⁶ See *TM*, pp.246-47.

¹⁰⁷ *TM*, p.247 (see also *ibid.*, pp.146-47). Although the above quotation is evidently from *The Prince*, ch.21—Machiavelli writes: “And above all a prince should contrive to give himself the fame of a great man and of an excellent talent in every action of his.” (*The Prince*, p.89)—Strauss opens his accompanying endnote, *TM*, pp.340-41n164, by instructing: “Cf. also the beginning of *Discourses* I 21.” Strauss then refers to *The Prince*, chs.7, 13, 18, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25; *Discourses* I 14, 19, 24, 33, 40, 41-42, III 8, 9, 21, 22, 46; and instructs to compare those references with *The Art of War* II, VI, VII.

¹⁰⁸ *Discourses*, pp.53, 55.

unwise actions are actions that are not in accord with the times. Only excellent men, because of their education and innate virtue, prudence and ability, can change the times, manipulate and dominate chance and, in other words, not be controlled by chance or the times.¹⁰⁹

Necessity and fear

Turning from the issue of virtue and free will to what Machiavelli means by necessity, Strauss gives this quotation from *Discourses* III 12: “As has been written by some moral philosophers, men’s hands and tongue, two most noble instruments for ennobling him, would not have done their work perfectly nor would they have carried the works of men to the height to which they are seen to have been carried, if they had not been driven on by necessity.” Rather than then asking whether Machiavelli agrees or disagrees with the “moral philosophers,” Strauss goes on to explain that what he means by necessity is not entirely clear: “Yet are not men’s failures also due to necessity? Man’s nature is such that necessity compels him to be virtuous or good as well as to be vicious or bad. Machiavelli’s praise of necessity must then refer to a particular kind of necessity.”¹¹⁰ The natural end of a soldier is the preservation of his own life, Machiavelli explains in III 12; depending on the choice he is given by his commander or by the enemy to die, fight, flee, surrender, or sue for peace, a soldier will invariably choose the best possible way to achieve the end of survival. In *Discourses* II 27 and elsewhere¹¹¹ Machiavelli explains that a virtuous captain, so as to maximize the chance of survival for himself, his soldiers

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Vatter, *Between Form and Event*, p.169.

¹¹⁰ *TM*, p.247.

¹¹¹ *Discourses* I 3, 28, 29, 30, II 12, 27, III 12; *The Prince*, chs.12, 17; *Florentine Histories* IV 14-18. For these references, see *TM*, p.341n165.

and his fatherland, will choose to exhaust every option before deciding to commit his soldiers to fight. In II 27 Machiavelli observes that Hannibal, when returning to Carthage (after sixteen years in Italy) “to relieve the fatherland,”

. . . . was not ashamed to ask for peace since he judged that if his fatherland had any remedy it was in that and not in war. When that was denied him, he did not wish to fail to engage in combat, even if he should lose, since he judged that he was still able to win or, losing, to lose gloriously. . . what should another do of less virtue and of less experience than he?¹¹²

In other words, necessity is that which makes a soldier who is facing overwhelming odds act against the natural desire for survival but also act within his capacity for combat. “Generalizing from this,” as Strauss explains on Machiavelli’s behalf, “we may say that it is fear, the fundamental fear, which makes men operate well.”¹¹³

Necessity and virtuous action

Yet man is made virtuous not only through fear but also through war. According to Strauss, “Machiavelli elucidates the necessity which makes men operate well also in the following manner. He distinguishes two kinds of war, “wars caused by necessity and wars caused by choice or ambition . . .” More often than not, “[w]ars of choice” are wars of ambition, for they aim at “acquisition or aggrandizement,” whereas “wars of necessity are waged by whole peoples,” namely, when an invading army or overpopulation and hunger force them to flee their homeland for another, conquering and killing, in turn, the population in the new homeland.¹¹⁴ In *Discourses* III 12, quoting the speech of a Samnite captain, Machiavelli proclaims: “War is just to whom it is necessary, and arms are pious to

¹¹² *Discourses*, p.195.

¹¹³ *TM*, p.248.

¹¹⁴ *TM*, p.248. See also *Discourses* I 37, II 6, III 8.

those for whom there is no hope save in arms.”¹¹⁵ In I 3 Machiavelli says that men never work for the good of their country (or city) unless forced to do so by necessity; confusion and disorder reign when men are free to indulge their ambitions.

“Therefore it is said that hunger and poverty make men industrious, and the laws make them good.”¹¹⁶ Quite possibly Strauss has the above two chapters in mind when encapsulating Machiavelli’s view: “If just wars are wars waged by those for whom war is necessary, the wars caused by hunger are the justest [*sic*] of all wars: everyone is compelled to fight for the sake of mere life and there can be no doubt that this necessity is not derived from previous guilt. Furthermore, hunger and poverty, people say, make men industrious.”¹¹⁷ Machiavelli cautions in *Discourses* III 8 that men are inherently incapable of forever holding their ambitions in check; in III 16 he warns of the danger to a republic arising from the unfulfilled ambitions of “great and rare men.” Such men who feel ignored will, in times of peace, seek to fulfil their ambitions by instigating troubles from which they can gain benefit.¹¹⁸ Machiavelli proceeds in III 16 to recommend two ways for the republic to satisfy ambition and, thereby, forestall disorder: “one, to maintain the citizens poor so that they cannot corrupt either themselves or others with riches and without virtue; the other, to be ordered for war so that one can always make war and always has need of reputed citizens . . .”¹¹⁹

Excellent men operate well because of their expectation of reward, while all other men, namely, men who are not excellent, operate well because of their concern

¹¹⁵ *Discourses*, p.248.

¹¹⁶ *Discourses*, p.15.

¹¹⁷ *TM*, p.248.

¹¹⁸ See *TM*, p.249. For the above phrase, “great and rare men,” see *Discourses*, p.254. I have gleaned the above references themselves from *TM*, p.341n166.

¹¹⁹ *Discourses*, p.255.

for survival. Strauss explains that in Machiavelli's judgment, "The compulsion proceeding from hunger precedes all compulsion caused by men. There is a necessary connection between the primary need and the means of satisfying it ("things useful"), and between the latter and property."¹²⁰ Survival depends upon the protection of property. The republic that fails to protect its lands will not possess the wherewithal to feed and satisfy its population; thus the Roman love of property was greater than even their love of glory.¹²¹ "Considering the connection between property and money," Strauss explains, "we are not surprised to learn that while virtue is indeed much more important for winning wars than is money, yet money is necessary in the second place."¹²²

In an endnote Strauss further explains the link between property and money. Of *Discourses* II 10 he writes: "As Machiavelli asserts, Livy tacitly contends that money is altogether unimportant for winning wars whereas Livy explicitly contends that chance or good luck is important."¹²³ I would add here that II 10 is titled "Money Is Not the Sinew of War, As It Is according to the Common Opinion."¹²⁴ The "Opinion" in question is voiced by Quintus Curtius and other historians, whom Machiavelli does not name. Toward the beginning of the chapter Machiavelli writes: "But since he [Agis III, King of Sparta] lacked money and feared that for want of it his army would abandon him, he was constrained to try the fortune of battle [against the Macedonians]. So from this cause Quintus Curtius affirms that money is the sinew of war. This sentence is cited every day and is followed by princes who are

¹²⁰ *TM*, p.249.

¹²¹ See *TM*, p.249; see also p.341n167, where Strauss refers to *Discourses* I 1, 7, 13, 32, 36, 37, II 2, 5, 8, III 6, 23; *The Prince*, ch.17.

¹²² *TM*, p.249.

¹²³ *TM*, p.341n168.

¹²⁴ *Discourses*, p.147 (original capitalization).

not prudent enough. . . .” By way, it would seem, of a contrast to the common opinion Machiavelli explains: “Titus Livy . . . shows that three things are necessary in war: very many and good soldiers, prudent captains, and good fortune. . . . he then comes to his conclusion without ever mentioning money.”¹²⁵ According to Mansfield, “when Machiavelli argues that one must not rely on money, he means one must not be dependent on God, or fortune, or faith.”¹²⁶

Turning from *Discourses* II 10 to II 1, Strauss observes: “Machiavelli says in explicit criticism of Livy that good soldiers cannot help having good luck”¹²⁷ Machiavelli opens II 1 by noting: “Many have had the opinion—and among them Plutarch, a very grave writer—that the Roman people in acquiring the empire was favored more by fortune than by virtue.” Shortly afterwards he reports: “And Livy seems to come close to this opinion, for it is rare that he makes any Roman speak where he tells of virtue and does not add fortune to it. I do not wish to confess this thing in any mode, nor do I believe even that it can be sustained.”¹²⁸ Also in II 1 Machiavelli draws this point from Rome’s wars for supremacy against the Samnites, Tuscans and Carthaginians: “whoever considers well the order of these wars and the mode of their proceeding will see inside them a very great virtue and prudence mixed with fortune. . . .” When the Romans sought to enter “new provinces they always tried to have some friend who should be a step or a gate to ascend there or enter there, or a means to hold it. . . . Those peoples who observe this will see they have less need of fortune than those who are not good observers of it.”¹²⁹

¹²⁵ *Discourses*, pp.147-48, 149.

¹²⁶ *Modes and Orders*, p.218.

¹²⁷ *TM*, p.341n168.

¹²⁸ *Discourses*, pp.125, 126.

¹²⁹ *Discourses*, pp.127, 128.

Good soldiers are the sinews of war, not money. Good soldiers can find money, but money is no substitute for good soldiers. To Machiavelli, Strauss explains, having discussed *Discourses* II 10 and II 1, “good soldiers cannot help coming into the possession of money; the status of money is not different from that of chance.”¹³⁰ Strauss elaborates Machiavelli’s argument in those two chapters by saying of *Discourses* I 37, 51, II 6, and III 10: “Machiavelli points out . . . [that] the Roman mode of warfare depended decisively on money, on a full treasury. The need for money is, to say the least, more evident than the need for Fortuna’s favor.”¹³¹ Machiavelli is not simply saying that money is more important than being in Fortuna’s good graces. Rather, he seems to be saying that reliance upon Fortuna should be supplanted with the need for—and love of—money, insofar as one’s talent for acquiring money is combined with an ability to lay firm foundations for one’s rule over a state that one has taken with the aid of Fortuna, who may withdraw her favor once one is in power.¹³²

Necessity and goodness

In Machiavelli’s judgment, Strauss goes on to explain, “Necessity makes men not only virtuous but good as well. Men in general have no natural inclination toward goodness. Therefore they can be made good and kept good only by necessity.”¹³³ In *Discourses* I 3 Machiavelli stresses: “it is necessary to whoever disposes a republic and orders laws in it to presuppose that all men are bad, and that they always have to use the malignity of their spirit whenever they have a free

¹³⁰ *TM*, p.341n168.

¹³¹ *TM*, p.341n168.

¹³² See *TM*, p.341n168; *The Prince*, ch.7.

¹³³ *TM*, p.249.

opportunity for it.” In *Discourses* II 25 he notes: “the cause of the disunion of republics is usually idleness and peace; the cause of union is fear and war.” Machiavelli states in Chapter 17 of *The Prince*: “one can say this generally of men: that they are ungrateful, fickle, pretenders and dissemblers, evaders of danger, eager for gain. . . .” When an unwise prince—or a prince unwisely—has more than one counselor, it will arise, Machiavelli says in Chapter 23 of *The Prince*, that “[e]ach one of his counselors will think of his own interest; he will not know how to correct them or understand them. And they cannot be found otherwise, because men will always turn out bad for you unless they have been made good by a necessity.”¹³⁴

People are made good by violence, fear, terror, and uncertainty. To seek “peace and security” people gather together in society for mutual protection. People are further made good by laws, and are kept good by the fear of penalties imposed for not obeying the laws.¹³⁵ Such imposed instances of necessity originate in men who are “leaders,” though such men are themselves taught to “operate well” and “act freely,” precisely as leaders, by “virtuous legislators or founders.”¹³⁶ In turn, “virtuous founders operate well because they are prompted by their natural desire for the common good . . .”; that is, they “do not operate well because they are compelled by other men or by the harsh necessity that they will perish from hunger or from the sword of the enemy if they do not do their work well.” Whereas most men are made good by a necessity that is rooted in fear of death and punishment, leaders and founders are made good by a necessity that arises from their drive to acquire property, money, honor and glory. “Thus the necessity to operate well

¹³⁴ *Discourses*, pp.15, 190; *The Prince*, pp.66, 95.

¹³⁵ See *TM*, p.249 (the paragraph beginning “Necessity makes men”).

¹³⁶ *TM*, pp.249-50.

which originates in men appears to be derivative from choice. It is then ultimately choice and not necessity which makes men operate well.”¹³⁷ Men are made virtuous and are kept that way either by necessity or by choice. Choice has a close affinity with ambition, and ambition is inextricably linked with the desire for honor and glory. Those men who are innately prudent operate well precisely because they can avoid being subject to mere necessity; choice is the preserve of the virtuous. However, most men, because they are weak and are not prudent, operate well only when subject to that fear, of death and hunger, which is imposed by the virtuous.¹³⁸

Machiavelli’s argument that ambition is a form of necessity compelling man to be good is the one factor alone that justifies his praise of necessity. According to Strauss, “Machiavelli’s praise of necessity, which surpasses in emphasis everything he says in praise of choice, would be untenable if he had not seen his way toward conceiving of ambition or the desire for honor or glory, and especially of the desire of the founder for supreme glory, as a form of that necessity which makes men operate well.”¹³⁹ The compulsion to operate well which arises out of ambition occurs when one’s “primary wants” have been fulfilled, “ambition” being “the desire to acquire, to have more than one needs, not to be inferior to others . . .” However, “ambition does not necessarily make man operate well. Not all men know how to satisfy “the natural and ordinary desire for acquisition.””¹⁴⁰ In *Discourses* I 29 Machiavelli explains that princes and peoples are often motivated by avarice in their relations with their captains, whose success in battle is responsible, in the first place, for the

¹³⁷ *TM*, p.250.

¹³⁸ See above. See also *TM*, pp.341-42n170.

¹³⁹ *TM*, p.251.

¹⁴⁰ *TM*, p.251. Strauss does not provide an accompanying endnote until p.252 (line 7); see p.342n171, where he refers to *Discourses* I 1, 14, 17, 29, 32, 37, III 3, 8, 10, 11, 12, 30; *The Prince*, ch.3; directs the reader to compare these references to *Florentine Histories* II 2 and VII 7; and refers to pp.119-20 of his own work.

prince and the people acquiring glory and empire. However, the appetite for acquisition is greater than the power for achieving it, Machiavelli says in I 37; in III 3 he declares: “Not less necessary than useful was the severity of Brutus in maintaining in Rome the freedom that he had *acquired* there.” In III 10 he states “one ought to wish to *acquire* glory even when losing; and one has more glory in being conquered by force than through another convenience that has made you lose.” In III 12 he explains: “towns are more difficult to *acquire* after rebellion than they were in the first *acquiring*, for in the beginning they surrendered easily, not having cause to fear punishment because they had not offended . . .”¹⁴¹ Throughout Chapter 3 of *The Prince* Machiavelli likewise advises the prince about the difficulties of keeping “*acquired*” territory. For instance, he explains: “when countries that have rebelled are later *acquired* for the second time, they are lost with more difficulty, because the lord, seizing the opportunity offered by the rebellion, is less hesitant to secure himself by punishing offenders . . .”¹⁴² The passage that bears most on the above observation that not all men are capable of satisfying “the natural and ordinary desire for acquisition” is this passage from Chapter 3 of *The Prince*: “And truly *it is a very natural and ordinary thing to desire to acquire*, and always, when men do it who can, they will be praised or not blamed; but when they cannot, and wish to do it anyway, here lie the error and the blame.”¹⁴³

Not all men can, and do, successfully act upon the natural desire for acquisition. “The most outstanding example used by Machiavelli to illustrate this is Manlius Capitolinus,” Strauss points out.¹⁴⁴ In *Discourses* III 8 Machiavelli

¹⁴¹ *Discourses* III 3, p.214; III 10, pp.243-44; III 12, p.247 (all emphases mine).

¹⁴² *The Prince*, pp.8-9 (emphasis mine).

¹⁴³ *The Prince*, pp.14-15 (emphasis mine).

¹⁴⁴ *TM*, p.251.

attributes Manlius's unsuccessful pursuit of ambition to his impatience and to his failure to adapt to the times; Manlius was a corrupt man in a Rome that did not wish to be corrupted. In Machiavelli's judgment, Strauss points out, "Only men of supreme virtue or prudence are compelled by their desire for glory to operate in the most perfect manner. . . ." For virtuous men, the very desire for glory has the power of *necessity*, for they are compelled to act with a view to satisfying that desire; but an element of *choice* is also involved, because the very compulsion to act "arises entirely from within."¹⁴⁵ In men who are weak and lacking in virtue, the compulsion to act (and to act well) arises not from glory, not from within, but, rather, from the action of an external necessity which plays upon men's fear of evil, death, misery, and darkness. "The soldiers led by Messius would not have fought well if Messius had not enlightened them as to the necessity to fight well by shouting at them "Do you believe that some god will protect you and carry you off from here?"¹⁴⁶

Yet of the twelve chapters from the *Discourses* to which Strauss's accompanying endnote refers, only III 8 speaks of Manlius Capitolinus. As well as directing the reader to compare those references to the *Florentine Histories* II 2 and VII 7, Strauss directs the attention of the reader to his previous comments, in Chapter III, on *Discourses* III 12.¹⁴⁷ For instance, Strauss explained that Machiavelli quoted Livy's speech but left out the part that explains that Messius and his army would not be rescued by "some god."¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ *TM*, p.251.

¹⁴⁶ *TM*, p.252.

¹⁴⁷ *TM*, p.342n171; Strauss refers here to pp.119-20 of his own work. The twelve chapters are I 1, 14, 17, 29, 32, 37, III 3, 8, 10, 11, 12 and 30.

¹⁴⁸ *TM*, p.120.

Drawing upon *Discourses* III 12 and both the *Florentine Histories* II 2 and VII 7, Strauss ascribes to Machiavelli the observation: “Only the known necessity compels men to make the supreme effort, not to trust in Fortuna but to try to subjugate her. . . .”¹⁴⁹ “[M]en never maintain themselves in difficulties unless maintained there by some necessity . . .”, Machiavelli writes in the *Florentine Histories* II 2; in VII 7 he notes that “men always flee more willingly from the evil that is certain . . .”¹⁵⁰ Men operate well and overcome the vicissitudes of fate and chance only when they have knowledge of necessity and are compelled to act by its exigencies. Soldiers respond to a necessity rooted in fear of death and concern for survival, whereas captains respond to a necessity rooted in the desire for glory.

Free will vs. necessity and chance

Having discussed Machiavelli’s remarks about Messius, Strauss begins to draw to a close his analysis of Machiavelli’s understanding of the expedient bases for excellent, virtuous action. “A man who is by nature supremely virtuous and is as such subject to specific necessities cannot mould his matter as he sees fit,” Strauss explains on Machiavelli’s behalf, “or cannot be the master of his fate and the fate of his people, or cannot operate in the most perfect manner possible to men, if he lacks the occasion or opportunity for so operating.”¹⁵¹ Men of supreme virtue who have already acquired or founded kingdoms operate well when the “matter” at hand, namely the people, is adapted to follow new modes and orders by such compulsion as is needed. The occasion for the virtuous man to operate well arises from events

¹⁴⁹ *TM*, p.252. With regard to *Discourses* III 12, see my above quotations, in this present chapter.

¹⁵⁰ *Florentine Histories*, pp.53, 285. Machiavelli continues in II 2: “whereas the fear of war may force them to live willingly in formidable and harsh places, when the war ends, beckoned by convenience, they live more willingly in domestic and easy places.”

¹⁵¹ *TM*, p.252.

gravely threatening to public safety, such as an invading army. From this very threat to public safety arises the opportunity to create an obedient populace; a corrupt populace is made obedient both by laws and, especially, the force required to impose the laws.¹⁵² In Chapter 6 of *The Prince*, whilst speaking about those who have acquired or founded kingdoms, “Moses, Cyrus, Romulus, Theseus, and like,” Machiavelli explains:

as one examines their actions and lives, one does not see that they had anything else from fortune than the opportunity, which gave them the matter enabling them to introduce any form they pleased. Without that opportunity their virtue of spirit would have been eliminated, and without that virtue the opportunity would have come in vain.

In *Discourses* I 17 Machiavelli points out

that where the matter is not corrupt, tumults and other scandals do not hurt; where it is corrupt, well-ordered laws do not help unless indeed they have been put in motion by one individual who with an extreme force ensures their observance so that the matter becomes good. I do not know whether this has ever occurred or whether it is possible . . . if a city that has fallen into decline through corruption of matter ever happens to rise, it happens through the virtue of one man who is alive then, not through the virtue of the collectivity that sustains good orders.¹⁵³

Thus for Machiavelli, Strauss explains, “The man of supreme virtue lacks opportunity in easy times, in times in which men can permit themselves a great variety of “free choices” without themselves encountering serious dangers and in which therefore they do not operate well.”¹⁵⁴

But does the virtuous man cease to be or is he less than a virtuous man if he does not have the opportunity to demonstrate his virtuousness? In *Discourses* III 16 Machiavelli says that the opportunity for the virtuous man to operate well is not

¹⁵² See *TM*, p.252.

¹⁵³ *The Prince*, pp.22, 23; *Discourses*, p.48.

¹⁵⁴ *TM*, p.252.

always readily available: "It has always been, and will always be, that great and rare men are neglected in a republic in peaceful times. For through the envy that the reputation their virtue has given them has brought with it, one finds very many citizens in such times who wish to be not their equals but their superiors."¹⁵⁵ For Machiavelli, as Strauss continues, "The highest achievement requires that the necessity to operate well which is effective in the giver of the "form" and the necessity to operate well which is effective in the "matter" should meet." I would add that "the giver" is the virtuous man; the "form" is laws, modes and orders; and the "matter" is the people and circumstances. A virtuous man (qua the virtuous man) creates his own opportunities: "But there is no necessity that the two supplementary necessities should meet; their meeting is a matter of chance. Still, the man of supreme virtue can create his opportunity."¹⁵⁶

Here one can see a critical point of difference between Machiavelli and Aristotle. Aristotle maintains, Strauss notes, that the "multitudes have a natural fitness either for being subject to a despot or for a life of political freedom . . ." ¹⁵⁷ In his *Politics* Aristotle explains: "there is by nature both a justice and an advantage appropriate to the rule of a master, another to kingly rule, another to constitutional rule; but there is none naturally appropriate to tyranny, or to any other perverted form of government; for these come into being contrary to nature." (1287b37-41) "A people who are by nature capable of producing a race superior in the excellence needed for political rule are fitted for kingly government . . . while the people who are suited for constitutional freedom are those among whom there naturally exists a

¹⁵⁵ *Discourses*, pp.254-55.

¹⁵⁶ *TM*, p.252.

¹⁵⁷ *TM*, p.253.

warlike multitude” (1288a8-13).¹⁵⁸ Strauss goes on to explain that opposed to Aristotle’s view is the view that “fitness for either form of life can be artificially produced if a man of a rare “brain” applies the required degree of force” Force compels a populace to act against its natural inclination of timidity or love for freedom. “No “defect of nature” can account for the unwarlike character of a nation; a prince of sufficient ability can transform any nation however pampered by climate into a nation of warriors.”¹⁵⁹

According to Strauss, “We may express Machiavelli’s thought by saying that Aristotle did not see that the relation of the founder to his human matter is not fundamentally different from the relation of a smith to his iron or his inanimate matter: Aristotle did not realize to what extent man is malleable, and in particular malleable by man.” Yet as Strauss adds, mitigating this apparently appreciative statement: “Still, that malleability is limited and therefore it remains true that the highest achievement depends on chance. . . .”¹⁶⁰ On the one hand, Strauss is saying that Machiavelli is more insightful than Aristotle as to the basis of virtuous action. In Machiavelli’s judgment, to be virtuous requires acting attentively with a view to the demands of the times, not with a view to transcendent moral norms; for the prince to be virtuous he must impose his will over exigent circumstances, and shape the people to the times and his will as he sees fit. On the other hand, Strauss is

¹⁵⁸ *Complete Works*, Vol.2, pp.2043-44, 2044.

¹⁵⁹ *TM*, pp.252-53. Here Strauss provides an accompanying endnote; see p.342n172, where he refers to *The Prince*, chs.6, 26; *Discourses* I 1, 17, 18, 21, 35, 41, 55, III 8, 16; and directs the reader to compare these references to Aristotle’s *Politics*, 1287b37ff. When Strauss said ““defect of nature”” he likely had in mind *Discourses* I 21; but see also I 41 and III 8. When Strauss said “a man of “rare brain””, he likely had in mind *Discourses* I 55; therein Machiavelli writes: “Because the making of a republic from a province suited to be a kingdom, and the making of a kingdom from one suited to be a republic, is *matter* for a man who is *rare in brain* and *authority*, there have been many who have wished to do it and few who have known how to conduct it.” *Discourses*, p.112 (emphases mine).

¹⁶⁰ *TM*, p.253.

saying that Machiavelli errs in claiming that the founder can, against chance, shape his subjects to his will.

Machiavelli clearly does praise the ability of the prince for decisive action in the face of great odds. But, Strauss emphasizes, “Machiavelli is far from being a worshipper of success: not the success but the wisdom of an enterprise deserves praise and admiration. The man who has discovered the modes and orders which are in accordance with nature is much less dependent on chance than is any man of action since his discovery need not bear fruit during his lifetime.”¹⁶¹ Interestingly, in an accompanying endnote Strauss refers to his own work.¹⁶² The first cross-reference is to Chapter II, where he described Machiavelli as a “new Moses” who is introducing new modes and orders. The second cross-reference is to Chapter III, where he explained that Machiavelli intends his new modes and orders to corrupt and overturn Christian modes and orders. The third cross-reference is to Chapter IV, where he explained that to Machiavelli the excellent man does not merely overcome Fortuna but seeks to be free and independent from her power. It seems fair to say that Strauss’s cross-references serve to remind the reader of the novelty of Machiavelli’s enterprise, and that Machiavelli did not simply praise the virtuous man’s mere success or enduring through travails but, rather, his capacity to impose his very will on necessity, Fortuna and chance.¹⁶³ Machiavelli is explicit in Chapter 18 of *The Prince* and in *Florentine Histories* VIII 22. In the former he explains that a prince “needs to have a spirit disposed to change as the winds of fortune and variations of things command him, and . . . [needs to] know how to enter into evil,

¹⁶¹ *TM*, p.253.

¹⁶² *TM*, p.342n173; Strauss refers to pp.83, 168-72 and 217-18. Strauss gives these references having referred to *Discourses* III 35, *The Prince*, ch.18, and *Florentine Histories* VIII 22.

¹⁶³ See also *TM*, p.253 (lines 22-38).

when forced by necessity.”¹⁶⁴ In the latter he notes: “Florence . . . celebrated Lorenzo to the sky, saying that his prudence had known how to gain in peace what bad fortune had taken from it in war and that he had been able to do more with his advice and his judgment than the arms and forces of the enemy.”¹⁶⁵

Conclusion

Strauss regards Machiavelli as having initiated a fundamental rupture with classical political philosophy. This chapter has shown that Machiavelli set virtue against goodness, and that he depicted virtue not as a mean between the extremes of deficiency and excess but as a mean between virtue and vice, between humanity and inhumanity. For Machiavelli, the extraordinary man of virtue is a man who rises above and rules over, rather than be subject to, changing times and the vicissitudes of life that are created by mundane chance and Fortuna. The next chapter further elaborates Strauss’s stress on the normative, but radical, character of Machiavelli’s moral-political teaching by examining his analysis of Machiavelli’s views on the common good and selfishness; the forms of government (republics, principalities and tyrannies); and the relations between human nature, the common good and the highest good.

¹⁶⁴ *The Prince*, p.70.

¹⁶⁵ *Florentine Histories*, p.344.

Chapter Six

Virtue and Governance

Introduction

In Strauss's reckoning, Machiavelli regards people as naturally disinclined to moral virtue.¹ Machiavelli comprehensively challenges the classical view of moral virtue. As Chapter Five explained, he takes issue with the concept of the mean and denies the claim that human action must always be based on moral standards of how people ought to live. The present chapter further examines Machiavelli's "new" approach to the principles of human action by examining his political conception of virtue and governance, namely, of what each is and the connection between the two.

Contemporary scholarship influenced by Pocock² and Skinner³ tends to situate Machiavelli in a tradition of classical republicanism. Machiavelli, so the argument goes, shared with that tradition the idea that freedom in the well-ordered republic entails freedom in civil society from domination and oligarchic or monarchical tyranny.⁴ According to Viroli, "In his defense of the superiority of republican government over monarchy, Machiavelli restates the classical argument that, if deliberations on matters of general interest are entrusted to the many, it is more likely that the common good will prevail over particular interest." Shortly afterwards Viroli states: "Machiavelli's republicanism is a commitment to a well-

¹ But cf. Gen.8:21.

² J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1975).

³ See the works cited below.

⁴ See, e.g., Gisela Bock, Quentin Skinner, Maurizio Viroli, eds., *Machiavelli and Republicanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Viroli, *Machiavelli*, esp. chs.4 and 5.

ordered popular government. By a well-ordered, or moderated, republic he means, in accordance with Cicero's concept of orderliness or moderation, a republic in which each component of the city has its proper place."⁵ Against Viroli, Springborg explains: "The Roman Republican form of government was, in sum, essentially undemocratic, and magistrates once elected could not be censured or impeached. . . . Cicero, Polybius, Machiavelli, Harrington, Milton and so on . . . were much less concerned to expand the terrain of *ius* [right] against the pull of *dominium* [property] than they were to explore the limits of *imperium* [power]."⁶

Skinner notes that Machiavelli espoused civic humanist tenets,⁷ but that he emphasized the necessity of political action in relation to the ceaseless pursuit of power, a pursuit that is often divorced from consideration of moral norms.⁸ Thus Machiavelli departed from humanism. In fact, says Skinner, his "critique of classical humanism . . . is underpinned by a darkly pessimistic view of human nature."⁹ Skinner nevertheless argues that Machiavelli's "allegiance" to the values of "political liberty," not simply to the values of "mere security," is evidence of his commitment to republicanism.¹⁰ Rawls explains that "civic humanism is (by definition) a form of Aristotelianism: it holds that we are social, even political, beings whose essential

⁵ *Machiavelli*, pp.123-24, 125. See also Maurizio Viroli, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the 'Well-Ordered Society'*, trans. Derek Hanson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp.11-12, 120-21, 170-72; *From Politics to Reason of State: The Acquisition and Transformation of the Language of Politics 1250-1600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp.126-77.

⁶ Patricia Springborg, "Republicanism, Freedom from Domination, and the Cambridge Contextual Historians," *Political Studies* 49, no.5 (2001), pp.857, 863.

⁷ Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, Vol.1: *the Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), pp.118-23, 123ff.

⁸ *Foundations*, Vol.1, pp.128-35. See also Baron, "Machiavelli," pp.248-51, 251n2; Gay, *The Enlightenment*, Vol.1, pp.258, 261-69, 507-15; Felix Gilbert, *Machiavelli and Guicciardini: Politics and History in Sixteenth-Century Florence* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1965; Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1973), esp. pp.153-200.

⁹ Quentin Skinner, "Introduction," in Machiavelli, *The Prince*, ed. Quentin Skinner, ed. and trans. Russell Price (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p.xviii.

¹⁰ *Foundations*, Vol.1, pp.152-58; see also pp.158ff, 170-71.

nature is most fully achieved in a democratic society in which there is widespread and active participation in political life. This participation is encouraged not merely as possibly necessary for the protection of basic liberties but because it is the privileged locus of our (complete) good. . . .”¹¹ But, Rawls emphasizes, “Do not mistake civic humanism (as defined) for the truism that we must live in society to achieve our good. Rather, civic humanism specifies the chief, if not the sole human good as our engaging in political life”¹² “[C]lassical republicanism,” as Rawls defines the term (referring to Skinner), is “the view that the safety of democratic liberties, including the liberties of nonpolitical life . . . requires the active participation of citizens who have the political virtues needed to sustain a constitutional regime” Conscientious citizens are “moved in good part by a concern for political justice and public good”¹³ Rawls offers to define “civic republicanism”: “The importance of deliberative political discussion is a theme of what is sometimes called “civic republicanism.””¹⁴

Establishing definitively whether Machiavelli was a theorist of civic humanism, or classical republicanism or civic republicanism is beyond the scope of this chapter.¹⁵ Nevertheless, I will argue that Machiavelli’s reflections on virtue and governance are at best ambiguous and at worst antithetical to the notion of the free and open participation in society, government and political life by the many and the

¹¹ John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*, ed. Erin Kelly (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, Belknap Press, 2001), p.142.

¹² *Justice as Fairness*, p.143. See also both Gay and Gilbert, as cited above.

¹³ *Justice as Fairness*, p.144; see p.144n13, where Rawls notes (of Quentin Skinner’s *Machiavelli*) that “Machiavelli’s *Discourses* is sometimes taken as illustrating classical republicanism as defined in the text.”

¹⁴ *Justice as Fairness*, p.146n16.

¹⁵ For a recent critical assessment of Machiavelli and civic humanism, see James Hankins, ed., *Renaissance Civic Humanism: Reappraisals and Reflections* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). See also Mark Hulliung, *Citizen Machiavelli* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1983), pp.11-30, 189-98, 237-47, et passim.

great alike. This chapter begins by examining Machiavelli's understanding of the relation between the common good and selfishness; it will be seen that the relation is one of mutual dependence, and that the crux of his notion of civil society is a notion of the common good that differentiates moral virtue from republican virtue and settles in favor of the latter. This chapter entertains the question of whether Machiavelli preferred republics, principalities or tyrannies. Which of those three forms of governance did he regard as the most efficacious in achieving the ends of civil society? The extent to which Machiavelli favored republics is far from clear, for he imparted advice to tyrants and republicans alike about the preservation of power. Finally, this chapter examines Machiavelli's view of the relations, especially the tensions, between human nature, the common good and the highest good.

The common good and selfishness

Virtue and the common good

Machiavelli's rejection of Aristotle's conception of virtue is a recurrent theme in Strauss's critical study of Machiavelli's moral-political teaching.¹⁶ Returning to this theme, Strauss states: "The common understanding of goodness had found its classic expression in Aristotle's assertions that virtuous activity is the core of happiness for both individuals and societies, that virtue or the perfection of human nature preserves society, and that political society exists for the sake of the good life, i.e., of the virtuous activity of its members."¹⁷ In the words of Aristotle: "if a man were always anxious that he himself, above all things, should act justly,

¹⁶ See *TM*, pp.237, 244.

¹⁷ *TM*, pp.253-54. Strauss's accompanying endnote, p.342n174, refers to *The Prince*, ch.15, *Discourses* I 3, and instructs the reader to compare *The Prince*, ch.25, with Aristotle, *Politics* 1311a30-31; Plato, *Republic* 408eff; Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1168b15-28.

temperately, or in accordance with any other of the excellences, and in general were always to try to secure for himself the honourable course, no one will call such a man a lover of self or blame him.”¹⁸ As will be seen below, Machiavelli has a quite different understanding of what constitutes excellence, happiness and virtuous activity.

The purpose of the “best regime,” and especially “kingship,” is the actualization and protection of virtuous activity. “Its opposite is tyranny,” Strauss points out, “the simply worst regime: whereas the king finds his chief support in the gentlemen, the tyrant finds his chief support in the common people.”¹⁹ However, if the best regime is defined precisely by its being concerned purely with the common good and the virtuous activity of its citizens, it will be seen that such a regime “exists very rarely, if it has ever existed . . . From Machiavelli’s point of view this means that the best regime, as Aristotle as well as Plato conceived of it, is an imagined republic or an imagined principality.” For Machiavelli, these forms of government are “imagined” because they “are based on the premise that rulers can or must exercise the moral virtues and avoid the moral vices even in the acts of ruling.” To say that the ruler can adhere to the moral virtues is to say that his subjects are good. However, as Strauss explains, Machiavelli’s departure from the classics is evidenced by his firm insistence about “the fact of human badness.” Interestingly, Strauss then explains that like the classics, Machiavelli says that man is predisposed towards self-seeking goals, and that the ruler must know, rather than simply be acquainted with, the actual ways of man. Machiavelli and the classics both argue that “most men are bad” but, Strauss emphasizes, they draw from that argument a

¹⁸ *Nicomachean Ethics* 1168b24-28, *Complete Works*, Vol.2, p.1847.

¹⁹ *TM*, p.254. See also *OPS*, p.172 (cf. pp.174-75).

different “conclusion” about the nature of virtue and governance and the relation between the two.²⁰

Evidently Strauss is seeking to explicate the difference between Machiavelli and the classics regarding how they assessed the best regime—what it is, how it is implemented and protected, and the virtuous ends for which it exists. However, by proceeding to express the view of Aristotle and restate that view with “the words of Machiavelli,” Strauss infers that Aristotle agrees with Machiavelli on the subject of the best regime:

Yet according to Aristotle, man is the worst of all living beings if he is without law and right, and law and right depend upon political society. In other words, men become virtuous by habituation; such habituation requires laws, customs, examples and exhortations, and is therefore properly possible only within and through political society. In the words of Machiavelli, good examples arise from good education, good education arises from good laws, and good laws arise from the most shocking things. . . .²¹

Machiavelli echoes both Aristotle and Plato, for he too maintains that laws, customs and education make men virtuous. Machiavelli goes further, though. He claims, Strauss argues, that “[m]orality is possible only after its condition has been created, and this condition cannot be created morally: morality rests on what to moral men must appear to be immorality.”²² Society cannot be based upon beliefs about the political and social imperative for acting in accordance with moral virtue. Such beliefs are groundless, false and inefficacious because they are not based upon actual experience. Furthermore, society should not be founded by “semi-divine or divinely inspired benefactors of the human race,” because such founders, being concerned

²⁰ *TM*, p.254. See also Green, *Jew and Philosopher*, p.159n49. Cf. Roger D. Masters, “Rousseau and the Rediscovery of Human Nature,” in Orwin and Tarcov, eds., p.110.

²¹ *TM*, pp.254-55. Cf. *Discourses* I 4.

²² *TM*, p.255. Cf. *Discourses* I 2.

more with otherworldly than this-worldly matters, lack the ability to respond in a timely fashion to political and military exigencies. The founders Machiavelli holds up as examples to be emulated are, Strauss points out, “men like Cesare Borgia and especially the criminal emperor Severus”²³

Illustrating Machiavelli’s belief that immoral methods are necessary for the foundation of society and morality, Strauss states on his behalf:

The primary badness which is severely limited by civil society and especially by the good civil society affects civil society however good. Reason may dictate the practice of moral virtue; necessity renders such practice impossible in important areas. Therefore the best regime of the classics is merely imaginary. . . .²⁴

Aristotle maintained that the best regime is one in which the state enacts, and follows, a constitution aimed towards such ends as virtue and justice. However, he admitted that few, if any, states pursue those ends; instead, states seek wealth and dominion, invariably at the expense of other states. Strauss observes:

Classical political philosophy culminates in the description of imagined states and thus is useless because it does not accept as authoritative the end which all or the most respectable states pursue. That end is the common good conceived of as consisting of freedom from foreign domination and from despotic rule, rule of law, security

²³ *TM*, p.255. Strauss’s accompanying endnote, p.342n175, refers to *Discourses* I 2, 4, 10, 18, 58, II 5, III 36; *The Prince*, ch.19; and instructs the reader to compare these references to Aristotle, *Politics* 1253a31-37; Plato, *Laws* 680d1-5 and 782b-c; and to pp.46, 71-71, 133 of his own work.

I would observe, then, that in *Discourses* I 10 Machiavelli describes Severus as a “criminal” (*Discourses*, p.32), but in *The Prince*, ch.19 speaks of him as “a very fierce lion and a very astute fox . . . feared and revered by everyone . . .” (*The Prince*, p.79). I would also observe that *TM*, p.46 mentions both Severus and *The Prince*, ch.19; that *TM*, p.71 speaks of Cesare Borgia (and refers to *The Prince*, ch.7); and that *TM*, p.133 speaks of the relationship between *The Prince* and the *Discourses*.

In *TM*, p.305n62 Strauss explains: “to see the special significance of the discussion of Severus, one should also compare Machiavelli’s judgment on his apparent hero Cesare Borgia with the judgment on Severus . . .” Strauss then directs the reader to compare ch.7 of *The Prince* with ch.19. I would add, then, to my above observations, that in ch.7 Machiavelli describes Cesare Borgia as having fallen from power not because of moral vice but, rather, because of “an extraordinary and extreme malignity of fortune,” namely, the death of his patron and father, Pope Alexander VI (*The Prince*, p.27). Machiavelli does not condemn violence, murder and cruelty; instead, he advises in *The Prince*, ch.19 that a prince must avoid above all a reputation for rapaciousness towards the women and property of his subjects.

²⁴ *TM*, p.255.

of the lives, the property and the honor of every citizen, ever increasing wealth and power, and . . . glory or empire. . . .²⁵

True virtue entails love of one's city (or country) and is patriotic in nature.²⁶ Truly virtuous citizens sacrifice their private ambitions for the common good, which consists of independence from foreign powers and freedom from tyrannical governance. "The common good is the end only of republics," Strauss explains, apparently on Machiavelli's behalf.²⁷ "Hence, the virtue which is truly virtue can best be described as republican virtue." Republics are preferable to principalities not because republics are "morally superior." Rather, they simply have a closer affinity for the common good than princes, who are interested primarily in their private good. Thus, republics "are to be preferred with a view to the common good in the amoral sense." Monarchies, governed by a single individual and not, as are republics, by a variety of men with "different natures," are less able than republics to adapt to "different kinds of times."²⁸

Moral virtue vs. republican virtue

Machiavelli differentiates virtue from goodness so as to differentiate republican virtue from moral virtue. In turn, he replaces the furtherance of moral virtue with the pursuit of republican virtue as the focus of governance. As Strauss encapsulates Machiavelli's reasoning for that replacement, "Goodness is not always compatible with the common good, whereas virtue is always required for it. Acts of kindness, however well-intentioned, may lead to the building up of private power to

²⁵ *TM*, p.256.

²⁶ Cf. *CM*, pp.27, 30-32, 239-40; *OPS*, p.184.

²⁷ *TM*, p.256. Curiously, Strauss's accompanying endnote, p.342n176, refers to passages from both Aristotle and Machiavelli. Strauss refers to Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1102a5-12, 1180a24-28; *Eudemian Ethics* 1248b38ff; *Politics* 1264a1-5, 1293b1-4, 1293b24-26, 1296a32-b2, 1324b1-28, 1333b5-14; Machiavelli, *Discourses* I 9, 10, 16, 29, 34, II 2, 8, III 6, 8.

²⁸ *TM*, p.256. With regard to patriotism, cf. *TM*, p.11.

the detriment of the public power. A most important means for making a republic great is to keep the public rich and the citizens poor. . . .”²⁹ In rare cases, though, an example of humanity is of greater use and benefit to the giver of the deed—namely, the republic or the leading men of the republic—than is “[a]usterity and severity” in dealing with the republic’s enemies. “In the chapter which is devoted to proving this proposition,” Strauss explains, “Machiavelli retells the story of how Scipio [the Elder] acquired high reputation in Spain by his chastity: he returned a young and beautiful wife to her husband without having touched her . . .”³⁰

Strauss has in mind here *Discourses* III 20, titled “One Example of Humanity Was Able to Do More with the Falisci Than Any Roman Force,”³¹ where Machiavelli conveys the lesson of that story. In III 21, though not mentioning Scipio’s return of the bride, Machiavelli again speaks of his humane and merciful conduct in Spain. However, in III 21 Machiavelli qualifies his praise in the previous chapter of Scipio’s conduct. For instance, he explains: “The hurt, as to Scipio, is that his soldiers in Spain rebelled against him, together with part of his friends, an affair that arose from nothing other than their not fearing him. . . .” Machiavelli’s argument is that ultimately fear, not love, humanity or moral virtue, should guide affairs of moment. Indeed, he further explains: “men are so unquiet that however little the door to ambition is opened for them, they at once forget every love that they had placed in the prince because of his humanity So, to remedy this inconvenience, Scipio was constrained to use part of the cruelty he had fled from.”³²

²⁹ *TM*, p.257. Cf. Coby, *Machiavelli’s Romans*, pp.27-30, 102ff, 107, 151-52.

³⁰ *TM*, p.257.

³¹ *Discourses*, p.261.

³² *Discourses*, pp.263-64. See also *The Prince*, ch.17. With regard to the phrase, affairs of moment, cf. *Discourses* II 23 and above, ch.5 (in the sub-section titled “A prudent mean”).

In III 34 Machiavelli notes that “public fame is acquired by some extraordinary and notable action, even though private, which has resulted honorably for you.” Elsewhere in III 34 Machiavelli notes that Scipio’s return of the young bride added to the fame he first acquired when he “defended his father on the Ticino while still a boy and after the defeat at Cannae, when with drawn sword he spiritedly made many young Romans swear that they would not abandon Italy as they had already decided among themselves.”³³ From Machiavelli’s retelling, principally in *Discourses* III 20, of the story about Scipio’s chastity, Strauss draws out the point that to Machiavelli, Scipio’s chastity was not itself of decisive importance: “it was not his chastity, which in the circumstances would have been a politically irrelevant virtue, but his generosity which redounded to the benefit of Rome.”³⁴

Strauss goes on to explain that implicit in Machiavelli’s replacement of moral virtue with republican virtue is a criticism of the notion of moral virtue enunciated by Plato and Aristotle, for both of whom justice is the sum of the moral virtues.³⁵ In his *Republic*, Plato advises that the guardians of a city be savage towards strangers but gentle towards citizens. Aristotle reproves Plato for giving that advice, and says that guardians should be savage towards whoever acts unjustly. But Aristotle, Strauss observes, “certainly refrains from reproving Plato for having purified the luxurious city without having forced it to restore the land which it had taken from its neighbors in order to lead a life of luxury. Cruelty towards strangers cannot be avoided by the best of citizens as citizens.”³⁶

³³ *Discourses*, pp.288, 289.

³⁴ *TM*, p.257. With regard to Machiavelli’s mention in *Discourses* III 20 of Scipio (the Elder), see also Coby, *Machiavelli’s Romans*, pp.180-82, 235.

³⁵ See *TM*, pp.257-58.

³⁶ *TM*, p.258.

Curiously, the passage from Aristotle's *Politics* to which Strauss refers in an accompanying endnote—1327b38-1328a10—never mentions this matter of the restoration of confiscated property. Instead, Aristotle says that guardians should be unfriendly to *all* wrongdoers, be they strangers or not. Furthermore, nowhere in the passages from Plato's *Republic* to which Strauss also refers—486b10-13, 537a4-7 and 619b7-d1—does Plato propose that the “luxurious city” confiscate the territory and property of a neighboring city so as to live the “life of luxury.” In the first of those three passages Plato explains that a philosophic person is just and kind, whereas an unphilosophic person is unjust and mean; in the second passage he speaks of testing children for future roles as guardians; and in the third passage he speaks against the foolishness of choosing to lead an unjust life, a life devoid of philosophy and orderly, good habits. Perhaps, then, Strauss had in mind Chapter 17 of *The Prince* (to which he also refers in his endnote).³⁷ In this chapter Machiavelli advises the prince to “above all . . . abstain from the property of others, because men forget the death of a father more quickly than the loss of a patrimony. . . . I conclude . . . that since men love at their convenience and fear at the convenience of the prince, a wise prince should found himself on what is his, not on what is someone else's; he should only contrive to avoid hatred . . .”³⁸ Indeed, having stated that cruelty towards strangers is unavoidable, Strauss, evidently on Machiavelli's behalf, stipulates his crucial distinction: “Justice which is the habit of not taking away what belongs to others while defending what belongs to oneself rests on the firm ground of

³⁷ See *TM*, p.342n179. Here Strauss also directs the reader to compare the above references to *TM*, pp.191-92, 239-40. As I examined those pages in, respectively, chs.3 and 5, I will simply say here that Strauss explained that Machiavelli regarded as impossible, given the flux of life, that any nation would refrain from fighting its neighbors and acquiring their property.

³⁸ *The Prince*, pp.67, 68.

the selfishness of society. "The factual truth" of moral virtue is republican virtue."³⁹

The factual truth of republican virtue and the common good

Machiavelli, by differentiating virtue from goodness and by differentiating republican virtue from moral virtue, is recasting the basis of the common good. He speaks of the common good not in terms of ideas of moral virtue but in terms of a concept of protection, security, survival, and salvation of the fatherland. He emphasizes that the republic must be mindful of both external and internal threats. For instance, he remarks in *Discourses* I 16 that it was necessary that the disaffected sons of Junius Brutus be killed to prevent their plotting against the newly established Roman republic.⁴⁰ Machiavelli implies, in other words, that any and all methods can be used to protect the common good; without the republic there is no common good or civil society or fatherland. In the absence of domestic and foreign enemies, a republic can indeed hold to laws that allow for individual freedoms. Yet virtue of a certain type is always required for the protection of the common good, namely, a virtue that consists of the willingness and ability of leaders to engage in cruel conduct. When faced by enemies, domestic or foreign, or when seeking to revive the lost ancient spirit for freedom, the republic's leaders must have recourse to extraordinary and immoral behavior commonly associated with criminals and tyrants.⁴¹

Machiavelli seems to be claiming that what makes a ruler a *good* ruler is not his religiosity and regard for morality but, rather, his foresight, perspicacity and

³⁹ *TM*, p.258.

⁴⁰ See also *Discourses* III 1.

⁴¹ The above discussion has drawn upon *TM*, pp.258-59, 342n180.

ability to lead his subjects. Is it better to have a general who is a bad man but a good, capable general, Aristotle asks, or is it better to have a man who is just and holds to the constitution? (*Politics* 1309b1-3) Aristotle answers: “in the choice of a general, we should regard his experience rather than his excellence; for few have military experience, but many have excellence. In any office of trust or stewardship, on the other hand, the opposite rule should be observed; for more excellence than ordinary is required in the holder of such an office, but the necessary knowledge is of a sort which all men possess.” (1309b3-9)⁴² But to Machiavelli, as Strauss notes, strong, capable rulers with vices that do not harm the republic and that can be kept from public view, “are infinitely to be preferred to saintly rulers who lack political and military ability.” Amplifying Machiavelli’s argument, Strauss explains: “To use the words of a historian who is well-known for his strict adherence to moral principle, “a weak man may be deemed more mischievous to the state over which he presides than a wicked one.”⁴³

Strauss perceives a blurring of the difference between criminal and non-criminal behavior in Machiavelli’s affirmation of the need for immorality in the conduct of rulers: “One may object to Machiavelli’s view of the relation between moral virtue and the common good by saying that it abolishes the essential difference between civil societies and bands of robbers, since robbers too use ordinary modes among themselves whenever possible. Machiavelli is not deterred by this consideration.”⁴⁴ Echoing *Discourses* I 40 and III 29, in that order, Strauss observes:

⁴² *Complete Works*, Vol.2, p.2079.

⁴³ *TM*, p.259. The “historian” Strauss has in mind here is William H. Prescott. See *TM*, p.342n180, where Strauss refers to the *Discourses*, I 4, 7, 9, 10, 16, 17, 18, 25, 27, 34, 40, 55, III 3, 7, 11, 21, 29, 40, 41 (cf. *Florentine Histories* II 5), 44; *The Prince*, ch.18; and instructs the reader to compare these references with both William H. Prescott, *History of the Reign of Ferdinand and Isabella*, ed. J.F. Kirk (Philadelphia, 1872), I, 233, and Aristotle, *Politics* 1309a39-b6.

⁴⁴ *TM*, p.259. Cf. McShea, “Strauss on Machiavelli,” p.785.

“He compares the Roman patricians, the most respectable ruling class that ever was, to small birds of prey, and he quotes Livy’s observation that a certain chief of pirates equalled the Romans in piety.”⁴⁵ In the former chapter Machiavelli writes: “men often act like certain lesser birds of prey, in whom there is such desire to catch their prey, to which nature urges them, that they do not sense another larger bird that is above them so to kill them.”⁴⁶ In the latter chapter he says:

Titus Livy . . . narrates that as the Roman legates were carrying the booty of the Veientes to Apollo, they were taken by pirates of Lipari in Sicily and led to that town. When Timasitheus, their prince, learned what gift this was, where it was going, and who was sending it, though born at Lipari, he bore himself as a Roman man and showed the people how impious it was to seize a gift such as this. So with the consent of the collectivity, he let the legates go with all their things. The words of the historian are these: “Timasitheus filled the multitude, which is always like the ruler, with religion.”⁴⁷

By imputing to a pirate prince the moral-mindset of an upstanding Roman citizen, Machiavelli would seem to be saying that a ruler must be guided in his actions by both base and noble principles. However, as was seen above, Machiavelli would advise the ruler to hide his vices from public view. All in all, Machiavelli clearly does not regard the basis of the common good as consisting of the scrupulous adherence not to moral virtue but to expediency and selfishness.

Strauss, perhaps in a tacit acknowledgment of Meinecke’s *Machiavellism*,⁴⁸ goes on to explain that closely related to Machiavelli’s conception of the common good is his understanding of the distribution of power in the republic. Machiavelli reasons, according to Strauss, that “since the common good requires that innocent

⁴⁵ *TM*, p.259.

⁴⁶ *Discourses*, p.89

⁴⁷ *Discourses*, p.278.

⁴⁸ See Friedrich Meinecke, *Machiavellism: The Doctrine of Raison d’État and Its Place in Modern History*, trans. Douglas Scott (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957), e.g., ch.1, esp. pp.30-31, 38-39; ch.2, pp.54ff; ch.6, pp.150-51. However, cf. below, ch.7, where I discuss Strauss’s censure of the Meineckian argument that the doctrine of *raison d’état* has its origin in Machiavelli.

individuals be sacrificed for its sake, the common good is rather the good of the large majority, perhaps even the good of the common people as distinguished from the good of the nobles or of the great. . . .” Nevertheless, “[t]he majority cannot rule.”⁴⁹

The majority of people are easily misled and led to ruin by the general appearance of their times.⁵⁰ Only a select minority, consisting primarily of nobles, has the capacity to occupy public offices effectively. Yet so that the republic is not riven by enmity, the divide between the people and the nobles must be resolved by a sharing of power. Needful, though, for territorial expansion is an armed populace and, in turn, the support of the people.⁵¹ But when people have had a taste of power and of riches from conquests, they become restless for more than their fair share. Acquisition of wealth invariably results in a populace accustomed to the pursuit of personal wealth and a comfortable, easy life.⁵² An imperial republic—a republic devoted to acquisition and expansion—cannot abide by moral virtue. But neither can it even wholly abide by the republican virtues of “austerity and severity.”⁵³ To maintain itself, an imperial republic must both satisfy the demands of the common people for enrichment and, so as to increase the size of its military forces, increase the size of its population by making citizens out of foreigners.⁵⁴ In other words, the imperial republic must be willing to open itself to the risk of corruption. The “peculiar evil” of the imperial republic begins precisely with its need, first, to partly forego austerity and severity, and, second, to regard conquered

⁴⁹ *TM*, p.260. Cf. Coby, *Machiavelli's Romans*, pp.64-66, 254-58.

⁵⁰ *Discourses* I 25, 44, 47-48, 53.

⁵¹ *Discourses* I 5-6, 40, 49, 50, 60, II 2; *The Prince*, ch.9; *Florentine Histories* III 1. Cf. *Discourses* I 37; *The Prince*, ch.3. Cf. also Coby, *Machiavelli's Romans*, pp.38-39, 114ff.

⁵² *Discourses* II 19. See also *TM*, p.261.

⁵³ *TM*, p.261.

⁵⁴ *Discourses* I 5, 6, II 2, 3, 4, 19, III 49.

subject states and independent states as allies.⁵⁵ Strauss notes that in Machiavelli's judgment, "The successful imitation by modern Italians of the early Roman republic would necessarily be accompanied by a peculiar evil: an Italy unified by a republic or a prince would no longer abound in independent republics and thus would be less likely to abound in excellent men."⁵⁶

It thus seems clear that Machiavelli, in lauding amoral republican virtue, reorientates the common good away from the high-minded pursuit of what is *common* and *good* for society as a whole⁵⁷ and towards what is advantageous for the people and the nobles. Yet Machiavelli is not simply differentiating republican virtue from moral virtue in order to show that the common good is in fact based on expediency and selfishness. Strauss states: "It is not sufficient to say that Machiavelli in effect makes a distinction between republican virtue and moral virtue, and sees in republican virtue the "factual truth" of moral virtue." Machiavelli argues, Strauss observes, that "[r]epublican virtue as dedication to the common good includes all habits which are conducive to the common good and in particular it includes opposite habits (e.g., severity and gentleness) to the extent to which each is conducive to the common good."⁵⁸

The respective virtues of the two groups in society, the nobles and the people, is indicative of the contrary habits that make up the common good.⁵⁹ As Machiavelli explains, the nobles rule, the people are the ruled and thus each group possesses its own type of virtue. The virtue of the people consists of their

⁵⁵ See *TM*, pp.261-62, and cf. Coby, *Machiavelli's Romans*, pp.127-30, 308nn17-18, 309-10n32.

⁵⁶ *TM*, p.262. Cf. *TM*, pp.307-8n29; Coby, *Machiavelli's Romans*, pp.270f, 342n68.

⁵⁷ I return to this point below, in the sub-section titled "Tyrants and the common good."

⁵⁸ *TM*, p.262.

⁵⁹ The following discussion draws upon *Florentine Histories* II 34, 41, III 17, 18, 20, VI 24; *TM*, pp.262-63, 343n185.

ignorance about how the world operates and of their obedience to rulers and the laws. The people often exhibit signs of fickleness, though; they make unruly and unrealistic demands to their rulers for wealth, glory and representation. Because that fickleness arises from ignorance, the role of the rulers is to lead the many and to make them good. To the people, the virtue of nobles consists of such qualities as venerability, gentleness, wisdom, humanity, kindness and liberality.

However, rulers need not, cannot and do not act in accordance those praiseworthy qualities. Virtuous, capable rulers are characterized by having an eye for what is needed in exigent circumstances; the true sense of virtue “consists not in the extirpation of ambition but in ambition guided by prudence. . . .”⁶⁰ According to Strauss, Machiavelli “is far from denying that there are some men who are genuinely kind and humane, not from fear or calculation but by nature; yet he contends that such men when entrusted with high office can become a public menace.”⁶¹ In *Discourses* III 7 and 20-22 Machiavelli appraises the social and political characteristics of public office holders; he explains that the virtue of rulers consists precisely of their willingness and capacity to perform the actions necessary to secure the well-being of the republic. Strauss continues: “It would seem that, according to him, virtue and goodness are praiseworthy only with regard to their social and political utility. . . .”⁶² Indeed, in III 21 Machiavelli states: “the mode in which a captain proceeds is not very important, provided that in it is the great virtue that seasons both modes of life . . . in both [humanity and cruelty] there is defect and danger unless they are corrected by an extraordinary virtue.”⁶³

⁶⁰ *TM*, p.264.

⁶¹ *TM*, p.265. Here Strauss provides an accompanying endnote; see p.343n187, where he says: “*Discourses* III 20-22 and 7 end [*sic*].”

⁶² *TM*, p.265.

⁶³ *Discourses*, p.264.

It is worth citing here *Discourses* III 27, as it bears on Strauss's above observation regarding the utility of virtue. In this chapter Machiavelli describes three modes for organizing a divided city. The first and "most secure" mode is to kill the leaders of the tumults; the second mode is to expel them from the city; and the third mode is "to make them make peace together under obligations not to offend one another."⁶⁴ The third mode poses the most danger: it creates the opportunity for further tumults to arise, Machiavelli warns. Enemies who see each other daily in close proximity will not be able to restrain themselves forever, especially when the lord who rules the divided city supports one faction, thus making an enemy of other factions. At the end of III 27 Machiavelli states: "modes . . . diverging from the truth arise from the weakness of whoever is lord, who, when they see that they cannot hold states with force and with virtue, turn to such devices, which sometimes in quiet times help somewhat; but when adversities and hard times come, they show their fallaciousness."⁶⁵

Forms of government: republics, principalities and tyrannies

Republican rule or princely rule?

It seems clear that for Machiavelli, the virtuous ruler is one whom possesses all the "habits" necessary to protect himself, his state and its inhabitants against all enemies, be they from within or without.⁶⁶ Of Machiavelli's preferred *form* of government Strauss has thus far explained in his critical study that the Florentine emphasizes the efficacy of republican rule in protecting the common good.

⁶⁴ *Discourses*, p.274.

⁶⁵ *Discourses*, p.276.

⁶⁶ See *TM*, p.265.

Elsewhere Strauss notes, “Machiavelli . . . did not attempt to be neutral towards subjects the understanding of which is incompatible with neutrality. As a matter of principle he preferred, in his capacity as an analyst of society, republics to monarchies.”⁶⁷ Though he preferred republican rule over princely rule, Machiavelli qualified his praise of republican rule. He claims, Strauss says, that “[i]f there is no good which is not accompanied by its peculiar evil, we have to keep watch for the peculiar defects of even the best republic. If it is true that the common good is the end only of republics and that the common good is the ground of virtue, the defective character of republics will prove the defective character of the common good and of virtue.”⁶⁸

Machiavelli did not always, at all times and for all places, favor republics over principalities. He adopts a stance of impartiality about the form of rule he favors, republican or princely. In the *Discourses* he often, Strauss explains, “blurred the difference between republics and principalities . . . In this explicitly republican book he is indeed slow to introduce the subjects “kingdoms” or “principalities,” as a glance at the headings of the first ten chapters will have shown. . . .”⁶⁹ Drawing then upon I 40 and III 6, as well as I 10 and III 28, Strauss speaks of “the detachment or the generosity” evidenced by Machiavelli’s dispensation of advice to the leaders of republics *and* those opposed to republics—potential and actual tyrants.⁷⁰

To Machiavelli, princely rule can in some instances be justified. It is defensible, he says in *Discourses* I 10, 11, 12, 43, and II 2 and the *Florentine*

⁶⁷ *TM*, p.20. See also *TM*, pp.20ff, 25, 111, 127, 340n159; *NM*, pp.314-15, and cf. Baron, “Machiavelli,” p.221, et passim.

⁶⁸ *TM*, p.265.

⁶⁹ *TM*, pp.265-66.

⁷⁰ *TM*, p.266; for the above references themselves, see p.343n188.

Histories V I, for it is more conducive than republican rule to establishing and attaining security. Indeed, the personal liberties allowed in republics are often inimical to stability; liberties such as freedom of speech, opinion and belief tend to result in individuals placing their own interests above that of the well-being of the republic.⁷¹ Machiavelli's defense of princely rule is equivocal, though. In *Discourses* I 10 he employs such phrases as "republics or kingdoms" and "kingdoms and republics." Similarly, in *Discourses* I 12 he writes: "And truly no province has ever been united or happy unless it has all come under obedience to one *republic* or to one *prince*, as happened to France and to Spain. The cause that Italy is not in the same condition and does not also have one *republic* or one *prince* to govern it is solely the church." In the *Florentine Histories* V 1 Machiavelli employs the terms "princes" and "heads of republics," but stresses: "it has been observed by the prudent that letters come after arms and that, in provinces and cities, captains arise before philosophers."⁷²

Machiavelli, in defending princely rule, is speaking against not only the occasional inefficacy of republican rule but also against its very possibility. "Above all," Strauss explains on his behalf, "republics are not always possible. They are not possible at the beginning and they are not possible if the people is corrupt. There is a connection between these two conditions. Since it is only government, laws and other institutions which make men good, men are bad or incorrupt prior to the foundation of society . . ."⁷³ In *Discourses* I 2, 9 and 11 Machiavelli suggests that the very power of a prince to enact new modes and orders, and only such power,

⁷¹ See *TM*, p.266; for the above references themselves, see p.343n189.

⁷² *Discourses* I 10, p.31, I 12, p.38 (emphases mine); *Florentine Histories*, pp.185, 186.

⁷³ *TM*, p.266. I have gleaned the following references themselves—to Machiavelli—from *TM*, p.343n190.

can overcome the disorder which predates human society. Elsewhere he identifies a corruption that arises from within society. For instance, in *Discourses* I 10, 16, 17 and 55 he warns that disquiet and ruin are caused by private persons agitating for their own benefit, and by the failure of princes to cultivate an incorrupt multitude.⁷⁴ When men—all men, not simply those of the multitude—are incorrigibly corrupt and lacking in the will and the knowledge of how to maintain the freedom of their fatherland, they can be made good and kept that way only by the extreme actions of one individual.⁷⁵ In *Discourses* I 55 Machiavelli explains that a republic is possible to the extent to which an individual exists who is “prudent,” has “knowledge of ancient civilizations” and “is rare in brain and authority.”⁷⁶ However, he says in the same chapter that such an individual has never existed in Italy. As Strauss dryly observes, summarizing Machiavelli’s argument in I 55 and the other passages in the *Discourses* that speak of corruption, “It is therefore insufficient to say that republics are not always possible.”⁷⁷

One must say instead, Strauss goes on to explain, that Machiavelli regards the poor judgment of rulers as responsible for the absence or failure of republican rule. Machiavelli criticizes princes for failing to use the cruelty that is needful for turning the “corrupt” populace in a principality into an “incorrupt” populace governed by republican rule.⁷⁸ To avoid being hated and regarded as inhumane, princes often tolerate the demands of the corrupt masses. In acting with such toleration, princes fail to act in accordance with the values of severity and austerity that form the basis

⁷⁴ See also *Discourses* I 33, 35, II 19, III 1.

⁷⁵ See *Discourses* I 17, 18, 55, III 4-6, 8, 30.

⁷⁶ *Discourses*, p.112. Strauss uses the phrases “a man of rare brain and authority” (*TM*, p.267 [line 39]) and “a late founder of rare brain” (p.268 [line 5]).

⁷⁷ *TM*, p.268 (lines 8-9); cf. his similar statement on p.266 (lines 37-39).

⁷⁸ *TM*, p.268.

of the common good. What a prince can do, though, at the very least, is to ensure the security of the lives of his subjects, namely, their basic or mere survival. But to do that, a prince needs a special freedom to act. Indeed, his preoccupation with his own ambition, liberty and glory is justified in Machiavelli's view if such preoccupation redounds eventually to the basic benefit of his subjects. To princes, the peoples and nobles alike, what is virtuous, good and entirely natural is the desire for property, honor and glory. Thus, a prince should act in accordance not with moral virtue but with intelligence, prudence and greatness of purpose to those ends.⁷⁹

Virtue, princely rule and tyrants

To Strauss, Machiavelli's advice regarding the virtuous characteristics of princely rule echoes "the kind of virtue praised by Calicles in Plato's *Gorgias* and possessed by the criminals Agathocles and Severus."⁸⁰ The passage in the *Gorgias* Strauss probably has in mind is 483d-484b. Calicles asks: "on what principle of justice did Xerxes invade Hellas, or his father the Scythians? . . ." Calicles answers:

Nay, but these men, I suggest, act in this way according to the nature of justice; yes, by Heaven, and according to the law of nature, though not, perhaps, according to that law which we enact; we take the best and strongest of our fellows from their youth upwards, and tame them like young lions,—enslaving them with spells and incantations, and saying to them that with equality they must be content, and that the equal is the honourable and the just. But if there were a man born with enough ability, he would shake off and break through, and escape from all this; he would trample under foot all our formulas and spells and charms, and all our laws which are against nature: the slave would rise in rebellion and be lord over us, and the light of natural justice would shine forth.⁸¹

⁷⁹ See *TM*, pp.268-69.

⁸⁰ *TM*, p.269.

⁸¹ *Dialogues of Plato*, Vol.2, p.577.

Machiavelli's advice about virtuous princely rule, Strauss goes on to explain, "is the most obvious message of *Prince* as whole. . . ." Closely related to that message is the idea that "men are praised or blamed also with a view to their being good or bad at acquiring."⁸²

By way of illustrating Machiavelli's Calliclean advice to princes, Strauss briefly evaluates (in an endnote) "his utterances and silences regarding chastity."⁸³ In Chapter 15 of *The Prince* Machiavelli lists chastity in his description of the moral virtues. He is silent about the subject of chastity in Chapter 16, and also in *Discourses* I 37 and 40, when describing what the prince must do to avoid being hated by his subjects. He is not silent in *Discourses* III 5, 19 and 26 about the subject of chastity but he is silent about the wrongness of the act of rape. For instance, in III 26 he draws attention to Aristotle's advice that a tyrant must avoid raping women or otherwise violating their dignity⁸⁴: "Among the first causes Aristotle puts down of the ruin of tyrants is having injured someone on account of women, by raping them or by violating them or by breaking off marriages, as this part is spoken of in detail in the chapter where we treat conspiracies."⁸⁵ Aristotle explains in his *Politics*, 1314b21-25: "it is hard for him [a tyrant] to be respected if he inspires no respect, and therefore whatever virtues he may neglect, at least he should maintain the character of a great soldier, and produce the impression that he is one. Neither he nor any of his associates should ever assault the young of either sex who are his subjects . . ." In 1303b17-39 he notes:

⁸² *TM*, p.269.

⁸³ *TM*, p.343n192.

⁸⁴ *TM*, p.343n192. Here Strauss does not, however, point to any passages in the *Politics* where Aristotle imparts his advice.

⁸⁵ *Discourses*, p.273. Here the Mansfield/Tarcov translation gives a footnote, p.273n4, which refers to *Discourses* III 6 and Aristotle's *Politics*, 1314b27, and adds: "see also 1303b17-4a18."

In revolutions the occasions may be trifling, but great interests are at stake. Even trifles are most important when they concern the rulers, as was the case of old at Syracuse; for the Syracusan constitution was once changed by a love-quarrel of two young men, who were in the government. The story is that while one of them was away from home his beloved was gained over by his companion, and he to revenge himself seduced the other's wife. They then drew the members of the ruling class into their quarrel and so split all the people into portions. We learn from this story that we should be on our guard against the beginnings of such evils, and should put an end to the quarrels of chiefs and mighty men. The mistake lies in the beginning—as the proverb says—'Well begun is half done' . . .⁸⁶

According to Strauss, "there is a subtle disagreement" between Machiavelli and Aristotle about "the teaching that tyrants ought to avoid hurting their subjects in connection with women . . ."⁸⁷ That disagreement, I suggest, lies in Machiavelli's judgment that it is not so much the violation of women that should be avoided as it is the disorders instigated by offended citizens; yet Aristotle says, as was seen above, that the tyrant should respect women because that is the right and appropriate thing to do in ruling the state. Machiavelli explains in *Discourses* III 26:

I say thus that absolute princes and governors of republics are not to take little account of this part, but they should consider the disorders that can arise from such an accident and remedy them in time so that the remedy is not with harm and reproach for their state or for their republic, as happened to the Ardeans. For having allowed that rivalry [between the nobles and the people] to grow among their citizens, they were led to divide among themselves; and when they wished to reunite, they had to send for external help, which is a great beginning of a nearby servitude.⁸⁸

Tyrants and the common good

Simply put, then, Machiavelli is saying that to avoid ruin, princes need not and should not be morally virtuous but, instead, need only avoid accidents and

⁸⁶ *Complete Works*, Vol.2, pp.2087, 2070.

⁸⁷ *TM*, p.343n192.

⁸⁸ *Discourses*, p.273.

disquiet immoral behavior might provoke in their offended subjects, consequently threatening the stability or very survival of the state.⁸⁹ But, Strauss points out, “If we look back to Machiavelli’s analysis of republics, we see at once that there is no essential difference between the motives of the prince and the motives of the ruling class. The excellent ruling class as exemplified by the Roman senate is not dedicated to the common good as the common is primarily understood.”⁹⁰ The senate viewed the common good largely from the point of view of their self-interest. In *Discourses* I 3, 37, 40, 46, and III 22 Machiavelli observes that the Roman nobles were preoccupied with their own wealth and their position in the republic. The nobility acknowledged plebeian demands for political representation but only so as to safeguard stability, unity, and the prosperity derived from Rome’s conquests. Such acknowledgment was not easily made, though. Fighting amongst themselves for supremacy in Rome often paralyzed the nobility, Machiavelli says in *Discourses* I 50 and III 11.⁹¹ In I 50 he explains that the creation of a dictatorship by the tribunate to stop the conflict between the consuls proved quite effective in redirecting the consuls’ attention toward working for the good of the republic. In III 11 he notes that the ambition of the tribunate was not, however, always aimed at the common good; he further notes that the renewal of goodness in republics is caused by “the simple virtue of one man” and by “extrinsic force.”⁹²

Having discussed Machiavelli’s analysis of the self-regarding motives of the Roman nobility, Strauss explains: “What the classics called aristocracy, we may say, is an imagined republic; the factual truth of aristocracies which are known to exist or

⁸⁹ Cf. *TM*, p.343n192.

⁹⁰ *TM*, pp.269-70.

⁹¹ See *TM*, p.270; for the above references themselves, see p.344n193.

⁹² *Discourses*, pp.211, 212.

to have existed is oligarchy. . . .”⁹³ The tendency of the nobility to dominate the many is manifested in a shift in governance from aristocracy to oligarchy. However, excessive oppression, being injurious of the women and property of the many, results in the many rising in revolt against the oligarchy, selecting a man of ambition to rule over the state. Strauss observes: “According to Aristotle, the fact that the tyrant is supported by the people as distinguished from the gentlemen is an argument against tyranny; according to Machiavelli, it is the strongest argument in favor of tyranny”⁹⁴

Before turning to Machiavelli’s seeming affirmation of tyrannical rule, I will address Aristotle’s claim regarding the problematic nature of tyrannical rule. In his *Politics*, 1292a7-31, Aristotle warns that demagogues arise in democracies where the rule of law is not paramount. The power exercised by a tyrant is similar to that of a king who rules according to law and over his willing subjects, Aristotle explains in 1295a10-17, but quite different in the sense that a tyrant rules with a view to his own interest. In 1297b1-5 Aristotle states that the standard of property ownership for assessing eligibility for public office must be “sufficiently comprehensive to secure that the number of those who have the rights of citizens exceeds the number of those excluded.” Interestingly, in 1297b5-10 Aristotle hints that tyranny arises from the poor being mistreated rather than from their resentment about their inability to ascend to public office: “Even if they have no share in office, the poor, provided

⁹³ *TM*, p.270.

⁹⁴ *TM*, pp.270-71. Strauss does not give an accompanying endnote for the passages he has in mind until further on the same paragraph, at p.272 (line 17); see p.344n194, where, for instance, he refers to Aristotle’s *Politics*, 1297b1-10 and 1308b33-1309a9. I have added the other below references to the *Politics* as they bear on Strauss’s observation. With regard to that observation, cf. Roger Boesche, *Theories of Tyranny, From Plato to Arendt* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), pp.117, 127-28, 161-65; Sullivan, *Machiavelli’s Three Romes*, pp.61ff, 72-75. With regard to Aristotle’s account of how tyrants preserve their power, cf. Boesche, *Theories of Tyranny*, pp.76-83.

only that they are not outraged or deprived of their property, will be quiet enough. But to secure gentle treatment for the poor is not an easy thing, since a ruling class is not always humane. . . .” Tyranny arises from the overlong occupation of public office, Aristotle explains in 1308a14-24. For example, he notes: “the aspirants to tyranny are either the principal men of the state, who in democracies are demagogues and in oligarchies members of ruling houses, or those who hold great offices, and have a long tenure of them.” (1308a21-24)⁹⁵ Having thus acquired power, tyrants preserve it, first, by eliminating both actual and potential rivals, and, second, by appearing to the populace as being merciful, generous and pious (1313a34-1315b10).

Unlike Aristotle, Machiavelli regards as “just” the popular support of a tyrant. As Strauss summarizes his argument: “the end of the people is more just—or . . . more decent or more respectable—than the end of the great. The common good may well appear to be identical with the good of the many. And just as free states may be established by means of violence, tyranny may be established by consent.”⁹⁶ I would add here that the keywords here are “may be,” for as will be seen below, Machiavelli claims that tyranny is invariably established and maintained by force and, moreover, fraud. In the meanwhile, I would note that he sees consent as but one way by which tyranny can arise, and a conditional one at that. For instance, Machiavelli states in Chapter 7 of *The Prince*: “Men who become princes from private individual solely by fortune become so with little trouble, but maintain themselves with much.”⁹⁷ In Chapter 8 he says that a man who “becomes prince from private individual” neither by “fortune” nor by “virtue” becomes prince “by

⁹⁵ *Politics* 1297b1-10, *Complete Works*, Vol.2, p.2059; 1308a21-24, p.2077.

⁹⁶ *TM*, p.271.

⁹⁷ *The Prince*, p.25.

some criminal and nefarious path or . . . by the support of his fellow citizens.” Further on in Chapter 8 Machiavelli explains that a man who becomes prince by “the first mode” uses fraud, violence and “cruelties . . . well used” to acquire, and thereafter maintain, his ambition for sole power in the state.⁹⁸ To repeat, Machiavelli regards consent as a conditional, though justifiable, way for tyranny to be established. Indeed, he says in Chapter 9 that a “private citizen [who] becomes prince of his fatherland, not through crime or other intolerable violence but with the support of his fellow citizens . . . should keep them friendly to him, which should be easy for him because they ask of him only that they not be oppressed.”⁹⁹ Similarly, in *Discourses* I 41 Machiavelli advises the tyrant not to change abruptly from being “a friend of the plebs” to being their “enemy,” for “finding yourself uncovered and without friends, you are ruined.”¹⁰⁰

Yet tyrants ascend to power ultimately not through consent but through altogether less salutary ways. Strauss explains: “If one says that the tyrant must use fraud in order to rise to power, Machiavelli replies to him that the model king Cyrus and the model republic Rome rose to greatness in no other way.”¹⁰¹ In *Discourses* II 13 Machiavelli maintains that it was through “fraud” rather than “force alone” that Philip of Macedon, Agathocles, Cyrus, and the Roman republic established the beginnings of empire and “Great Fortune.”¹⁰² In I 2 he reflects that no form of government is totally immune to the changes in men wrought by chance. Machiavelli’s point here is that tyranny is not as unstable a form of government as

⁹⁸ *The Prince*, pp.34, 37.

⁹⁹ *The Prince*, pp.38-39, 40.

¹⁰⁰ *Discourses*, p.90.

¹⁰¹ *TM*, p.271.

¹⁰² *Discourses*, p.155. *Discourses* II 13 is titled “That One Comes from Base to Great Fortune More through Fraud Than through Force.”

critics say it is. In I 10, 29, 37, 52, and III 6 he expands that point. He claims that tyrants who establish the foundations for centuries of stability are to be praised, not condemned. By putting into place laws and orders to provide representation for the many and the great alike, thereby negating or holding in check the root causes of the cyclical changes in government, a tyrant keeps the people as a whole free from corruption, ambition, avarice, greed, discontent, and suspicion. To Machiavelli, Strauss explains, “What name or title is more glorious than “Caesar,” and Caesar was the first tyrant in Rome. As a typical tyrant, he based his power on the common people who avenged his murder. . . . [Caesar] prepared the peaceful reign of Augustus and the golden times of the good Roman emperors.”¹⁰³ I would add here that in *Discourses* I 1 Machiavelli spoke of “the long peace that was born in the world under Octavian . . .”, and explained in I 10 that if “a prince put[s] himself before the times from Nerva to Marcus, and compare[s] them with those that came before and that came later [h]e will see golden times when each can hold and defend the opinion he wishes.”¹⁰⁴ According to Strauss, “Considerations like these induce Machiavelli frequently to use “prince” and “tyrant” as synonyms, regardless of whether he speaks of criminal or non-criminal tyrants.”¹⁰⁵

Strauss emphasizes, though: “It therefore becomes necessary to reconsider the distinction between criminal and non-criminal tyrants. It is not sufficient to say that the criminal tyrant lacked opportunity, since without opportunity he could never have become a tyrant.”¹⁰⁶ However, drawing upon *Discourses* I 8, 24 and III 8, Strauss indicates that Manlius Capitolinus aspired to be a tyrant but lacked the

¹⁰³ *TM*, p.272.

¹⁰⁴ *Discourses* I 1, p.8; I 10, pp.32, 33.

¹⁰⁵ *TM*, p.272.

¹⁰⁶ *TM*, p.272.

requisite opportunity: “The classic example of a potential tyrant who lacked opportunity and *therefore* failed was Manlius Capitolinus.”¹⁰⁷ To say, as Strauss clearly has, that Manlius had the potential to be a tyrant is to say that he was waiting for the appropriate moment to turn that potentiality into actuality. Nonetheless, it seems that Manlius failed not only, if all, because of a lack of opportunity. In *Discourses* I 8 Machiavelli notes that Manlius, unable to contain his envy over the success of Camillus, “was a calumniator . . .”, and likewise says in I 24 that “Manlius was moved . . . by his envy or by his wicked nature to arouse sedition in Rome . . .”; in III 8 Machiavelli writes that Manlius had “much virtue of spirit and body” but was blinded both by his excessive desire for glory and his excessive envy of Camillus.¹⁰⁸ Manlius Capitolinus remained a potential tyrant ultimately because of factors intrinsic to himself. He did not possess “that prudence” to recognize that the Roman republic could not be made corrupt because it did not wish be corrupted; that is to say, the Romans wanted to keep their liberty, not lose it to a tyrant.¹⁰⁹

According to Strauss, “It is likewise not sufficient to say that a criminal tyrant, while not lacking opportunity, lacked justification, for where there are opportunities of this magnitude, justification will not fail to be forthcoming.”¹¹⁰ The “potential tyrant of extraordinary gifts” believes that he can better protect a city or a country against foreign enemies than can his republican rivals, and he uses such a

¹⁰⁷ *TM*, p.272 (emphasis mine).

¹⁰⁸ *Discourses* I 8, p.28; I 24, p.60; III 8, p.237.

¹⁰⁹ See *TM*, pp.272-73. Strauss’s accompanying endnote, p.344n195, refers to *Discourses* I 8, 24, III 8; and directs the reader to compare these references with I pr., II 2, 3, III 9. I would add, then, that Machiavelli perceives envy and excessive idleness to be dangerous to the well-being of a city, and that a love for freedom—as well as a sizeable population—is essential to the building of empire. With regard to the Romans’ desire to keep their liberty, see also Coby, *Machiavelli’s Romans*, pp.94, 243ff.

¹¹⁰ *TM*, p.273.

belief to justify his desire to seize control of the republic. But it is difficult to ascertain after the fact whether or not the tyrant's belief was well-founded, as his republican rivals may have been able to achieve the same great deed of acquiring power in the state. Thus for Machiavelli, Strauss states, "There is then no essential difference between the public-spirited founder of a republic and the selfish founder of a tyranny: both have to commit crimes and both have to pay due regard to that part of society the cause of which is most just. As for the difference between their intentions, one may say with Aristotle that the intentions are hidden."¹¹¹

It is not immediately clear what Strauss means by the latter observation. Given that "the public spirited founder of a republic" evidently is an individual who does intend to benefit the public good, it seems strange that he would need to hide his intentions. In contrast, the selfish tyrant believes that the only part of society to which he is obliged to pay due regard to whose cause is most just is himself, not the people. He views his self-interests as being intrinsically and extrinsically of far more important than the common good. But to gain the support of the people, which even tyrants must do to some extent, the tyrant must not make his selfish intentions publicly known. He must *appear* to be serving the people's interests, not his own. Indeed, Aristotle says in his *Politics* that "the people" do not like their office holders to steal from the public purse or to similarly act with self-interest (1308b34-1309a9).¹¹² It is clear, then, why the tyrant would need to hide his intentions. Pointing to the reason why the intentions of the founder of a republic would be hidden, Strauss explains that to Machiavelli, "In the last analysis farsighted patriotism and farsighted selfishness lead to the same results. . . . to achieve its goal,

¹¹¹ *TM*, p.273.

¹¹² *Complete Works*, Vol.2, p.2078.

justice must use injustice and injustice must use justice; for both, a judicious mixture of justice and injustice, a certain middle course between justice and injustice, is required.”¹¹³ In other words, the founder must hide his intentions because he invariably must, like the tyrant, employ cruel, unjust and expedient methods.

Prolonging tyrannical rule

“However this may be,” Strauss explains, for Machiavelli, “the tyrant as well as any other new prince must arm his subjects. Yet he cannot arm all his subjects.”¹¹⁴ A tyrant need only arm and benefit those whose support he requires. As a new prince, he exploits the traditional hostility between the “these two diverse humors” in society,¹¹⁵ the many and the great. To Machiavelli, Strauss notes, “just as the tyrant comes to power by exploiting the division between the great and the people, he maintains himself in power by creating a division within the people. In some cases he does not have to create such a division . . .”, for the division may already exist.¹¹⁶ It may also be needful that a tyrant acquire a new state to add to his own, though keeping the new populace unarmed, lest they revolt against him. Yet if he has the support of soldiers, a tyrant need not worry about harming the many nor about depending solely upon the unreliable support of the many, who may desire to reacquire their ancient freedoms; neither would he have to depend upon the support of the nobles, who may still harbor a great desire to dominate the state and the many.¹¹⁷ In Chapter 19 of *The Prince* Machiavelli advises the prince that, as a matter of prudence, he arm only those who have helped him acquire their state. It is

¹¹³ *TM*, p.273.

¹¹⁴ *TM*, p.273.

¹¹⁵ *The Prince*, p.76.

¹¹⁶ *TM*, p.274.

¹¹⁷ See *TM*, p.274.

worth nothing here that when describing the actions of new princes, Machiavelli does not restrict the meaning of the term, new princes, to the princes of principalities. He means any prince of any type of governance. In Chapters 19 and 20 of *The Prince* he speaks of princes, new princes, principalities, and the Roman emperors, while in *Discourses* I 40 and 41 he speaks of the Roman republic, tyrants and the tyranny of Appius Claudius.

Machiavelli dispenses his advice regarding ascension to power with equal fervor to tyrants as well as to founders of republics. According to Strauss, “It goes without saying that this advice, as well as other advice of the same kind, is innocent of any consideration of the common good. . . .” If Machiavelli were willing to advise tyrants specifically about “their security or glory,” he would not restrict himself from imparting similar advice to “private citizens” or to any person motivated by a great concern for self-interest.¹¹⁸ Of *Discourses* III 4-5 Strauss explains that although Machiavelli “does not there discuss explicitly how those [final three Roman] kings acted wisely or foolishly with regard to their private advantage, and . . . even refers there to such public spirited princes as Timoleon and Aratus, we are not permitted to forget that the theme of these chapters is private advantage.”¹¹⁹ Yet Machiavelli also specifically warns the prince about the danger to his rule posed by the agitation of dissatisfied and jealous people who wish to be the supreme power in his state. At the end of III 5 he says that the “following chapter” will “speak . . . thoroughly” about “princes and private individuals.” At the beginning of III 6 he

¹¹⁸ *TM*, p.274. Strauss then provides in approximately this sequence a brief, succinct description of *Discourses* III 1, 2-3, 4-5, 6, 8, 9, 11, 22, 23, 30, 34, 35, and 42. See *TM*, pp.274-76; he provides most of the references themselves an accompanying endnote, p.344n197. Strauss starts with *Discourses* III 1; he speaks of “the first chapter of the Third Book of the *Discourses* . . .” (p.274 [line 39]). When he speaks of III 4-5, that is precisely what he says, “III 4-5 . . .” (p.275 [line 28]).

¹¹⁹ *TM*, p.275.

states: "It did not appear to me that reasoning about conspiracies should be omitted, since it is a thing so dangerous to princes and private individuals; for many more princes are seen to have lost their lives and states through these than by open war. For to be able to make open war on a prince is granted to few; to be able to conspire against them is granted to everyone."¹²⁰ Machiavelli goes on to explain in III 6 that the lack of prudence and spirit in people who conspire against a prince is manifested in their failure to properly deal with the various dangers that occur before, during and after the acting out of a conspiracy. One danger is that the secrecy of the enterprise will be compromised. Another danger is that the conspirators will not kill the prince when they have the opportunity to do so. Moreover, by failing to consider the possibility that the prince will be avenged by his relatives or his subjects, there a danger to the conspirators that they will themselves be killed. Machiavelli does not condemn conspiracy as inherently wrong. What is wicked and dangerous about a conspiracy is, he says, neither private ambition nor such acts as murder and treachery, but rather the lack of foresight given by conspirators to their own survival. As Strauss points out, "Machiavelli's chief concern is with advising conspirators as to their self-preservation. . . ."¹²¹

Strauss goes on to explain: "While advice with regard to the private advantage of private men becomes conspicuous only in the Third Book of the *Discourses*, it is not absent from the other parts of Machiavelli's work. . . ."¹²² For instance, in *Discourses* I 29-30 (which Strauss describes as "the section on gratitude") Machiavelli imparts advice not only to aspiring tyrants but also to individuals

¹²⁰ *Discourses*, p.218.

¹²¹ *TM*, pp.275-76. Cf. Coby, *Machiavelli's Romans*, pp.162-69.

¹²² *TM*, p.276 (lines 27-29). Strauss does not give an accompanying endnote until p.278 (line 2); see p.344n198, where he refers to *Discourses* I 9, 18, 29, 30, 52, II 26, 28; *The Prince*, chs.22, 23.

previously without such aspirations. In I 52 Machiavelli excuses the failure of Piero Soderini to commit the treachery of turning from being a man of the Florentine people to being an apologist for the Medici. Machiavelli reasons that “if he had been exposed as a friend to the Medici, he would have become suspect and hateful to the people. Hence his enemies would have had much more occasion for crushing him than they had at first.” Having excused Piero’s inaction, Machiavelli then hints that deserving of criticism is the lack of forethought given to treacherous actions, not the very act itself of treachery: “. . . in every policy men should consider its defects and dangers and not adopt it if there is more of the dangerous than the useful in it . . .”¹²³

The thread running throughout Machiavelli’s advice to private men about their self-advantage is that they develop a presence of mind when manipulating the common good to satisfy their own ends. In *Discourses* II 28 Machiavelli advises that republics and princes must take every care in refraining from greatly offending the sense of justice of not only the collectivity but also private individuals. If an individual is offended and perceives that his honor has not been avenged satisfactorily, such an individual will put the acquisition of satisfaction above all else, even if doing so cannot be reconciled with personal safety or with the public good.¹²⁴ In *Discourses* III 34 Machiavelli elaborates three modes by which any individual (“private” man, as Strauss puts it) may acquire a reputation for greatness. A person with a father who is well respected by the people gains respect for himself by giving public demonstrations of filial piety. Any benefit thus gained is, however, soon cancelled out if one is judged by the people to be without one’s own virtue. Superior to the first—but inferior to the third—mode is the second method: any man

¹²³ *Discourses*, p.104.

¹²⁴ See also *TM*, p.277.

may gain respect by keeping the company of wise, cultured and widely respected men. But respect thus acquired is based on opinion and, as such, is easily susceptible to change. The third mode is that “men who are born in a republic” must strive to gain, maintain and increase their reputation by contriving to commit rare, notable and great deeds which benefit the republic. Only by committing numerous actions contrary to the public good will a person lose his reputation for greatness.¹²⁵ When citizens of a republic decide to give rank to a fellow citizen, they should select a man who has proven himself worthy by the very fact alone of his great deeds. Yet only a small proportion of those deeds need to have been aimed at the public good. Most of the time, a man can best demonstrate his greatness with deeds aimed at his private benefit. Finally, as Machiavelli explains in Chapters 22 and 23 of *The Prince*, it is not in the prince’s best interest to have ministers who are preoccupied with putting their own interests above their duty of giving candid and honest counsel. Accordingly, the prince should benefit his ministers with honors and riches, but also make them good with some necessity or compulsion.¹²⁶

Having discussed Machiavelli’s advice to “private” men, Strauss states: “Let us survey the movement of thought which leads from unselfish patriotism to criminal tyranny. . . .”¹²⁷ Strauss’s effort here is to reinforce his argument that Machiavelli thinks of society, virtue, governance, and the common good in a basically political manner that is devoid of agreement with high-minded moral considerations. In the *Discourses* Machiavelli initially identifies the natural, or best, function of society with the protection of life. In I 1 and 2 he explains that people

¹²⁵ *Discourses*, p.288; *TM*, p.276.

¹²⁶ See *TM*, pp.277-78; *The Prince*, pp.92-95.

¹²⁷ *TM*, p.278. Half a page later, Strauss provides an accompanying endnote; see p.344n199, where he refers to *Discourses* I 1, 2, 6, 16, 37, III 16. The below discussion draws upon those chapters and *TM*, p.278.

gather together in the first place to form society so as to better defend themselves and thereby live a longer life, with a more or less comfortable, stable and free existence. Yet if a society wishes to maintain itself in its freedom and to keep its citizens good, it must return periodically to its beginnings. In I 6 and 16 Machiavelli observes that if a society wishes not only to maintain itself but also to expand, it must be ordered with a view to the acquisition of empire; in other words, protection of mere life is not the sole function of society. Patriotism, as Machiavelli goes on to explain, is inextricably linked with collective selfishness, not simply with the protection of mere life. In I 37 he notes that wars arise from the natural desire of people to possess everything they can. As that desire is greater than the actual power or capacity for acquisition, the dissatisfaction of men with what they actually possess inevitably drives them to war against those whom they wish to despoil or against those whom they fear. In I 46 Machiavelli proposes that republics must, lest they be riven by discord, create laws that keep within the bounds of freedom the ambition of men and their tendency to do evil. Men cannot, therefore, be kept good simply by the threat of return to the beginning of society, to the uncertainty of life which predates society. Machiavelli suggests in III 16 that a republic that is ordered with a view to war will always need worthy men; such a need forestalls the agitations of men who feel they are not esteemed. To Machiavelli, as Strauss explains, "Oppression, or injustice, is then coeval with political society. Criminal tyranny is the state which is characterized by extreme oppression."¹²⁸ The difference between a republic, principality and a tyranny pertains to "a difference of degree," not "a difference of kind," to which oppression exists and is employed by

¹²⁸ *TM*, p.278.

whoever is in power, though “oppression perhaps exists also where extreme inequality of wealth causes an extreme dependence of the poor on the rich.”¹²⁹

Human nature, the common good and the highest good

Goodness and badness in human nature: a comparison with Hobbes

It is evident that Machiavelli, in reflecting upon the bases of virtue and governance, delimits the extent of participation in civil society by the many and the great alike. That delimitation, one can argue, is closely related to his dim view of human nature. This section turns to Machiavelli’s understanding of the relations between human nature, the common good and the highest good.

To Machiavelli, as Strauss points out, “Oppression is coeval with society, or with man, because man is by nature compelled to oppress or because men are bad. It is man’s nature to be envious, ambitious, suspicious, ungrateful, discontented and predatory. . . .”¹³⁰ “[I]t is necessary to whoever disposes a republic and orders laws in it to presuppose that all men are bad,” Machiavelli states in *Discourses* I 3, “and that they always have to use the malignity of their spirit whenever they have a free opportunity for it.”¹³¹ Man is bad, though not wholly bad, for if man were, he would not be able to be made good by the compulsion of necessity and laws. In I 9 Machiavelli notes, “men are more prone to evil than to good,” while in I 29 he stresses, “men are kept better and less ambitious longer through fear of punishment.”¹³² In Chapter 17 of *The Prince* he writes that “one can say this

¹²⁹ *TM*, pp.278-79.

¹³⁰ *TM*, p.279.

¹³¹ *Discourses*, p.15.

¹³² *Discourses* I 9, p.29; I 29, p.66.

generally of men: they are ungrateful, fickle, pretenders and dissemblers, evaders of danger, eager for gain.”¹³³

Strauss summarizes: “One would have to say that man is by nature bad if, to quote Hobbes, this could be said without impiety. At any rate, men do not possess a natural inclination toward the good. They are more inclined toward evil than toward the good . . .”¹³⁴ In so encapsulating Machiavelli’s view of human nature, does Strauss mean to say that Machiavelli is being impious? Strauss does at least open the door to a less radical judgment of human nature by acknowledging Machiavelli’s position in the negative form: that man is not naturally good. But as the Book of Genesis teaches, man is made in the image of God. Therefore, is it impious and blasphemous for Machiavelli to describe man as he does? Furthermore, is Strauss claiming that Machiavelli rejects the concept *and* the existence of the highest good?

In his book on Hobbes, Strauss asked: “Why could Hobbes not make up his mind to treat the view which is in reality conclusive for him, that man’s natural appetite is vanity, unequivocally as the basis of his political philosophy? If this conception of natural appetite is right, if man by nature finds his pleasure in triumphing over all others, then man is by nature evil.” Strauss emphasized, though: “But he did not dare to uphold this consequence or assumption of his theory.”¹³⁵ Rather than admitting that “consequence,” Hobbes posited a less condemnatory view: “Because man is by nature animal, therefore he is not by nature evil, therefore he is as innocent as the animals; thus vanity cannot characterize his natural

¹³³ *The Prince*, p.66.

¹³⁴ *TM*, p.279. Cf. Robert A. Kocis, *Machiavelli Redeemed: Retrieving His Humanist Perspectives on Equality, Power, and Glory* (Bethlehem: Lehigh University Press; London: Associated University Press, 1998), pp.197-98; cf. also *ibid.*, pp.29, 62f, 98.

¹³⁵ *TPPH*, p.13.

appetite.”¹³⁶ Nevertheless, Hobbes did maintain, according to Strauss, that man is characterized precisely by the appetite for power: “The striving after power, as human striving after power, is always either good and permissible or evil and unpermissible. . . .” The appetite for power is permissible insofar as it is not destructive of “the preservation of life,” which “is the *primary* good,”¹³⁷ or destructive of “happiness,” which “is the *supreme* good.” Indeed, the appetite for power helps one to stave off “death,” which “is the *primary* as well as the *greatest* and *supreme* evil.”¹³⁸

Hobbes opened the preface of *De Cive* (*On the Citizen*) with an entreaty to “Readers” to “attentive[ly]” read his book. He asserted that it examines “an important and useful Subject . . . [namely] men’s duties, first as men, then as citizens and lastly as Christians. These duties constitute the elements of the law of nature and of nations, the origin and force of justice, and the essence of the Christian Religion.”¹³⁹ Elsewhere in the preface he explained that men are naturally disposed to “fear and distrust of each other,” but stated shortly afterwards: “Some object that if we admit this principle, it follows directly not only that all Men are evil (which perhaps, though harsh, should be conceded, since it is clearly said in holy Scripture), but also (*and this cannot be conceded without impiety*) that they are evil by nature.” Hobbes claimed: “However, it does not follow from this Principle that men are evil by nature. . . . Still less does it follow that those who are evil were made so by nature. . . .” The propensity of men to carry out evil actions is due to the absence of

¹³⁶ *TPPH*, p.14.

¹³⁷ *TPPH*, p.15 (original emphasis).

¹³⁸ *TPPH*, p.16 (original emphases).

¹³⁹ Thomas Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, ed. and trans. Richard Tuck and Michael Silverthorne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p.7.

society and their failure to exercise the power of reason: “Unless then we say that men were made evil by nature simply because they do not have discipline and the use of reason from nature, it must be admitted that they can have greed, fear, anger and all the other animal passions from nature, but still not be made evil by nature.”¹⁴⁰ Only when living under the strictures of “civil society”—to which men submit so as to escape the uncertainty of life in “the state of nature,” an uncertainty that is grounded in every man asserting a “right to all things”—do men act in accordance with “natural laws,”¹⁴¹ namely, with “the Dictate of right reason . . . about what should be done or not done for the longest possible preservation of life and limb.”¹⁴²

Human nature and the common good

According to Strauss, “Machiavelli takes issue with those who explain the bad conduct of men by their bad nature: men are by nature malleable rather than either bad or good; goodness and badness are not natural qualities but the outcome of habituation.”¹⁴³ Habituation originated when people gathered together to form society for mutual protection, Machiavelli says in *Discourses* I 2. Yet over time people stray from the “civil way of life,” he explains in I 3, and hence must be rehabilitated “by hunger and poverty . . . and the laws . . .”¹⁴⁴ In I 26 Machiavelli explains that “a new prince” who desires to make his power absolute must completely reorder his “city or state.” In accordance with that task or end, the

¹⁴⁰ *On the Citizen*, p.11.

¹⁴¹ *On the Citizen*, pp.11-12 (emphases mine).

¹⁴² *On the Citizen*, p.33. Cf. *TPPH*, p.19.

¹⁴³ *TM*, p.279 (lines 26-30). Here Strauss gives an accompanying endnote; see p.344n200, where he refers to *The Prince*, chs.15, 17, 18; *Discourses* I pr., 3, 9, 26-27, 29, 35, 37, 40, 42, 47-48, 57, 58, II pr., III 12, 29; and then instructs “Cf. Hobbes, *De Cive*, praef. See page 275 above.”

¹⁴⁴ *Discourses*, p.15.

prince should “make the rich poor, the poor rich, as did David when he became king—“who filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty” These modes are very cruel, and enemies to every way of life, not only Christian but human . . .” The modes are indispensable, though. Yet they are also difficult to achieve and to follow, for men “do not know how to be either altogether wicked or altogether good.”¹⁴⁵ Similarly, Machiavelli claims in I 27 that the failure of men to commit wicked deeds when necessary or advantageous arises “from men’s not knowing how to be honorably wicked or perfectly good . . .”¹⁴⁶

That people can through habituation be made to act in accordance with the common good does not, however, entirely obviate their propensity to act with a view to self-advantage. Strauss notes that in Machiavelli’s estimation, “Even those who appear to be wholly dedicated to the common good or to forget themselves completely in the service of others are driven to such conduct by their peculiar natures and their natural desire to see themselves obeyed or to acquire reputation or to be pleased by pleasing. . . .” At the root of one’s being in society is the selfish perception, but of a certain kind, of one’s needs and wants: “selfishness is badness as long as it is not molded with a view to the needs of living together; it becomes goodness through such molding; but it always remains selfishness. . . .”¹⁴⁷ Here Machiavelli draws upon the account in Polybius’ *Histories* about the beginnings of “sociability”¹⁴⁸ and “political society.” But, Strauss notes, he “omits even Polybius’ extremely brief references to the union of men and women and the

¹⁴⁵ *Discourses*, pp.61, 62. A footnote in the Mansfield/Tarcov translation, p.61n1, refers to Luke 1:53, and points out: “Said of God, not of David.”

¹⁴⁶ *Discourses*, pp.62-63.

¹⁴⁷ *TM*, p.280.

¹⁴⁸ *Histories*, Vol.3, VI 5.10, p.279.

generation of children as well as to man's natural rationality, to say nothing of the fact that whereas Polybius speaks in this context of "nature," Machiavelli speaks of "chance."¹⁴⁹ Polybius speaks of "[m]en being all naturally inclined to sexual intercourse, and the consequence of this being the birth of children . . ." (*Histories* VI.6.2), but emphasizes, "men are distinguished from the other animals by possessing the faculty of reason . . ." (VI.6.4).¹⁵⁰ Yet as Machiavelli says in *Discourses* I 2, "variations of governments arise by chance among men. For since the inhabitants were sparse in the beginning of the world, they live dispersed for a time like beasts . . ."¹⁵¹

To Machiavelli, as Strauss goes on to explain, man is naturally concerned with his own interests, though he cannot ignore "the well-being of his society on which his own well-being appears to depend. . ."¹⁵² The "good republic" is "good" precisely because it provides the laws and orders that persuade people not to act in a manner contrary to the common good. Yet selfishness, Machiavelli insists, need not be wholly eliminated. He explains that insofar as the pursuit of self-interest can be harnessed for the good of society, people need not be compelled to abandon self-interest; people can be motivated by the expectation of personal benefit to work for the common good. The failure by rulers to vent the agitations of the malignant humors of men causes ruin to society. That is, the passions, humors and selfishness

¹⁴⁹ *TM*, p.280. See also *TM*, p.344n201, and cf. MCL, pp.18-19. With regard to Machiavelli's Polybian omission, see Mansfield, *Modes and Orders*, pp.36-40. See also Coby, *Machiavelli's Romans*, p.23; Fischer, *Well-Ordered License*, pp.111-12; Mansfield, *Modes and Orders*, pp.49, 79-80n2, 206-7; *Machiavelli's Virtue*, pp.274f; Sullivan, *Machiavelli's Three Romes*, pp.90-95, 210n18; Vatter, *Between Form and Event*, pp.47-50, 54-57, 202; Voegelin, *Collected Works*, Vol.22, pp.62-64.

¹⁵⁰ *Histories*, Vol.3, p.279. See also *Histories* VI 5.1, 5.8.

¹⁵¹ *Discourses*, p.11.

¹⁵² *TM*, pp.280-81. On p.282 (line 23) Strauss gives an accompanying endnote; see p.344n202, where he refers to *The Prince*, ch.17; *Discourses* I 7, 9, 20, 29, 30, 35-36, 40, 43, 48, 60, II 2, 24, 33, III 10, 15, 21, 28.

are not directly to blame, even the selfishness on the part of the individual and the two groups in society, the many and the great. Rulers instill within the citizenry a fear of punishment. To avoid being hated, rulers temper that fear with acts of liberality and by holding out the hope of benefits.¹⁵³

Nevertheless, "It is impossible to preserve the perfect combination of being loved and being feared," Strauss notes on Machiavelli's behalf, "but deviations from that "middle-course" are unimportant if the governors are men of great virtue . . ." ¹⁵⁴

The well-ordered republic is one that allows excellent rather than weak or humble men to rise to high positions of governance; excellent men of action, of ferocious strength of spirit, will and body, can govern more effectively than men interested only in contemplation. An excellent man is motivated by a love for personal glory and wealth, though he acquires his reputation for greatness by appearing to the citizenry as working tirelessly for the common good only. The well-ordered republic will permit the excellent man to acquire public office only by votes and the authority of the citizenry, not by deception and violence and other such means inimical to the stability of the republic. To ensure its leaders would not foment discord because of resentment over not receiving their due rewards, the Roman republic allowed them to acquire glory for themselves from their public actions; for instance, allowing a commander to decide matters of tactics and permitting him to keep the glory gained from his successful conduct of a military campaign.¹⁵⁵

The common good vs. the highest good

¹⁵³ See *TM*, p.281. With regard to the humors within the republic, see *Discourses* I 7, 45.

¹⁵⁴ *TM*, p.281. Cf. *Discourses* I 7, II 2; *The Prince*, ch.17.

¹⁵⁵ See *TM*, pp.281-82. Cf. *Discourses* I 20, 29, 35-36, 43, II 33.

It thus seems clear that Machiavelli jettisons the classical teaching that the common good ought to be determined and directed by the highest good and its attendant moral norms. Believing that people are not good and that they cannot be made virtuous by acting in accordance with the highest good, Machiavelli favors a temporal, this-worldly conception of the methods and ends of human action. Strauss goes on to explain that, in Machiavelli's judgment, "The desire for glory as the desire for eternal glory liberates man from the concern with life and property, with goods which may have to be sacrificed for the common good; and yet glory is a man's own good. . . ." ¹⁵⁶ Insofar as *The Prince* and the *Discourses* "are meant for immediate prudent use rather than for rendering secure the basis of prudence, their broad purpose is to show the need for reckoning with the selfish desires of the rulers and the ruled as the only natural basis of politics . . ." Machiavelli's purpose in his two books is to show rulers that they must place their trust in their own virtue, "not in men's good will, nor in mercenaries, fortresses, money, or chance . . ." But whereas rulers (the great) are made good by the expectation of eternal glory, a glory that will forever remain in the minds of all people, the many who are ruled are made good by the inculcation in them by the great of belief in rewards in the hereafter. ¹⁵⁷

Machiavelli's reflections on virtue and governance are marked by his equivocal support of republican rule. He espouses a republican creed that power and goodness reside in the people, but he also advises those people—namely, tyrants—opposed to the republican form of government. Strauss asks, "How can we respect someone who remains undecided between good and evil or who, while benefiting us, benefits at the same time and by the same action our worst

¹⁵⁶ *TM*, p.282. Cf. *Discourses* I 20.

¹⁵⁷ *TM*, p.282. Cf. *Discourses* II 24.

enemies?”¹⁵⁸ Strauss’s answer can be thus summarized: Machiavelli directs his particular advice to tyrants because he believes that being a teacher of new modes and orders entails defending views that benefit both republicans and tyrants.¹⁵⁹

But having explained how Machiavelli can be both a republican and an adviser to tyrants, Strauss reveals what appears in his view to be a fundamental dilemma which renders Machiavelli’s thought both paradoxical and fraught with danger:

This difficulty, however, remains. Machiavelli claims to serve the common benefit of everyone by communicating to all the new modes and orders which he has discovered. Yet, as he points out, the new modes and orders cannot benefit those who benefit from the old modes and orders. There are two ways of solving this difficulty.¹⁶⁰

Machiavelli directs his advice to the great because it is not so much the “defenders” of the old ways as it was the many who believed the “untruth,” of the old ways, that there exists a highest good, namely, a good superior to the common good. Machiavelli intends that his advice be kept from the attention of the many, as it would be too shocking to their sensibilities. According to Strauss, his advice gives the great “a good conscience in doing what they hitherto did with a more or less uneasy conscience . . .”¹⁶¹

With regard to the second way of solving the difficulty in identifying whom Machiavelli claims to be benefiting, Strauss finally offers his solution to the enigma of Machiavelli’s thought: “Or else one must say—and this is what Machiavelli in fact says—that there is no good however great which is unqualifiedly good.”¹⁶²

¹⁵⁸ *TM*, p.282.

¹⁵⁹ See *TM*, p.282.

¹⁶⁰ *TM*, p.283.

¹⁶¹ *TM*, p.283 (cf. p.28).

¹⁶² *TM*, pp.283, 284. In an endnote Strauss refers to his previous observations on Machiavelli’s “emphatic references” to the classical mean; Strauss’s endnote, *TM*, p.344n203, refers to *The Prince*, chs.6, 7, 15; *Discourses* 1 pr., 58, III 2, 27; and instructs, “Cf. pages 242-244 as well as notes 152 and 159 above.” See my discussion in ch.5 of those pages and notes.

Strauss's statement brings to mind, I would suggest, his introductory affirmation that "old-fashioned" view that Machiavelli's teaching is "evil," "immoral" and "irreligious."¹⁶³ That Machiavelli regards the highest good as an impossible standard for virtuous human action implies that he has no compunction in advising tyrants to act against morality, religion and the common good.

Expanding on Machiavelli's disavowal of the highest good, Strauss explains that in Machiavelli's judgment, "The common good in the political sense is defective not only because it is inferior *qua* common good to the common good simply, which is the truth. . . ." For Machiavelli to claim that there is no good which is absolutely good indicates that he means by the "political common good" something other than "the truth." Strauss observes that in *La Mandragola* Machiavelli speaks of a "supplement to the common good which exists on the same level as the common good, i.e., on a level lower than the truth. . . ."¹⁶⁴ By speaking in his play about such themes as conspiracy and "[t]he triumph of forbidden love," Machiavelli conveys the appearance that he is speaking about the difficulties leaders have in following traditional morality whilst defending the fatherland. He conveys this appearance, according to Strauss, in order to furnish a publicly defensible basis for questioning morality.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶³ *TM*, p.10.

¹⁶⁴ *TM*, p.284. Strauss gives a synopsis of the play, describes the main characters, and provides critical commentary. With regard to Strauss's very mention of the play, cf. my comments in ch.4 about digressions.

¹⁶⁵ *TM*, pp.284-85. Cf. Faulkner, "*Clizia*," pp.30ff, 35-37, 40, 49ff; Carnes Lord, "Allegory in Machiavelli's *Mandragola*," in Palmer and Pangle, eds., pp.153-54, 165-67; Harvey C. Mansfield, "The Cuckold in Machiavelli's *Mandragola*," in Sullivan, ed., esp. pp.1ff, 5, 8, 28-29; Masters, *Machiavelli, Leonardo*, pp.82-83, 290n4; Vickie B. Sullivan, "Introduction," in Sullivan, ed., pp.xi-xii. Cf. also de Grazia, *Machiavelli in Hell*, pp.27, 61f, 140-41; Wayne A. Rebhorn, *Foxes and Lions: Machiavelli's Confidence Men* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), pp.45-85, passim.

Like both *The Prince* and *Discourses*, *La Mandragola* evinces Machiavelli's desire to say something both for the good of all and his own good—he hopes to gain a measure of personal “benefit” and “reward” for his labors. However, as Strauss then states, “The reward would consist in nothing but praise. The praise for which he could hope is necessarily much smaller than the praise which men bestow on the founders of religions and the founders of kingdoms or republics.”¹⁶⁶ Though Strauss quite likely has in mind here *Discourses* I 10, it is worth noting that in the prologue of *La Mandragola*, Machiavelli indicates a doubt that he would earn even praise for his endeavors. He explains that the play's author “is striving with these trifling thoughts to make his wretched life more pleasant . . .”, and he laments: “The pay he expects is that every man will stand aside and sneer, speaking ill of whatever he sees or hears.”¹⁶⁷ In *Discourses* I 10 Machiavelli explains that first among men worthy of praise are leaders and reformers of religions; second, the founders of states; third, military leaders who have “expanded” the state; and fourth, “literary men . . . and because these [literary men] are of many types, they are each celebrated according to his rank. To any other man . . . some share of praise is attributed that his art or occupation brings him.”¹⁶⁸ Machiavelli's argument here is that it is in the nature of all men to desire glory but that most men are deceived by the seeming appearance of success; what they praise, in themselves and in others, especially in princes, is the capacity and will for acquisition. Supreme glory should be ascribed not to the founder but to the teacher of the founder. After all, the teacher imparts his

¹⁶⁶ *TM*, p.286. Cf. Lord, “Allegory in Machiavelli's *Mandragola*,” pp.153-54

¹⁶⁷ *Chief Works*, Vol.2., p.778.

¹⁶⁸ *Discourses*, p.31.

discovery of the truths of the world to the founder and to future generations.¹⁶⁹ The teacher—"the discoverer"—is not a theoretician, though. Strauss explains that, for Machiavelli, the teacher "looks at society not theoretically but, being the teacher of founders, in the perspective of founders. . . . The perspective of the teacher of founders comprises the perspectives of both the tyrant and the republic. . . ." The teacher is interested in knowledge about "the most stable, the most happy and the most glorious society . . ." Therefore, the teacher "necessarily has a bias in favor of republics."¹⁷⁰

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that Machiavelli's comprehensive challenge to the classics was given voice through his decidedly temporal notions of human nature, governance, society, and the common good. His notion of republican virtue abandons underpinnings of moral virtue, whereas Aristotle would say that the two types of virtue are inextricably linked. One should not, however, forget the statement Strauss made near the beginning of Part Two of his critical study of Machiavelli's teaching: "In his teaching concerning morality and politics Machiavelli challenges not only the religious teaching but the whole philosophic tradition as well."¹⁷¹ In other words, Strauss regards Machiavelli's challenge to the classics as also being a challenge to Biblical religion.

¹⁶⁹ See *TM*, pp.286-88.

¹⁷⁰ *TM*, p.288.

¹⁷¹ *TM*, p.232.

Chapter Seven

The Legacy of Machiavelli's Moral-Political Teaching

Introduction

This chapter discusses and examines the closing section of Strauss's critical study of Machiavelli's moral-political teaching. That section, as Jackson notes, "provides a summary assessment of Machiavelli's place within the history of political philosophy."¹ According to Gildin, "The closing pages of his *Thoughts on Machiavelli* raise the question of the extent to which *all* modern philosophy or science found a congenial home on the new continent Machiavelli claimed to have discovered."² As Strauss, in *On Tyranny*, forcefully expressed Gildin's point: "To understand the basic premise of present-day political science [namely, that one cannot make value based assessments of social phenomena], one would have to understand the meaning of the epoch-making change effected by Machiavelli; for that change consisted in the discovery of the continent on which all specifically modern political thought, and hence especially present-day political science, is at home."³ In "What Is Political Philosophy?" Strauss observed that Machiavelli "claimed to have discovered a new moral continent. His claim is well founded; his political teaching is "wholly new." The only question is whether the new continent is fit for human habitation."⁴

¹ Jackson, "Strauss's Teaching," p.226.

² In *IPP*, p.ix (original emphasis).

³ *OT* (rev.ex.), p.24 (with regard to the above premise, see p.23).

⁴ *WIPP?*, p.40. See also *MCL*, pp.12, 13.

Before turning to Strauss's "summary assessment" of Machiavelli's legacy to the history of political philosophy, it would be instructive to briefly return to what one's introduction called the "general features" of Strauss's mapping of the terrain of modernity. Strauss's oft-mentioned thesis that modernity has its ultimate point of origin in Machiavelli can be interpreted as meaning that he regarded modernity as Machiavelli's legacy.⁵ Strauss stated in his essay, "The Three Waves of Modernity," that modernity is not simply secular, that it consists not simply of "the loss or atrophy of biblical faith." Instead, modernity is characterized by Machiavelli's depiction of "all earlier political philosophy as fundamentally insufficient . . ."⁶ His rationale for rejecting both biblical faith and classical political philosophy is described thus by Strauss: "The traditional views either lead to the consequence that the political things are not taken seriously (Epicureanism) or else that they are understood in the light of an imaginary perfection—of imagined commonwealths and principalities, the most famous of them being the kingdom [*sic*] of God. One must start from how men do live; one must lower one's sights."⁷ Shortly afterwards Strauss noted that in Machiavelli's judgment, "virtue exists exclusively for the sake of the commonwealth . . . Furthermore, the establishment of political society and even of the most desirable political society does not depend on chance, for chance can be conquered . . ."⁸

In Part II of "Progress or Return?" Strauss described modernity, though without citing Machiavelli, as being characterized by three key traits: first,

⁵ See NM, pp.297ff, et passim; *NRH*, pp.61n22, 177-80; *OT* (rev.ex.), pp.24, 192; *TPPH*, pp.xv-xvi; *TWM*, pp.83-89; *WIPP?*, pp.40-49.

⁶ *TWM*, pp.83, 83-84.

⁷ *TWM*, p.86.

⁸ *TWM*, pp.86, 87. See also *OT* (rev.ex.), pp.106n5, 183-85; *SPPP*, p.144.

anthropocentrism; second, “a radical change of moral orientation” from the (traditional) emphasis on duty to the emphasis on rights; and third, the linking of “freedom” to the horizon of “history,” not of “the whole order of nature or creation.”⁹ Echoing Strauss’s point about the third key trait of modernity, Vatter explains: “To understand freedom as the cause of history is to acknowledge the radical contingency of all order, which no longer derives its support from the necessity of foundational instances like Nature or God. . . .” According to Vatter, “In Machiavelli freedom and history, rather than Nature or God, become the terms in which the difference between necessity and contingency is framed for the first time in modernity.”¹⁰ In the words of Berns: “History . . . seems to have been conceived as the secular substitute for divine providence. One of the first signposts on the way to the idea was Machiavelli’s observation that the conflicts between nobles and plebeians in Rome . . . actually led to the greater good of Rome as a whole.”¹¹ But, says Mansfield, “when modernity is established and what is modern becomes traditional, modernity must define itself against what had once bravely claimed to be modern. Thus, modern is always in danger of being surpassed by more modern; defined as against the traditional—that is, in relation to the traditional—modern seems to have no definition. Nor does “tradition” . . .”¹² Understanding modernity and its attendant traits requires that one understand Machiavelli. Mansfield explains: “as soon as one defines the modern, it becomes the status quo and hence traditional . . . To understand modernity, therefore, one cannot look to its *end* . . .

⁹ POR?, pp.269-72. With regard to the second point, see also *CM*, pp.44-45; *CPP*, pp.97-98; *SPPP*, p.144. With regard to the third point, see also above, this chapter and ch.1.

¹⁰ *Between Form and Event*, pp.133, 193. See also Mansfield, *Machiavelli’s Virtue*, pp.37, 109, 129ff, 258-63; Sullivan, “Introduction,” pp.xv-xvi. Cf. Jacobitti, “Classical Heritage,” pp.179-80, 181ff; Parel, *Machiavellian Cosmos*, pp.4-10, 60-61, 154-58, 158f, 160; Strauss, *CM*, p.16.

¹¹ “Philosophy and Religion,” p.55.

¹² *Machiavelli’s Virtue*, p.259.

one must look to its *beginning* . . .”¹³ In short, to understand modernity, one understand Machiavelli.

In Chapter VI of *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, whilst examining the modern turn to history that began in the sixteenth century, Strauss stated: “This turning is shown by the fact that now for the first time the methodic study of history is demanded. . . .”¹⁴ Like philosophy, this “new study” of history seeks “truth,” the difference being, according to Strauss, that for Hobbes, “philosophy seeks general precepts, while the study of history seeks the application and realization of precepts . . .”¹⁵ Bacon carried further the emphasis upon acquiring purposeful precepts from the study of history: “The systematic transformation of philosophic interest, which brought about the turning to history, finds its most complete expression in Bacon’s philosophy. Bacon starts from the premiss that moral philosophy as the theory of virtue and duty has been perfectly worked out by classical philosophy. . . .” To Bacon, Strauss explained, “the fundamental shortcoming of ancient philosophy is that it limits itself to a description of ‘the nature of good’ . . .”¹⁶ Indeed, “we are much beholden to Machiavel and others, that write what men do, and not what they ought to do.” Having quoted Bacon’s praise of Machiavelli, Strauss noted: “The reference to Macchiavelli’s programme (15th chapter of *Il Principe*) shows the direction and the lines which further investigation of the origins of the modern interest in history should take place.”¹⁷

¹³ *Machiavelli’s Virtue*, p.260 (original emphases).

¹⁴ *TPPH*, p.83.

¹⁵ *TPPH*, p.85. With regard to the modern conception of history, see ch.1 of my study. With regard to the difference between philosophy and the study of history, see *CM*, pp.141-45.

¹⁶ *TPPH*, pp.86-87.

¹⁷ *TPPH*, p.88n5.

With regard to Strauss's exploration in his book on Hobbes about the modern turn to history, Kennington observes: "He does not even allude to this earlier turn in *Natural Right and History* . . . "The discovery of history" remained for Strauss an uncompleted inquiry."¹⁸ Even if Kennington is correct about the incompleteness of Strauss's inquiry into the emergence of history one can still say that Strauss's critical study of Machiavelli's teaching explicated, in the context of recovering the "permanent problems,"¹⁹ the key, founding traits of modernity, including its abandonment of nature for history.

Strauss's concluding thoughts on Machiavelli

Plato and Machiavelli on the efficacy of the best regime

As seen above, Strauss examines Machiavelli's moral-political teaching with a view to explicating how he regarded his enterprise in relation to classical precepts of moral virtue. Strauss's argument is that Machiavelli inveighs against Aristotle and Plato for their grounding of the means and ends of politics in ideals of excellence. It is curious, therefore, that Strauss opens the closing section of his critical study of Machiavelli by drawing a striking parallel between Machiavelli and Plato with regard to how they assessed the core characteristics of the best regime:

The manner in which Machiavelli achieves the transition from neutrality in the conflict between the tyranny and the republic to republicanism, from selfishness to devotion to the common good, or from badness to goodness reminds one of the action of Plato's *Republic*. In the first book of the *Republic* Thrasymachus questions justice, i.e., he raises the question as to whether justice is good.²⁰

¹⁸ "Strauss's *Natural Right and History*," p.228.

¹⁹ See *TM*, intro.

²⁰ *TM*, p.288. Cf. *CM*, pp.121-24; *OPS*, pp.158, 183. Cf. also William B. Allen, "Machiavelli and Modernity," in Codevilla, ed. and trans., pp.107-8.

Socrates does not immediately proceed to refute Thrasymachus's thesis that justice is based on the pursuit of self-interest, not the pursuit of goodness. Instead, Socrates "begins to found a city in speech . . .", Strauss notes. "Within that speech he takes for granted the goodness of justice which had become thoroughly questionable."²¹ According to Thrasymachus, the tyrant is the best man, and the highest pleasure is the pleasure the tyrant gains from power. Socrates goes on to explain that without a proper, lifelong education, man is incapable of enjoying the benefits of civilization; a purely literary education will produce a soft man, while a purely physical education will produce an ignorant philistine. To properly protect the city, the guardians must receive both intellectual and physical training.²² The "transformation" discussed in the *Republic*, Strauss points out, is about how to convert "the lover of tyranny, to say nothing of the lover of bodily pleasure, into a lover of justice. . . ." However, "this transformation proves to be only the preparation for the true conversion from badness to goodness, the true conversion being the transition to philosophy, if not philosophy itself . . ."²³

Like Plato, Machiavelli stresses the need for rulers to be properly educated. Yet in describing the education of the excellent man in politics, morality, the art of war, and the ways of the world, Machiavelli seems simply to be alluding to "the transformation of man through the desire for glory . . . the second and higher conversion seems to have been forgotten." Having drawn a parallel between Machiavelli and Plato regarding the best regime and retracted that parallel by concluding that Machiavelli forgets "the second and higher conversion," Strauss

²¹ *TM*, p.289.

²² See *TM*, p.289.

²³ *TM*, p.289.

qualifies that retraction: "This conclusion however is not compatible with Machiavelli's clear awareness of the delusions of glory and of the limitations of the political. . . ." ²⁴

If, as Strauss has indicated, Machiavelli speaks of the converting the excellent man into someone other than a lover of tyranny but neither a lover of justice nor of philosophy, then to what exactly is the excellent man converted? This much is clear: the conversion consists of a transformation from ignorance to knowledge. Machiavelli argues that to be ignorant is to be powerless in the face of *fortuna*, mundane chance and the perpetual state of flux in the world. The excellent man is one who does not allow his spirit to be overcome by those travails. With knowledge of how the world operates, the excellent man rises above and rules over chance rather than simply conquering it with might, as would a tyrant. Knowledge of the world is acquired through the intertwining of experience and the reading of histories, Machiavelli claims. He insists, though, that the man properly deserving of the reputation for greatness is neither the soldier, captain, prince, nor the tyrant, nor even the founder. To Machiavelli, the truly excellent man is the teacher who imparts to his students (soldiers, princes, tyrants, and founders) the truths of the world and of all things. ²⁵

The newness of Machiavelli's moral-political teaching and its opposition to the classics

The distinctive characteristic of modernity as it appears in Machiavelli, to the extent to which one can identify such a single characteristic, ²⁶ consists of a

²⁴ *TM*, p.289.

²⁵ See *TM*, pp.289-90, and p.345n208, where Strauss refers to *Discourses* III 31, *The Prince*, ch.8, and *Florentine Histories* V 1.

²⁶ With regard to this point, see *TWM*, pp.83-84.

thoroughly—and avowedly—temporal, political standpoint for interpreting all the things in the world. Strauss states: “Machiavelli claims to have taken a way not yet trodden by anyone and thus to have discovered new modes and orders. His discovery is implied in the principle that one must take one’s bearings by how men live as distinguished from how they ought to live”²⁷ That Machiavelli clearly is “opposed” to the classics is evidenced by his “almost complete silence about Plato, Aristotle, and the political philosopher Cicero, to say nothing of scholasticism” Machiavelli’s opposition to the classics is further evidenced by his reading of Polybius. Strauss observes that in *Discourses* I 2 Machiavelli alters “a philosophic passage” from Polybius’s *Histories*, VI 6.2-4.²⁸ Strauss does not, given his previous discussion of the matter, further explain Machiavelli’s alteration of Polybius, except to point out that the very location of that alteration in the *Discourses* is significant: “he who reserves the full power of his attack rather for the end is not likely to reveal the scope of his deviation from the most revered tradition at the beginning of a book.”²⁹

The full extent of Machiavelli’s rejection of the classics is evidenced not by his reading of Polybius but, rather, of Xenophon. Strauss notes that for Machiavelli, “the representative par excellence of classical political philosophy is Xenophon, whose writings he mentions more frequently than those of Plato, Aristotle, and

²⁷ *TM*, p.290. Cf. my above discussion, in ch.3 (intro.), of Machiavelli as a “discoverer.”

²⁸ *TM*, pp.290-91. Strauss’s accompanying endnote, p.345n209, says “Cf. pages 279-280 above.” On p.280, Strauss described Machiavelli as “adopting [but changing] Polybius’ account of the origins of political society”; in an accompanying endnote, p.344n201, Strauss referred to *The Prince*, chs.2, 9, 10, 17, 20; *Discourses* I 2, 17, 57, III 6, 12, 23, 30, 34, 43, and directed the reader to compare those references with Polybius VI 6.2-4. In other words, then, when saying on *TM*, p.290 that “[n]ear the beginning of the *Discourses* he almost copies a philosophic passage from the historian Polybius”, Strauss is most likely pointing to *Discourses* I 2 and Polybius VI 6.2-4. But cf. *TM*, p.134, where Strauss explains that Machiavelli “may well have adopted Polybius’ account of the beginnings of civil societies because that account is silent about gods and religion.”

²⁹ *TM*, p.291.

Cicero taken together or those of any other writer with the exception of Livy. . . .”³⁰

If one were to employ the logic of the argument in Strauss’s above observation about Machiavelli’s alteration of Polybius, one could say that Machiavelli’s rejection of the classics is signaled by his very mention of Xenophon’s *The Education of Cyrus* toward the end of the *Discourses*—in III 39—and in Chapter 14 of *The Prince*. In the latter Machiavelli explains: “And whoever reads the life of Cyrus written by Xenophon will then recognize in the life of Scipio how much glory that imitation [of Cyrus (559-529 BC)] brought him . . .”³¹

In reflecting upon what constitutes virtuous human action Machiavelli abandons the Socratic aspect of Xenophon’s works for the tyrannical aspect. As Strauss points out, “Machiavelli refers only to the *Hiero* and the *Education of Cyrus*, not to the *Oeconomicus* or to any other of Xenophon’s Socratic writings. Xenophon’s thought and work has two foci, Cyrus and Socrates. While Machiavelli is greatly concerned with Cyrus, he forgets Socrates.”³² It would be no overstatement to say that with regard to his delineation of the “two foci,” Strauss is both echoing his earlier work, *On Tyranny: An Interpretation of Xenophon’s Hiero* (1948), and foreshadowing his later works, *Xenophon’s Socratic Discourse: An Interpretation of the Oeconomicus* (1970) and *Xenophon’s Socrates* (1972).

Strauss goes on to explain that Machiavelli is not entirely at odds with the classics. For instance, “he agrees with classical political philosophy against classical hedonism in admitting the high dignity of political life.”³³ Against the classical hedonists, Aristippus (founder of the Cyrenaics) and Epicurus (founder of

³⁰ *TM*, p.291.

³¹ *The Prince*, p.60.

³² *TM*, p.291. See also MCL, p.13, and cf. OPS, pp.161-63, 165ff; *OT* (rev.ex.), p.56.

³³ *TM*, p.291.

Epicureanism), Machiavelli maintained that the highest pleasure is precisely that pleasure acquired through the praise, honor and glory that are derived from participating in the political life of the city. Machiavelli agrees with the sophists, Gorgias, Hippias, Prodicus, Protagoras, and Thrasymachus, against the classics, for he stresses that “political science” is “the art of legislation.” Interestingly, Machiavelli disagrees with the sophists and agrees with Aristotle, for Machiavelli focuses that “art” not on “collecting renowned laws” but on (the end of) the well-being of the city.³⁴ In the words of Aristotle:

But those of the sophists who profess the art [of legislation] seem to be very far from teaching it. For, to put the matter generally, they do not even know what kind of thing it is nor what kinds of things it is about; otherwise they would not have classed it as identical with rhetoric or even inferior to it, nor have thought it easy to legislate by collecting the laws that are well thought of . . .³⁵

Machiavelli’s agreement with Aristotle does not, however, extend to the scope of law. Whereas Aristotle maintains that legislators must be guided by considerations of excellence, goodness and virtue,³⁶ Machiavelli maintains that legislators (namely, rulers) must be guided only by concern for the protection of the “fatherland.” In *Discourses* III 41 he states:

where one deliberates entirely on the safety of his fatherland, there ought not to enter any consideration of either just or unjust, merciful or cruel, praiseworthy or ignominious; indeed every other concern put aside, one ought to follow entirely the policy that saves its life and maintains its liberty.³⁷

³⁴ *TM*, p.292. Strauss’s accompanying endnote, p.345n212, refers to the *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1181a12-17. With regard to hedonism, see *TM*, pp.291-92; with regard to Machiavelli and the sophists, see also MCL, p.13.

³⁵ *Nicomachean Ethics* 1181a12-17, *Complete Works*, Vol.2, p.1866.

³⁶ See *Nicomachean Ethics* 1102a5-25, 1103a14-b6, 1160a9-17; *Politics* 1273a32-b24, 1283a27-42, 1331b24-1332a35, 1337a10-21. Cf. *Politics* 1265a19-24, 1267a18-31.

³⁷ *Discourses*, p.301.

Against “contemporary readers” who see in Machiavelli Thucydides’ “denial of the power of the gods or of justice,” Strauss observes that “Thucydides never calls in question the intrinsic superiority of nobility to baseness . . .”³⁸ Curiously, in an endnote Strauss simply says, “Cf. *Discourses* III 41,”³⁹ and does not indicate the passages he has in mind with regard to Thucydides’ *History of the Peloponnesian War*. It would be instructive, then, to briefly turn to Strauss’s chapter on Thucydides in *The City and Man*. Here Strauss wrote: “Thucydides’ horizon is the horizon of the city. . . . The city, if it is healthy, looks up, not to the laws which it can unmake as it made them, but to the unwritten laws, the divine law, the gods of the city. The city must transcend itself.”⁴⁰ The extent to which Thucydides’ horizon looks up to the gods can be questioned, though. Strauss states: “The Funeral speech in which his Pericles sets forth what his Athens stands for is silent about the divine law. . . . He is silent about the gods or the strictly superhuman.”⁴¹ For instance, in his speech commemorating the Athenian dead, Pericles simply spoke of “Hope, the uncertain goddess . . .”⁴²; he did not mention in that speech, nor in the Melian dialogue, the traditional Greek gods. Strauss noted of the dialogue: “the fact that the gods’ existence is not explicitly discussed between the Athenians and the Melians does not prove that it was of no concern to Thucydides.”⁴³ Rather, it proves Thucydides’ piety, Strauss emphasizes, “the silent character of the

³⁸ *TM*, p.292.

³⁹ *TM*, p.345n213.

⁴⁰ *CM*, p.153.

⁴¹ *CM*, p.161. See also POG, p.2.

⁴² Thucydides, *The History of the Peloponnesian War*, ed. R.W. Livingstone, trans. Richard Crawley, rev. Richard Feetham, (London: Oxford University Press, 1943), II.42, p.115.

⁴³ *CM*, p.190. See also POG, p.8.

conveyance [of belief in the gods] being required by the chaste character of his piety.”⁴⁴

Having spoken in his critical study of the ancient Greek historian, Thucydides, Strauss advances a further criticism of contemporary readers:

The modern historian disposes of an immense apparatus supplying him with information which can be easily appropriated because it is superficial; he is therefore tempted to try to be wiser than the great men of the past whose work he studies. This is true particularly of his efforts to judge of their positions with respect to their predecessors. We repeat therefore that Machiavelli points to Xenophon more strongly than to any other thinker.⁴⁵

Foreshadowing Strauss’s censure of “[t]he modern historian,” Shotwell wrote in 1922: “To see in the author of the *Peloponnesian War* a “modern of modern,” facing history as we do, equipped with the understanding of the forces of history such as the historian of today possesses, is to indulge in an anachronism almost as naïve as the failure to appreciate Thucydides because he lacks it!”⁴⁶ But is the “modern historian” of whom Strauss speaks ultimately Machiavelli? After all, Strauss then emphasizes (as will be seen below) that Machiavelli desired to be wiser than the classics.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, even if he fails to name names, Strauss clearly does have in mind the scholarship on Machiavelli. As Mansfield notes, “it may well appear that Strauss’s only fault in scholarly courtesy was an inability to remember names.”

According to Jackson, “Since Strauss intended above all to author a critique of

⁴⁴ *CM*, p.153. Cf. *TPPH*, pp.74-75. With regard to Thucydides’ emphasis of “nobility” over “baseness” (to echo *TM*, p.292), see *CM*, pp.210-19; cf. *ibid.*, pp.186-87, 192ff.

⁴⁵ *TM*, pp.292-93. Cf. *CM*, pp.141f, 145; *GH*, pp.657, 662-64; *OCPH*, pp.559-64, 566ff; *ONI*, pp.328-32; *OT* (rev.ex.), pp.22-28.

⁴⁶ James T. Shotwell, *An Introduction to the History of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1922), pp.166-67. In his review of the 1939 revised edition of Shotwell’s book, Strauss wrote: “Only one question must be raised. He judges the classical historians with reference to the demand of the modern scientific spirit “to find the truth and set it forth.” There can be no doubt that the writers concerned [e.g., Herodotus and Thucydides] were interested in finding the truth. But to what extent were they interested in telling it, or able to tell it, without reserve?” *RHH*, pp.126-27.

⁴⁷ See *TM*, p.293.

Machiavelli, his brief treatment of the secondary literature does not perplex.”⁴⁸ In *On Tyranny*, also without naming names, Strauss censures as erroneous the approach taken by scholars to understanding the past: “Many present-day scholars start from the historicist assumption, namely, that all thought is “historical” But the historicist approaches the thought of the past on the basis of the historicist assumption which was wholly alien to the thought of the past.”⁴⁹

Strauss continues in his critical study with this further comparison between Machiavelli and his predecessors regarding virtue, governance and the nature of the state: “He may be said to start from certain observations or suggestions made by Xenophon and to think them through while abandoning the whole of which they form a part. . . .”⁵⁰ Machiavelli speaks in a matter-of-fact fashion about principles that underlie relations between states, particularly the struggle for supremacy. He does not also speak of broader considerations, or ideals, of what the state itself ought to be. Indeed, according to Meinecke, Machiavelli gave the first formulation of the modern doctrine of *raison d'état*.⁵¹ It would be a mistake, Strauss argues, to see in Machiavelli the origin of the theory of “the primacy [over domestic politics] of foreign policy.” Machiavelli did articulate a “case for imperialism” but, Strauss explains, the principle which underpins his advice to both princes and the leaders of republics about the acquisition of territory “applies equally to domestic policy; according to him the fundamental human fact is acquisitiveness or competition.”⁵² In

⁴⁸ Mansfield, *Machiavelli's Virtue*, p.225; Jackson, “Strauss's Teaching,” p.54 (see also pp.47f, 53-55). With regard to Strauss's brief treatment of the secondary literature, see also the reviews of *TM* by Felix Gilbert, John H. Hallowell and George L. Mosse.

⁴⁹ *OT* (rev.ex.), p.25. See also, e.g., PPH, pp.57ff.

⁵⁰ *TM*, p.293.

⁵¹ Meinecke, *Machiavellism*, esp. pp.1-22, 25-48, 409-33.

⁵² *TM*, p.293. Strauss's accompanying endnote, p.345n214, refers to *The Prince*, ch.3; *Discourses* II 2, III 11, 30.

Chapter 3 of *The Prince* Machiavelli describes as “natural and ordinary” the tendency of princes to acquire territory, and he says in *Discourses* II2 that “the end of the republic is to enervate and to weaken all other bodies so as to increase its own body.”⁵³ R.B.J. Walker observes that “while Machiavelli may be invoked too frequently in a crude and scholarly way, it does make some sense to identify him as someone who managed to articulate the most pressing problems of international relations theory in a forceful and provocative manner. After all, whatever else he may have written, he did write specifically about the prince (read statesman) in a situation of extreme danger (read international relations).”⁵⁴ Yet as Walker admits, Machiavelli’s “primary concern was not international relations at all.” Rather, his concern was to formulate a theory of *virtù* that would enable the prince to respond in a timely manner to the perpetual flux of the world.⁵⁵

Strauss goes on to explain: “We also cannot accept the assertion that he was the first to realize what some people call the narrowness of the traditional condemnation of tyranny. . . .” Aristotle and Machiavelli both wrote about how tyrants preserve their power, though “Aristotle treats tyranny as a monstrosity whereas Machiavelli rather deals with tyranny as essential to the foundation of society itself. In this point, as well as in others of the same character, Machiavelli is closer to Plato than to Aristotle. . . .”⁵⁶ Through the Athenian Stranger, Plato explains that it is just that parents rule over their children, the old over the young,

⁵³ *The Prince*, p.14; *Discourses*, p.133.

⁵⁴ R.B.J. Walker, *Inside/Outside: International Relations as Political Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p.36.

⁵⁵ Walker, *Inside/Outside*, pp.36, 37-49, 62, 108-9. Cf. Michael W. Doyle, “Fundamentalism: Machiavelli,” in *Ways of War and Peace: Realism, Liberalism, and Socialism* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997): 93-110.

⁵⁶ *TM*, p.293. Strauss does not here or further on refer to the passages he has in mind with regard to Aristotle’s condemnation of tyranny, probably because he had previously discussed the matter; see *TM*, pp.270f.

masters over their slaves, the stronger over the weak, and the wise over the unwise (*Laws* 690a-c). In a like manner the tyrant rules over his subjects, the Athenian Stranger seems to say; he explains that it is advantageous that legislators be given a state in which a tyrant had instilled within citizens the practice of moral virtue. Tyrants can in a short period of time alter the habits of the people away from vice and towards virtue; however, the role of the tyrant is simply to assist and help the legislators organize the city (*Laws* 709d-710b, 711a and 735d-e). Machiavelli explains in *Discourses* I 18, 55 and III 26 that tyranny often is essential to the foundation of the republic.⁵⁷ For instance, in I 55, equating tyrannical power with the justness of “kingly” rule, Machiavelli remarks: “where there is so much corrupt matter that the laws are not enough to check it, together with them greater force is needed to give order there—a kingly hand that with absolute and excessive power puts a check on the excessive ambition and corruption of the powerful.”⁵⁸ But, Strauss notes, Machiavelli abandons the strict limits Plato places on the extent of tyrannical rule, and “even argues for tyranny pure and simple. Yet what enables him to do so is not a more thoroughgoing or comprehensive analysis of political phenomena as such than that given by the classics but his destructive analysis of moral virtue or what one may call his emancipation of acquisitiveness.”⁵⁹

However, having discussed Machiavelli’s affirmation of the justness and efficacy of tyrannical rule, Strauss states: “Machiavelli’s most emphatic attack on “all writers” is directed, not against the traditional condemnation of tyranny but against the traditional contempt for the multitude.”⁶⁰ In an endnote Strauss refers to

⁵⁷ For the above references themselves, see *TM*, p.345n215.

⁵⁸ *Discourses*, pp.111-12. Cf. *OT* (rev.ex.), pp.68f.

⁵⁹ *TM*, p.293. Cf. Boesche, *Theories of Tyranny*, pp.25-48, 115-19, 131-32, 161-65.

⁶⁰ *TM*, p.294.

Discourses I 58, and instructs: “Cf. also the defense of the people against Livy in *Discourses* III 13 and the corresponding change of a Livian story (IV 31.3-4) in III 15 beginning.”⁶¹ Machiavelli opens I 58 with the observation: “That nothing is more vain and inconstant than the multitude so our Titus Livy, like all other historians, affirms.” Shortly afterwards, Machiavelli explains, against Livy’s criticism of the peoples’ propensity for being vainglorious and fickle, “that all men particularly, and especially princes, can be accused of that defect of which the writers accuse the multitude; for everyone who is not regulated by laws would make the same errors as the unshackled multitude.”⁶² Elsewhere in I 58 Machiavelli insists: “a prince unshackled from the laws will be more ungrateful, varying, and imprudent than a people.”⁶³ In *Discourses* III 13 Machiavelli claims that “the virtue of soldiers,” that is to say, the virtue of the people, proves decisive in winning battles—Livy, though, stresses the importance of a capable captain.⁶⁴ At the beginning of III 15 Machiavelli notes: “When the Fidenates had rebelled and had killed the colony that the Romans had sent to Fidenae, to remedy this insult the Romans created four tribunes with consular power. They left one of them for the guarding of Rome and sent three against the Fidenates and the Veientes.” Machiavelli then explains, partly echoing the Livian story (IV.31.3-4), that because the three tribunes quarreled with

⁶¹ *TM*, p.345n216; also, Strauss gives a cross-reference to his own work: “Cf. pages 127-132 above.” Here Strauss speaks of Machiavelli’s censure of the widely-held “prejudice” against “the multitude.”

⁶² *Discourses*, pp.115, 116.

⁶³ *Discourses*, p.117. According to Strauss,

What is particularly striking in the 58th chapter is that Machiavelli compares therein the wisdom of the multitude or of the people with the wisdom of princes, i.e., of kings, emperors and tyrants, without saying a word about the wisdom of “the princes,” i.e., the ruling class, in a republic. Instead, he tacitly substitutes in a considerable part of the argument of that chapter “republics” for “multitude,” and thus tacitly contrasts the wisdom of princes, not with the wisdom of the multitude, the common people or the plebs, but with the wisdom of the Roman senate . . . [*TM*, p.129.]

⁶⁴ *Discourses*, p.249. See also Mansfield, *Modes and Orders*, pp.358-59.

each other as to who would make the decisions in battle, the Roman forces were unable to respond in a timely fashion to an attack by the Veientes. The Livian story describes the Roman people, having been defeated in battle because of discord among the consuls, as demanding that a dictator be elected to rule Rome. Machiavelli omits the part of the Livian story which explains that the Roman people feared the tribunate would choose a consul as dictator; to the Livian story Machiavelli adds the statement that the reason why Rome did not come to “harm” arose from “the virtue of the soldiers . . .”⁶⁵ In sum, although he agrees with Livy that tyrannical princely power be used to reorder republics, in accounting for the justness of such power, Machiavelli explains against Livy that the common people are the “repository” of “authority” and “morality.”⁶⁶

The soullessness of Machiavelli's moral-political teaching

According to Strauss, Machiavelli's democratically-minded remarks should not be interpreted as meaning that he was the originator of “democratic theory” as enunciated by “Spinoza and Rousseau” and passed on by them to following generations. One must not emphasize Machiavelli's seemingly democratic inclination to the extent of failing to consider the nature of that inclination: his support of the multitude, like his support of tyranny, advances “a comprehensive argument” about the proper basis of virtue.⁶⁷ “Moral virtue, wished for by society and required by it,” Strauss explains on Machiavelli's behalf, “is dependent on society and therefore subject to the primary needs of society. It does not consist in

⁶⁵ *Discourses*, p.253.

⁶⁶ *TM*, p.130.

⁶⁷ *TM*, p.294. With regard to Strauss's comment about Machiavelli, democratic theory and Rousseau, cf. Rousseau, *Social Contract* III.6, esp. at p.118 (Cranston, trans., Penguin, 1968).

the proper order of the soul. It has no other source than the needs of society; it has no second and higher source in the needs of the mind. . . .”⁶⁸ Thus for Strauss, Machiavelli’s notion of virtue is “soulless”: “his silence about the soul is a perfect expression of the soulless character of his teaching: he is silent about the soul because he has forgotten about the soul . . .”⁶⁹

Though not referring to Aristotle, Strauss’s mention of “the soul” and its “order” bring to mind Aristotle’s writings on the matter. In the properly ordered soul, movement⁷⁰ is in accordance with thinking about excellence. In his *Magna Moralia* Aristotle explains:

the soul is, as we say, divided into two parts, the rational and the irrational. In the rational part, then, there resides wisdom, readiness of wit, philosophy, aptitude to learn, memory, and so on; but in the irrational those which are called the excellences—temperance, justice, courage, and such other states of character as are held to be praiseworthy. For it is in respect of these that we are called praiseworthy; but no one is praised for the excellences of the rational part. For no one is praised for being philosophical or for being wise, or generally on the ground of anything of that sort. Nor indeed is the irrational part praised, except in so far as it is capable of subserving or actually subserves the rational part.⁷¹

In Book I of his *On the Soul*, Aristotle states: “Two characteristic marks have above all others been recognized as distinguishing that which has soul in it from that which has not—movement and sensation.” (403b24-26)⁷² In Book III he writes: “There

⁶⁸ *TM*, p.294. Cf. *CM*, p.134; *LSPS*, pp.7-8, 57, 242-43.

⁶⁹ *TM*, p.294.

⁷⁰ *On the Soul* 433b13: “All movement involves three factors, (1) that which originates the movement, (2) that by means of which it originates it, and (3) that which is moved.” *Complete Works*, Vol.1, p.689.

⁷¹ *Magna Moralia* 1185b4-13, *Complete Works*, Vol.2, p.1874. Although the authenticity of *Magna Moralia* as Aristotle’s work is disputed, one could argue that the division of the soul into the rational and irrational parts is representative of Greek thought of the time; see, e.g., Plato, *Republic* bk.IV—but see also passim, where Plato turns from speaking about that dualistic division to a tripartite division of the soul, namely, into the rational, spirited and appetitive parts. Aristotle also speaks of a tripartite division; see *Nicomachean Ethics* 1139a17-18.

⁷² *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, revised Oxford translation, Vol.1, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984), p.643.

are two distinctive peculiarities by reference to which we characterize the soul—(1) local movement and (2) thinking, understanding, and perceiving.” (427a18-20) Also in Book III Aristotle notes: “thought is never found producing movement without appetite (for wish is a form of appetite . . .), but appetite can originate movement contrary to *calculation*, for desire is a form of appetite. Now thought is always right, but appetite and imagination may be either right or wrong.” (433a23-27) “Those who distinguish parts in the soul, if they distinguish and divide in accordance with differences of power, find themselves with a very large number of parts, a nutritive, a sensitive, an intellective, a deliberative, and now an appetitive part . . . appetites run counter to one another, which happens when a principle of reason and a desire are contrary . . .” (433b1-6).⁷³ It seems fair to say, then, that by describing Machiavelli’s moral-political teaching as “soulless” Strauss is illustrating the scope of his rejection of the classics. Machiavelli believes that the excellent man must be moved not by reasoned thoughts or thinking about eternity and transcendent moral norms but only by a spiritedness in his thinking about the here-and-now present.⁷⁴

Though Machiavelli is silent about “the soul,” it would be a mistake to thus claim that he completely rejects the philosophic quest for knowledge of excellence. Strauss states: “To avoid the error of denying the presence of philosophy in Machiavelli’s thought, it suffices to remember what he indicates regarding the relation between the superiority of “the most excellent man” to fate and that man’s knowledge of “the world.””⁷⁵ Illustrating that observation, Strauss instructs in an

⁷³ *On the Soul* 427a18-20, *Complete Works*, Vol.1, p.679; 433a23-27, pp.688-89 (original emphasis); 433b1-6, p.689.

⁷⁴ Cf. *On the Soul* 433b7-10; *Nicomachean Ethics* 1139a17-b35. Cf. also Markus Fischer, “Machiavelli’s Political Psychology,” *Review of Politics* 59, no.4 (Fall 1997): 789-839, esp. pp.799-801; Strauss, *LSPS*, pp.57-58; *OPS*, pp.190-93.

⁷⁵ *TM*, p.294. Cf. Gilbert, *Machiavelli and Guicciardini*, p.193: “Machiavelli was not a philosopher. He intended neither to outline a philosophical system nor to introduce new philosophical terms.”

endnote: “Cf. also the strange “dependence” of the *Castruccio* on Diogenes Laertius (cf. pages 224-225 above).”⁷⁶ As Chapter Four addressed that “above” mention of the *Castruccio*, I will limit myself to saying here that what is striking to Strauss about the work is that unlike the *Prince* and *Discourses* it speaks of philosophy and philosophers—the majority of the sayings in the *Castruccio* are derived from Diogenes Laertius.⁷⁷

Strauss continues, though: “Still, as our presentation could not help showing, one is entitled to say that philosophy and its status is obfuscated not only in Machiavelli’s teaching but in his thought as well.” Strauss’s point here is that Machiavelli does not think about morality and politics in terms of the classical precept that “moral virtue” is needful for excellence and the foundation of society.⁷⁸ According to Strauss, Machiavelli “denies that there is an order of the soul, and therefore a hierarchy of ways of life or of goods. . . .” Machiavelli bases his notion of virtue on temporal, political aspects of human existence, not on “supra-political” considerations.⁷⁹ Machiavelli was not, however, voicing any notions unknown to classical political philosophy. His “seeming discovery” about politics obfuscates the meaning of philosophy enunciated by the classics. In an apparent allusion to Heidegger’s narrowing of the horizon of all thought from the horizon of nature to the horizon of historicity, Strauss states: “A stupendous contraction of the horizon appears to Machiavelli and his successors as a wondrous enlargement of the horizon.”⁸⁰

⁷⁶ *TM*, p.345n217.

⁷⁷ *TM*, p.224. See also MCL, pp.9-10.

⁷⁸ *TM*, p.294.

⁷⁹ *TM*, p.295.

⁸⁰ *TM*, p.295. With regard to my point about Heidegger, see ch.1.

Machiavelli vs. the classics

Clearly Strauss is of the view that Machiavelli forever changed the meaning of philosophy. The classics regarded philosophy as the quest for knowledge of the whole and political philosophy as a quest for knowledge of the best regime.⁸¹ The classics also, though, regarded the city as being closed to philosophy, in the sense that the common people—"the *demos*"—is unwilling to accept the imperative of acting in accordance with ideals of what is best, virtuous, just, and good. For the *demos*, the end of the city consists of the practical, everyday well-being of the city. The role of philosophers is to "sketch the "outlines" of philosophy; the implementation of philosophy is "left to orators or poets."⁸² Referring to the *Phaedrus* and the *Gorgias*, Strauss explains that Socrates criticizes orators for being interested not in enlightenment but only in the crafty use of rhetoric.⁸³ In the *Republic* Socrates explains that the philosopher ruler leads the people into the upper world of enlightenment from the cave of ignorance, wherein the people are trapped by the riddles of poets and their lies that the gods do not care for humankind.⁸⁴

Machiavelli forever changed the meaning of philosophy precisely because he forever changed the basis and the end of philosophy. He maintains that the notion of the good life is fundamentally impracticable, for it is an ideal that is based on a conception of how men ought to be, not how they actually are; thus the good life is impossible. Whereas for the classics the implementation of the best regime is dependent upon chance, in Machiavelli's "new notion of philosophy" (as Strauss

⁸¹ See *TM*, p.295; WIPP?, esp. pp.9-17.

⁸² *TM*, p.296. Cf. OPS, pp.158, 185, 195-96, 200-5; *SPPP*, p.87; McAllister, *Revolt Against Modernity*, pp.104-5.

⁸³ See *TM*, pp.296, 345n119.

⁸⁴ *Republic* 484a-541b. See also *TM*, p.296, and cf. *LSPS*, pp.171-72, 229; OPS, pp.196ff, 202, 204.

puts it) rare men of virtue base society on the conquest of chance and of necessity.⁸⁵ Corrupt men can be made good, and kept that way, only by living in a society ruled by the excellent man (or men) of virtue. But to enact his “new philosophy,” Machiavelli was compelled to persuade his readers of the truth of his views as compared to the falsity of the classics. Strauss then points out: “before that grand revolt or emancipation can get under way, the hold which the old modes and orders have over the minds of almost all men must be broken. . . .”⁸⁶

Strauss opens the final paragraph to his critical study of Machiavelli’s teaching by observing, “The necessity which spurred on Machiavelli and his great successors spent itself some time ago.”⁸⁷ Unlike “many present day conservatives,” Strauss notes (but without naming names), the classics were wary not only of social and political changes but also of concomitant technological changes. Though on the whole not favoring the development, usage and proliferation of inventions, the classics made two exceptions, Strauss points out: to foster change in a tyranny (a most desirable and admirable goal), and to enable the good city to defend itself. According to Aristotle, “not only should cities have walls, but care should be taken to make them ornamental, as well as useful for warlike purposes, and adapted to resist modern inventions.”⁸⁸

The classics, Strauss explains, “had to admit in other words that in an important respect the good city has to take its bearings by the practice of bad cities or that the bad impose their law on the good. Only in this point does Machiavelli’s contention that the good cannot be good because there are so many bad ones prove

⁸⁵ See *TM*, pp.296-97; for the above phrase itself, see p.296.

⁸⁶ *TM*, p.297.

⁸⁷ *TM*, p.298.

⁸⁸ *Politics* 1331a11-15, *Complete Works*, Vol.2, p.2112.

to possess a foundation. . . .”⁸⁹ Qualifying his observation that Machiavelli’s rejection of the classical emphasis upon moral virtue was not completely amiss, Strauss emphasizes: “One could say however that it is not inventions as such but the use of science for such inventions which renders impossible the good city in the classical sense. From the point of view of the classics, such use of science is excluded by the nature of science as a theoretical pursuit. . . .”⁹⁰ In brief, the fundamental purpose of science is to find out, and to ascertain the veracity of, knowledge about the natural processes in the world; the purpose of science is not to proliferate technology.⁹¹

“Besides,” Strauss goes on to explain, “the opinion that there occur periodic natural cataclysms in fact took care of any apprehension regarding the excessive development of technology . . .” Natural disasters are acts of “beneficence” intended by nature to redound eventually to the benefit of human society. According to Strauss, “Machiavelli himself expresses this opinion of the natural cataclysms . . .”⁹² In *Discourses* II 5 Machiavelli states that heaven purges “the human race . . . either through plague or through famine or through an inundation of waters. . . .” That no memory exists of such calamities in an ancient past is “because those who are saved are all mountain men and coarse . . .”⁹³ Perhaps Machiavelli was drawing upon, for instance, *Politics* 1269a4-6, where Aristotle explains: “the primaeval inhabitants, whether they were born of the earth or were the *survivors of some destruction*, may

⁸⁹ *TM*, pp.298-99. Cf. Fischer, *Well-Ordered License*, pp.170-71; Schall, “Latitude for Statesmanship?”, pp.132-33.

⁹⁰ *TM*, p.299.

⁹¹ Cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1094a1-b7; *Politics* 1268b22-36. Cf. also AE, pp.313-15; NCS, p.114; *OT* (rev.ex.), p.23; OPS, pp.134, 135, 138; POR?, pp.266-67.

⁹² *TM*, pp.299, 345n222. Cf. Sullivan, “Introduction,” pp.xiv-xv.

⁹³ *Discourses*, pp.139, 140. A footnote for this passage in the Mansfield/Translation, p.139n6, refers to Plato, *Timaeus* 22a-23c; *Laws* 676b-678a; Aristotle, *Politics* 1269a4-8; *Metaphysics* 1074b1-14; Polybius VI 5.

be supposed to have been no better than ordinary or even foolish people among ourselves . . .”⁹⁴

Schall observes, “the last footnote in *Thoughts on Machiavelli* cited, among others, St. Thomas, or at least a section of a book attributed to St. Thomas, namely, to Lectio IX of book 7 of the *Commentary on the Politics*. The subject matter footnoted had to do with Machiavelli’s use of natural “cataclysms” to mitigate the fear of scientific technology. . . .” But, Schall says, “It is not exactly clear why Strauss referred to this *Commentary* in this context. The text deals with the proper physical location and the proper arrangement, including the defenses, of parts a city. This may have been the only point.”⁹⁵ By referring to Aquinas Strauss may, I would suggest, have been signaling Machiavelli’s opposition to both Christianity and classical political philosophy.

Indeed, having cited *Discourses* II 5, Strauss reflects, drawing his critical study to a close: “It would seem that the notion of the beneficence of nature or of the primacy of the Good must be restored by being rethought through a return to the fundamental experiences from which it is derived. For while “philosophy must beware of wishing to be edifying,” it is of necessity edifying.”⁹⁶ Interestingly, Peterman notes that Strauss’s “concluding sentences . . . emends Hegel’s statement on philosophy—“for while ‘philosophy must beware of wishing to be edifying,’ it is of necessity edifying”—to the end of supporting the seeming need to “return to

⁹⁴ *Complete Works*, Vol.2, pp.2013-14 (emphases mine).

⁹⁵ “A Latitude for Statesmanship?”, p.143. Strauss’s endnote, *TM*, p.345n222, refers to *Discourses* II 5 and directs the reader to compare *Discourses* II 5 with Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1094a26-b7; *Politics* 1268b22ff, 1331a1-18; and Xenophon, *Hiero* 9.9-10. Strauss instructs the reader to compare the passages from Aristotle with Aquinas, *Commentary on the Politics*, VII, lectio IX; and directs the reader’s attention to his own work, to ch.II, n53. Therein Strauss said Machiavelli equated criminal rule with non-criminal rule; Machiavelli described as impious and cruel the actions of Cesare Borgia, Agathocles, Nabis, Cyrus, Hannibal, Severus, and Giovampagolo Baglioni, but he also described them as excellent men.

⁹⁶ *TM*, p.299.

the fundamental experiences” that might restore the notion of the “primacy of the good.”⁹⁷ In stating thus *the* purpose of philosophy, Strauss echoed the statement of intent he made at the end of the introduction, namely, that his critical study would “contribute towards the recovery of the permanent problems.”⁹⁸

Having reached the end of Strauss’s critical study of Machiavelli’s teaching it is clear that Strauss affirmed the dignity of the classical notion of moral virtue against Machiavelli’s amoral notion of republican virtue. Yet it cannot go unnoticed by the reader that Strauss, in mapping the originary specific features in the terrain of the continent of modernity discovered by Machiavelli, regarded his attacks upon Christianity and religion in general as fundamentally untenable.

⁹⁷ “Approaching Strauss,” pp.324-25. See also McAllister, *Revolt Against Modernity*, pp.94-95, 100, 107ff.

⁹⁸ *TM*, p.14. Cf. Jackson, “Strauss’s Teaching,” pp.40-41, 61, 76, 178.

Conclusion

Through a careful examination of his idea of history, his conception of the revelation-reason question and his critical study of Machiavelli's teaching, this thesis has endeavored to explicate Strauss's attentive and wide-ranging engagement with each of the two fundamental alternatives, revelation and reason. Particular emphasis, in Parts Two and Three, has been placed upon the exegetic, narrative and thematic analysis of Strauss's critical study.

To understand the crux of the matter at hand, one must, as Strauss would say, pay particular attention to the surface of the matter.¹ The apparent surface of Strauss's idea of history clearly does adopt, as Chapter One demonstrated, an idea of what history is and how and why one must study it. Against historicism, especially its radical, Heideggerian variant, which articulated an ontology that sought to base the meaning of Being (of what it truly means to be) in the here-and-now present, Strauss upheld the endless challenge of philosophy. "Philosophy in the strict and classical sense is *quest* for the eternal order or for the eternal cause or causes of all things. It presupposes then that there is an eternal and unchangeable order within which History takes place and which is not in any way affected by History."² These sentences reveal that Strauss viewed the meaning of history as constituted not by the play of events within the ambit of autonomous history but by the action of history in relation to eternity, to the orbit of that which is supra-temporal. Historicism, though, claims to *possess* true insight into the meaning of history, for it insists that History, not eternity, represents the horizon of all that is

¹ With regard to this point, see above, introduction.

² *OT* (rev.ex.), p.212 (emphasis mine).

and can be. That historicism so views the sweep of history has, according to Strauss, made paramount the return to the classics, that is to say, to the careful study of the works of Aristotle, Plato, Thucydides and Xenophon; indeed, for Strauss that study is the necessary educative and propaedeutical strategy for countering the “crisis of our time,” namely, the perilously immanent and nihilistic atheism of the modern, contemporary era. In short, when Strauss gives hermeneutic advice his attention is directed to the permanent problems; his advice on how to turn to history reopens a path to approaching the fundamental alternatives.

To cast light on the philosophical and theological undercurrents that flow strongly beneath the surface of Strauss’s idea of history, Chapter Two examined Strauss’s conception of the revelation-reason question. In probing his use of such terms as “theology” and “law,” the first section of the chapter found that he regards the Bible and Greek philosophy as having a shared understanding of the scope of divine law and justice. Chapter Two proceeded to explain that Strauss did not, however, perceive the agreement between the Bible and Greek philosophy as extending to how law and justice are realized. Whereas the biblical notion of moral virtue is inextricably linked with the concept of the divinely *created* providential order, the classical notion of moral virtue is grounded in the *eternality* of nature. The relationship between the two fundamental alternatives is one of mutual exclusivity. There cannot be, Strauss says, a synthesis of the life of unswerving obedience to God’s Law and the life devoted to the free philosophic quest for intellectual and moral perfection. Strauss was himself a philosopher or, as he would have put it, a scholar with a particular interest in the history of political philosophy.

Strauss was, however, open to the challenge that revelation, not philosophy, is the right way of life. His openness is, as Chapter Two argued, evinced in his

affirmation of the authoritative character of the dictates of revelation. That openness may seem, though, to be a paradox, given his strong insistence that the two fundamental alternatives are immiscible, and that he declaimed a synthesis of the alternatives. Yet revelation and reason, as Strauss also maintained, both stress the importance of importance of morality and, thereby, provide a common front against the morass of modernity.

Parts Two and Three of this thesis demonstrated that Strauss perceived an anti-teleological orientation as underpinning Machiavelli's rejection of both biblical and classical morality. The closest Strauss came to identifying such an orientation was towards the end of his critical study of Machiavelli's teaching on religion, when he stated: "It is reasonable to assume that Machiavelli favored a cosmology which is in accordance with his analysis of morality. His analysis of morality will prove to be incompatible with a teleological cosmology."³ Elsewhere Strauss employed a variety of terms analogous to "teleological cosmology." For instance, in Chapter III of *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, whilst examining the Florentine's rejection in the *Discourses* of Biblical authority, Strauss spoke of "the comprehensive theo-cosmological scheme implied in the principle of authority . . ."⁴ In "What Is Political Philosophy?" Strauss wrote: "the narrowing of the horizon which Machiavelli was the first to effect, was caused, or at least facilitated, by anti-theological ire—a passion which we can understand but of which we cannot approve."⁵ In his essay on *Parsilius of Padua* Strauss described Machiavelli's revolt against "the classical tradition" as inspired by "antitheological passion . . ."⁶ In

³ *TM*, p.222.

⁴ *TM*, p.165 (line 35).

⁵ *WIPP?*, p.44.

⁶ *MP*, p.294.

Natural Right and History Strauss noted: "The Stoic natural law teaching is based on the doctrine of divine providence and on an anthropocentric teleology. In his *On the Nature of the Gods* Cicero subjects that theological-teleological doctrine to severe criticism . . ."⁷

Chapter Three explained that Strauss perceived in Machiavelli's teaching on religion the thesis that Christianity had made the world morally weak and politically unstable. Machiavelli's thesis is not simply anti-clerical. He took issue with the otherworldly nature of Christianity's explicit focus upon the hereafter. Machiavelli insisted that injunctions against cruel and evil acts prevent priests from responding in a timely fashion to the exigencies of circumstance. Thus he regarded political authority (the rule of princes) as superior to religious authority (the rule of priests).

From discussing Machiavelli's claim that Christianity itself is responsible for engendering weakness in the world, Chapter Three turned to Strauss's analysis of Machiavelli's reflections on Biblical/Christian theology. Whereas the Bible proclaimed obedience to God's Law as paramount, Machiavelli apparently regarded observance of one's own worldly gain as the one thing needful for life. Reasoning that no providential act is unaccompanied by extreme hardship, and that unjust men frequently go unpunished by God, Machiavelli sought to replace providential order with an order that can better affect meaningful change, namely, through the operation of human virtue against necessity, *fortuna* and mundane chance. Machiavelli apparently followed the lead of Averroes, and Averroes had followed the lead of Aristotle, in maintaining that the eternal, pre-existent matter of the world was set in motion by the prime mover, God. Closely related to Machiavelli's rejection of creation *ex nihilo* is his claim that revealed evidential phenomena such as miracles are

⁷ *NRH*, p.154.

beyond the bounds of human experience. According to Strauss, “We would go too far were we to assert that Machiavelli has never heard the Call nor sensed the Presence, for we would contradict his remarks referring to the conscience. But he certainly refuses to heed experiences of this kind.”⁸

Curiously, by indicating that Machiavelli likely affirmed the eternity of the world against creation *ex nihilo*, Strauss had placed him in the company of Aristotle. Subsequently, however, Strauss surveyed “Machiavelli’s doctrine regarding God and his attributes” so as to identify “more clearly the difference between Machiavelli and Aristotle . . .”⁹ Examining Strauss’s survey, Chapter Four explained that Machiavelli sought to replace God as the divine, supreme being with *Fortuna*, an occasionally malignant but always fickle entity. Furthermore, he sought to replace Fortuna with mundane chance as the governing principle in nature, the world and human affairs; by chance he meant truly random and unpredictable accidents, not the occasional and capricious intercessions of an external necessity such as Fortuna. Strauss argued thus that Machiavelli did not accept the Aristotelian notion of “a ruling Mind.” It seems, then, that Strauss believed Machiavelli’s cosmology to be, at its very basis, anti-teleotheological.¹⁰ Machiavelli’s irreligiousness was underscored by his blunt view of religion’s importance as a tool of social control.

The decidedly temporal conception of the ends towards which human action should be directed that is evidenced in Machiavelli’s teaching on religion is amplified, as Part Three demonstrated, in his teaching on morality and politics. To Strauss, “In his teaching concerning morality and politics Machiavelli challenges not only the

⁸ *TM*, p.203.

⁹ *TM*, p.208.

¹⁰ See *TM*, pp.221f.

religious teaching but the whole philosophic tradition as well.”¹¹ Yet Strauss also perceived, according to Green, that “with all his radicalism Machiavelli still wanted to actualize what the classics merely envisaged. He still moved in the sphere of human nature as delineated by the classics, even if he reached different conclusions about what to do with it.”¹² Whereas the classical perception of the base tendencies attendant to human nature did not attenuate its emphasis upon the desirability of the good life and the best regime, Machiavelli concluded from his dim view of human nature that good governance, be it in the form of republican rule or princely rule, must seek a singularly temporal, practical goal: controlling the many and the great alike, preventing them from doing harm to the common good.

Chapter Five addressed themes raised by the classics and Machiavelli about moral virtue and human action. Aristotle maintained, Strauss observed, that virtue is the mean between the two extremes of excess and deficiency, and that some actions, such as murder and theft, do not admit of a mean. But Machiavelli, Strauss pointed out, spoke of a mean between virtue and vice that varies in accordance with the times; Machiavelli did not declaim the badness of such actions as murder and theft. To Aristotle, that which is good is, by definition, in accordance with the eternal order of nature. Man has free will, not in the sense that he can choose his own ends but, rather, in the sense that he can choose good or bad and choose to act with a view to the highest good. Yet to Machiavelli, free will consists in the freedom one has to choose one’s own ends and how one reaches them, irrespective of a highest or supreme good. The range of free will is, Machiavelli admitted, limited by chance, nature and necessity. He reasoned thus, however, that the truly excellent man is a

¹¹ *TM*, p.232.

¹² *Jew and Philosopher*, p.159n49.

man capable of freely acting in the face of great odds. The excellent man supplants the necessity that is rooted in fear of death with a necessity that is rooted in his desire for personal benefit and glory; virtuous action is evidenced by the excellent man's capacity to overcome, and rule over, chance, nature and necessity.

Titled "Virtue and Governance," Chapter Six examined Machiavelli's departure from the classical notion of the best regime. Machiavelli and the classics both spoke in less than flattering terms about human nature—people are often guided by concern for self-interest, not the good of society as a whole, and must be made good by laws and education. Nevertheless, the classics maintained that the individual and society should be guided by the common good and moral considerations of how one ought to live. According to Machiavelli, though, principles of virtue and governance should be grounded in the "effectual truth" of all things. Thus abandoning classical normative philosophy and its transcendent moral criteria, Machiavelli seems to have believed that a major end of civil, political society is to ensure that citizens remain free from foreign domination. Whereas Plato and Aristotle defined the common good in terms of a concept of moral virtue, Machiavelli apparently defined the common good in terms of a concept of the protection of the fatherland from external *and* internal threats.

Chapter Six explained that Machiavelli advocated republican rule insofar as it is more conducive than princely rule with regard to realization of the common good. The common good is the end only of republicans, he argued, because princes and tyrants are interested primarily in their private good. However, Machiavelli maintained that the excellent man, who is rare in body and spirit, is essential to the renewal of existing—or to the very creation of new—modes and orders. Human nature being what it is, disposed towards evil rather than goodness, rulers must have

recourse to means of persuasion more cruel than kind so as to habituate citizens to act in accordance with the good of society as a whole. Although Machiavelli attested to the superiority of republican rule compared to the rule of princes or tyrants, in that he upheld the constancy of the many against the tendency in the great towards avarice and overweening self-esteem, his republican sympathies did not prevent him from imparting advice to tyrants about the preservation of their rule.

Strauss ultimately concluded that Machiavelli's moral-political teaching was not so much new as it was a restriction of the scope of virtue from what ought to be to what is. As Chapter Seven explained, Strauss depicted Machiavelli's legacy to the history of political philosophy as consisting of the thoroughgoing change he initiated in the meaning of philosophy. Whereas Plato spoke of converting the tyrant from a life devoted to the pursuit of power to a life devoted to philosophy or philosophy itself, Machiavelli spoke of converting the tyrant from badness to goodness by appealing to his desire for glory. Machiavelli maintained that the badness in a ruler that is worthy of castigation consists not of moral shortcomings but, instead, of a shortsightedness in foreseeing dangers to the welfare of the fatherland; rulers must be guided by an unremitting alertness to the life and liberty of their fatherland, not by moral considerations of justice and virtue. He never regarded the ruler who rises above and controls chance, rather than being subject to it, as the truly excellent man. Machiavelli, perhaps in an autobiographical reflection, viewed the truly excellent man as the teacher and discoverer of new modes and orders.

In grappling with Machiavelli's rejection of biblical and classical morality, and in exposing as fundamentally untenable his opposition to the fundamental alternatives represented by Biblical religion and classical political philosophy, Strauss affirmed the authority, justifiability and validity of both revelation and

reason. Throughout his critical study Strauss affirmed (what the introduction to *Thoughts on Machiavelli* described as) the “old fashioned and simple verdict” that Machiavelli was “evil,” and his “teaching immoral and irreligious.”¹³ However, Strauss did not aim in his critical study to give a manifestly practical solution to Machiavelli’s abandonment of the fundamental alternatives. As Gourevitch notes, “The scope and meaning of philosophy are diminished, its aspirations are lowered, once it confines itself primarily to problems that admit of solutions.”¹⁴ Strauss, rather than aiming to give a concrete rejoinder to Machiavelli’s initiation of modernity, intended in his critical study to move towards recovering the natural horizon of the permanent problems. Strauss listened attentively to ideals about goodness voiced by the classics but conveyed to the reader the acuteness of Biblical religion as a way of thinking about, and finding, moral principles for guiding human action.¹⁵

¹³ *TM*, pp.10, 12.

¹⁴ “Philosophy and Politics, II,” p.317. Cf. Gunnell, “Myth of the Tradition,” p.130 (col.2); “Political Theory and Politics,” pp.356-57; George Kateb, “The Questionable Influence of Arendt (and Strauss),” in Kielmansegg, Mewes and Glaser-Schmidt, eds., pp.38ff.

¹⁵ Cf. Orr, *Jerusalem and Athens*, pp.148-49.

Appendix

An Outline of Leo Strauss's Critical Study of Niccolò Machiavelli's Teaching

¶¶1-43: Part One: Machiavelli's teaching on religion

¶¶1-26: Section One: Machiavelli's critique of Christianity and Biblical religion

¶1: Introduction

¶2: Strauss states his thesis for Part One: Machiavelli is neither Christian nor pagan

¶¶3-14: Machiavelli's judgment regarding the weakness(es) of Christianity

n.b., at ¶¶4-6 respectively, Strauss examines the three explicit statements in the *Discourses* on the core beliefs of Christianity—I pr., II 2, III 1

¶¶15-30: Machiavelli's reflections on Biblical/Christian theology

¶15: conscience

¶¶16-19: Divine providence

¶17: providence as mentioned in the *Florentine Histories*; ¶19, the *Exhortation to Penitence*

¶¶20-23: creation and miracles

¶¶24-26: the weakness of biblical religion and strength of pagan religion

¶¶27-28: Divine attributes

¶¶29-30: prophecy

¶¶27-42: Section Two: Machiavelli's judgments on cosmology and religion in general

¶¶27-36: Machiavelli's cosmological reflections

n.b.: the subject matter of both ¶¶27-28 and ¶¶29-30 is theo-cosmological, and bridges Sections One and Two

¶31: *Fortuna*

¶¶32-33: the relationship between *Fortuna* and nature

¶34: the power of chance and accidents

¶¶35-36: order in the world: God, *Fortuna* or mundane chance?

¶37: order in the world, as mentioned in the
Castruccio

¶¶38-42: the utility of religion

¶43: Strauss defends the length of his analysis of Machiavelli's teaching on religion

¶44: Bridging paragraph between Parts One and Two

¶¶45-87: Part Two: Machiavelli's moral-political teaching

¶45: Introduction

¶¶46-80: the aspects of Machiavelli's moral-political teaching

¶¶46-51: virtue and goodness

¶¶52-60: free will, necessity and chance

¶¶61-68: the common good and selfishness

¶¶69-75: forms of government: republics, principalities and tyrannies

¶¶76-80: human nature, the common good and the highest good

¶79: human nature, the common good and the highest good in

La Mandragola

¶¶81-87: Strauss's concluding thoughts on Machiavelli's moral-political teaching: Machiavelli's legacy to, and place in, the history of political philosophy

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