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MACHIAVELLI'S PHILANTHROPY

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“Machiavelli’s Philanthropy”

Abstract

Machiavelli claims to be animated by a “natural desire” to “bring common benefit to everyone” (Discourses, I.Pr.). But what kind of benefit is it that subjects so many people to tyrannical rule and world empire? What has Machiavelli to offer those whose freedom and independence are sacrificed to the greater glory of imperial powers? After framing the indictment against Machiavelli—in effect, that the world is worse off for having been instructed by him—the paper turns to composing his apology. The defense speech comes in five parts. Most importantly, it makes no use of the association presumed to exist between Machiavelli and latter-day liberalism. For Machiavelli’s philanthropy, the paper argues, rests on the conviction that the human essence resides in the spirited part of the psyche, or that the “lion” in man is more meritorious and admirable than the “fox” in man.
"Machiavelli's Philanthropy"

As was often the case, the comic strip *Calvin and Hobbes* raised questions of enduring interest to political philosophy. In one Sunday morning strip printed years ago,\(^1\) Calvin, while wandering through the woods, suddenly announces to Hobbes, his stuffed tiger and imaginary friend, that he, Calvin, no longer believes in ethics; that henceforth he means to operate on the principle that "the ends justify the means." "It's a dog-eat-dog world," declares Calvin; so he will do what pleases him and let others dispute the
morality of his acts. Whereupon Hobbes pushes Calvin in the mud, explaining that Calvin, who formerly was in Hobbes’ way, now is not—the end justifies the means!

In the *Discourses on Livy* Machiavelli advertises for disciples to help him accomplish his intention, and young Calvin, it would appear, signs on for duty as a pint-sized Machiavellian. Not that Calvin knows from “Adam” what Machiavelli’s intention is all about; the tyke simply is intoxicated by the prospect of unaccountable freedom. He has a theory now which tells him it’s okay to think only of himself. But Calvin, while never one to mind his P’s and Q’s, is certainly no better for having happened upon Machiavelli’s easygoing ethics. He suffers spiritually from the encounter, becoming more egotistical, covetous, and mean-spirited than he would otherwise be. And, face-down in the mud, he is physically worse off, to boot. A like effect occurs with adults who selfishly adopt means-ends morality. Liars, thieves, and cutthroats number among Machiavelli’s apparent followers, some fair portion of whom wind up in prisons and in early graves. Is it any wonder then that Machiavelli is reputed an evil man for enjoining the good to imitate the wicked, or that his name is a byword for overweening ambition, unscrupulous intrigue, and ruthless domination? Machiavelli attacks traditional morality, the purpose of which is to restrain the appetites and desires. He does so in part for reasons of self-defense, citing the criminal behavior of “so many who are not good” (*Prince* 15); but he does so as well in order to clear the way for acquisition—because “it is a very natural and ordinary thing to desire to acquire” (*Prince* 3).² Louis XII, king of France, desired to acquire Italy; his failed expedition Machiavelli analyzes so that other invaders might avoid the king’s mistakes. Cesare Borgia desired to acquire the Romagna; because he accomplished his ambition, Machiavelli offers Cesare’s example as
a model for imitation by new princes everywhere (*Prince*, 7). Machiavelli’s hero is the new prince—that is, any private individual with the talent and the gumption to seize power for himself. The new prince is a usurper; and if oppression suits his purposes, he is free to rule as a tyrant.

Many have noted that a new prince continues to inhabit a state of nature and that his ambition is tantamount to the license of natural right. Were he alone in that state, or of such surpassing strength as always to prevail, he would have little incentive to exchange his freedom for the protection of law. But because he is not alone, and because fortune at some point is likely to desert him, he is better off, say liberal political theorists, accepting the restraints and limitations of a mutually agreed upon social contract. The social contract is a middle-way compromise enjoining moderation and forbearance. It presumably is the lesson which a muddied Calvin learns, who in the cartoon’s last frame is lamenting the consequences of a liberation from ethics extended to people other than himself.

Machiavelli, though, has no truck with such a lesson or with the social contract as a basis of community. The contract promotes the interests of the unenterprising many by thwarting the ambitions of the “virtuous” few. Social contract liberalism produces societies bound by the rule of law, respectful of the rights of individuals, and disposed to industry and commerce as the means to achieving prosperity and peace. Such bourgeois propriety can hardly be to the liking of Machiavelli who celebrates martial strength and the imperialism of republican Rome. Machiavelli is hungry for greatness and glory, and he admires states whose ambitions are without limit. Accordingly, considerable awkwardness attends the effort to project Machiavelli forward, ascribing to him
authorship of the Enlightenment and linking to him the egalitarian principles of contractarian theory, the “self-interest rightly understood” doctrine of utilitarian ethics, and the “private vice/public virtue” paradox of capitalist economics. To be sure, Machiavelli partly invites the linkage with several of his more novel pronouncements, such as his rejection of imaginary republics, and therewith of the large ideals of philosophy and religion; his endorsement of domestic tranquility, or of factious politics; and his defense of the popular humor against the charge of incompetence and naivété. But the more compelling reason for projecting Machiavelli forward is the realization that except for the company of modern liberals, Machiavelli is simply too harsh, too bloody—too fascistic—to qualify as a philanthropist concerned for the welfare of his fellow human beings. There is, it seems, a general inclination to think favorably of any person who authors a “great book” and to assume that the world is somehow better off for having been instructed by him. No doubt, Machiavelli benefits from this widespread tendency and expectation; it spares him the opprobrium his wickedness might otherwise bring. But in Machiavelli’s case the ascription of philanthropic intent has solid textual grounding, since Machiavelli professes to be driven by a “natural desire” to work for those things which he believes “will bring common benefit to everyone” (Discourses, I.Pr.1), and since he describes himself as a “good man” who teaches “others the good” that a malignant fortune has prevented him from accomplishing (II.Pr.3). One wonders though what kind of philanthropy it is that subjects so many people to world empire and tyrannical rule; or what common benefits Machiavelli offers those states whose freedom and independence are sacrificed to the greater glory of imperial powers?
The purpose of this paper is to defend Machiavelli’s self-proclaimed goodness and to do so deriving no advantage from Machiavelli’s putative association with latter-day liberalism; to show that even when wearing the toga of a Roman senator and wielding the sword of a Roman consul, Machiavelli speaks a message useful to all of humanity; or, if sides must be taken, that he takes the side of the weak against the strong (meaning, usually, the side of the potentially strong against the actually strong). In any event, the taking of sides is tactical, as it is a step toward the creation of ever-larger unions. The defense may not be persuasive to some; but unlike defenses which look ahead to scientific liberalism or which look behind to classical philosophy, it is faithful, I believe, to Machiavelli’s meaning and intent.

Machiavelli puts his distinctive imprint on early Roman history when he traces the perfection of Rome’s mixed regime to the inclusion of the popular humor in the ordinary functioning of government. Soon after the downfall of the Tarquin kingship, the office of tribune of the people was created to protect the plebs from the capital power of the consuls (494 BC). With tribunes as its defender and mouthpiece, the plebs had the standing to voice its discontents. The tribunate thus regularized the assertion of popular rights and grievances. But the tribunate’s more obvious effect was to aggravate class animosities in Rome. Livy expresses his disapproval of the factious tumult which bedeviled Roman politics; and many, says Machiavelli, who do “no other than read” of the street demonstrations and refusal of military service conclude that Rome was ill-founded because its mixed regime empowered the democratic element (I.4.1).
Machiavelli disagrees loudly, taking his stand with the people against the nobles. He does so despite the fact that the preceding 13 or so years witnessed good government in Rome; for from the expulsion of the Tarquins in 509 to the death of Tarquinius Superbus in 496, Rome was governed aristocratically and governed well. But no simple regime, argues Machiavelli, is in fact a good regime because no men, to say nothing of governing classes, are good by nature. Human goodness is a function of necessity. People band together, obey authority, and make sacrifices for the commonweal in circumstances where selfish freedom would result in their ruin. Nature imposes this necessity, as when a city is founded on a sterile site. But law can take nature's place, especially the law that institutes a mixed regime; for such a law causes power to be shared by parties mutually hostile, to be neutralized in easy times when the parties are most given to selfish enterprises, and to be energized in dangerous times when concerted action is a must.

Custom, too, can impose necessity, and it was custom, of a sort, which kept the Roman senate good, since fear of a Tarquin restoration caused the patricians to treat the populace decently. But because custom is mostly invisible, Machiavelli worries that customary restraint will be mistaken by the people for natural goodness, that the people, deceived by benefits, will put itself in the hands of the great; and that the great, alone in power, will practise the tyranny their nature desires. Exposure, therefore, is the order of the day; and Machiavelli welcomes any event which contributes to the education of the people, including the speedy end to good government in Rome. One part of the people's character wants security and peace; like children under the care of benevolent fathers, the people is never happier than when ruled by a good king. But the other part of the people's character is suspicious, envious, and ungrateful. Because plebeians share the
same basic human nature with patricians, plebeians also are bad. But their badness is their political salvation, as it is the material out of which the love of liberty is born. With the right institutions, such as a tribunate, popular suspicion becomes vigilance, envy of the privileges of elites becomes jealous insistence upon rights, and ingratitude toward benefactors becomes the demand for accountability. Awakened from its childlike trust, the people takes on the pugilistic qualities of the great, and a fighting, “don’t tread on me,” public defends its liberty.

Liberty for Machiavelli is the product of equality, and equality is established by balancing the power of the classes, not by arguing the fine points of distributive justice. Equality is established by combat. The humors of Rome fought each other, and from their truculent partisanship liberty emerged. Mainly it was the plebs which carried the burden of standing up and fighting back, since by disposition the people is quiet, its ambition reactive. The burden borne by the patricians of Rome was less the willingness to attack and defend, since domineering comes naturally to the great, than the willingness to let their insolence be moderated by astuteness. Faction could do Rome no good if class strife deteriorated into class war. It thus fell to the patrician order, the weaker of the two humors, to conceal itself through indirect rule and to yield ground slowly through temporizing and anticipating (e.g., I.37, I.52). In sum, Roman liberty depended on a populace with backbone and a ruling class with brains.

There are other occasions when Machiavelli conspicuously defends the people’s cause. The people under law is grateful (more so than any prince), constant in its opinions, wise enough to choose its leaders, and faithful in its dealings (I.29, I.58, I.59). The people’s share of power increases over time (from tribunes, to consuls, to dictators,
to censors), a democratization of politics which Machiavelli seems to accept. The
equalization of property, called agrarian legislation, is judged a sound republican policy
(I.37.1). Even in principalities, the sensible strategy, barring special circumstances, is
for the prince to build his foundations on the people. If he is a "civil" prince who excited
class fears so as to be an indispensable protector of one humor or the other, the people is
the humor he wants finally to befriend, since the people in turn can defend the prince and
its aspirations are satisfied by a government under law (Prince, 9; Discourses, I.16.5).

Machiavelli’s second step in benefiting the weak—and then in benefiting
everyone—is to attach the executive power to the common good. Any well-constituted
executive is *uno solo* in office. This is true of captains, who sit atop a single chain of
command, no less than of founders, who execute their “brothers”—Romulus’s killing
Remus—in order to have power all to themselves. The trick lies in persuading the prince
to surrender the power he has killed to acquire, or to share it with others by separating out
those duties not essentially executive. The new prince who rises from a private station
first wants “state,” meaning influence, then more state, as in uncontested power, then
secure and enduring state, then glorious state, or “state” in a state that is expanding. No
matter how vulgar the new prince’s original ambitions (e.g., the run of Perugia and incest
with a sister [I.27]), ambitions satisfied bring others in their wake (I.37.1, I.46, II.Pr.3),
and some new princes are capable of instruction and of an enlargement of their horizons.
Which is where Machiavelli comes in. His advice to new princes is that the divided
power of a mixed regime is more effective than the concentrated power of a simple
regime. Romulus is praised for instituting a senate and arming the populace (I.9.2, I.11.2,
I.19.1). Romulus’s successors also were wise to avoid dynastic monarchy, resisting the
temptation to perpetuate orders through hereditary succession. "Probity does not descend by the branches" (notes Machiavelli, quoting Dante), meaning that sons typically are unworthy and dynasties unsound (I.11.4). Modes and orders, if they are to survive the founder, need strangers to defend them. These strangers consist of ordinary citizens, who maintain the founder’s orders out of habit, inertia, and reverence for the ancestral. Foundings are best done by one alone, but maintaining is the work of many, Machiavelli insists (I.9.2, I.58.3). A second sort of stranger, needed both to maintain and to desist from destroying, is the reformer-prince. His ambition for glory rivals that of the founder’s, and he will topple the old regime, reform “outside of ancient orders,” if the founding is perfect, or regarded as such, and nothing remains but to memorialize the beginning (I.9). From this insight follows Machiavelli’s paradoxical contention that imperfect beginnings and continuous foundings are superior to “at a stroke” foundings reflecting the mind of a single lawgiver; that Rome was better founded for being incomplete than was Sparta, perfect from the start. The lesson is that “one alone” is not alone for long. Others must share in the work and in the glory to save the state from premature death. What’s more, the prince is secure on his throne if, while not neglecting sensible precautions, he rules his subjects justly. The prince is never safe paying wages to mercenaries or tribute to neighboring states. Strength at the core surpasses strength at the periphery, and a citizen army is the only source of domestic strength (II.30). But a prince who is hated for his injustice cannot afford to arm the people. Nor can he risk stepping outside the protection of a fortress. Fortresses are a last resort for a hated prince, but also they are what cause a prince to be hated in the first place, since they convey a sense of invulnerability, which sense induces a prince to indulge his basest desires and to
govern as a tyrant (II.24). A tyrant-prince may be safe from the vengeance of his own citizens, but their hatred excites the ambitions of rival princes who see his hiding behind walls as a mark of his weakness and his weakness as an invitation to attack. On the other hand, a prince who is just, who respects the property and women of his subjects and rules in accordance with law, has no need of a fortress and can risk militarizing the public. The teaching is clear: Justice is in the prince’s own interest; it keeps him safe and it brings him power. And power is important since with it a state expands, and an expanding state draws the attention of the world and wins the prince fame. Fame requires not only the creation of something large and magnificent, but the endurance of this creation throughout the ages. Principalities as a rule are not large and magnificent for the reason that too few people have a stake in their success (II.2.3). Republics are the regime with the potential for world conquest. Thus it is possible—just possible—that an ambitious individual has a better chance at everlasting glory by serving an imperial republic than by seizing power and making himself prince. Scipio Africanus is arguably more glorious than Philip of Macedon because the Roman republic, while extending its dominion across the world, lasted four and a half centuries; whereas the Macedonian kingship, comparably extensive, broke apart with the death of Alexander. Grand ambition is necessarily collective, so leaders are bound to their followers and must attend to their needs.

But not only have princes an interest in imperial greatness. The humors want it too. The nobles are defined by their desire to dominate. Their victim is the plebs, unless an “ennobled” populace frustrates their efforts to dominate domestically; in which case the nobles turn their aggression outwards, conquering neighbors and expanding the city’s boundaries. And a free and fighting public, it own acquisitive instincts excited, provides
the manpower needed for this policy of expansion (I.4.1). Machiavelli can encourage the humors to fight with each other because an imperial republic has always a war to bring the humors together. Foreign war is the remedy for civil war. Thus all three elements, the glory-seeking individual, the domineering great, and the money-hungry people, unite around the same ambition, making common cause of conquest.

But if Machiavelli has thus managed to protect the weak and benefit everyone, the “everyone” benefited quite pointedly excludes those outside the city’s borders. They are targets, cannon fodder, “road kill” on the highway to greatness. Rome determined from the start that it would expand, that it would accept no limits to its ambitions, and that it would war upon all competitors until it had achieved world domination (II.1). Occasionally Machiavelli warns of the dangers of overreaching, of refusing a half-victory and winding up with a total defeat (II.27). But these words of caution are easily muffled by his celebratory hosannas for the Roman achievement: Rome was not lucky in its rise to the top, but followed a simple strategy sure to succeed against credulous and cowardly states. Some it deceived with promises of good will; others it frightened with its warlike demeanor. By giving future enemies a reason to hang back and lie low, Rome ensured that no two powers would unite against it (II.1). On the other hand, Rome was economical in its prosecution of war, applying massive force to achieve quick victories, paying wages to troops drawn from the proceeds of conquest, using garrisons to fortify the frontier, eschewing costly sieges, and requisitioning auxiliaries from allied states. This last procedure was particularly significant, since Rome utilized foreign soldiers but kept command of the allied army entirely to itself. Over time Rome capitalized on its command-position to lay claim to most of the spoils and to all of the glory.
Unbeknownst to them, the Latin allies went from near-equals to inferiors, and when Rome expanded beyond Italy (with victories over Sicily, Sardinia, Corsica, Spain, Macedon, and Carthage), its new acquisitions were used to enforce and make palpable the allies’ subordination. Rome moved indirectly against its supposed friends even as it moved directly against its declared enemies. Indirect warfare was the principal way in which Rome, for four hundred years, expanded its empire (II.21). Part of its strategy of indirect war was to offer support and to arbitrate disputes, even to send out praetors to administer lesser cities unable to govern themselves. Sometimes Rome snarled and bared its teeth, but often it smiled and extended a helping hand. Needless to say, the price of Rome’s assistance was the loss of local autonomy. But in lieu of independence, subject states gained protection, good government, and the chance to take part in history. Subjects who rebelled against Roman authority were treated ruthlessly or treated gently. Rome judged on a case by case basis, but always favoring the extremes of eliminating or caressing. It caressed the Privernates because they were proud and liberty-loving (II.23.4). But mainly it tried corrupting its subjects by eroding their attachment to locale and their capacity for self-government. Rome was intent upon state-building; accordingly, it had to overrun the peninsula, subduing and breaking to the bit all of those tiny republics ferociously jealous of their liberties. Rome wanted to make Romans out of Latins and then out of Italians in order that Rome might become a country instead of a city. By extending a diluted citizenship to its conquered neighbors, Rome created a wider community with a more comprehensive common good. The reproach directed against republics, that they are as cruel in their treatment of foreigners as are barbarian princes in their treatment of natives, applies to Rome only in the sense that it took from most of its
beaten opponents their political independence. It did not ruin them like slaves (II.2.4). Or if it did—and to the extent that it did—then Machiavelli is reproving Rome; for the plain lesson is that brutality on the part of the victor causes obstinacy on the part of the vanquished; and an obstinate love of liberty causes escalation in the price of acquisition. The interest of the conquering state in economical acquisitions coincides then with the interest of the defeated state in humane assimilation. State-building is thus the third step in the drive toward benefiting everyone.

Of course a state is not inclusive of everyone, and talk of world empire is always an exaggeration. No matter how far Rome expanded, there remained a frontier and a people beyond its domain. But then the real objection is not that some states, unabsorbed by Rome, retained their enemy status, but that those which were absorbed lost their identities and therewith their freedom and independence. They survived but as subjects of Roman power. How can Machiavelli honestly claim that the feeding of appetites as voracious as Rome’s benefited anyone other than Rome? The aforementioned answer presupposed that people would happily trade their liberty for peace, or that pride and the passion to rule lived in Roman hearts only. But Machiavelli is too cosmopolitan to think that Rome alone was suited for freedom. Human virtue is constant in the world (II. Pr.2), and whether it locates in one place or another depends not on nature or geography but on law and education; for where there are men but not soldiers, the responsibility lies mainly with the prince (I.21.1).

How then does Machiavelli come to the aid of the liberty-loving oppressed? The answer is distinctively Machiavellian: he condones and facilitates conspiracy. His advice to the weak is that they rise by fraud. The downtrodden are not without resources;
if they possess the brain of a “fox,” they can survive and prosper even though they lack
the brawn of a “lion.” Junius Brutus was thought the court fool, but he was waiting for
the opportunity (which the rape of Lucretia supplied) to topple the monarchy and become
the first man of the new republic (III.2). Cyrus, king of Persia, used fraud to accomplish
his ascent to power, as did Philip of Macedon and Agathocles of Syracuse (II.13).
Conspiracy is a hazardous affair, Machiavelli is quick to point out—and hazardous for the
conspirator no less than for the targeted prince (III.6.1). But then Machiavelli devises
escapes from all of the pitfalls likely to be encountered. He thus encourages the astute to
rise from their private stations of relative weakness and chance becoming new princes
through usurpation. It also helps that by exposing the faithlessness of princes he allays
the scruples which hinder the weak as they contemplate ascending by fraud.
Machiavelli’s denunciation of “middle way” morality convinces potential princes among
the weak that there is virtue in extremism, especially when wrongdoing is capped off by
success; for then it is called “honorable wickedness” and “cruelty well-used” (I.27.1,
Prince, 8). Machiavelli elaborates on a story told by Livy in which two Roman senators
first chastised the leaders of the plebs for their vengeful demands and then suggested a
deferral of the matter until after the people’s tribunes had been reestablished in power
(Livy, II.53). Machiavelli’s gloss on the incident—the punishment of the decemvirs in
449—notes

how much stupidity and how little prudence there is to ask for a thing and to say
first: I wish to do such and such evil with it. For one should not show one’s
intent but try to seek to obtain one’s desire in any mode. For it is enough to ask
someone for his arms without saying, “I wish to kill you with them,” since you are able to satisfy your appetite after you have the arms in hand (I.44.2). In addition to empowering the weak, clever deception can bring the weak glory. The Roman consul defeated at the Caudine Forks (321 BC), because he tricked the Samnites into setting free the captured Romans, “was more glorious . . . for having lost” than was the Samnite commander “for having won” (III.42). Even the fox, it seems, is eligible for fame.

Of course not all of the weak possess the brain of a fox. Often the weak are weak because they are in the grip of false opinions or lack knowledge of the world. Typical of the weak are such mistakes as believing that money is the sinew of war (II.10); that technology superannuates ancient military orders (II.16-17); that cavalry, not infantry, is the mainstay of the army (II.18); that confederations are adequate for defense (II.19); that auxiliary forces on loan from a stronger state afford an easy means of acquisition (II.20); that victorious armies are so weakened by their battlefield losses as to be vulnerable to new, inferior, and previously neutral foes (II.22); that fortresses and tribute can substitute for arms of one’s own (II.24, II.30); that “furtive violence” reliant upon refugee information can replace “forced surrender” (II.31-32); that an army too weak even to defend a stronghold can win by delay (III.10); and that subject states can be managed by a divide-and-rule strategy (III.27). All of these false opinions rest on the hope that weakness need not be converted into strength or that the virtueless can get by without virtue. Machiavelli’s favor to the weak is to disabuse them of this misplaced hope while simultaneously showing them the way out of weakness. A case in point is the advice given respecting first-thrusts: The strong seem invincible because of their size; but then
size presupposes unity among the parts; since enemies are mixed bodies composed of competing interests—if not alliances of dubious integrity—the weak need only the strength to resist a first thrust, for then artful diplomacy can go to work to set the state or the alliance at odds with itself (III.11). In particular, weak Italians, who know nothing of war, can use diplomacy against the strong French, who know nothing of state (Prince, 3); thus diplomacy, supported by minimal strength, affords Italians a means of ascent.

If the experience of weakness reinforces false opinions agreeable to the weak, so too do the values of weak education—meaning Christian education. Christianity teaches humility, submission, forgiveness. Charity is its premier virtue, and vengeance it treats as a vice; even justice is problematic. The exemplary Christian is the contemplative monk, alone with his prayers, scorning the honor of the world; not the captain or lawgiver who competes for glory. Enjoined to imitate the life of Christ, Christians show strength only in the wrongs that they suffer; martyrdom is the supreme act of faith. So compliant and patient are Christians that they refuse “to say evil of evil” and leave to God the punishment of unworthy rulers whom they entirely obey. Machiavelli credits the Duecento reform movements of Saints Francis and Dominick for returning Christianity to its first principles of poverty and Christlikeness. But it was no favor to the world to have Christianity renewed in this way, since disbelieving prelates “do the worst they can because they do not fear the punishment that they do not see and do not believe” (III.1.4). The corrupt church hierarchy abandons all pretense of religion and governs tyrannically because the faithful, made obsequious by Christian doctrine, puts up no resistance. Christianity thus stands accused of “render[ing] the world weak and giv[ing] it in prey to
criminal men, who can manage it securely, seeing that the collectivity of men, so as to go to
paradise, think more of enduring their beatings than of avenging them” (II.2.2).

Christians have an especially hard time comprehending nature, necessity, and fortune. Their notions of a willful, providential God and of a life after death make them inept and inconstant in managing the affairs of this world. They are not "knowers of the world" (III.30.3); as such they change from being vain and intoxicated in good fortune to being vile and abject in bad fortune, from thinking falsely that they are invulnerable to thinking falsely that they are defenseless. Lacking the constancy that comes from virtue and experience, they reckon that fortune rules all and that resignation is better than valor; or they conclude that present discontents are the price to be paid for everlasting rewards. Either way they are passive, and their passivity causes their weakness. Machiavelli’s war upon Christianity, the religion of the weak, is thus undertaken for the empowerment of the weak.

Still, the distance is vast separating weak from strong; and the counsel meant to arm the weak is equally available for use by their oppressors. One of the enduring puzzles about Machiavelli is his willingness to advise both parties to a dispute and his insouciance regarding the justice of their claims. Machiavelli seems no more the partisan of the people than of the great, of unoffending republics than of aggressive empires. But a caveat is in order: No empire can remain forever at the top; Machiavelli’s philosophy of regimes is cyclical. Necessity, he argues, is the cause of human goodness, which goodness is the cause of success; success brings deliverance from necessity, but the absence of necessity causes the corruption of goodness; corruption leads to failure, and failure permits the return of necessity. States rise and fall and rise again because of the
internal dynamic of goodness-corruption (and because of exogenous forces). Rome annexed Campania and was corrupted by the luxuriant life led by Capuans. Corruption, says Machiavelli, is how the weak take their revenge upon the strong (II.19.2). When Rome had subdued the major powers of the Mediterranean, it no longer required the talents of its most reputed citizens; it therefore took to electing demagogues and plutocrats to high office (I.18.3, III.16, III.30.1). There is a sickness which afflicts the powerful; every good is accompanied by some evil (I.2.2, I.6.3, III.11.1, III.37.2). Mixed bodies are mortal and imperfect, Machiavelli affirms.

Well enough—the human condition suffers from disease. But as a political physician and discoverer of new modes and orders should it not be Machiavelli’s business to supply a cure—to fix it so that states can survive their own success, to devise an escape from the cycle of rise and decline? The mixed regime of antiquity was a partial escape, a leveling out of the cycle’s highs and lows (e.g., good kings succeeded by wicked tyrants) sufficient to maintain strength and achieve greatness. Rome combined elements of simple regimes, not to provide itself with the best and wisest of governments, but to prevent the worst abuses of power; accordingly, Rome extended to 460 years the cycle from tyranny to caesarism (509-49 BC), whereas simple regimes fall to ruin within a generation or two. An improvement on the Roman republic, which managed fortune tolerably well (II.1), should aim then for a new republic which manages complacency equally well and so endures even longer, if not forever. But no such improvement is contemplated, although twice Machiavelli outlines the problem of perpetuation: that the neglected great conspire against the regime (III.17) and that their antagonists, reformer-princes who return the regime to its beginnings, occur not on schedule and too
infrequently (III.1.3, III.22). The problem, though, is deemed intractable, a condition to
make the best of, not a defect admitting of remedy. On the other hand, the success of any
such remedy would betray Machiavelli’s promise to bring common benefit to each. For
one state would capture the summit and never thereafter yield it to another. The
monarchical elements of Machiavelli’s thought would triumph over the republican.
Perhaps then it is useful—as well as no accident—that this most obvious of problems is
never resolved. The decline of the strong provides the occasion for the rise of the weak.
No hegemony is forever; virtue moves around. And so we come upon the fourth step in
Machiavelli’s philanthropy, the assurance that hegemons must fall and that opportunity
for dominion must pass to another. Each is benefited, but in turn—Assyria, Media,
Persia, Rome (II.Pr.2). While common, Machiavelli’s philanthropy is nonetheless
sequential, since a cyclical philosophy of history precludes simultaneous benefits for all.
In the meantime, however, while waiting for the chance to grab the brass ring of
greatness, states are encouraged to fight for their freedom.

Even so, it is a peculiar sort of benefit which Machiavelli bestows, in that
continual fighting among the parties is what it envisions and demands. Machiavelli
recommends the reclamation of Roman virtue. But having more Romans translates into
suffering more mayhem. To anyone seeking peace and the quiet enjoyment of property,
the prospect of many more nations training their populations for war must certainly be
alarming; and certainly Machiavelli cannot be counted a philanthropist for working to
make an “arms race” happen. Genuine philanthropy would require renouncing
Machiavelli and his love of arms, especially if the conquest of nature could replace the
conquest of men as a means of acquisition. But Machiavelli is not interested in
acquisition for the comforts it supplies, and only secondarily is he interested in it for security and preservation. The argument that necessity forces states to expand does not fully account for the Spartan republic which followed its victory over Athens with a freely chosen war against Thebes,\textsuperscript{10} or even for the Roman republic whose wars were mostly wars of choice motivated by ambition (II.9). In one sense ambition, like fear, is a necessitated passion, “for whenever engaging in combat through necessity is taken from men they engage in combat through ambition” (I.37.1). But then ambition is hierarchical, and ascending the hierarchy is not a necessity felt by all. Not all “live ambitiously in a republic” (I.46): some love life, some love liberty, some love power, and some love glory. Glory-lovers rank the highest. More generally, that part of the psyche which orients individuals and collectives toward glory, power, and liberty ranks higher than the part which orients natural and mixed bodies toward preservation and gain. Spiritedness is a higher faculty than appetite; and each is higher, or is simply more powerful, than reason. Reason is defined as the cunning of the fox and is relegated to auxiliary status; it can align with spiritedness or with appetite, with the pride of the lion or the desires of the wolf (\textit{Prince}, 18).\textsuperscript{11} Machiavelli would have it that reason serve as a loyal adjunct to spiritedness. He returns to Rome, pays it homage, and commends its example for imitation in the hope that generations of readers will prefer the martial valor of Rome to the commercial acquisitiveness and pious indolence characteristic of contemporary Christians. Machiavelli is like Plato in regarding the thumotic passions as worthier than the appetitive desires and in ranking timocracy ahead of oligarchy and democracy. Where Machiavelli parts company is in thinking that spiritedness and timocratic republics deserve their ranking irrespective of their relationship to reason. Plato disagrees: Reason
disciplines; it ennobles spiritedness in the same way that domestication ennobles a dog, changing it from a wild animal into a best friend and trusted ally of man, its master. Outside of reason's supervision, spiritedness is impulsive, brutish, and unjust—no better than appetite except that honor operates on it as an extra mode of constraint. Likewise, timocracy's superiority arises from the fact that honor-loving rulers are under some control. Self-control, not self-aggrandizement, is what constitutes nobility and is the reason for separating spiritedness from desire. But Machiavelli puts self-mastery among the objectives of Christian education and as one of the causes, therefore, of the weakness of the modern world (II.2.2). Nobility lies in strength, not in weakness, and in a strength which is surprisingly indifferent to justice. Machiavelli would understand perfectly that part of Pericles' Funeral Oration in which the Athenian statesman lauds his city's dedication to amoral greatness—to the production of sempiternal monuments of good and evil. Romans were better human specimens than the normal run of men and better than their descendants in what once were Roman provinces, because Romans conquered and ruled the world. Once philosophical humanity is removed from the equation, the choice is between humans as lions and humans as wolves. Machiavelli chooses what he takes to be—though the point is not argued—the higher representation of man. This choice and the project it inspires—repopulating the world with spirited Romans—is then the core of Machiavelli's benefaction and the fifth and final step in his philanthropy. For those who will allow, or can be persuaded to affirm, that the warrior is more noble than the philosopher, the monk, or the merchant, Machiavelli's philanthropy is genuine.
It is not, however, modern. Modern philanthropy looks to science to ameliorate the lot of man; Machiavelli looks to war. He looks to war not just because science and technology are unavailable to him—for he knows of artillery and rejects it, just as he rejects numerous other expediets aimed at simplifying acquisition. The acquisitions which come from science and technology are in Machiavelli’s estimation inglorious. They enhance the stature of the mercantile and artisan classes, while diminishing the significance of the warrior nobility, which over time surrenders its distinctive identity. Machiavelli is not Francis Bacon, for whom the highest glory goes to inventors. The printing press, the cannon, and the compass, Bacon contends, have brought more blessings to more men than have “sect[s]” (including, presumably, Christianity) or “civil benefits” (meaning, presumably, new modes and orders). The latter, observes Bacon, extend only to particular places and are initiated by violence and accompanied by confusion. Moreover, the ambitions inspiring political men are morally dubious: they consist of a “desire to extend their own power in their native country” or “to extend the power and dominion of their own country among men.” The first, which describes the ambition of the new prince in The Prince, is “a vulgar and degenerate kind”; the second, which describes the ambition of the Roman republic in the Discourses, “has more dignity, though not less covetousness.” Only the ambition—which Bacon hesitates calling ambition—“to establish and extend the power and dominion of the human race itself over the universe” is without these moral blemishes. And since “the empire of man over things depends wholly on the arts and sciences,” Bacon reasons that mankind’s foremost benefactors are discoverers, scientists, and fabricators, or the fathers of the House of
Salomon in his own *New Atlantis*. But Machiavelli places proficiency in the arts far down the list of glorious occupations, after religious and political foundings, military leadership, and literary composition, all of which a revised assessment places after the reordering of corrupt cities (I.10.1, 6). One of the crimes of Tarquinius Superbus was that he imposed “mechanical things” upon the plebeians of Rome, taking them away from “what his predecessors had put them to work in,” namely the bearing of arms (III.5).

Machiavelli does expect improvements to flow from the study and imitation of ancient history, and some scholars have even argued that Machiavelli’s innovation is the discovery of a science of statecraft. Such a science would make the conquest of fortune its goal, since fortune interrupts the business of safe and regular acquisition. At several points Machiavelli muses on the possibility of a virtue so virtuous that it astutely keeps fortune securely in tow (II.30.5, III.1.3, III.22.3). But always Machiavelli snaps out of his reverie, thinking the dream to be unachievable but also undesirable (II.29.1, 3; III.17; *Prince*, 25). The defeat of fortune by science would put an end to the contest of fortune and virtue and so would put an end to virtue itself. For what use are noble Romans in an era of perpetual peace? The world would neither need nor want such aggressive individuals wandering about. More obviously though, Lady Fortune is indomitable; she controls half or more of human affairs, and when ravished by impetuous lovers, she in fact “lets herself be won” (*Prince*, 25). Against fortune history is at best a crude instrument of prediction; for like causes happen rarely, and so rarely do like remedies apply (I.32). Add to that the claim that histories typically are bundles of lies written for the glorification of the powerful (II.Pr.1), and the conclusion presses hard that well-crafted histories (the *Discourses* being one) provide inspiration for the many and
prudential training for the few but contain no methodology by which the present can
govern the future. Alasdair MacIntyre differentiates Machiavelli’s artful approach to the
study of history from the law-like generalizations of Enlightenment philosophes and their
descendants in the social sciences: Machiavelli wisely understands, argues MacIntyre,
that fortune is “ineliminable from human life,” because the sources of unpredictability are
multitudinous; whereas Enlightenment thinkers take as the mark of scientific progress the
“diminution of predictive failure.”

On the political front, modern philanthropy seeks procedural justice through the
legitimization of power. Power is rightfully held if it rests on the consent of the governed
and stays within the boundaries of law. Machiavelli, though, never raises the issue of
legitimacy, because to his mind—and perhaps to his liking—power is taken by, not given
to, new princes rising from a private station. Usurpation is the truth about the origins of
power; and tyranny, as often as not, is the truth about its exercise. Machiavelli is more
interested in advising new princes as to the ways and means of acquiring, maintaining,
and expanding state than he is concerned to devise constitutional barriers against their
ambition. Conspiracies are unavoidable; indeed they are the very essence of politics.
What matters is not that they be prevented from occurring but that they be punished once
they have. And what mainly matters is that there be someone, a reformer, able and
willing to do thepunishing. Machiavellian politics is not only factious—this it has in
common with modernity—but gladiatorial.

The consent of the governed is a principle which attempts to establish the equality
of rulers and ruled. Universal suffrage extends the principle to the point where a ruling
class with an ethos of its own is unlikely to emerge. To a degree, Machiavelli initiates
the movement toward the equalization of the humors with the instruction in realpolitik he provides to the plebs—e.g., don’t disclose your intention to kill until the weapon is securely in your possession. But only to a degree does Machiavelli do this; for notwithstanding such instruction, Machiavelli keeps nobles and plebs well apart. The nobles are foxes acutely aware that their privileged position and the paucity of their number expose them to public resentment and require for their safety practise of the arts of hiding, temporizing, and ruling indirectly. At the same time they are lions, energetic and ambitious, who effectively determine the policies of the state: Rome’s objectives were the enterprises of the senate. In the case of Rome, its nobles managed a plebeian population so unlike themselves as to believe in oracles, auspices, and talking statues. An immense gulf separated “knowers of the world”—atheists in effect—from the superstitious and credulous crowd.

Needless to say, fraud is the underlying principle of indirect rule. The weak rise by fraud, and since never is a prince so strong as to reveal himself entirely, fraud is a continuing part of his repertoire. But a central supposition of modern philanthropy—as Ruth Grant nicely observes—is that public deliberation delivers ameliorative policies if conducted openly and honestly. Ignorance, not interest, is the cause of political disputes, and reason, properly informed and forthright in its speech, is the corrective. Human nature is perceived to be good (although corrupted by society), and all differences are assumed to be negotiable; accordingly, Enlightenment thinkers exude optimism about the prospects for peace and prosperity. Machiavelli, on the other hand, is of the opinion that people are bad (though made good by society) and that some passions are too primordial to be assuaged by economic bargaining. Political relations occur among people who are
less benevolent than friends and less malevolent than enemies; among people, that is, who are mutually needy but disinclined to provide assistance. Since citizens are at once dependent and selfish, they must be deceived into appreciating the common good. Hypocrisy, therefore, is the appropriate mode of address for princes trying to persuade the public. Fraud is indispensable; and fraud, unlike force, is consistent with the in-between nature of political relations.\textsuperscript{21}

But force also is a part of politics. People are moved by fear as well as by love. Another item on the agenda of modern philanthropy is the humanization of power. Despotic government is the great evil (for Montesquieu if not for Hobbes); moderate government is the great good. A mark of a well-ordered society is its disdain for cruel and unusual punishments.\textsuperscript{22} Of course Machiavelli shows no such squeamishness about cruelty in the punishment of malefactors. Cruelty well-used serves a political purpose: it satisfies the public, which demands vengeance against the nobility, and it stupefies the nobility, deterring its more insolent members from their conspiratorial designs. Well-executed punishments are extraordinary, theatrical, and partial, rather than juridically fair and correct;\textsuperscript{23} by definition they are cruel and unusual.

Modern philanthropy is liberal in that it discovers and generates rights borne by the individual, rights against the community to which the individual belongs. Likewise in Machiavelli there runs a deep strain of individualism: the potential prince who actualizes his potential and becomes a new prince is an individual through and through. But liberal individualism is about the protection of the weak (the permanently weak), whereas Machiavellian individualism is about the emancipation of the strong (the potentially strong). This is not to retract what was said before about Machiavelli’s support for the
popular cause. But his help is to the plebs, as a humor, not to individual plebeians in need of a guardian; and his help comes as instruction in the arts of self-defense, not as a declaration of inalienable rights. Otherwise Machiavelli is content to enumerate the duties of citizens and to orient them toward the glory of the state. The state should be wealthy and the citizens should be poor, says Machiavelli time and again (I.37, II.6, III.25).

Modern philanthropy supposes that law is the better guarantor of right conduct; accordingly it disregards or downplays the character of political actors. Machiavelli, though, emphasizes virtue, albeit a virtue different from the ancients, one compatible with "the effectual truth of the thing" (vera effetuale della cosa [Prince, 15]). The rule of lions is compatible with effectual truth, not the rule of philosophers contemplating the Good. Machiavelli’s focus is on the virtù of the prince. Successful governance is a matter of leadership (more than of institutions), and leadership is a matter of manipulating the citizenry so as to win praise and avoid blame (Prince, 15). Likewise the citizens have a virtue of their own, called civic virtue or goodness (bontà). The citizens are partners in acquisition and so must be hardened for combat as well as put on their guard against the ruling elite. At the same time they must possess such opposite qualities as reverence, trust, and fellow feeling, because obedience to authority and sacrifice for the common good are also required of them. Much depends on the character of the citizen body; if corrupted, republican government is at an end. Thus to the question can corruption and freedom coexist, Machiavelli’s answer is no, they cannot (I.18).²⁵

Chief among the instruments for implanting goodness in the people is civil religion. Machiavelli admires paganism and the uses to which it was put by Roman
authorities. It gave Rome gods who looked after the city and whose superintending purposes men could divine. Such support from on high occasioned hopefulness toward the future; hopefulness produced confidence, and confidence, supported by virtue, produced victories. Religion also instilled fear—fear of the gods which carried over to fear of the authorities; which fear caused obedience, and which obedience, coupled with hope, brought more victories and enlargement of the state. But while Machiavelli admires the pagan religion, he does not admire Christianity; and it is fair to say that the assault on the “Kingdom of Darkness” begins with Machiavelli. But unlike Enlightenment propaganda, which tries to disarm the Christian religion, privatize it, eliminate its more controversial doctrines, convert it from a theology of heaven and hell into a morality of tolerance; Machiavelli values religion (if not Christianity per se): he depends on its sanctions and its capacity for mobilizing men. He cannot, therefore, rest easy with a campaign of secularization aimed at undermining society’s religious foundations. It may be unclear what future Machiavelli envisions for Christianity (he calls for a reinterpretation consistent with “the exaltation and defense of the fatherland” [II.2.2]), but latitudinarianism would be the least promising of the available options.

The secularists among the moderns are also materialists. They take it that society’s purpose is the preservation of life, liberty, and property. They measure progress by the numbers who are secure in the enjoyment of such goods. But what modern philanthropy regards as a sign of progress, Machiavelli accounts a sign of corruption. Life is often sacrificed in the service of virtue; and both liberty (choice) and property corrupt. Necessity is what purifies (I.1.4); it is the cause of goodness, which in turn is half the cause of progress (princely virtù being the other half), until the inevitable occurs
and decline sets in. Necessity is mankind’s stern but solicitous guardian, responsible for leading “human works to the height they are seen to be led to” (III.12.1). Machiavelli rescues human beings from their encounter with necessity only to the extent that he replaces physical necessity (a sterile site) with law. But the total mastery of nature’s necessities is not his objective, because leisure, luxury, and license he sees as ruinous to human virtue and therewith to human progress. Machiavelli’s old-fashioned endorsement of poverty stands in striking contrast to modern defenses of free enterprise and high technology. For not only is it thought philanthropic, in some quarters, to augment productivity, but people are thought better for having more goods to consume. Scarcity, argues David Hume, is what causes people to be unjust, not ease and comfort. Eliminate scarcity, and the need for justice, even the intelligibility of justice, disappears. Since material acquisition is a cumulative affair, with each generation amassing more wealth than its predecessor, modern philanthropy interprets human history as the story of material and moral progress. But Machiavelli is not a progressive: time brings decay, and longevity depends on periodic renewal. Thus for Machiavelli the greatest benefactor is the reformer who wrenches the state back to its moral beginnings. Odd though it may seem, Manlius Torquatus, the consul who executed his son in order to restore discipline to his army, is the exemplar of Machiavellian philanthropy (III.22).

In one respect Machiavelli is surely kindred to the moderns. Machiavelli denies that the soul has a right order other than the subordination of appetite to spirit—a preference of his never adequately justified. Human striving, therefore, is without the ends of religion and philosophy, without eternal salvation for a life well-led or rational comprehension of a universe intelligently ordered. But too much can be made of
Machiavelli’s break from tradition and too much credit conferred on him for initiating modernity. Machiavelli is not the first serious thinker to disbelieve in God or the first to grow impatient with philosophical speculations. He may be the first to proclaim openly the liberation of politics from ethics. But this openness, rather than evidence of a new appraisal of man, as Leo Strauss maintains, may simply signal an attempt to escape the straitjacket of Christian modes and orders and to return to the pagan politics of republican Rome. Machiavelli is certainly opposed to the tradition of Greek philosophy and Christian religion. But in opposing that tradition does he create the Enlightenment, as is often said, or does he revert to an older tradition, one pre-philosophic and pre-Christian? And in opposing the tradition—the “Great Tradition,” as Strauss styles it—does Machiavelli emerge victorious, imposing his modes and orders on a new-born modernity, or is he rebuffed and marginalized? For another view holds that the Great Tradition continues apace inside the Enlightenment, taking from Greek philosophy its confidence in reason and from the Christian religion its humane morality. To be sure, the differences are pronounced between ancient and modern rationalisms and ancient and modern ethics; but the two traditions have this feature in common, that they downgrade courage and the hero and disavow fighting as a mode of acquisition; accordingly they are cosmopolitan and universalistic in outlook and scope. Machiavelli, though, is committed to the warrior state; he is agonistic and particularistic and his outlook is tragic—every good is accompanied by evil; nothing man-made lasts forever. On the other hand, his warrior state is not isolationist and xenophobic; it rather expands and assimilates. And his loyalty is to no particular state but to whichever state is ready for greatness. Machiavelli also writes comedies; and in the comedic spirit, he devises
remedies; reason is half of virtù, for the cunning fox saves the brave lion from falling into snares. Nor is Machiavelli averse to economizing in matters of acquisition or greatly offended by the fact that the effectual truth of timocratic nobles is that they are, or in time become, oligarchic landholders. Machiavelli is not quite then a throwback to the heroic age of Homer (or if he is, Odysseus is his hero as much as Achilles). He is sui generis, as is his philanthropy, which despite its aspiration for glory is tempted by gratifications of a material sort. Modernity may then claim Machiavelli as its own, but it is truer to say that the modernity of Machiavelli is the corruption of Machiavelli.

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3 "Civic humanism" is the school of interpretation which tries defending Machiavelli by linking him to the political philosophy of Greeks and Romans. Space constraints prevent my discussing it, but a recent contribution is Maurizio Viroli’s Machiavelli (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).


5 A praetorian guard demanding patronage is a special circumstance (Prince, 19).

6 Because the appeal is strictly self-interested, there is some truth to the claim that Machiavelli prepares the ground for utilitarian ethics. But whether Machiavelli is a proto-utilitarian or not will depend on his understanding of the self whose enlightened interests he is pleased to advance.

7 After the break up of the Latin League in 338, four classifications were used to organize Rome’s growing population: full-citizens, half-citizens, Latin allies, and Italian allies. The rights and responsibilities of each group varied. Howard Scullard contends that “Rome ever followed the policy of
'divide and rule,' and when she had made her divisions she tended to treat each section according to its degree of civilisation. . . . But ‘divide and rule’ is only a half-truth. By this policy Rome had won the hegemony of Italy; she retained her position only because she welded the divisions into a higher unity” (A History of the Roman World, 753-146 B.C. [London: Methuen and Company, Ltd., 1935], p. 141). See also W.E. Heitland, The Roman Republic, vol. I (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1909), pp. 165-74.

The best escape is not the one which Machiavelli highlights—keeping silent about the conspiracy until the moment of its execution (III.6.7-9). For this remedy, while it guards against betrayal, runs afoul of the advice not to change plans in order not to unnerve fellow conspirators, who, if surprised with the news that a conspiracy is afoot, are denied the time needed to steel themselves for the deed (§12-14). The better plan is to forge evidence of the prince’s hostile intent (§10-11), since fear for one’s own life overcomes the reverence ordinarily felt for men in high places. (See Harvey Mansfield, Jr. Machiavelli’s New Modes and Orders: A Study of the Discourses on Livy [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979], p. 331.) Analysis thus suggests that Machiavelli’s preferred conspirator, the one with the best chances for success, is not a man of quality who commands a following, but a person lightly regarded though close to the ruler. The regime resulting from such a conspiracy would almost certainly have to be a republic, since the party responsible for the change would not have the standing to make himself a prince.

Consider the parable of the Vineyard Workers in Matthew 20: 1-16.

The surprise attack on the Theban citadel was against state policy, and the commander responsible for the act was discharged. But Sparta kept its new acquisition, nevertheless. Plutarch reports that all of Greece was astonished (Pelopidas, 5-6, in Lives, vol. V [London: William Heinemann, 1917]).


Plato, too, relies upon imagery to make the case for philosophical rule (Republic, 588b-592b, 2nd ed. [New York: Basic Books, 1991]).
The aristocrats of Athens, in similar circumstances (imperium acquired by naval power dependent on the demos, rather than by land power supplied by the aristo), changed the base of their strength from money and birth to rhetorical skill—i.e., they sent their sons to study rhetoric with the sophists. By contrast, the curriculum of the Machiavellian prince consists of hunting, war games, and histories of military and political heroes (Prince, 14; Discourses, III.39). See Arthur W.H. Adkins, Merit and Responsibility: A Study in Greek Values (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960), pp. 236-37; Mark Hullung, Citizen Machiavelli (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1983), pp. 21-23. Viroli is of a different opinion (Machiavelli, pp., 71-113).


There are of course many affinities between Bacon and Machiavelli. In fact, when speaking of philanthropia, Bacon associates himself, albeit guardedly, with Machiavelli’s attack upon Christianity. Goodness, says Bacon, is the foundation of philanthropy, and Christianity has done more to “magnify goodness” than has any law, sect, or opinion. But Christian goodness is prone to error: it is naive, indiscriminate, short-sightedly generous, and unable to use envious natures for political advantage. It has, in consequence, “given up good men in prey to those that are tyrannical and unjust.” Here Bacon cites Machiavelli (II.2.2) (Essay #13, “Of Goodness, and Goodness of Nature,” in The Essays or Counsels, Civil and Moral [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985]). Paul Rahe notes, however, that Bacon’s advocacy of “the new technological science” and of the peaceful, prosperous enlightenment which this science engenders undermines religion, most influential in troubled times, as well as “the ethos supporting austere virtue” (Republics Ancient and Modern: Classical Republicanism and the American Revolution [Chapel Hill: North Carolina University Press, 1992], p. 279). But then Bacon and Machiavelli must have different purposes in attacking Christianity, since Machiavelli’s purpose is the reclamation of austere, ancient virtue (I.Pr.2). See also Robert K. Faulkner, Francis Bacon and the Project of Progress (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1993), pp. 62-65.


19 There are five passages in the Discourses where Machiavelli invites the Butterfield interpretation of a science of statecraft based on direct imitation of the past: I.11.5, 1.39.1, III.27.2, III.30.2, III.43.1. All are problematic, and the last is particularly so; it stipulates that foreign policy decisions can be made on the basis of what one’s ancestors did centuries ago. Among the various liabilities attending this claim (and intimated by Machiavelli himself) is the difficulty of ascertaining who one’s ancestor are—e.g., are Florentines descended from Etruscans or from Romans (I.1.3; *Florentine Histories*, II.2)?

20 *After Virtue*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), pp. 92-93. Alasdair MacIntyre identifies four sources of unpredictability in human affairs: “radical conceptual innovation,” “unmade decisions,” “the game theoretic character of social life,” and “pure contingency” (pp. 93-100). Masters takes a middle position. He associates Machiavelli, by way of Leonardo da Vinci, with modern science, but he allows that science without prudence is useless (e.g., the fiasco of diverting the Arno): “Ultimately, it is the human dispositions and virtues that are central to political success, not the technological devices derived from a scientific understanding of inanimate nature” (*Machiavelli, Leonardo*, p. 193).


24 On the impracticality of philosophical rule, consider the following statement from Prince 14: “. . . for there is no proportion between one who is armed and one who is unarmed, and it is not reasonable that whoever is armed obey willingly whoever is unarmed, and that someone who is unarmed be secure among armed servants.”


27 For a contrary opinion, see Vickie B. Sullivan, Machiavelli’s Three Romes: Religion, Human Liberty, and Politics Reformed (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1996). Sullivan contends that Machiavelli is out to destroy religion in toto as a way of protecting politics from the blandishments of tyranny (pp. 6-8, 66-72, 102-21, 188-89). In support of her thesis it can be argued that Machiavelli undermines religious conviction by reducing the truth of religion to calculations of utility. But a counter-argument is given by Mansfield: that the public is incorrigibly pious and is not expected to disbelieve (Virtue, p. 29). See also Hullung, Citizen Machiavelli, p. 106.


29 Mansfield argues to the contrary that Machiavelli is a progressive (Virtue, pp. 109-22). But what Mansfield appears to mean by progress is an agonistic condition conducive to virtue’s perpetuation; this he calls “the perpetual republic” (p. 280).

30 The pre-Socratics were notorious atheists (Apology, 18c [Euthyphro, Apology, Crito [Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, Inc., 1956]), and the sophists of Socrates’ day, while more circumspect, were just as unbelieving (Republic, 365d-e; Laws, 885b [New York: Basic Books, 1979]); and both


32 Thoughts, p. 232; see also pp. 10, 59, 79.

33 Friedrich Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy, sec. #15; Beyond Good and Evil, Pr.; sec. #188; Genealogy of Morals, I, sec. 12, in Basic Writings of Nietzsche, Walter Kaufmann, trans. and ed. (New York: Modern Library, 1968).

34 Socrates wants justice for the soul (Republic, 353d-e), whereas Descartes wants health for the body (Discourse on Method [Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, Inc., 1956], p. 40). But when Socrates asks what justice is, he presupposes that a correct answer to the question will contribute to the betterment of men. Reason resolves, repairs, discovers; and people are reasonable. By the same token, other-worldly Christianity is far removed from non-teleological and insistently secular utilitarianism. But Christian charity and Christian egalitarianism (that all human beings are equal in the eyes of God) provide the underpinnings for the modern welfare state.

35 The Greek polis is a cosmopolis of sorts because concern for the good man supersedes concern for the good citizen (Aristotle, Politics, III.4 [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984]).