HUMANISM, POSITIVISM, IMMORALITY

Thoughts On Machiavelli. By Leo Strauss (Glencoe: *The* Free Press, 1958). Reprinted by University of Washington Press, 1969. Pp. 348. $7.95, $2.95 paper.

Of all writers on politics, has there been any one whose meaning has been more hotly contested over the centuries than Machiavelli? "Even now," says Cassirer, "after the book (the Prince) has been approached from every angle, after it has been discussed by philosophers, by historians, by politicians and sociologists," its meaning remains, "in a sense, a secret ... (that) has not yet been completely revealed."[1] Why? The immorality of Machiavelli's teaching is manifest, he himself makes no bones about it. But his readers either will not take him at face value, or else, agreeing with some aspect of his thought, wish to attribute the immorality to some kind of praiseworthy motive, or else explain it away. The explaining away is usually done by calling Machiavelli "a product of his time"; the praiseworthy motive is located either in his patriotism *or* his love for liberty or his "realistic sincerity." Unlike other political theorists, Machiavelli's teaching was applied in practice from the very first; the century-old debate about the essence of that teaching therefore goes beyond the confines of the academy and, through the position on him adopted by many active men, directly affects the existential order or disorder of peoples. In that case, those who think of Machiavelli as a guide "merely for practice" ignore the philosophical implications of his counsel, to become easy prey for the profounder perversion of political reason.

There has thus been not merely an intellectual duty but an existential compulsion for every age to make up its own mind about Machiavelli, and as long as Western civilization continues, this re-examination will go on. In a period of re-emerging political philosophy one naturally expects this re-thinking to be illumined by philosophical concepts, and this Leo Strauss purports to provide in his *Thoughts on Machiavelli,* a series of lectures delivered in Chicago in 1953 and first published, in an expanded version, in 1958. Much of the revival of political philosophy of our time is

[1] *The Myth of the State,* Ch. X.

traceable to the profoundly shocking experience of the armed ideological mass movements that transcended national boundaries and yet provided the mightiest political impulse for rulers. It was not the totalitarianism of our time that caused political scientists to turn again to Machiavelli : the nature of totalitarianism could not be grasped as a contemporary version of Machiavellism but rather through such phenomena as ancient Gnosticism and medieval millennarianism. Machiavelli is not the founder of an ideology, but, in an age of widespread perversion of political rationality, his teaching of "bestial" political practices cannot help being linked up with what is gushing forth from deeper wells of demonism.

Spinoza was the first to suggest that Machiavelli was hiding a far-reaching and universal design under what semed to be down-to-earth practical advice: "But what means a prince, whose sole motive is lust of mastery, should use to establish and maintain his dominion, the most ingenious Machiavelli has set forth at large, but with what design one can hardly be sure."[2] Leo Strauss, in his *Persecution and the Art of Writing,* has raised the suspicion of hidden design to the rank of a general assumption that in his opinion should govern all research on political theoretical writing. If the assumption applies to Spinoza and Hobbes, it would *a fortiori* apply to Machiavelli who, at the beginning of the *Discourses,* points out, in Strauss' words, "that he has discovered new modes and orders, that such discovery is dangerous if it is communicated, and that he will nevertheless communicate his discovery," and who, in a letter to Guicciardini, remarks: "for some time I never say what I believe and I never believe what I say; and if it sometimes occurs to me that I say the truth, I conceal it among so many lies that it is hard to find out." In the case of Machiavelli's two principal works, Strauss would modify this remark to read: "I conceal it among so many contradictory and mutually exclusive observations that it is hard to find out." Find out, however, is what Strauss sets out to do, and his entire first chapter consists of an account of the sleuthing methods by which he seeks to separate Machiavelli's message from the cunning concealments. He concludes that behind the cunning lurks the intention not merely to conceal but even more to seduce the reader,

[2] *Tractatus Politicus,* V, p. 7.

and that this seduction is Machiavelli's true and philosophical, or rather anti-philosophical, message.

From the very beginning Strauss disallows the legend of Machiavelli's "realism" and "patriotism." "To speak of Machiavelli as a scientist is at least as misleading as to speak of him as a patriot. The scientific student of society is unwilling or unable to pass 'value-judgments,' but Machiavelli's works abound with 'value-judgments.' His study of society is normative." (p. 11) What is the norm Machiavelli prescribes? Right in the Introduction, Strauss calls him a "teacher of evil," *(ibid.)* and "a devil," (p. 13), whose teaching is "diabolical" *(ibid.).* "[I]n describing the *Prince* as the work of a revolutionary, we have used that term in the precise tense: a revolutionary is a man who breaks the law, the law as a whole, in order to replace it by a new law . . ." (p. 62). So, lawless subversion is Machiavelli's main purpose. Machiavelli's revolution, according to Strauss, is "above everything else a revolution in thinking about right and wrong" (p. 67). Strauss is right in placing the center of gravity here. Yet, Machiavelli's transvaluation of values must be said to differ not only from Nietzsche's, but also from that represented by leading Sophists of the type of Thrasymachus and Callicles. These latter believed that morality was tantamount to the interests of the strong man who has the power to call that right which serves him and that wrong which pertains to weakness. Unlike these men, Machiavelli did not pervert the accepted notions of right and wrong but simply taught that the prince, in order to secure political success, must commit wrongs which, even though Machiavelli deems them necessary in politics, still remain *wrongs.* What he taught was therefore not a novel concept of right and wrong but rather a novel duty which bids the prince to accept evil as his norm. To teach evil as a norm, however, does not come natural to man, particularly to the man of Western tradition who has been brought up in the knowledge of the soul and its structure that stems from Socrates and Plato, and in the knowledge of the God of righteousness and God the Trinity of Love that stems from the Old and New Testaments. Aldous Huxley, in his *Ape and Essence,* has given us a glimpse of what it takes to break with such a tradition. In the case he describes, a post-nuclear-Armageddon society in Southern California, the men and women derive the normativity of evil from their conviction that during the past four centuries, being had definitely

come under Satan's power, and that the prince of darkness must be propitiated by men's evil practices. This poses the question of what Machiavelli saw as an ultimate reality that caused him to break with the tradition.

In some respects it seems that Machiavelli was not quite as novel and solitary a thinker as Strauss makes him out to be. Panofsky has reminded us that Petrarch, the originator of Renaissance self-consciousness, was the first one to distinguish between two periods, the *historiae antiquae* and the *historiae novae,* "and where his forerunners had conceived of (a) continuous development as a steady progress from heathen darkness to the light that was Christ . . . Petrarch interpreted the period in which the name of Christ began to be celebrated in Rome and to be adored by the Roman emperors' as the beginning of a 'dark' age of decay and obscuration, and the preceding period . . . as an age of glory and light."[3] From Petrarch's impetus and that of his counter-part in architecture, Brunelleschi, issued the two-fold slogan of the age: *Back to Antiquity, Back to Nature!* This slogan was not heeded in all branches of art and thought at the same time. In letters, it was not adopted until Boccaccio-and one may say that in political thought the turning mark was Machiavelli. Machiavelli, then, does have the character of a "child of his age," but not so much in the sense that the political turmoil of Sixteenth century Italy had completely overwhelmed his perception of human and divine reality. Rather, it was the anti-Christian mood of a new historical orientation that saw two distinct periods in the past and looked upon itself as the initiator of a third period, and soon began to speak of Antiquity and Modernity as the two significant poles of time between which the intervening centuries were degraded to something as insignificant as the "middle ages." In the cinquecento, however, this was still to come, and even Machiavelli, when speaking of "modern," meant something synonymous with "Christian," because only fifty years earlier the "modern" style in Europe was still Gothic, and this was the Christian artistic expression *par excellence.* At any rate, when Machiavelli in his *Discourses* focused on Livy and Rome, it was in a spirit of rejection of Christianity to which Antiquity appeared as the antipode. Did he also comply with the second part of the slogan and embrace

[3] *Renaissance and Renascences,* p. 10.

"Nature" and, if so, what was Machiavelli's nature and what normative implications did he see in the concept? Since Machiavelli, though pursuing a design on the metaphysical and spiritual foundations of the Western tradition, was not a philosophical writer but rather concealed his ultimate intent under apparently realistic and wholly practical advice, the answers to these questions are not easy to come by. Neither is his espousal of Antiquity a clear-cut affair. Strauss, guided by his basic suspicion of Machiavelli's 'word and purpose, has probed tenaciously into the texts and shown that both concepts, Antiquity and Nature, play an ambiguous part in Machiavelli's teaching.

Livy's work at first seems to serve Machiavelli to establish Rome as a universal paradigm, then is used to cast doubt and discredit on Rome, and finally becomes the target of Machiavelli's disapproving remarks. Thus Machiavelli first lifted Livy into the place of an anti-Christian authority. Strauss feels that he treated Livy's work as an ersatz-Bible to which one harkens "in filial affection, in patient docility, in pious reverence until it has revealed to us its full message" (p. 93) ; but that Machiavelli, still using Livy, first destroys the paradigm of Antiquity and finally takes apart also Livy's authority. "With some exaggeration one may say that Machiavelli uses Livy as a *corpus vile* by means of which he can demonstrate how he has tacitly proceeded in regard to the *corpus nobilissimum" (i.e.,* the Bible) (p. 142) . Quite consistently, Strauss calls the Livy of the *Discourses* "a character of Machiavelli," a strawman used for the purpose not to re-establish the authority of Antiquity but rather to undermine the authority of the Bible, and indeed, all authority. In other words, the movement toward Antiquity is in Machiavelli mainly an instrument with which to accomplish his anti-Christian design, a design that throughout remains "underground" (p. 99).

The thesis is intriguing. It does not conflict with the evidence and seems to explain the results. All the same, it has been accomplished by reasoning that moves from one circumstantial conclusion to another, so that each further step is always predicated on the solidity of the previous one, which in turn also depends on the speculative interpretation of circumstantial evidence. There is nothing in Strauss' elaborately prodding proof that one could call downright artificial or forced, yet one cannot help wondering whether a complex apparatus of roundabout theses has a compelling logic and whether Machiavelli's meaning could not be

grasped in a more direct way. To this point we shall have to return later. At this juncture we must move on to examine Machiavelli's "Nature."

II

One wonders whether there is a more ambiguous, more abused, more evasive word in the entire dictionary of political thought than nature. Raised first by the Ionian physiologists, sharpened into a tool of eristic debate by the Sophists, then by Socrates and Plato elevated to a testimony of the divine, in Aristotle's work the cornerstone of his conceptual structure-and all this diversity merely in the Greece of a bare two hundred years, not taking into account what happened to "Nature" between 1650 and 1950! Even though the content and scope of the nature concept has widely changed, the political debate revolving around it has remained remarkably constant. The issue was joined by the Sophists in fifth century Athens, who used *physis* as a battering ram to attack the validity of laws, *nomos,* based on tradition and ancestral custom. The question was that of the source of political order. Heraclitus had said: "All human laws are nourished by one, which is divine." The implication that traditional political entities, historically unique though they are, root in the same source of order which "governs as far as it will, and is sufficient for all, and more than enough," was rejected by those who acknowledged as law only that which manifests itself in the "necessity" of nature. They rejected custom and tradition as artificial, merely human, unreliable, and illegitimate. The measure of laws to them is trans-social, trans-historical, but definitely sub-divine, whether they look for the manifestation of nature in their own abstract ratiocinations, or in animal behavior as something more relevant than human consciousness. If they incline to the latter, then they might refer either to the animalic drives in the composite of human beings, or else to the direct example of non-human animals. This debate, in which Socrates decisively defeated the Sophist arguments, has nevertheless been revived from time to time with the fronts drawn by and large along the same lines, and each time the initiative was taken by those who wished to assail the political tradition of given societies, as well as the Occidental tradition of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, going back all the way to Heraclitus.

Strauss has called Machiavelli a revolutionary who "breaks

the law." It is only logical that he would look in him for expressions revealing that concept of nature which has turned out to be intellectual and political dynamite in the hands of revolutionaries. He points to the opening chapters of the *Prince* where Machiavelli speaks of traditional political orders as something "natural" but then finds that in chapter III Machiavelli talks of acquisition, including the acquisition of kingdoms by usurpers as something equally natural. From this inconsistency Strauss derives the certainty that Machiavelli is again engaged in one of his deceptive, ploys. Maybe he is; one finds it hard to consider the evidence conclusive. It seems just as logical to assume that Machiavelli was not sensitive enough to philosophical incompatibilities so that the inconsistent use of "natural" may have been careless rather than deliberate. More direct evidence is found in the notorious passage in ch. XVIII of the *Prince:*

> "You should know, then, that there are two ways of fighting: one with the law, the other with force: the first way is peculiar to man, the other to beasts; but since the first in many instances is not enough, it becomes necessary to resort to the second. Therefore, a prince must know how to make good use of the beast and the man. This role was taught to princes indirectly by the ancient writers, who wrote how Achilles and many other ancient princes were given to Chiron the Centaur to be brought up ... Since a prince must know how to make good use of the beast, he should choose then the fox and the lion ..."

Strauss comments on this passage: "We may note here that Machiavelli is our most important witness to the truth that humanism is not enough. Since man must understand himself in the light of the whole or of the origin of the whole which is not human, or since man is the being that must try to transcend humanity, he must transcend humanity in the direction of the subhuman if he does not transcend it in the direction of the superhuman. . . . As for Machiavelli, one may say . . . that he replaces the imitation of the God-Man Christ by the imitation of the Beast-Man Chiron." (p. 78) Interspersed in this remark is Strauss' exclusion of the middle: "*Tertium, i.e.,* humanism, *non datur.*" One wonders, though, whether the matter ends there. Those intellectuals who have professed themselves prophets of nature, in opposition to the political entities as they had grown in history along the gnarled lines of tradition, generally attributed to nature something like a semi-divine rank. The foun-

dation for that was laid by the Ionian nature-philosophers; but in later and elaborate form, a somewhat divinized nature governed the thinking of the Stoics as well as the neo-Stoic outlook of the eighteenth-century *philosophes.* Even 'Chiron still represents some of the awe that men feel for the divinely mysterious Nature.

There seems to be none of this awe in Machiavelli. The lion and the fox are mere rhetorical figures; the entire "bestiality" is simply another term for what Machiavelli *passim* calls "committing wrongs"; nature is no cosmos nor the manifestation of any inherent lawfulness but simply a formula for a break-out from rationality and morality. Unlike the Stoics and even eighteenth-century deists, Machiavelli is quite unconcerned with man's participation in nature as a transcending reality, or, for that matter, with any problem of participation at all. Rather, his writings testify to a political schizophrenia which Eric Voegelin has described: "man has split into a power-self that is his own, and another part of his self that cannot escape participation, though its participation is experienced by a victimization by the process." The "participating half" of Machiavelli's man is the man "who wishes to profess goodness at all times." He is the one who "must fall to ruin among so many who are not good." Machiavelli's norm, then, is the other half, neither of superhuman nor of subhuman origin, but rather the man who is strong, powerful, and uses his strength with the maximum of freedom: the *libido dominandi* of Augustine, Spinoza's lust of mastery, the man who dreams of making himself, by sheer will and skill, the master of history and closes his eyes to the tragic falls that have followed every triumphant rise in the affairs of peoples and kings. Thucydides, in the Melian Dialogue he inserted into his *Peloponnesian War,* has sketched a universally valid portrait of the power-self, replete with references to the "necessity of nature" by which both gods and men "rule wherever they can." Augustine's analysis of the *libido dominandi,* in the bipolarity of the *amor Dei* on the one side and the *amor sui* on the other, has proved that the "power-self" does not move in the realm of "nature" conceived as a kind of intra-mundane normativity, but rather in the realm of human concupiscence. Concupiscence, as Aristotle taught, is not an aspect of man's animal existence, but rather that element of his soul that either does, or does not, heed the *nous,* "itself divine or the most

divine thing in us.'"[4] Machiavelli's references to nature, then, seem to amount to relatively careless remarks accompanying his choice for a reduction of the human self to the concupiscent part, which, *pace* Strauss, amounts to humanism apart from, and antagonistic to, both God and Nature, asserting the prowess of self-will to attain mastery over history.

The claim is peculiarly underscored by Machiavelli's "mythical" figure of Fortuna. Fortuna's important role in Machiavelli's writing has led some to maintain that Machiavelli was a pagan, i.e. a man relapsed from Christianity to the divinities and the cosmos of ancient Rome. Strauss quite rightly rejects this thesis: "Paganism is a kind of piety and one does not find a trace of pagan piety in Machiavelli's works" (p. 175). Roman piety included the worship of Fortuna as a mighty goddess. Livy, whom Machiavelli here quotes with full agreement, "demonstrated" the will and design of Fortuna in Rome's initial defeat and subsequent victory against the Gallic invaders. Could Machiavelli indeed have harked back to Fortuna in order to conjure up the luck that in ancient times accompanied Rome's military expansion? There are those, of course, who look on religion as if it were a utility, judging it by "how it works," i.e. provides results advantageous to a person or society in this historical world. That Machiavelli was interested in results, at least in the two works discussed by Strauss, is hard to deny. He addresses one of these works to Lorenzo de' Medici who was in a position to use political power to certain effects Machiavelli desired; the other work, as Strauss repeatedly notes, is written in the same spirit and carries the same message. He turns his own mind, and directs his readers' minds, toward ancient Rome, because he deplores Italy's sixteenth-century impotence, attributes it to political decadence and corruption of the spirit, and wants to see a resurrection of Italy's strength and resolution on the model of Rome's ancient glory. But why Fortuna? Could he really have imagined that it would be possible to resurrect a myth of the past and thereby to cure the political ills of the present?

Strauss, who in the estimate of this reviewer gives too little

[4] *Nicomachean Ethics,* 1177a 16.

attention to the Renaissance setting of Machiavelli's Florence, provides us with no satisfactory answer to this question. In the generation before Machiavelli, his compatriot Marsilio Ficino had merged Neo-Platonism with Christianity in such a way that on the one hand he had brought back the hellinistic notion of the cosmos and cosmic "influences" on man and society, on the other hand had declared not only the compatibility but even identity of the Greco-Roman pantheon of Gods with the Trinity whom Christians worshipped. It was in this sense that Mary was not infrequently identified with Venus, that a "cosmic spirit" was believed to be the every-day affairs mediator between man and God, and that the figures of ancient myths appeared in painting and literature side by side with Christian symbolisms, with no feeling of incongruity or even radical difference. We must assume, then, that Machiavelli found nothing unheard of or revolutionary in introducing Fortuna, the Roman goddess, into a discussion of historical matters in which he also sometimes dropped the phrase "we Christians." It was, in itself, nothing but a manifestation of the same outlook that gave us Botticelli's "Birth of Venus." One can further assume that, had one asked Machiavelli more closely, he would not have denied that his Fortuna was a synonym for the Christian Providence. Now Ficino, in a famous letter, had coined the phrase *Prospero in fato fortuna, vera in virtute felicitas* (good. luck comes by fate, true happiness only from virtue), and, in a different place, had remarked "all the heavens are within ourselves." Machiavelli may have misunderstood Ficino's true meaning, but he did call upon the image of Fortuna not to defer to her for all desirable political results but, on the contrary, to turn from her to *virtu,* to assert that in politics the key to success is indeed "within ourselves." Inasmuch as this occurred in the midst of a Neo-Platonist revival in which the mind and the soul figured as respectively higher and lower emanations from the One Immutability, a tendency to divinize the human mind and soul as hypostases followed not unnaturally. Machiavelli need not have intended the ruthless destruction of tradition as Strauss maintains, if he wanted to see in man's capacity of virtue the potency of political self-salvation. The real trouble lies in Machiavelli's shifting of both "virtue" and "salvation" from philosophical theology to the field of politics, whereby he effected the first sharp reduction of human life to one of its world-immanent aspects. At this point Fortuna

is dethroned, and there emerges the essentially Machiavellian outlook of which his a-moralism is a mere byproduct: Fortuna is not the mistress of our successes and failures, we are the captains of our own ship, and human will, steeled by *virtu,* can prevail over the fickle goddess. If man will recognize his superior rank, he can compel Fortuna by beating her into submission. Had Machiavelli not substituted Fortuna for Providence, he would in all probability not have been capable of thinking such thoughts. As it was, he did find it possible to imagine Fortuna, a woman, to knuckle under to forceful male self-assertion. In the net result, though, Machiavelli had dethroned Providence, that is, God, as he usurped for man the final power to shape his destiny, just a little short of Marx's "self-creating" man. All the same, the triumphalism of god-ridded man, natural strength shorn of divine grace, cannot be laid exclusively at Machiavelli's door; the blame must be shared by many others of his age who, turning their back to 'Christianity and their face toward "Nature," recalled the lifeless shapes of ancient gods and the by then inanimate cosmos of the Greeks, and, in so toying with assorted divinities, erased limits which centuries of careful' intellectual efforts had lovingly constructed.

Here lies the key to Machiavelli's disdain for old and traditionally established states and his well-nigh exclusive concentration on what today we would call illegitimate power. "The primary purpose of the *Prince,*" says Strauss, "is not to give particular counsel to a contemporary Italian prince, but to set forth a wholly new teaching regarding wholly new princes in wholly new states," which he then characterizes as "a shocking teaching about the most shocking phenomenon" (p. 79). Not that Machiavelli ignores traditional established governments, yet he talks about them disdainfully and somewhat mockingly. On the other hand, he strongly recommends that the prince look for guidance and inspiration to those who "have becomes princes" by means "of their ingenuity and *not by fortune,"* who are "innovators" introducing "a new system of things." One must read these statements in the light of Machiavelli's explicit declaration that he has put into his works "all he knows about world _ affairs," so that one cannot look on them as an intended limited treatment of a limited section or aspect of politics. What he writes about is, in his eyes, the whole of the reality of human order. One must conclude, then,

that politics, to Machiavelli, is not the field of "acting" ("deliberate choices" in the setting of "things which are what they are by necessity": Aristotle) but rather a process of "making" ("producing things which either could, or could not be"). The prince-correction: the *new* prince of wholly *new* states-is essentially a maker of human worlds, a "mortal god," as Hobbes called him. In subsequent centuries the adjective "Machiavellian" has been applied to skillful and coldly calculating managers of *realpolitik*, the Richelieus, Talleyrands, Metternichs, Bismarcks, Cavours. This usage implies a gross misunderstanding of Machiavelli. Such statesmen were skillful in "acting," they took the world and man as they are, they knew the nature of things, and they judged by and large correctly what could be done. If anyone embodied Machiavelli's view of politics, it was not they, but Napoleon, intoxicated with his own *virtu,* dragging Fortuna like a submissive wench from battlefield to battlefield, insatiably making "new systems," new states, new governments, carving peoples and traditions as though playing with paper and scissors, shifting around boundaries and loyalties like toy building blocks. Marx, by his own statement, was "no Marxist." Machiavelli had no chance to say so, but he was no Machiavellian, rather a Promethean, a man who defies God and all authority in order to play the demi-god among ordinary mortals, drinking the heady drafts of un-normed liberty and unlimited power that befit a "maker" of human destinies.

Machiavelli's immediate motive may have derived from his lament over Italy's corrupt and vile condition, and his ardent desire to see his native country rise to something like her ancient glory. Yet let us recall Aristotle's treatment of peoples in similar conditions. Under even the worst circumstances, he said, the mind must steadfastly strive for the best, the highest good, the best state, even though he has to adjust to the limiting factors of time, place, and people. Even in the presence of tyranny that motion toward the best can be carried out, if only in the form of a hypocritical bow. This continuous motion toward "the best" had been explicitly rejected by Machiavelli. Since he took corrupt and decadent Italy as his point of departure, and as his model the kind of politicians and politics which such sickness brings forth, and called this "all he knew," it follows that Machiavelli reduced politics to the problem of power stability under conditions of extreme human depravity. We might say that he resembles the psychologist who

treats only of psychopathology and claims that this is all there is to the human psyche. In both cases we have the same reduction of reality, the scaling down of the concept of man, a substitution of the sick man for the whole man, of the witch doctor for God, of the depiction of abnormality for the knowledge of "the best. Strauss does not do full justice to this problem by calling such social conditions, and the corresponding type of politician, "shocking." Shocking. they are, indeed, but the theorist should have more to communicate to the reader than his personal disapproval, which sheds not much light on what goes on in Machiavelli and in those who accept his version of political "knowledge" as "realism." This, however, is a point to which I shall return later.

Throughout Strauss' book, which begins with a chapter on detective work, one has difficulty in escaping the impression that his procedure takes needless round-about routes and that a reliable estimate of Machiavelli's teaching could have been obtained by more direct approaches. Machiavelli himself has taught us in blunt terms wherein he intends to "depart" in his works "from the procedures of others," i.e. from traditional political theory.

> "But my intention being to write something useful for whoever understands it, it seemed to me more appropriate to pursue the effectual truth of the matter rather than its imagined one. And many have imagined republics and principalities that have never been seen or known to exist in reality; for there is such a gap between how one lives and how one should live that he who neglects what is being done for what should be done will learn his destruction rather than his preservation: for a man who wishes to profess goodness at all times must fall to ruin among so many who are not good. Whereby it is necessary for a prince who wishes to maintain his position to learn how not to be good ..." (*The Prince*, ch. XV)

Now Strauss, in his first chapter, observes that Machiavelli "explicitly excludes only one subject from discussion" (p. 28) ; the alert reader perks up his ears and expects him to continue : ". . . consideration of things as they ought to be." Instead, however, at this point Strauss mentions, as the "only subject excluded from discussion," the great danger "to make oneself the head

of a new thing which concerns many people, and how difficult it is to manage it and to bring it to its consummation" *(ibid.).* Strauss may have meant "the only subject excluded from discussion in the *Discourses,*" but does not clearly say so, and the impression prevails that at this first mention of subjects excluded by Machiavelli he fails to come to the crucial point. *That* subject, the "good" or "the best" which Machiavelli excises from his consideration, is mentioned by Strauss only late in the book, on page 232, where it is quite adequately discussed. Had this point been lifted into prominence earlier in Strauss' treatment,- the novel character of Machiavelli's teaching would have been clearly in view from the outset. The book might have been somewhat shorter then, but that might have been rather a gain. Let us first consider what makes the omission of this "subject" so extraordinarily novel and revolutionary, and then ask why the treatment of this point comes so late in Strauss' work.

Machiavelli's decision not to look on life "as it ought to be" but rather exclusively "as it is" amounts to a radical shift from the science of human order of existence to the observations and analysis of human behavior. Political science stems from Plato, who linked the quest for order to the noetic exploration of man's participation in the encompassing reality of being and its divine ground. This is a type of knowledge that illuminates *from within,* as it deals not with objects than in strangeness stand over against the knower, but with man's typical and revealing experiences in his encounters with other men, society, nature, death, God. Machiavelli's shift to the observation of behavior amounted to the supplanting of the knowledge Plato had made possible, by data obtained by looking at men - *from without,* considering men as mere "objects" to whose inside life the knower has no access, and thus equating them with other "objects" of nature. - In dealing with the data of nature, external observation and measurement is indeed the only approach available to us, since we have no way of sharing the experiences of plants, trees, stones, animals, provided there be such experiences. Regarding nature, we are barred from anything like understanding and are confined to the recording of regularities and the formation of theories enabling us to predict and control. In the case of human beings and their quest for an ordered life, however, we find ourselves in the unique position of being on the inside, of participating in what we desire

to know, and therefore being able to look deeper than anywhere else in the universe. When the human mind discovered a science of the order of life, it approached reality not as an "object," something detached and separate from the knower, but as something of which his own experiences gave testimony.' To state it in the words of Bergson: "There are two profoundly different ways of knowing things. The first implies that we move round the object, the second that we enter into it . . . Relative knowledge is the knowledge attained by the intellect, a knowledge that is sought for its utility to man and which enables him to manipulate matter and, thereby, to control it and act upon it ... The first kind of knowledge may be said to stop at the relative; the second, in those cases where it is possible, to attain the absolute . . . The goal of absolute knowledge is to be in sympathy with reality without any thought of relation and comparison." Political science, shaped by Plato and Aristotle and continuously developed through the Christian centuries, has been what Bergson calls the second kind of knowledge.

Machiavelli, who hailed the "innovators" of history, himself was an innovator as he proclaimed Bergson's first type of knowledge to be appropriate not for nature alone but also for the study of human order, and tried to create the impression that by its help one could attain to norms of conduct. What is more, he spoke of the investigations he carried on in his fashion as "all he knew." In fact this was not so, for Machiavelli knew far more than a mere external record of human behavior; he simply chose to ignore all but this truncated bit of reality. He was the first of the intellectual reductionists who in modern times narrowed down the range of methods, the scope of evidence, and the concept of reality, in each case calling the remaining fragment not only "all they knew": but also "all that could be known" and "all that is real." Cutting out a part, the most significant. part, of reality from one's cognizance has not only intellectual but enormous practical consequences. If one reduces one's knowledge of men to the record of their behavior, one can see nothing more than apparently self-centered "objects" engaged in self-seeking pursuits, their self-centeredness not being inferred but rather built

[5] Cf. Eric Voegelin, *Anamnesis*, III, *p. 2.*

into the assumption that behavior is the whole reality. of man. Man set up as an "object" is something about which one has willed not to learn from shared experiences, whose participation in anything transcending self is not recordable and presumably not real This ununderstandable object must appear void of any inner sense of obligation and community, something that can be kept in social units only by sheer power, or by the compulsion of "the system." Machiavelli's exclusive emphasis on the technique of power therefore roots in his shift from the science of political order to the analysis of external social phenomena. Man's openness to goodness and God could be known only "from within" but not "from without," and the contracted human reality that was left could be tamed only by force. Hobbes arrived at the same conclusion because he, too, started from the same premises.

Whereman gathers knowledge about "objects," the aim of his knowledge is utility. An orientation toward utility is characteristic of all "modern" political analysis; it is implied in Machiavelli and first made explicit in Hobbes. It is predicated on the pre-analytical reduction of men to "objects" whose experiences, norms, participation are not "observable," who must therefore be construed as a-political beings whose wholly separate "interests" then figure as the raison d'etre of society. In the best extant variety of such doctrines, this kind of "relative knowledge" (still using Bergson's terms) may be oriented to the utility of the "private man," the man who, as Locke put it, enters society only "for the great and chief end" of property. If we are not so lucky we will see "relative knowledge" oriented to the utility of the power-self, the rough-shod riding "man of history," the "mortal god" for whom ruling means satisfying a personal lust. For this man indeed will learn how to manipulate and to control men as if they were natural objects, and the techniques of power will appear to him as if they were ends in themselves.

It becomes clear that it matters little whether Machiavelli himself was anti-Christian and anti-theist (he died after having received the sacraments of the Church), because he founded his new type of "knowledge" on the excision of any transcendence, either that of the moral order, or that of the constitution of being, or that of the divine ground, and thus became the originator of self-consciously anti-theistic political thought. Voegelin has called this exclusion "the positivistic taboo on theory." When philosophy

differentiated from the entire compact picture of reality created by the myth, a world-immanent "nature," the result was the transcendence of God, whereupon man's relation to the transcendence became a problem in the reflection on which man sought to understand the order of his life. Man's inquiring into his participation in the divine ground has been the source of order in all human societies, not excluding the ones which organized bodies of Communists have subdued in order to use them for their strategic purposes. When man cuts himself off from this source of order, he will replace it by some other point of orientation; in the nature of things this can only be some world-immanent factor, either material (economics, race) or historical (a class, a party, a hero, a particular country). In either case, the result is the deification of something contingent and non-divine, which process opens the door to what Peter Drucker has called "the return of the demons." Political rationality hinges on man's openness to being, the divine ground of being, and transcendent. goodness; and theory consists in establishing, with careful craftsmanship and . dispassionate penetration, the ontological concepts that illuminate political choices.

Machiavelli's decision not to inquire into "life as it ought to be" and to confine "all he knew" to "life as it is" must therefore be considered the core of his message. It so happens that he did not try to conceal this decision but stated it, in clear and unequivocal words, at the beginning of the fifteenth chapter of the *Prince.* Why did Strauss not write his book on Machiavelli centering it on this passage and its implications, why, when he mentioned subjects "excluded from discussion" did not this, but rather another passage; come to his mind, and why did he. not get around to analyze the key passage until page 232, in a text running to 299 pages? It seems that Strauss is not interested in the problems of being, transcendence, and man's orientation in this perspective reality. If philosophy in its very essence is ontological, then Strauss has not written a philosophical book, a book of political theory. He has written a very painstaking analysis of Machiavelli's texts, a study without which nobody will from now on dare to say that he has grasped Machiavelli. All the same, . the book does not convey a full philosophical understanding of what Machiavelli has done. Rather, Strauss from the very first substitutes moral judgment for philosophical analysis. Machiavelli is "an evil man" who teaches "evil." He is a "devil." His teaching is "shock-

ing" and concerns "the most shocking phenomena." In an age where political writers have seen fit to observe an attitude of moral neutrality about such figures as Lenin, Stalin, Khrushchev, Mussolini, Hitler, Mao Tse-tung, and many other bloodthirsty revolutionaries, it is a wonderful thing to see a great and renowned professor take a moral stand, and to remind us that politics cannot be discussed in an atmosphere of moral neutrality. Judgment, indeed, is our inescapable task where the order of human life is concerned. Where there is no political theory, a firm insistence on intuitive moral judgment is still better than no standard at all, as is the case with the standards Confucious introduced into Chinese political thinking. In the West, however, we are in the fortunate position of having a legacy of theory: not merely exhortation to virtue but profound analysis of virtue in the light of the human psyche and the nature of the mind; not merely an ideal of the wise man, but a finely chiseled concept of man as a being "in between" the human and divine realms; not merely a notion of society as a moral structure, but a sophisticated inquiry into social order and its inescapable tension toward the transcendent divine ground. Thus judgment in our case cannot confine itself to moral approval and disapproval but must enter into the profound problems of political rationality and its perversion. It is possible to put one's finger on the passages where modern ideologists commit themselves to irrational premises and exclusions. This implies "judgment" indeed, but not on grounds of subjective approval or lament.

Strauss has given us great books, and, above all, has educated an entire generation of students and scholars to the discipline of a close reading of the texts, and to a renewed interest in Greek political philosophy. He has become one of the champions in the fight of political order against the demonic forces of our age. He has shed much light, and, one may add, radiated much goodness. Nobody can diminish the fame that attaches to these great achievments, and neither can this review, in so far as its remarks are to some extent critical. Without critical reactions, there could be no dialectic, and political science remains committed to Plato's dialectic.

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