

AUTHOR MEETS CRITICS

Mansfield's Montesquieu: Can There Be a Moderate Machiavellianism?

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Machiavelli's Effectual Truth: Creating the Modern World

By Harvey C. Mansfield. Cambridge University Press, 2023. Pp. 298. \$34.99

On the thirty-ninth page of Mansfield's book (thrice thirteen; preface, acknowledgments, first chapter) the reader encounters this declaration about its thesis and import: "In my book, Montesquieu represents the effectual truth of Machiavelli's notion of effectual truth, from the crafty prince to the constitutional order of separated powers" (31). Paradoxically, the culminating proof that Machiavelli founded modernity as a new world guided by the effectual as opposed to any metaphysical, spiritual, or classical truth—the self-making truth of humanity commanding its fortunes—is the philosophy of a liberal constitutionalism that moderates the philosophy of efficacy by ensuring equal liberty and security for all. Mansfield briefly notes Montesquieu was the most influential philosopher for the framers of American constitutionalism (150, 215); he leaves unstated the inference that the United States of America, eventually the first solo superpower bestriding global politics, would be an effectual truth yielded by the Machiavellian project. Mansfield's book thus provokes crucial questions about modern political philosophy and the United States, for which all readers are indebted—whether agreeing or not with its thesis and analysis.

Mansfield prepares for this paradoxical focus on, and reading of, Montesquieu by noting in the preface he is the one post-Machiavelli philosopher studied at length, for he “maintained that he had in a sense completed the mission received from Machiavelli over two centuries before” (x). *The Spirit of the Laws* (1748), Montesquieu’s masterwork, “is examined from beginning to end to reveal its derivation from Machiavelli’s effectual truth, its correction of Machiavelli’s application of that notion in its advice, and its declaration that Machiavelli’s work had been completed.” This approach builds upon scholars who have explored the seeming condemnation in book 21 of *Spirit of the Laws* that “one has begun to be cured of Machiavellianism” (x). Mansfield’s thesis is that “[t]o understand the cure one must see how it is conveyed, and take note that Montesquieu uses the sort of ‘fraud’ that Machiavelli boasted of to describe and even to announce the cure of ‘Machiavellianism’ he thought was underway. My book shows Montesquieu’s esotericism for the first time from a scholarly point of view, and no doubt imperfectly” (x). One element of Montesquieu’s esotericism is his use of thirteen as a sign to other Machiavelli adepts that he is conversing with—and correcting—the captain. Thus:

Montesquieu gives recognition to Machiavelli that previous modern philosophers, especially liberal ones like himself, had denied him—but having done so, he can criticize him openly. He calls Machiavelli “that great man” and a legislator, and more: he tacitly accepts him as the founder of modern philosophy. He adopts the principle of effectual truth and uses it first to praise, then to destroy the ancients, and then to establish modernity as if it had no founding philosopher. Or it had no other founding philosopher than himself, only an historical development he discerns. His grand work *The Spirit of the Laws* shows the notion of historical context at its origin and as part of Machiavelli’s plan to make liberty secure (more than glorious) in this world, now *the* world. (xiv)

The Montesquieu chapter opens by noting its length makes it “outsized” in a work on Machiavelli (149; at ninety-seven pages, it is indeed one third of the book). The *apologia* was previewed in the first chapter, arguing several modern philosophers can be readily identified as Machiavelli’s successors—with Montesquieu a grand, culminating example. While Montesquieu “declared himself an enemy of Machiavelli,” he nonetheless “illustrates the success of his effectual truth when it has been completed and accepted as the normal way to think and behave.” The long study shows him “as a student more than a critic of Machiavelli,” for the “criticism could have been made only as a student of the master who makes his acceptance of the master’s mastery almost invisible. Here is the effectual truth of Machiavelli’s glory; it has to be surrendered at the moment when it is most deserved” (27). This articulates the ironical reality that Machiavellians who moderate this philosophy of the extreme case, the radically new and modern, are founders of a liberalism containing a moderate moment: “Montesquieu, the liberal philosopher, one of Machiavelli’s successors, could never be described as his henchman. In Chapter 6 he will be shown to be a faithful student and practitioner of effectual truth and yet a determined, all-around opponent of Machiavelli’s principle of *uno solo*.” Thus the effectual truth of Machiavelli’s philosophy of efficacy is its tamed version as “the constitutional order of separated powers” (31).

Mansfield terms his reading of Montesquieu speculative; while grounded in close textual readings and engagement with scholarship, it advances a “probable” thesis, not demonstrated (xii). Later he notes his is not a comprehensive account of *The Spirit of the Laws* given its focus on the “philosophic relationship to Machiavelli” (218). This reading of Montesquieu’s philosophy as quietly moderated Machiavellianism is surely plausible; anyone contesting it must grapple with the great care Mansfield shows to *The Spirit of the Laws* (“this marvelous work,” 151), his insightful survey of all thirty-one books through his chosen lens (a rare feat even among Montesquieu scholars), and the range of recent French and American Montesquieu scholars cited, from Manent and Barrera, Pangle and Schaub, Rahe and Sullivan to Hirschman, Krause, and

Callanan (some of my scholarship as well). Montesquieu “draws the foundation of his work from Machiavelli’s critique of the ancients and of Christianity”—the philosophy of effectual truth—yet criticizes “Machiavellianism” explicitly “because it maintains rather than removes the error it was meant to criticize.” The rule of one alone, *uno solo*, is despotism; there is no virtue, no grand mastery, in placing oneself above—beyond any dependence on—all others, either as philosopher or ruler. This correction points to a philosophy that blends and balances classical, medieval, and modern principles and philosophers; thus Mansfield observes of a later book in *The Spirit of the Laws* that “[t]he ancient-modern difference emerges yet again, as Montesquieu’s firm preference for modernity does not exclude the ancients and is not intended, unlike previous modern philosophers, to render them obsolete” (222, on book 23). This carefully balanced philosophy yields the complex constitutionalism of separated powers, also arrayed to check and balance each other, thus providing a tumultuous yet non-terrorized liberty and security for all (151).

The Spirit of the Laws tames Machiavellianism through a new “political science” based on modern natural science, which “formalizes and regularizes” the terror-inducing strokes the founder commended for closing the gap between wishes and the world’s realities. “Machiavelli’s aggressive princely virtue first is transformed into the honest bourgeois predictability of self-interest and then gradually forgotten along with the utility of vice. Honest good comes dependably from self-interest” (150). The ruling mode of “stupefy and satisfy” is replaced by a legal order designed “to relieve and reassure”; freedom is redefined as “security” against the Machiavellianisms of necessity and fear. The evidence for this thesis is then compiled in a tour of the thirty-one books of *The Spirit of the Laws*, starting at book 29 with the final reference to Machiavelli—as a flawed philosopher and “legislator” paired with Plato and Aristotle, among others. Mansfield then turns back to book 1 and journeys through main themes of *The Spirit of the Laws*. Questions arise, however, for those as serious about Montesquieu and the philosophical stakes as Mansfield is, about

the probability of this reading of moderated Machiavellianism. I mention a few points for further investigation and discussion, with hopes scholars will take up Mansfield's insights.

The opening section on "The Errors of Philosophers as Legislators" (151–64) shows Montesquieu turning Machiavelli's reductive tack against him while also applying it to Plato, Aristotle, Thomas More, and the advocate of republicanism James Harrington (the philosophers named in *Spirit* book 29, chapter 19). All philosophers in the mold of Plato and Aristotle, who legislate the truths they discern into political and social orders, are blind to the passions and prejudices shaping their thinking; to their narrowness, thus the modes of despotism their theories entail, yielding fear and insecurity for the common man. A new conception of philosophy is needed, humbly adapting to enduring human realities. Machiavelli pointed to a helpful corrective: Beware ideals or abstractions imposed on human realities. Yet he failed to implement it. Montesquieu's new philosophy accommodates ideas from multiple philosophers, not one, and from custom (to include religion), as well as the modern spirit of commerce, among other dimensions of natural and human reality—all blended and balanced so that no one idea or element goes to extremes and yields despotic, fear-inducing politics. This final chapter of book 29 is indeed a discerning point of entry to *The Spirit of the Laws* and Montesquieu's mature philosophy, and Mansfield indicates how this late passage in this masterwork reveals the design and spirit of its hundreds of pages across many books and parts. Yet perhaps Mansfield misreads the import of this critique of philosophy, for only in the final pages of his long chapter does he provide Montesquieu's own statement of the main idea guiding it—the idea that opens book 29: moderation. He paraphrases book 29, chapter 1, and comments, "His difference from Machiavelli is shown in the adoption of classical moderation, and his debt to Machiavelli is shown in the fear they share that moral virtue will in effect be Christian" (240). This reflects his stated thesis of Machiavelli's "pervasive influence" on *The Spirit of the Laws* "as both inspiration and opposition" (164). Yet the reader deserves to grapple directly with Montesquieu's

statement opening this book, “On the Way to Compose the Laws,” which closes with a critique of philosophers as “legislators” and opens with a chapter entitled “On the Spirit of the Legislator,” along with a striking declaration: “I say it, and it seems to me I have written this work only to prove it: the spirit of moderation should be that of the legislator; the political good, like the moral good, is always found between two limits.”¹

Guided by the clues of Montesquieu’s quiet Machiavellianism, Mansfield offers a reductive reading of “the moral good” in *The Spirit of the Laws*, entailing a lowered political good. One test for this view thus is his reading of book 1, explaining away Montesquieu’s apparent rejection of modern reductive philosophies about the order of the cosmos, laws of nature, and natural laws discernible in human nature (chaps. 1 and 2; Mansfield, 164–72). There is a voluminous literature on these passages, with varied reasonable readings of Montesquieu’s views on these core questions of Western political philosophy. Yet Mansfield might be asked to at least mention, *then* explain away, views such as the natural sociability among male and female that is Montesquieu’s third natural law. This in turn is a crucial foundation for the fourth natural law, “the desire to live in society,” which Mansfield mentions; he finds the argument for it “unconvincing” (apparently because brief) but omits the statements that this law of natural sociability rests on “bonds” of “knowledge” as well as “feelings” (*Spirit* 1.2,.6–7; Mansfield, 168–70). The omission of natural sociability is odd given that Mansfield later notes that book 26—very important because Machiavelli-focused (twice thirteen, among other clues)—features the themes of natural coupling and marriage, precisely (Mansfield notes) as part of Montesquieu’s rejection of the reduction of politics and humanity to conflict, power, war (228–29).

Another telling test for Mansfield’s thesis is his interpretation—*to his credit*—of a passage in *The Spirit of the Laws* that many

1. Charles de Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, ed. Anne M. Cohler, Basia Miller, and Harold Stone (Cambridge University Press, 1989 [1748]), book 29, chap. 1, p. 602. Subsequent references will cite book, chapter, and page number of this edition (e.g., 29.1.602).

reductive, Machiavellianizing readings simply ignore. This is book 3, chapter 10, which includes a rare early reference in the work to natural right (*droit naturel*). Mansfield explains away the use of moderation in this passage, its possibly anti-reductive meaning given the coupling with natural right, by effectively collapsing Montesquieu's account of a despot's demand for obedience with the demand made by a king in "monarchical and moderate states" (173–74). This is an unconvincing reading, in part because Mansfield omits the dramatic juxtaposition in the chapter's title—"The Difference in Obedience Between Moderate Governments and Despotic Governments"—which, at the close of book 3, suggests Montesquieu is declaring a meta-level of regime analysis transcending Aristotle's typology as well as his own just formulated in books 2 and 3 (*Spirit* 3.10.29–30). Moderation is the crucial category. This foreshadows the dramatic declaration opening book 29. Indeed, natural right functions here to emphatically repudiate despotic power; yet Mansfield overlooks this by omitting Montesquieu's list of the crimes typically committed by despots: against "natural feelings, respect for a father, tenderness for one's children and women, laws of honor, or the state of one's health." Here is a non-Hobbesian, non-Lockean view of natural right; isn't this elevated, humane moderation also a repudiation of Machiavelli's view of human reality? This would have to be noted, then explained away. Finally, Mansfield omits Montesquieu's characterization here that the moderate "prince," in contrast to the despot, "is enlightened" (or "has some enlightenment") as one of his moments defining Enlightenment in more humane, complex terms than Locke's seemingly narrow, materialist, and individualist account in *The Second Treatise*. (Mansfield makes note that Montesquieu never mentions Locke in *The Spirit of the Laws*; is this because he seeks to avoid notice of how much he is borrowing from Locke, or, does he signal that Locke's reductive, narrow philosophy of politics is beneath mention?) Finally, the explaining-away of natural right in 3.10 is undermined by the slip that this is "the only" mention of it in the work, when Mansfield later discusses its use in books 21 and 26 (174; see 221, 228; Montesquieu also uses the term in book 15,

its cognate “right of natural defense” in books 6, 10, 26, and “right of natural modesty” with regard to women in books 15, 16, 26).

Four final queries provoked by Mansfield’s masterful reading of *The Spirit of the Laws* concern honor, the repudiation of slavery and of anti-Semitism, Christianity, and Tocqueville. If Mansfield is underplaying Montesquieu’s statement of the import of *Spirit* and its core principle of moderation, a consequence of an incomplete reading of early foundational passages articulating Montesquieu’s philosophy (books 1 and 3), then these four further topics in this long chapter and in *Machiavelli’s Effectual Truth* would need reconsideration. The whole set of queries invites pursuit of the alternative Mansfield himself briefly entertains about his Machiavellian Montesquieu: Does he moderate his predecessor? “Or does he mean to replace Machiavelli?” (164). Regarding honor, it again is to Mansfield’s credit that he notes the striking praise of Viscount Orte, who, as a matter of honor, refuses to kill Protestants (Huguenots) when so ordered by France’s king in 1572 (*Spirit* 4.2.33); and while Mansfield notes Christian “piety” may inform Orte’s honor, he underplays this passage’s import for indicating a higher sense of the moral good and political good by omitting the praise of “this great and generous courage” (Mansfield, 224n99). Not all kinds of honor in moderate Christian monarchies are false, contrary to the implication in book 3, chapter 7. Similarly, on race-based slavery and anti-Semitism, the Machiavelli focus leads Mansfield to note Montesquieu’s repudiation of these, yet only as part of the code-word esotericism responding to Machiavelli on philosophy and philosophers, Jews and women. The elevated conception of the moral good thereby indicated, informing the political good, is underplayed or lost—even though these judgments distinguish Montesquieu from the radical modern and Enlightenment philosophers preceding him, as the first modern philosopher to repudiate these evils for violating both Christian morals and natural right. On the massive topic of Montesquieu’s view of Christianity (related to his views on honor and a higher morality, race-slavery, and anti-Semitism), one passage must stand for testing Mansfield’s reduction of Montesquieu’s apparent praise

for this religion's moderating and elevating influence. Is his reading of book 10, chapter 3, on the superior humaneness of the modern European concept of the right of war, fair in subsuming Montesquieu's praise for the salutary influence of "the religion of the present day" under his correlate reference to "our philosophy"—and understood only as Machiavelli and his modern protégés? Mansfield mentions the invocation in 10.3 of "the law of natural enlightenment" as another moral restraint on war, yet he omits Montesquieu's definition of it: as "want[ing] us to do unto others what we would have done to us" (*Spirit* 10.3, 139; Mansfield, 180, 194). Related is Mansfield's later mention of book 24 on the political benefits of Christianity's "gentleness" while omitting the striking declaration that "we owe to Christianity both a certain right in government and a certain right of nations in war, for which human nature can never be sufficiently grateful," (*Spirit* 24.3.461–62; Mansfield, 224, 224–28 passim). This leads to Tocqueville, given that Mansfield's sequel to his Montesquieu study analyzes Tocqueville as not moderating but repudiating, Machiavellianism (a chapter drafted by Mansfield's late wife, Delba Winthrop, here revised by Mansfield; see 247–58). If Tocqueville insists on elevating modern philosophy to emphasize the metaphysical meaning of human dignity and greatness against Machiavellian materialism with its degrading political consequences, it is plausible to consider that he found not only Pascal's philosophy but also Montesquieu's as a crucial source for a "new political science" that appreciates the political consequences of Christianity as truly practiced; in which humanity's natural sociability and inclination toward honorable, dignified political conduct can be married with both Christianity and modern ideas of individual rights—all within a complex constitutionalism as the political frame permitting these religious, moral, civic, and social goods to actually flourish in human affairs. Just how new is Tocqueville's moderate political science? Was he the first to repudiate Machiavellianism while fitting some of Machiavelli's insights into a neo-Aristotelian political science? I am grateful to Mansfield for prodding such important queries.

Tyrant or Grist: Mansfield's Machiavelli

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Machiavelli's Effectual Truth: Creating the Modern World

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I once heard Harvey Mansfield suggest that to read Leo Strauss's *Thoughts on Machiavelli* required several months of one's life. I took the statement to be autobiographical. Lest he suspect me of flattery, I will suggest merely that you reserve several weeks of your life for *Machiavelli's Effectual Truth*.

The book consists of a preface, seven chapters (six of which have appeared in article form), and an appendix reviewing the work of a "contextualist" biographer of Machiavelli. Despite such diverse sources, these writings cohere so successfully that Mansfield can announce at the beginning of chapter 1 that "[its] purpose is to connect the two principal themes of the book, mostly unstudied and hardly noticed in Machiavelli scholarship, of effectual truth and succession." The book contains two parts, "Machiavelli's Enterprise and 'The World'" and "Machiavelli's Fortune." These parts correspond at least roughly with the two principal themes announced. The four chapters of the first part expound Machiavelli's thought, taken in its own right, while the three chapters of part 2 primarily concern its reception.

While reception theory is all the rage these days, Mansfield flips the script on it. The reigning presumption of reception scholars (and the reason why their work is so often tedious) is that the

character of the reception is wholly determined by the receiving culture. The author received recedes from view except as an artefact of the receptors. Mansfield in his boldness makes quite the opposite assertion: that Machiavelli succeeded in setting the conditions of posterity's reception of him. The connection that chapter 1 establishes between the two principal themes of the work is that the division between them is artificial. Given the character of Machiavelli's enterprise and the understanding of the world that it presupposed, it cannot be distinguished from his subsequent fortune. In fact, Mansfield's use of the term "fortune" to describe Machiavelli's reception in the centuries following is ironic. For what this reception confirms is that Machiavelli had left nothing to chance. The *verità effettuale*, or effectual truth, at the center of his understanding had enabled him to impose his necessities on a world as malleable as it was clueless. He had not only planned this colossal achievement but had succeeded in executing it in his lifetime. He did so by composing his books, which were so contrived as to compel their readers' compliance with his intentions. Mansfield does not balk at describing Machiavelli's posthumous realm as a tyranny: "Machiavelli is . . . a tyrant because his notion of necessity, which he was the first to see, has been imposed on all thinkers and through them on nonthinkers as well. His enterprise is the making of the modern world, which can be defined as a more or less concerted attempt at the rational control of chance for the benefit of mankind" (7).

As a tyranny, Machiavelli's accomplishment offered conclusive proof of the power of his conception of the effectual truth: "Effectual truth . . . is a prescription of what can be achieved when one looks to control the chance one perceives to be in the way of one's intent. One can anticipate how one's interest will be 'held' by others and use this knowledge to conquer the chance that might prevent it" (8).

According to Mansfield, then, Machiavelli not only preached the conquest of fortune but successfully practiced it. His seeming failure in the politics of his own day camouflaged his laying of the foundations of his successful principality of the future. His

posthumous triumph has been complete: All subsequent thinkers have danced to his tune, and so, as a consequence, have the nonthinkers, on whom the thinkers, relying on *la verità effettuale* learned from Machiavelli, have imposed in their turn.

All of which might seem fantastic, and Mansfield seems to grant that such perfect knowledge of the power required to dominate the future might seem the preserve of a god rather than a man. He is emphatic, however, that Machiavelli had before his eyes a previous instance of a human being thus endowed with this knowledge—namely, Jesus Christ (9–10). No ordinary human being could have carried off Machiavelli's project, but not all human beings are ordinary. Those who are so are susceptible to manipulation by the extraordinary ones to an extent they cannot imagine, as the successes of both Machiavelli and Jesus confirm. Mansfield's claim is that Machiavelli has bestrode humanity as an invisible colossus, more often denied than affirmed, but ubiquitous even among those who deny him, their prince despite themselves.

Mansfield hunts no small game, and accordingly devotes his two most systematic studies of Machiavelli's influence to two seemingly unpromising cases: Montesquieu and Tocqueville. His chapter on Montesquieu is the longest in the work, while that on Tocqueville (coauthored with his late wife, Delba Winthrop) is the shortest. They have in common that they make a lot from a little in dealing with two writers who hardly mention Machiavelli.

As a polymath who had moreover written his own book on the Romans, Montesquieu would certainly have known Machiavelli. Still, the vast reaches of *De l'Esprit des Lois* yield just five references to him, the most famous of which appears to be dismissive. Mansfield describes himself as proceeding from these five citations to the pervasive influence of Machiavelli on the work as a whole—that is, on the 99.9 percent of the work in which he goes unmentioned. Tocqueville is even less promising: *De la démocratie en Amérique* (the work on which Mansfield and Winthrop rely) contains just one reference to Machiavelli, and not one of any evident importance. There is also the deflating fact (which our authors are good enough to note) that Tocqueville left behind

private notes disparaging of Machiavelli. In both these cases Mansfield rallies in the face of adversity to produce a reading that is “Machiavellian” in the complex and equivocal sense noted. These readings are vintage Mansfield: learned, ingenious, and abounding in striking insights. Mansfield succeeds in establishing the possibility of reading both writers as Machiavellian. The question is whether he passes the more rigorous test incumbent on an esoteric reading, that of persuading of the necessity of so doing. Here it does not even help very much that Tocqueville’s sole reference to Machiavelli occurs in a chapter numbered 26 ($=2 \times 13$, which is “Machiavelli’s number”). Coincidences do happen.

While the arguments of *Machiavelli’s Effectual Truth* are both novel and distinctive, readers familiar with the scholarship on Machiavelli will have recognized it as an ambitious variation on a familiar theme. While it is true that its thesis and the two principal themes that it links have gone unnoticed by most scholars, these do not include Leo Strauss. Mansfield takes Strauss’s suggestion that Machiavelli was the founder of theoretical modernity and runs with it, elaborating it perhaps even beyond Strauss’s intention. Would Strauss, who spoke of “three waves of modernity,” the initiator of the first of which was Machiavelli, have agreed with Mansfield that every subsequent modern development was either in agreement with Machiavelli or had sustained an objection to him that was nonetheless rooted in him? That is not how I would interpret Strauss’s reading of Rousseau, for example. Of course, Mansfield might read both Strauss and Rousseau differently than I do.

In his jacket blurb for *Machiavelli’s Effectual Truth*, the Italian scholar Gabriele Pedullà praises it as “an existential inquiry into what it means to create, to hand down, and to inherit in the world of ideas—as much today as in the past.” So it is, and as such it raises the question of Mansfield’s stance on this issue. Here I must admit a certain unease. However we interpret Machiavelli, and however we may admire his intelligence, it remains a question whether we can conclude that his influence was as overwhelming (one might even say overbearing) as Mansfield suggests. I have no problem with his claim that the great modern thinkers who followed owed a

“debt” to Machiavelli. Nor do I dissent from the suggestion that this debt was both broader and deeper than most commentators have recognized. Nor, again, do I disagree that great thinkers may spawn epigones, whom we can describe (if only in a manner of speaking) as aspects of the effectual truth of the thinker whose mind has shaped their own. Yet the relation between two great thinkers is rarely of this sort. It typically includes the later thinker borrowing from the earlier one, but only as it suits him. In his discussion of Montesquieu Mansfield suggests that Machiavelli has served him as both inspiration and opponent. He fails to consider that he might have served him in a third way (and this primarily)—namely, as grist for his mill. In this last case the later thinker’s reading of the earlier one will be highly selective (as Montesquieu’s reading of Machiavelli appears to be) and therefore not to be relied on. (Just think of Aristotle’s account in the *Politics* of the argument of Plato’s *Republic*, with its omission of the philosopher kings, whose absence suits the *Politics* although not the *Republic*. While Plato doubtless had done much to shape Aristotle, here Aristotle was shaping him: Here “influence” was a two-way street. Or think of Nietzsche’s use of Schopenhauer, or Kierkegaard’s of Socrates.)

Returning, then, to the titans of modernity who figure in Mansfield’s argument, would anybody, including him, regard them as mere epigones of Machiavelli? That each drew inspiration from Machiavelli and saw him as useful to their own respective projects would not preclude that those projects differed widely (even radically) from his. Mansfield confronts this problem by suggesting that even in their very departures from Machiavelli they were exercising the flexibility that he had recommended. This seems to imply that therefore these were not departures at all. Yet is it not perverse to cast these thinkers’ very deviations from (and improvements on?) Machiavelli as tokens of their subjection to him? No, neither Bacon nor Spinoza would have been the same thinkers had they not encountered Machiavelli. But that is not to say that they would not have been Bacon and Spinoza. It would not follow that there was nothing to them but what they owed to him, or even that what they took from their meeting of minds with him was more

important than what they had brought to that meeting. Rousseau, who was in a position to know, declared that geniuses neither needed teachers nor abided them. While Mansfield does construct dialogues between Machiavelli and the great thinkers that followed, such is his account of the success of Machiavelli's project that both parties to the discussion end up sounding like him.

Since Mansfield construes even his thinkers' differences with Machiavelli as inspired by their agreement with him, what would it take for him to admit that a given thinker had gone AWOL from Machiavelli's army? That he had returned to classical or Christian modes of thinking, as Swift perhaps did? If so, this would imply that any thinker worth his salt who hews to the modern path *ipso facto* owes this choice and his understanding of it to Machiavelli. Here Mansfield might invoke the authority of Strauss. As he himself so often stresses, however, there can be no authority in matters of philosophy. Strauss may have been mistaken, or (more likely, in my opinion) he may have knowingly oversimplified in offering so dramatic and *ad hominem* account of so complex a business as the origins of modernity. Inevitably this question mark hovers over Mansfield's brilliant book.

What Effectual Truth?

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Machiavelli's Effectual Truth: Creating the Modern World

*By Harvey C. Mansfield. Cambridge University Press,
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Harvey C. Mansfield is the most penetrating and elegant analyst of the political regime in which Europeans and Americans have chosen to live for more than two centuries—that is, the representative republic. He is also its most mischievous moralist. Why and how have we chosen—or have we been forced?—to organize a political mechanism that is so new, so complicated, so fragile, and yet capable of unleashing such power? Those who are preoccupied by this question as the political and historical enigma most worthy of our efforts find in the works of Harvey Mansfield the clearest, and sometimes most unexpected, explanations since the closing of the founding period of this regime, a period that extends from Hobbes and Locke to Tocqueville and includes Montesquieu and *The Federalist*. I must add that in our research into what I would call a bit gravely the truth of our political order, Harvey Mansfield has always been for me a particularly judicious guide, an encouraging and generous companion, and the most considerate of friends.

I have evoked the founding period of political liberalism. It is well known that Harvey Mansfield makes Machiavelli the initiator of this period. In fact, we are in Mansfield's debt for the most constant and penetrating effort to shed light on "the Machiavelli problem." More precisely, his effort has been to make more explicit and to validate Leo Strauss's thesis according to which the Florentine is the founder of modern political philosophy, which is

itself the driving force and the motive of modern politics. One might be tempted to say that Mansfield radicalizes the Straussian thesis, if this thesis were not already so radical. So let us say instead that Mansfield affirms and thematizes with notable emphasis the approach that in Strauss's works maintained a certain reticence and elusiveness, an enigmatic character.

The special value of Mansfield's latest book is the way in which he deploys Machiavelli's discovery or invention of a new "truth," the "effectual truth" (*verità effettuale*), which was to become irresistibly our idea of truth, the modern truth, an understanding of truth that would spread to all domains of life and of human knowledge, such that it is possible to say that this understanding "built and maintains the modern world." The thesis appears less outlandish as soon as we understand that the effectual truth is the factual truth or the truth of facts, and as we consider the following question: How would we orient ourselves in the world if we were suddenly deprived of the notion of facts—whether these are human facts that "fact-checkers" claim to verify or scientific facts that must be established by scientists armed with their scientific methods?

The notion of fact is the result of a move that Machiavelli was the first to make—and to define so tersely and completely—and that we essentially replicate implicitly and make our own every time that we speak of a fact or of facts. To understand what makes a fact, we must understand that we live naturally in an element other than that of fact—that is, the element of speech, of imagination, of morality. In this context these terms are synonyms. People speak of the way they should live, they profess morality, they imagine that they are moral and that the world in one way or another will reward or recognize their morality. The thorniest human handicap, which Mansfield brings to light, one might say, is thus the intention or rather the "profession" of acting well, a profession that prevents us from knowing ourselves and from orienting ourselves judiciously in the human world. How, then, are we to perceive this world adequately—that is, without the deceptive lens of our "goodness"? The answer is by attending to the effects of our good intentions, of our "virtues," for example of our "liberality"—an example dear to Machiavelli. My

liberality will at first be a pleasant surprise for its beneficiary, who will soon expect it to be renewed, and who in the end will blame me for not guaranteeing its regular enjoyment (5). Such is the effect of my “goodness.” Such is the effectual truth of my liberality.

This effect is necessary. The ancient world, the world of morality, taught good action by explaining to human beings how to choose the good while avoiding evil. The world that Machiavelli claims to discover or establish is based on the way human beings necessarily react: The effectual world will be the sum total of the necessary effects of human actions. But how can we derive a new rule of action from these effects, these necessary reactions? The agent—that is, first of all, the prince, who is the agent par excellence—will conceive his action by anticipating the reaction that it will necessarily produce and that will make him the master of the one who reacts. He will not learn to choose the good while prudently taking account of circumstances but will learn to be able “not to be good,” or to “know how to enter into evil,” and to make use of it or not according to necessity (*The Prince*, 15, 18).

We are duly shocked by these recommendations. But do we really understand them? It seems to me that here the figure of the prince gives active form to a point of view that can hardly guide action “effectively.” We can readily understand, to be sure, that a sudden and brutal action, an “execution” such as that ordered by Cesare Borgia, by which his “executor” Remiro de Orco was cut in two in Cesena’s piazza, can produce fortunate effects for the prince and even for the people. The wise and prudent have long acknowledged that brutal means can be part of the composition of a good action, or at least of an action conforming to the common interest. But to obtain such good effects does not require one to know how to be “altogether bad.” Harvey Mansfield recognizes that there is a kind of “comic extremism” in Machiavelli’s bloody recommendations, as when Machiavelli blames Baglioni for not having liquidated the pope and the cardinals when they were at his mercy (*Discourses* 1.27). The significance of the example is, however, not so clear. If we follow Machiavelli’s argument, this would indeed have been a great and even a good action, so much did he blame the Church for Italy’s

misfortunes. Yet we lose confidence in the pertinence or the coherence of the Secretary's advice, since elsewhere, as Mansfield emphasizes, he seems seriously to have considered enlisting the Church and the pope in the service of his "new order."

Near the end of chapter 3 Mansfield concludes the section entitled "The Highest Class of Princes" with this particularly pregnant sentence: "The occasional exception to the moral and noble way, taken with embarrassment when necessity suddenly appears, as by chance, becomes the norm of virtuous princes now taught to anticipate chance and to do the vicious deed out of necessity, but before it is plainly seen to be necessary" (89). One could hardly point out more soberly the difficulty that Machiavelli's "exaggerations" risk hiding from us: When and how can we know that necessity is "effectively" necessary?

If we put together Mansfield's two most synthetic propositions—namely, that Machiavelli is the author of the modern point of view and that modern philosophy is at bottom an epistemology (60)—we are able to conclude that Machiavelli can hardly offer us a practical philosophy. More precisely, the necessity that he constantly appeals to cannot provide the (new) rule of action. It is quite true, as Mansfield emphasizes, that Machiavelli's horizon is an action that rather than at every moment obeying or wishing to obey the will of God claims to obey the necessity included in the circumstances. It is not clear, however, that the commandment of necessity is easier to discern than the will of God, which we at least know to be embodied in the divine commandments (the Decalogue), whereas the sovereignty of necessity requires that we know how to ignore these commandments. By situating the guiding standard of action in circumstances as indicators of necessity, Machiavelli opens up a domain of practical indeterminacy so unlimited that it causes us to leave behind the very domain of practice.

Thus the effectual truth is not a practical truth, since the fact by itself, the "brute fact," is not an object of practical reason, whereas it may become an object of theoretical reason once this

reason has modified its criteria and its processes. Harvey Mansfield no doubt rightly emphasizes that modern scientific reason is tributary to the Machiavellian revolution, but I would add that modern scientific reason had to break with the illusion fostered by Machiavelli of an action of a new kind, an action, as it were, greater than great, an “exaggerated” action. One might indeed draw this conclusion from Mansfield’s engaging study of Montesquieu. There he indeed shows very well how Montesquieu brings the effectual truth down to our level by in a way apportioning it between the various parameters that “govern men,” but he sees in this movement of thought the enterprise of a “prince” intent on rivaling Machiavelli, while Montesquieu prepares and decorates the table for those avid consumers of facts and makers of correlations between facts we now call sociologists. Never has a new “science” been more elegantly introduced.

It is in any case the idea of commerce that will render operational the new perspective on action, an action to be evaluated by its effects; it is here that we find the direct continuity between Machiavelli and Montesquieu. Europeans have been able to observe over a great number of cases the effectual truth of commerce, which is to pacify and soften mores. Perhaps this softening is inseparable from a certain “corruption”—“this was the subject of Plato’s complaints” (*Spirit of the Laws* 20.1), but the weight of modern experience prevails over the fears or the scruples of the ancients. Facts—that is, the effects of commerce—bring improvements to common life tangible to everyone, whereas the maxims of good action have not only less evident positive effects but also negative effects that are too often observable, such as the “ambitious idleness” of Christians that Machiavelli castigated, a judgment that Montesquieu did not deign to contest.

Once these good effects have been noted, the need for a new practical science, one that will intentionally produce these happy effects, becomes apparent. The extension of the domain of commerce will guarantee the extension of the effects of commerce, thus, to employ the new sociological language, generalizing the new logic of social action. Rather than being regulated by its end

or its criterion—the good or the just—my action will be regulated by the reaction of the other party, and especially by the obstacle that this other will present to me if my action seems to him unjust or otherwise harmful. The power of fact will be defined and concretized by this external obstacle that every person constitutes for the other party in the different domains of collective life. Whether it is a question of the highest institutions—the executive and legislative branches of government being a most notable example—or of the most modest negotiations of social life, “it is necessary that by the arrangement of things power may check power” (*Spirit of the Laws* 11.4).

Machiavelli’s dismantling of the integrity of action thus led to a complete restructuring of the human experience. Once the “good choice” that constitutes action has been dismissed, all that remains as distinctive elements are its circumstances, or its conditions, and its effects. Its effectual truth resides in the facts that come before and those that come after. Action itself is effaced, or rather becomes entirely opaque. Since it is after all necessary to say something about it, we say that the intention or the motive of action is the “self-interest” of the agent, a proposition that encloses and smothers action in the agent’s relation to himself; the relation to self is left without discernible practical content and thus incapable of offering any material to the faculty of practical judgment. Every acting person is supposed to obey the same motive, a motive whose only definition is tautological (i.e., self-interest). Thanks to this theoretical “hold” on human action, we think we are able to escape the condition of essential dependance that defines human life—that is, the obligation to act, to accomplish at every moment, not the commandment of necessity, but that of action understood as the synthesis of its circumstances, its motive, and its end.

Despite statements as explicit as those cited in the foregoing on the difficulty of knowing in advance what form necessity will take, Harvey Mansfield seems reluctant to point out the limits of the effectual truth—or, let me say more directly, its lack of truth. This is no doubt owing first of all to his conception of morality, or of the moral point of view. As we have seen, he is very alert to the

limits of this point of view, limits brought out by ancient philosophy and enthusiastically advertised by Machiavelli. As I have already granted, a certain lack of self-knowledge and a biased approach to the world are inherent in the moral point of view. But the moral point of view is not in fact morality. The moral point of view refers, if not to conventional morality, at least to a morality that has not yet been educated so as to become morality properly so-called, or moral virtue. To be sure, Mansfield enlists Kant in his polemic against morality, arguing that “morality is an indivisible whole” or, more precisely, “a spurious whole that must defend itself as a whole,” because if one enters into casuistry, “there is always a reason to be or not to be moral in a particular case” (114). By conflating, under the name of morality, conventional or uneducated morality, on the one hand, and Kantian morality, or Kant’s moral fanaticism, on the other, one risks blocking access to actual practical life. The prudential evaluation of cases and situations does not lead to abandoning morality but to making it effective. Both Greek moral philosophy and the Christian moral theology that was informed by it, but also by the requirements of a “new commandment,” emphasized the importance of the virtue of prudence.

The limits of this “holistic” conception of morality appear, it seems to me, in the way Mansfield interprets the moral drama upon which the comedy of the *Mandragola* rests. The character Lucrezia, who embodies the moral perspective, seeing that the whole of morality is at stake in the action she is presented with, is easy prey, he says, for the argument of a corrupter (115). I confess I do not grasp the point. If Lucrezia’s character were simply defined by morality, as Mansfield argues, she would reject without hesitation the proposition made to her and would hold to her decision. In fact, referring to all the ideas that have come to her husband for causing her to have a child, she says to her mother, “Of all the things that have been considered, this seems most strange to me: to be required to subject my body to this dishonor, to be the cause that a man should die in order to dishonor me” (3.10). Her mother then confides Lucrezia’s conscience to her confessor,

Brother Timoteo. His argumentation transforms evil into good by manipulating the distinctions of moral theology—a certain good and an uncertain evil, or the contrary, body and soul, the will of the wife, the will of the husband, and so on. The mother's brutality ("little brat!") supplements the sophistry of the confessor, and, more dead than alive, Lucrezia agrees to the plan: "Alright [*sic*], but I do not at all expect still to be alive tomorrow morning" (3.11). Instinctively virtuous, she does not have enough strength of soul to obey her conscience. In the end she surrenders to the pressure of the authorities that assail her—her husband, her mother, and her confessor—these supposed supporters of morality forming an alliance to persuade this honest woman to commit a patently immoral act (which, I emphasize, entails in principle the death of a man). Once in the arms of Callimaco, and discovering at once nature's pleasures and the vicious malice of those who have "led her to do what she herself would never have done," she grants her new lover all the rights of legitimate possession (5.4). She has left the domain of morality, which until then was a given, in order to follow her desire, the satisfaction of which, moreover, seems to coincide with the punishment of a manifest injustice. Lucrezia's conduct reveals less the "failings of morality" than the vulnerability of the institution of marriage, which is proportional to the force of the opposing requirements involved in its terms and conditions. The fulcrum of this institution is obviously at the same time its weak point: the young woman fit both to give birth and to be passionately desired. On her falls the full weight of the wishes and willfulness of all the other concerned parties. In Machiavelli's comedy, it is this young woman who, under the revelation of the night, radically reverses the situation in a way that dupes and subjects in turn those who have deceived and coerced her. The spectator sympathizes with the two lovers, but is it reasonable to put our faith in this tale we are told is a miracle of nature? It is far from certain that Lucrezia, having once heeded her desire, will always continue to accept the protection of her new lord and master.

Under the notion of effectual truth, Machiavelli proposes a diagnosis, at once audacious and penetrating, of a general human phenomenon, one that took on a particular acuity under Christianity: the fact that there is “such a big gap” (*tanto discosto*) between the way one lives and the way one ought to live that by following the latter one is brought to ruin rather than preserved. The accent is on the adjective *tanto*! If there is such a great distance between the rule and its effective practice, then how is the human world to be ordered? Christianity clearly aggravated the human condition in this respect by proposing exorbitant commandments and counsels to human beings, such as that of making oneself “a eunuch for the Kingdom of heaven,” or even “loving your enemies.” Christians—at least minimally lucid Christians—are actually the first to experience their own impotence in fulfilling the commandments; it is this experience that led Luther in particular to wreck Christendom in order to free believers from their scruples of conscience. More precisely, Luther denounced and rejected the mediation of the Catholic Church, which had for centuries administered the *discosto*. This was, so to speak, what defined the Church, that it taught obedience to commandments and at the same time it forgave acts of disobedience. It filled up the whole gap as no institution had ever done so completely or precisely. The Church’s position was certainly very advantageous, but also very exposed. How is it possible at once to enforce the highest practical requirements and to exercise a boundless leniency or “mercy”?

We thus have strong reasons to think that Machiavelli’s diagnosis and recommendations—in a word, the effectual truth—have to do above all with the misdeeds of the Christian religion, “our religion.” Leo Strauss refers in this connection to Machiavelli’s “anti-theological ire.” At the same time—and Harvey Mansfield brings out this aspect very clearly—Machiavelli, in adapting his weapons to the physiognomy of his enemy, intends to imitate the *modus operandi* of the Christian Church: just as the Church addressed its proposition of salvific truth to all humanity, Machiavelli will share with all his readers, or at least those capable of understanding, the “good news” of the “effectual truth,” an *Imitatio Christi* turned

back against Christ's Church. In fact, the Enlightenment will consist largely in a propaganda campaign against "*l'Infâme*." Still, the parallelism of forms must not cause us to forget the radical opposition of contents: Christian preaching turns hearts toward the other world, modern preaching toward this world. Here Mansfield adds a consideration that is unexpected but that seems to me decisive for his argument: "[I]t was Christianity that invented the 'effectual truth' by seeking to arm Heaven so as to make it powerful on earth" (53). The Christian Church accomplished this singular operation by transforming the approach of Platonic philosophy, which turns "natural philosophers" toward the Ideas without undue concern for the many into a proposition of salvation addressed to all, and thus especially to the many. In short, the Church invented the effectual truth by proposing a "Platonism for the people," according to Nietzsche's formula.

The thesis is appealing, but it seems to me to obscure considerably the very notion of effectual truth. If the Christian Church "invented the effectual truth," then this is an effectual truth that, rather than overcoming the *discosto* between the aim and the reality of human action, widens it to infinity. As Saint Paul emphasizes, Christians preach "a crucified Messiah, a scandal for the Jews, and foolishness for the pagans" (I Corinthians 1:23). By the way, if we are to speak of a "Platonism for the people," why should we not also speak of a "Judaism for humanity"? This is in fact how many Christians as well as agnostics or atheists would readily define Christianity today. The two formulas have the same advantage and the same downside: Their plausibility stems from the fact that they define Christianity on the basis of a form of spirituality entirely independent of it, a form that had been fully deployed before the rise of Christianity. It seems that there is an "idea" or "nature" of Platonism, and an "idea" or "nature" of Judaism, but neither an "idea" nor a "nature" proper to Christianity. Why this difference in treatment?

It is possible, however, to associate the notion of effectual truth with Christianity without ignoring this religion's proper substance. More precisely, there is a specifically Christian way of recognizing the insurmountable *discosto* between the way one lives and the way

one should live, and that is “to confess oneself a sinner.” This is the basis of the Christian critique of Platonism and more generally of philosophy: The philosopher, just as much or more than an ordinary person, prefers himself to everyone and to everything.

However that may be, the enterprise conceived by Machiavelli in view of the effectual truth has produced such effects that our political regime now places us in conditions that stand opposed to those that motivated this enterprise. For our part, we wish to live; we in fact live more and more *senza discosto* between the way we should live and the way we in fact live. The interior distance that the rule once produced and maintained has been erased by our eagerness to identify “my desire,” “my right,” and “my law.” The effectual truth of the modern movement is the oblivion, the erasure, the rejection of our practical condition, which consists in living under law—as free and active beings under law, as free agents guided by law. Still, while the modern regime wears down the spring of action, it yet does not destroy it. We necessarily remain acting animals, beings who aim at a certain good by prudently mobilizing useful and just means—a certain good that can never be the object of a theoretical “grasp,” whether as a Platonic Idea or as a Machiavellian effectual truth. We therefore live simultaneously according to the practical truth of the human good and the effectual truth of the effects of our actions: We live according to virtue and according to commerce. Even though our political and moral history has caused us to go “from virtue to commerce,” our representative regime would cease to be practicable if the interplay of parties were totally detached from the just and the good. Montesquieu was the first to figure out with perfect clarity the salutary mechanism of parties in a representative regime. The entire freedom of the passions brought about and required by this regime, according to him, leaves only a very modest place to virtue. Harvey Mansfield’s constant preoccupation, since his first book on Burke and Bolingbroke, has been to understand our regime adequately and to evaluate it justly. It seems to me that despite his

very discerning admiration for Montesquieu, Mansfield accords a greater place to the just and the noble than does the author of *The Spirit of the Laws*.

And yet Harvey Mansfield's reticence, his reserve concerning the just and the noble, which is particularly noticeable in his book *Machiavelli's Effectual Truth*, continues to trouble me. At the end of chapter 3, devoted to "Leo Strauss on *The Prince*," he points out the strange way that Leo Strauss, at the end of his book on Machiavelli, seems suddenly to recall, and to wish to remind his reader, that "Machiavelli is wrong." A reference by Strauss to Plato "dislodges a cascade of strong, even dismissive, criticism of Machiavelli's thought in the last ten pages" (93). As to Strauss's recommendation to counter Machiavelli by rethinking the primacy of the Good through a return to "the fundamental experiences" from which it derives, Mansfield observes rather abruptly that Strauss "forgets to explain why Machiavelli is wrong" to bring down the Good, and as to how these "'fundamental experiences' contribute to recovering the permanent problems" and just what they are "Strauss does not say" (94).

It is unlikely, of course, that Strauss simply "forgets" any such thing. And it is hardly more likely that Harvey Mansfield forgets to explain the purpose of these (his own) concluding remarks. I am left to ask, then, in the spirit of friendly questioning: Does Mansfield agree with Strauss's apparently "dismissive" criticism of Machiavelli? One is entitled to wonder why it is so difficult to receive from Leo Strauss or Harvey Mansfield an answer to the following question: Is Machiavelli really wrong, and if so, why precisely? Very tentatively, and knowing fully well that I am here out of my depth, I suggest this hypothesis: Is not Strauss's and Mansfield's reluctance to defend frankly and clearly practical life against Machiavelli's effectual truth a consequence of their "Platonism," of their just and noble devotion to the idea of philosophy?

Translated by Ralph C. Hancock with Pierre Manent

An Affectual Look at Mansfield's Effectual Truth

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Machiavelli's Effectual Truth: Creating the Modern World

*By Harvey C. Mansfield. Cambridge University Press,
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I have been debating Harvey Mansfield on Machiavelli since December 7, 2000, when we held a memorable, for me, duel under the auspices of the Political Philosophy Colloquium at Princeton University. Since then we have had several occasions to discuss our irreconcilable interpretations of Machiavelli's thought. Mansfield has always maintained that Machiavelli was a teacher of evil, as Mansfield's mentor Leo Strauss famously proclaimed in 1958. At the dinner in his honor, given October 19, 2023, at Harvard University, Mansfield publicly proclaimed that for him Machiavelli was "good at teaching evil." My view is that Machiavelli was a good teacher of good. On the solid foundations of our sharp intellectual disagreements, to say nothing of our political disagreements, Mansfield and I have become good friends. I am delighted to offer a few comments on his book *Machiavelli's Effectual Truth*.

I find utterly fascinating, to begin with, Mansfield's idea of focusing on Machiavelli's notion of effectual truth ("*verità effettuale della cosa*"). He remarks that Machiavelli

is the author of his own effectual truth. He will do this after his death through philosophers who will carry on, or "execute," his "enterprise"—the two quoted words being key features of his vocabulary. These philosophers, whom

he designates “captains” in his *Discourses on Livy*, will be his successors. They are not mere accidents or chance consequences he cannot control beyond his lifetime, but designated thinkers, those who desire to “reason about everything,” who will be convinced to follow in his “path” and continue to develop the “effectual truth” of the world. They are known to us as the philosophers of modernity, as they, following Machiavelli, came to define it: the world understood as effectual truth, complete in itself, confined to what can be seen, heard, tasted, smelled, or touched by the senses, not requiring any supra-world of Plato’s ideas or God’s heaven either to explain it or supply its defects. (3–4)

The effectual truth, Mansfield clarifies, “is less than the simple truth but at the same time more. It is less than the high-minded rationality of Plato and Aristotle with their forms or ideas and essences needed to establish the being of things we perceive.” He continues, “But it is also more than this truth because it contains an incentive to receive and practice it; it is truth that has an effect in the world, not depending on the imaginative high reason of the high-minded. Once the unintended consequences of being high-minded are seen as typical, not as chance events aspired to by powerless philosophy, they will appear as intended by the one who first conceived the effectual truth and made it serve his plan of bringing common benefit to each of us, by Machiavelli” (7–8).

Mansfield is right to remark that “the novelty of the word [*effettuale*] has not been noticed and the signal it sends to all and sundry is left unobserved even though its message to readers, particularly scholarly readers in our time, seems clear if not loud.” In fact, it is quite astonishing that even the masterful commentary to *Il Principe* in the monumental *Edizione Nazionale delle Opere di Niccolò Machiavelli* is silent about the “*verità effettuale della cosa*.” To bring this concept to the center of an investigation on Machiavelli’s political thought is unquestionably a fine scholarly accomplishment. On this matter (appendix, 451), Mansfield flagellates the militants of the contextualist school: “The phrase is very

little discussed by Machiavelli scholars: Why? Because it has no 'source' they can discuss. A new kind of truth! How can that be interesting? Saying this once, Machiavelli calls attention to it. A word to the wise is sufficient, but to contextualist scholars the lack of repetition deprives it of context and renders it a slip of the tongue."

I am an old contextualist scholar. I accept Mansfield's flagellation. I would like, however, to retort. To correctly interpret the meaning of "*la verità effettuale della cosa*," it would be useful to consider the rhetorical structure of *The Prince*, in general and of chapter 15 in particular. To begin with, the whole chapter is about praise and blame ("Of Those Things for Which Men and Especially Princes Are Praised or Blamed," in Mansfield's translation). As Machiavelli puts it, his intention ("*intento*") is to "write something useful." To write something useful is, again, a typical claim of deliberative rhetoric, the part of rhetoric that teaches us to speak with persuasive power on political matters. Machiavelli's *Prince* clearly belongs to this tradition. The "*verità effettuale*" is therefore the truth that is effective because it is congenial to the matter being discussed—the matters of state—as opposed to the "*immaginazione*" of the matter—that is, the representations or fantasies that are not congenial to the gravity of the matter and therefore do not help render the argument effective.

In the central section of *The Prince* Machiavelli contrasts two ways of using the rhetorical technique of the "*ornatus*." He mentions, and rejects, the first in his "Dedicatory Letter": "I have not *ornamented* this work, nor filled it with fulsome phrases nor with pompous and magnificent words, nor with any blandishment or superfluous *ornament* whatever, with which it is customary for many to describe and adorn their things. For I wanted it either not to be honored for anything or to please solely for the variety of the matter and the gravity of the subject" (emphasis mine). The second is the technique of empowering the text or the speech with metaphors and similes that are appropriate to the "*cosa*" (matter). Machiavelli's "*verità effettuale della cosa*" is therefore, in my opinion, the truth of the true orator: the truth empowered and

embellished in the right manner. It is surely a brilliant choice of words, like many other that Machiavelli has crafted in his works. But it does not have the revolutionary novelty that Mansfield claims.

I am also not persuaded by Mansfield's treatment of Machiavelli's interpretation of tyranny. He writes:

Machiavelli is a kind of tyrant because he cannot help putting his own glory first. He is by himself, *uno solo*, the philosopher with an agenda, his enterprise for the redemption of mankind. He will not lord it over other philosophers but convince them with reasoning that his personal superiority, his tyranny over them, is necessary and hence just. He is their prince and they are his captains. Machiavelli sets forth the organization of his army and its discipline in the *Discourses*; in *The Prince* he pictures himself as the replacement of Christ, the redeemer of mankind. Christ is shown, we have seen, as Cesare Borgia, who both conquered Romagna at the behest of his father, Pope Alexander VI, and brought peace to that territory through his prudent use—and striking disposal—of his henchman, Remirro de Orco. Cesare Borgia is Machiavelli's model—"I shall never hesitate to cite Cesare Borgia and his actions" (*The Prince* XIII, 13.55)—but Machiavelli cannot carry arms in the literal sense, as did Cesare, and he certainly does not want to be the instrument of his father. (148)

Let me begin with Mansfield's first sentence: "Machiavelli is a kind of tyrant because he cannot help putting his own glory first." In *Discorsi* 1.10, however, Machiavelli eloquently claims that glory does not belong to tyrants: "And no one will ever be so crazy or so wise, so wicked or so good, who will not praise what is to be praised and blame what is to be blamed, when the choice between the two qualities of men is placed before him. Nonetheless, afterward, deceived by a false good and a false glory, almost all let themselves go, either voluntarily or ignorantly, into the ranks of those who

deserve more blame than praise; and though, to their perpetual honor, they are able to make a republic or a kingdom, they turn to tyranny. Nor do they perceive how much fame, how much glory, how much honor, security, quiet, with satisfaction of mind, they flee from by this policy; and how much infamy, reproach, blame, danger, and disquiet they run into."

About Mansfield's assertion that "Machiavelli sets forth the organization of his army and its discipline in the *Discourses*; in *The Prince* he pictures himself as the replacement of Christ, the redeemer of mankind," I wish to remark that we have no textual evidence that sustains these interpretations. It is one thing to invoke a redeemer, as Machiavelli does in *The Prince*; another to picture oneself as a redeemer. Moreover, Christ is not the redeemer that Machiavelli invokes. Christ never redeemed peoples from political servitude, as Machiavelli's redeemer is supposed to do. Machiavelli's exemplary redeemer is Moses, not Christ.

Mansfield also claims that Machiavelli "does not seem to care here about the difference between a republic that respects law and morality and a tyranny that does not. The tyrant could have survived if he had satisfied the people at the expense of his son, which is advice implying that the people care more about punishing immorality than about keeping the law. As to the law, a prince who does not take away the life, wife, or property of his subjects can rule them in a tyranny not essentially different from a republic" (160). In fact, in *Discourses* 1.25, Machiavelli sets a sharp distinction between republics and kingdoms on one side and tyrannies on the other. He also remarks in *Discourses* 2.2 that tyranny causes the decline of republics. Machiavelli, contrary to Mansfield's opinion, does care a lot about the difference between republics and tyranny.

In the second part of Mansfield's study, I find especially valuable the chapter on Montesquieu. In his introduction, Mansfield remarks that "Montesquieu gives recognition to Machiavelli that previous modern philosophers, especially the liberal ones like himself, had denied him—but having done so, he can criticize him openly. He calls Machiavelli 'that great man' and a legislator, and more: he tacitly accepts him as the founder of modern philosophy.

He adopts the principle of effectual truth and uses it first to praise, then to destroy the ancients, and then to establish modernity as if it had no founding philosopher. Or it had no other founding philosopher than himself, only an historical development he discerns. His grand work *The Spirit of the Laws* shows the notion of historical context at its origin and as part of Machiavelli's plan to make liberty secure (more than glorious) in this world, now *the world*" (10). This assessment is persuasive. I also agree with Mansfield that Montesquieu "adopts Machiavelli's fundamental principle of effectual truth, but makes it less dramatic, less outrageous, less devilish, by eliminating the invigorating violations of morality that Machiavelli thought necessary" (277).

I am not convinced by the way in which Mansfield opposes Machiavelli and Montesquieu on the rule of law. "Whereas Machiavelli dismisses the importance of laws, notably in *The Prince*, where he says that arms cause laws and laws never cause arms. Montesquieu brings laws to the fore in their relations to other things if not simply as causes. In Montesquieu's title one sees Machiavelli's *animo* ('intent' or 'moving spirit') in Montesquieu's *esprit*, yet also Montesquieu's emphasis on laws, contrary to Machiavelli's dismissal of law (which perhaps he insists on more than he holds to)" (292–93). In fact, Machiavelli considers the rule of law to be a fundamental principle of civil life. In *Discorsi* 1.25 he contrasts a "political way of life" with tyranny understood as "absolute power"—that is, power unbound by the laws. For Machiavelli, the rule of law is the distinctive feature that separates good and corrupt polities. In a corrupt city, he explains, "well-ordered laws do not help" (*Discourses* 1.17) and "neither laws nor orders can be found that are enough to check a universal corruption" (*Discourses* 1.18). When he speaks of the rule of law, Machiavelli always means a government of just laws and statutes that tend to promote the common good. As an anonymous orator eloquently explains in the *Florentine Histories*, to restore "true free and civil life," Florence needs new laws and new statutes that will protect the common good against the power of factions and that will replace those laws and statutes ordered "not in accordance

with free life but by the ambition of that party which has come out on top." For Machiavelli, the best government is one that ensures the rule of law and the common good. He maintains that a "political way of life" can be attained either through a republican form of government or a monarchic government, on the condition that the sovereign power is, in either case, regulated by laws: "[A] prince who can do what he wishes is crazy; a people that can do what it wishes is not wise" (*Discourses* 1.58).

Mansfield rightly remarks that in 1757, in reaction to criticism of the 1748 edition, Montesquieu "explains that his use of 'virtue' refers to 'political virtue' as the 'spring' (*ressort*) of republican government, not Christian virtue, and does not deny virtue to be present in monarchy, particularly the monarchy Montesquieu lives under" (295–96). I suggest that Montesquieu, in the same "Avertissement," remarks that *vertu politique* is love of country (*amour de la patrie*)—that is, love of equality (*amour de l'égalité*). Montesquieu's identification of *vertu politique* with *amour de la patrie* calls for an obvious comparison with Machiavelli. Machiavelli also stressed that political virtue—especially the virtue of the Romans—was indeed one and the same as love of country. In his preface to book 1 of his *Discourses*, for instance, Machiavelli writes, "And seeing, on the other hand, that the most virtuous works [*virtuosissime operazioni*] the histories show us, which have been done by ancient kingdoms and republics, by kings, captains, citizens, legislators, and others who have labored for their fatherland [*che si sono per la loro patria affaticati*], are rather admired than imitated—indeed, they are so much shunned by everyone in every least thing that no sign of that ancient virtue remains with us—I can do no other than marvel and grieve." Like Machiavelli, Montesquieu describes love of country as love of the laws and institutions that protect common liberty. Love of equality is the love of civil equality, equality as citizens, equal political rights, and equality before the law. The true spirit of equality consists "neither in making everyone command nor in placing no one in command, but in obeying and commanding one's equals" (*The Spirit of the Laws* 3.8).

Mansfield observes that Montesquieu offers a constitution of liberty (in books 11 and 12) “rather than a rapacious republic or principality as with Machiavelli” (304). In my view Machiavelli rejects the “rapacious” pursuit of greatness. In *La cagione dell’ordinanza* (1512), he openly reproaches the Florentine elite for their rapacity: “Voi, della iustitia, ne havete non molta.” In the *Florentine Histories* (7.30), he indirectly, but eloquently, condemns the sack of Volterra that the Florentines perpetrated under the leadership of Lorenzo il Magnifico. In *The Ass*, the unfinished poem that he composed probably around 1517–1518, Machiavelli remarks that so many republics and kingdoms fall because “all rulers here on earth / with wealth and power never feel replete.” The lust for conquest “ruins all states.” And, even though all are well aware of this pitfall, “yet into it [they still] fall.” While Venice, Sparta, and Athens fell because they conquered too extensively, in Germany every free city “lives secure and safe from harm, / barely encompassing six miles of ground.”

States must be able to expand if they are to remain free, but conquest and rapacious expansionism lead to their ruin. Machiavelli writes that the policy of conquering and subjecting peoples is “useless” and, indeed, “very useless” for those republics that do not have their own arms, as was the case with Florence. He condemns Florentine expansionism toward Pisa, Siena, and Lucca and praises its policy of protection for Pistoia. The former policy ensured that the Pisans, Siennese, and Lucchese “have exerted and exert all their force” to resist the Florentines; the policy of protection, by contrast, “has made the Pistoiese run willingly under their rule.” The words with which Machiavelli concludes the chapter require no other comment: “And without doubt if the Florentines by way either of laws or of aids had tamed their neighbors and not made them savage, they would without doubt at this hour be lords of Tuscany” (*Discorsi* 2.4, 2.21).

“An uncorrupt republic, a civil way of life (*vivere civile*), he [Machiavelli] says viciously, requires that the gentlemen all be killed and an ‘even equality’ established,” Mansfield writes on p. 250. The truth is that Machiavelli asserts many times that a good

republic *must* give the nobility an outstanding place. In the *Discourses* 1.2, he praises Lycurgus because he gave “their roles to the kings, the aristocrats and the people” and therefore made a state that lasted more than eight hundred years, achieving the highest praise for himself and peace for the city. By the same token, Machiavelli blames Solon because he ordered “only the popular state there” and therefore created a state that had a “short life.” In the *Florentine Histories*, Machiavelli even more explicitly claims that it is utterly wrong to deprive the nobility of its institutional place or, even worse, to try to eliminate it:

For the people of Rome desired to enjoy the highest honors together with the nobles, while the people of Florence fought to be alone in the government without the participation of the nobles. And because the desire of the Roman people was more reasonable, offenses to the nobles came to be more bearable, so that the nobility would yield easily and without resorting to arms. Thus, after some differences, they would come together to create a law whereby the people would be satisfied, and the nobles retain their dignities. On the other side, the desire of the Florentine people was injurious and unjust, so that the nobility readied greater forces for its own defense; and that is why it came to the blood and exile of citizens, and the laws that were made afterwards were not for the common utility but were all ordered in favor of the conqueror. From this it also followed that in the victories of the people the city of Rome became more virtuous, for as men of the people could be placed in the administration of the magistracies, the armies, and the posts of empire together with the nobles, they were filled with the same virtue as the nobles, and that city, by growing in virtue, grew in power. But in Florence, when the people conquered the nobles were left deprived of the magistracies, and if they wanted to regain them, it was necessary for them not only to be but to appear like men of the people in their conduct, spirit,

and mode of living. From this arose the variations in coats of arms and the changes of family titles that the nobles made so as to appear as the people. So, the virtue in arms and the generosity of spirit that were in the nobility were eliminated, and in the people, where they never had been, they could not be rekindled; thus did Florence become ever more humble and abject. (*Florentine Histories* 3.1)

I am offering Harvey these remarks with the same admiration with which I began debating him almost a quarter of a century ago, in the hope that we will soon have another occasion to discuss our ideas on Machiavelli and republican liberty. It is quite unlikely that either of us will change his position. For sure, however, our friendship will grow even stronger.

Response to Critics

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Machiavelli's Effectual Truth: Creating the Modern World

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The thesis of my book is in the title: Machiavelli designed his notion of the effectual truth in order to create the modern world. That world is *the* world in the way that we speak of it today, the world of stubborn facts and things that are not made intelligible through invisible essences or made perfect in heaven. Call the essences Aristotle and heaven the Bible; these were the two authorities dominating Machiavelli's time. To overturn their views of truth he substituted his view of truth qualified not by form and purpose but by the unintended, chance effect or result or outcome. If, however, this chance or *fortuna* can be anticipated by human prudence, the effectual truth can become the intended purpose in a new use of imagination backed by fact, opposing the prior abuse of imagination resting on invisible essences or the unseen next world.

The power of Aristotelity (Hobbes's witty combination of the two authorities) is such that Machiavelli cannot overturn it in his lifetime. He can only start the path he proposes to be followed. But he can communicate that path and describe the conspiracy he has in mind to his successors, who are philosophers like himself. A philosopher is one who thinks it "good to reason about everything" (*Discourses* 1.18.1), and Machiavelli cannot compel, but must convince his successors to follow him not slavishly but prudently with such modifications as they may find necessary or helpful. The

later liberalism of Hobbes, Locke, and Spinoza was an important remaking of Machiavelli's effectual truth, yet faithful to its focus on effects.

How will Machiavelli communicate to fellow philosophers after his death, considering the strength of the authorities he wishes to overturn? The answer is by esoteric communication in which he speaks to them through the words and between the lines that he addresses to the public. Everyone knows, *ciascuno sa*, that this esotericism has been recovered for our unprovided time by Leo Strauss. My book focuses on the esotericism of Machiavelli and of his recipients, particularly Montesquieu and Tocqueville. It attempts to show that the modern world was made available to us by philosophers who covered up what they conveyed, hiding it from unwary eyes but leaving it in plain view to those who know how to take a hint. To take a hint you have to look for one, which means examining a text that is ambiguous or if explicit, contains deliberate contradictions and misstatements. Such readings are intended to pose a problem to which the reader is supposed to find the answer. Esoteric readings are opposite to the sort of readings that demand a clear and distinct statement, but which in practice are often easily satisfied when ambiguity is suppressed or contradiction overlooked. The notion of public reason, stating that the reason one holds for oneself cannot differ from the reason one gives to everyone—Habermas's "ideal speech situation"—is the enemy of esoteric communication. Historicism, stating that reason cannot rise above the commonplaces of one's time, is another, related enemy.

Esotericism is practiced by philosophers because their reasoning about everything means questioning everything, especially those beliefs most cherished, which means not questioned, by societies they dominate. The public reason of societies shown in its cherished beliefs is authoritative; it never reasons about everything. It is never identical to the private reasoning of philosophers, which if stated publicly would put them in dire straits. In their esotericism philosophers practice ways of talking to other philosophers while at the same time and with the same words addressing the public of

non-philosophers. These ways can be seen over centuries and found among philosophers ancient, medieval, and modern. Each may have his own special modes—for example, Machiavelli with the thirteens he uses to put the stamp of his enterprise on his chapters and characters. Strauss in his *Thoughts on Machiavelli* noticed that Machiavelli's *Discourses* on the first ten books of Livy's *History* had the same number of chapters (142) as Livy's *History* had books. This fact, unpublished since 1531 but noticed by however many careful readers, can hardly be a chance coincidence. Why is it there? It is in plain view, but Machiavelli does not call attention to it. He does not say that with one more chapter Livy could have made it possible for all of Machiavelli's four major works, instead of all but the *Discourses*, to have multiples of thirteen in chapters or speeches.

The use of numbers, or numerology, by philosophers makes it necessary to suppose that they have an intent they want to impart that is open to everybody but will not be noticed by everybody. The numbers declare an intent where one would expect mere chance. Montesquieu's *Spirit of the Laws* has six parts and thirty-one books of a varying number of chapters. What sort of fool would count up these 605 chapters? But the result is to be presented with a number that is $5 \times 11 \times 11$. Moreover, who would count the number of chapters titled "continuation of the same subject," or as I call them "continuation chapters," to be rewarded by a result of 550, or $5 \times 10 \times 11$? One can consult the philosophic tradition to discover the meaning of 5, 10, 11, and 13—and other eidetic numbers besides these. But these are unmistakable hints of something being imparted. Less clear, requiring imagination and lacking the demonstrable truth of numbers, are figurative hints when one name stands for another. For example, Machiavelli uses Camillus in the *Discourses* to signify Christ (see the painting on the cover of my book) and uses Cesare Borgia for Christ in *The Prince*. Who, then, is Pope Alexander VI? Indeed, who is Alexander, in both Machiavelli and Montesquieu? For that matter, who is the "Prince" of Machiavelli's title? At the beginning of *The Prince* Machiavelli declares himself to be in a low place with malignant fortune, but at

the end of it he is giving orders as if he were in charge. To illustrate hints, I offer hints with these tendentious questions.

In my book I attempted to show the historical significance of esoteric communication. For all the doubt of the speculative imagination required to appreciate the depth and range of its ingenuity, its existence is an historical fact. There are great thinkers who used esoteric communication “between the lines.” The great thinkers are surrounded by lesser thinkers, to be sure, but the causation goes from great to lesser, not the reverse. The great ones cannot be cut to pieces and diminished into lesser “sources,” for it is the great who make their sources out of their materials. Perhaps the most illuminating aspect of Machiavelli’s esotericism is the analogy he establishes between material and spiritual warfare. Borrowing from such phrases as “onward Christian soldiers,” he fashions his own army like the Christian one based on a union of obstinacy, rhetoric, and authority. The great Tocqueville fastened on the analogy between military and intellectual campaigns in his response to Machiavelli (MET, chap. 7), for as an aid to his readers’ education Machiavelli tells them how to learn to read with a military metaphor. He says that a captain can come to be a “knower of sites” by gaining great familiarity with one region, from which it is easy to transfer his knowledge to others (*Discourses* 3.39.2). Do a careful job with one book worth reading, and you will learn how to transfer your accomplishment to read other such books.

My critics are not mere colleagues but warm friends who seek to distract scholars unconvinced of esotericism by offering criticisms that, with one exception, avoid discussing the thesis of my book. After this general response to them I turn from what they omit to what they say.

Paul Carrese offers genial compliments mixed with clearly stated criticisms. He says that my book is written with “great care,” but then finds an instance I cannot deny of what he calls a “slip” and I admit as an egregious instance of enthusiastic carelessness (MET, 174) that Montesquieu’s mention of “natural right” in book 1 of *The Spirit of the Laws* is the only one in the whole book. This will be the extent of my admissions, however. Carrese in his own

writings is an apostle of liberalism through moderation, which he takes to be a gift from outside liberalism of Christian religion and Aristotle's moral virtue. By accepting these gifts Montesquieu gave liberalism a moderation it could not have achieved on its own, acting on the principles of Hobbes, whom Montesquieu criticizes by name (*Spirit* 1.2).

In this chapter Montesquieu criticizes Hobbes from the standpoint of Hobbes, not that of classical virtue. He says that a man in the state of nature would feel weak and timid rather than strong and bellicose; he would seek his self-preservation rather than the origin of his being—for example, “the idea of a creator.” Second, he would seek nourishment, and third, Carrese wants us to notice, there would appear marks of mutual fear that Hobbes might agree to and “the pleasure one animal feels at the approach of an animal of its own kind.” Difference of sex would increase this pleasure. Nature's pleasure, he says later, is “the sweetest of all voices” (*Spirit* 26.4). This third natural law is not virtue. The fourth is the desire to live in society in order to gain knowledge, unique to humans. Nothing here is said about the “possible relations of justice” introduced in the preceding chapter (*Spirit* 1.1). Nothing is said about the justice of a contract that Hobbes used to describe the pass from the state of nature to society.

Montesquieu then comes to the right of nations, political right, and civil right in the following chapter (*Spirit* 1.3); these are positive laws on seventeen topics, added to or in place of the four natural laws, or added to the five kinds of law in the first chapter (these are numbers). The argument of book 1 goes from possible relations of justice to natural laws to positive laws, where the title of Montesquieu's great work is introduced in capitals. The capitalized concepts belong to the third chapter on positive laws. And the positive laws arise from “two sorts of states of war” bringing about the laws of nations and laws of political right. I think Hobbes might have been willing to swap his war in the state of nature for Montesquieu's wars just outside it. Both notions lead to modern liberalism of liberty secured rather than the classical regime of claimed virtue according to natural right. A similar result can be

seen in book 26, which begins with natural right and proceeds to substitute for it the spirit of the laws.

Now, let readers return to have a look at Carrese's quotation of "the spirit of moderation" (*Spirit* 29.1), in my view to be seen as distinct from the virtue of moderation in the classical tradition. After the paragraph quoted, Montesquieu adds that the "formalities of justice" are necessary to liberty but can in practice be so extensive as to counter the end of the laws establishing them. Then the next chapter is a "continuation chapter on the same subject," which offers further comment on the spirit of moderation. It speaks of a law that permitted a creditor to cut an insolvent debtor to pieces, a "law that by its very atrocity . . . prevented one's borrowing beyond one's abilities" (*Spirit* 29.2). "Are the cruelest laws therefore the best," asks Montesquieu. "Shall the excess be the good and all the relations between the things be destroyed?" The spirit of moderation, it appears, can be guaranteed neither by the formality of law nor by the end of law. It is found, rather, in the "relations of things" rather than ordered by the good. This is but a morsel from a huge book, but it supplies a view of moderation outside the dictates of moral virtue, and it rewards those who notice the continuation chapters. Montesquieu's (probably) imaginary example recalls the effect of sensational executions according to Machiavelli.

I do not think that America, through the influence of Montesquieu, is the effectual truth of Machiavelli. This is not the view of Carrese, but he attributes it to me. In my book I present Tocqueville, leading a counterrevolution, as the antidote to Machiavelli. For this view one needs the not-so-esoteric analogy of actual to spiritual or intellectual warfare, and this is as far as I go in chapter 7 of my book. To see that Tocqueville opposes Machiavelli one can note his hostility to the "individualism" he fears will arise from democracy. Individualism is Machiavellian *uno solo* democratized to all and thus made weak and ineffectual. It is the opinion that individuals in a democracy face domination by historical forces that render them incapable of effective political action and induce them to take refuge in close circles of family and friends.

Tocqueville's remedy for individualism so defined is the art and science of association, which he sees active in American democracy. Associations allow individuals to be citizens by giving effect to common goals not discounted as effectual truth in the mode of Machiavelli. These few words are enough, I hope, to indicate where my thinking would go in response to the firm but gentle strictures of Paul Carrese.

Clifford Orwin takes up the succession problem described in my book, but he leaves open the question of esotericism. He says that I make a lot from a little in regard to Montesquieu, with only five mentions of Machiavelli, and with Tocqueville, where there is just one. But it's one of the practices of esotericism to make much with little, with the *cose piccole* that permit a prince to keep his soldiers firm and united (*Discourses* 3.33.1). Little things can be auspices of big things when they are accompanied with virtue, particularly the virtue of being a careful rather than a hasty reader. One could say that Machiavelli drew attention to the phrase *verità effettuale* by using it just once in all his writings. Since it was invented and had no source, scholars dismissed it as inconsiderable. Yet this was the phrase that launched a thousand ships. Esotericism made Machiavelli's plan of succession possible. It enabled Machiavelli to address two audiences at once, the philosophers who would notice little things and the nonphilosophers who would not. To the first he could divulge the long-term plot and modes of his conspiracy; to the second he could give advice for his time at his beginning stage.

Orwin says that Machiavelli made himself a tyrant over the future, which I think is correct, but he was a hidden tyrant and his plan emphasizing tyranny could not deny the opportunity of tyranny to his future fellow philosophers. They too could make a name for themselves, perhaps even against his name. Machiavelli's fame takes the form of infamy. He is a tyrant, but all he does is give advice that makes him every prince's minister (see *The Prince*, chap. 22). His army can be understood as a principality insofar as he is its tyrant, but also as a republic because he allows for a competition among the princes who follow him. Who wins, Hobbes

or Descartes? Orwin asks whether Montesquieu is Machiavelli's agent or uses him as "grist for his mill." Machiavelli is a generous boss who allows for a measure of his own tyrannical desire in his lieutenants. As one of them Montesquieu identifies *un seul* as despotic, opposing Machiavelli's insistence on the necessity of striving to be *uno solo*. Here indeed Montesquieu is his own miller. Or does he make us suspect that despotism is not always wrong?

Are there philosophers in modern times who are AWOL from Machiavelli's army? So Orwin asks, and he names Jonathan Swift, correctly in my view. Swift was indeed an ancient in modern times and no friend of Machiavelli. In an esoteric flash of his own he pictures Machiavelli as a monkey found by Gulliver in Brobdingnag, who he declared to be "the greatest Danger I ever underwent in that Kingdom." The meeting of monkey and Gulliver takes place in a chapter of fourteen accidents befalling Gulliver, of which this one is next to the last (Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*, 3.5).

There are ancients in modern times, but can we be sure that Machiavelli was such an enemy to the ancients? He does say that "I depart from the orders of others" (*The Prince*, chap. 15), but in his disguise as Fabius he seems to qualify his departure. He discusses Fabius's discovery of the Ciminian Forest, an unknown "doubtful and dangerous country" forcing him to depart from instructions of the Roman Senate. Fortunately the Senate had a policy of giving "free commissions" to captains in such circumstances so that they could act on their own for their own glory rather than follow instructions (*Discourses* 2.33). It seems that Machiavelli is claiming that the ancient philosophers (the Senate) have given him such a commission to oppose their doctrines in the unexpected, previously unknown case of ambitious idleness arising from the domination of Christianity. In this context one should remember Tocqueville's remark on the danger or advantage arising from the ambition of noncommissioned officers in democratic armies (*Democracy in America*, 3.23). Philosophers claim free commissions for themselves, a necessity Machiavelli must take into account when providing for the discipline of his army. Like the Senate, he cannot be on the spot to see what discretion may be

required and must be allowed to his captains to accomplish his goal. His own glory, mostly hidden from the multitude and appreciable only to his captains, must be shared with them.

Pierre Manent asks why I do not show that Machiavelli is wrong about the effectual truth, but instead show “a reluctance to defend practical life” and moral virtue against him. I could say first that I knew he could do a better job at this than I, as he demonstrates in his critique. Second, I would rather criticize the mechanistic models of social science (sociology) in our day in order to defend the practical life under the American Constitution than take up against Machiavelli. The clumsy, obtuse, mediocre character of social science is a clear and present danger to practical life, hence a practical danger to it that Machiavelli does not pose. I think I have shown my disapproval of Machiavelli’s enterprise, and if contrary theory is needed, Hobbes (whom I treat in a forthcoming book), with his pretention to science, is a more inviting target than Machiavelli. True, Machiavelli set the premise for social science, but Hobbes set the standard for scrawny social theorizing denying voluntary action. Machiavelli still espoused virtue and did so to an extreme that he called “altogether bad” rather than require obeisant promise-keeping with Hobbes and irresponsible value-free analysis with social science. Moreover, Machiavelli displays his own nobility in his attack on nobility. His writing is full of comic elegance, and the network of his extraordinary plot to rescue human virtue is a wondrous pleasure to discover. Leo Strauss admiringly compares him to a fallen angel and asserts that a magnanimous deity would excuse his beautiful blasphemies.

Behind Machiavelli’s capacious and exaggerated concept of necessity lie human necessities that as Manent says are at a distance from divine commandments. Machiavelli releases the necessities from the Christian accusation of sin and goes so far as to adopt the Aristotelian vices as virtue. He may be considered to have emerged from humanist Averroism—for example, Boccaccio’s *Decameron*, which interpreted the commandments to allow for human necessities. He ends *The Prince* by citing a poem of Petrarch declaiming “virtue” and “the ancient valor in Italian hearts.” This is not social

science! But he is critical of the half-hearted acceptance of Christianity by the humanists, as one sees in his criticism of their hero Cicero (*Discourses* 1.52.3, 2.5.1), and he attacks both the Church and Christian doctrine with open and explicit vehemence (*Discourses* 1.12.2, 2.2.2, 3.1.4).

Aristotle himself makes concessions to human necessities in his discussion of the practical life. In his *Nichomachean Ethics* he sets forth a claim that moral virtue is attainable, then qualifies it with a discussion of the prudence necessary to achieve it. He shows in the *Politics* how moral questions are answered and practical activity formed with his discussion of regimes. In the *Rhetoric* he writes on passions and characters in a way that includes but submerges the claims of intellectual virtue and the splendor of moral virtue. For the mean of moral virtue between excess and defect he substitutes the opposites seen in normal behavior, such as envy and indignation or emulation. Aristotle's *Rhetoric* is closer to the modern, Machiavellian simplification of practice into necessity than the *Ethics* and *Politics*. He shows the many choices available to us among the constraining possibilities of normal (not merely Athenian or Greek) practical life. These many small niceties of behavior, very human but not voluntary and virtuous, take the sting and the compulsoriness out of necessity in the general sense of Machiavelli. A study of practical life would want to take account of these diverse avenues of truth. My answer to Pierre Manent is to hit the ball back to his court with a weak, defensive shot.

Machiavelli's effectual truth appears to answer the question of the "domain of practical indeterminacy" by resorting to the extreme case. Just as with modern physics, the character of the whole is taken from the extreme or ultimate instance of it. Thus with Lucrezia the defeat of her morality comes with the challenge of what would be necessary to regenerate humanity from extinction and the answer found by "judiciously" wrenching a passage from the Bible, her highest authority. The extreme case will not be found ordinarily in the facts, and it has to be imagined or posited in the extreme case of the "state of nature" proposed by Hobbes later on. That state presents an alternative to the account in the Bible, as did

Brother Timothy's interpretation in *Mandragola*, to the effect that even God is accountable to human necessities. It specifically justifies the anticipation of evil by doing to your fellows what they—maybe—will do to you. Machiavelli precedes Hobbes's science in the simplification of determinacy out of the extreme case rather than by study of the circumstances. By the authority of the simplified extreme one can dismiss the difficult wrestle of prudence with circumstance as inexact and therefore incompetent. The problem of *Mandragola* remains, for still today not enough babies are born. We have not found a magical potion as a remedy, and we cannot blame Christianity for the lack.

Machiavelli as philosopher took a decision to limit philosophy to the effectual truth rather than the essential truth. What is essential is too reliant on chance, on the chance that Christianity with its confession of sin would not arise. As said earlier, I believe Machiavelli with his free commission thought he was carrying on the Great Tradition (so called by Leo Strauss) of the Senate of ancient wisdom by departing from its orders. The effect of judging by facts is soft submissiveness to fact, as one sees in Hobbes's reduction of "citizen" to "subject" in *Leviathan*. But modernity is also grand in its ambition, and Machiavelli participates in the reasonable pride of the philosopher in his "just and noble devotion to the idea of philosophy." The philosopher is the extreme case of a human being who speaks for humanity without ruling humanity. In the extreme case of the necessity he sees rather than imagines, Machiavelli justifies his rule without desiring to rule. As philosopher he becomes tyrant by necessity.

Maurizio Viroli, a scholar and a man of warmth and style, brings mainstream Machiavellian scholarship to bear on my book. He is not really a contextualist, as he claims, because he concentrates on Machiavelli's text rather than little adolescents of his time that contextualists study. My book, he believes, is not authorized by the text, which means the explicit text. Nowhere in that text does Machiavelli say "I am the author of a conspiracy of philosophers to bring about the modern world." Viroli is not in tune with the notion of esoteric writing on which my arguments depend. His

interpretations represent the alliance of goodness and Italian patriotism to which Machiavelli appeals when he wants to seem innocent. I will try to meet, if not refute, his objections on that level:

1. The effectual truth is not the same as Aristotle's deliberative rhetoric. The latter assumes a prudent intent to find means to an end, whereas Machiavelli criticizes the notion that the intent matters and that words can rule deeds. Machiavelli quotes "the very true words" of a Latin praetor that when a prince or republic tries to act in accordance with words it is difficult to know what to do, but when "spirit is firm . . . it is an easy thing to find the words" (*Discourses* 2.15.1). From this one sees that Machiavelli's words are more reliable than those of people who want us to rely on words.
2. Machiavelli speaks of "what is called tyranny by the authors" when describing "he who wishes to make an absolute power" (*Discourses* 1.25). Out of deference to the authors and to the prince, as well as to his view of the truth, he does not use the word in *The Prince*. Tyranny is a necessity of human behavior.
3. Machiavelli does not say he is the anti-Christ, but he presents the case for Italy's "redeemer," not as Christ but as the advice of his book at the end of *The Prince*.
4. Machiavelli cares about the difference between a prince and a republic, but he also presents himself as both prince in charge of his enterprise and as a prince in a republic consisting of his successors (for whom he reserves their own glory). A republic has a number of potential tyrants restraining one another.
5. The rule of law is found in a republic, but so are "new modes and orders" that constantly change the law, not to mention the dictator over the laws that may be necessary to a republic (*Discourses* 1.40). As to "equality before the law," what of "the necessity to be alone" to order a republic? (*Discourses* 1.9).
6. Is it possible for a republic to "expand" without "conquest"? (see *Discourses* 2.6). In general, Machiavelli uses the economic term "acquisition" for conquest.

7. Viroli's idea that Machiavelli finds a suitable place for the nobility in his balanced republic does not survive a reading of *Discourses* 1.55.

These words are just another stage in the lifelong debate that Maurizio Viroli and I have held. I cannot say who is the loser, but I can say how much I appreciate the friendship of a man so beautifully Italian. Pierre Manent, from whom I always learn, is indelibly French, but for his higher loyalties. Next to them, Paul Carrese and my former student Clifford Orwin are just fellow Americans dear to me. Altogether I think I have received a thorough scrubbing from four friends and gratefully thank them all.