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Strauss on *The Prince*

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Abstract: Here is a study of what Leo Strauss in his marvelous book, *Thoughts on Machiavelli* (1958), tells us about Machiavelli's *The Prince*, and how he tells it. The "how" is quite remarkable: his book is unlike any other book that has ever been written on Machiavelli. For the first time Machiavelli's esotericism is not only alluded to or introduced but explained at length. In explaining, Strauss shows how he arrived at his discoveries in Machiavelli's texts, teaching his readers the proper mixture of innocence and savvy. With his book Strauss gives a wholly new picture of an author who set store by being "wholly new." All scholarly studies on Machiavelli can now be divided into those written before Strauss and those written after him, and the latter between those that take account of him in some fashion and those that willfully, or blithely, ignore him.

My purpose is to set forth what Leo Strauss in his marvelous book, *Thoughts on Machiavelli* (1958), tells us about Machiavelli's *The Prince*, and how he tells it. The "how" is quite remarkable: his book is unlike any other book that has ever been written on Machiavelli. For the first time Machiavelli's esotericism is not only alluded to or introduced but explained at length. In explaining, Strauss shows how he arrived at his discoveries in Machiavelli's texts, teaching his readers the proper mixture of innocence and savvy that enables one to discover that an apparently useless observation such as the number of chapters in Machiavelli's *Discourses on Livy* (and also in *The Prince*) is a meaningful discovery. With his book Strauss gives a wholly new picture of an author who set store by being "wholly new." All scholarly studies on Machiavelli can now be divided into those written before Strauss and those written after him, and the latter between those that take account of him in some fashion and those that willfully, or blithely, ignore him.[1]

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[1]Of studies that take account of him, one may distinguish those who take his path and those who disagree but reply, and of the latter the most notable is Claude Lefort, *Le travail de l'oeuvre Machiavel* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972), *Les formes de l'histoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1978), *Ecrire à l'épreuve du politique* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1992). See also Dante Germino, "Second Thoughts on Leo Strauss' Machiavelli," *Journal of Politics* 28 (1966): 794–817; Anthony J. Parel, *The Machiavellian Cosmos* (New Haven, CT:

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In this book Strauss teaches his students, actual and prospective, how to read esoteric philosophical writing. He addresses readers who are or might become careful readers in the sense he describes, that is, his potential followers, members of the school of philosophy he was intent upon creating. Being a careful reader means being open to, alert to, the hints of a writer who writes between the lines, or esoterically, to a special audience. Strauss shows more or less openly various tricks of intimation used by Machiavelli, including the numerology by which the number of occurrences of a word and the placement of his statements and discussions indicate something more, or other, than what they say openly. But more than describing Machiavelli's tricks, Strauss also practices them himself—the same ones—so that he too says quietly more or other things than what he says openly.[2] Thus does he establish a parallel between Machiavelli's troops of Machiavellians and his own school, known already then and now still as Straussians.

Strauss does not make it easy to see what the parallel consists in. The famous first sentence of his book, though festooned with provisos, suggests that he disapproves of Machiavelli as a teacher of evil. This suggestion is borne out in the rest of the book, but the teaching of evil is not countered directly with a teaching of morality. The doctrine of natural right that Strauss set forth in his earlier book *Natural Right and History* (1953) is not brought to bear against Machiavelli. In fact, the phrase "natural right" occurs only once in *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, in a footnote on Machiavelli's use of Polybius that happens to say in parentheses "there is no natural right."[3] Instead, Strauss proposes a "considerate ascent" (the words he uses in the Introduction, *TOM* 9.13) from the "simple opinion" that Machiavelli was a teacher of evil. Only a considerate ascent, one that takes the simple opinion seriously, will be "doing justice" to what is "truly admirable in Machiavelli." One will not climb above moral denunciation of Machiavelli by mere counterdenunciation of his denouncers. Strauss indicates that one must not refuse respect to that denunciation, as do Machiavelli's scholarly interpreters when they excuse him from it. To appreciate Machiavelli, one

Yale University Press, 1992); Hanna F. Pitkin, *Fortune Is a Woman* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); Erica Benner, *Machiavelli's Ethics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009); John P. McCormick, *Machiavellian Democracy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011). One grateful scholar, difficult to classify, praises Strauss for offering "the model," but unfortunately of what one must *not* do to "penetrate Machiavelli": Bernard Guillemain, *Machiavel: L'anthropologie politique* (Geneva: Droz, 1977), 4.

[2]As Lefort remarks, *Ecrire à l'épreuve du politique*, 159, 262.

[3]Leo Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 339n145 (hereafter *TOM*). Citations to this work are to page followed by paragraph number in the chapter.

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must appreciate the intrepidity that enabled him to shock and oppose the power of morality. Machiavelli shows that necessity is stronger than morality to be sure,[4] but he would not have to argue this point if morality were not stronger than it appears to be.[5] Its strength lies in what people "profess" to others and to themselves. Almost everyone is aware of the contrast between what people profess and what they do or how they behave, but almost no one thinks that this sad divergence justifies abandoning morality for evil. Machiavelli thinks, or "teaches," that it does. He is "the only philosopher who has lent the weight of his name" to a way that is as old as politics (*TOM* 10.2). He opposes one profession, that of the good, with another profession of his own—of the necessity of evil. Yet he says that he is driven by a natural desire to bring things he believes will work for "the common good of each" (*D* 1 pr. 1). Out of evil has come good—and out of more evil will come more good.[6]

To see more of the parallel between Machiavelli and Strauss one may look at their use of the first person singular and plural. This item may seem of small importance casually inserted, but the precision one finds discloses the way in which Machiavelli, and then Strauss following him, convey important matters in small details (*piccole cose*, in Machiavelli's words, *D* 3.33.1). Machiavelli begins his *Discourses on Livy* with "I," then ends the book with the word *Massimo*.[7] *The Prince* he begins more modestly with *Sogliono*, referring to what is usually done in dedicatory letters, and presents himself as doing homage (*servitù*) to Lorenzo de' Medici, yet he uses "I" eight times in the three paragraphs of that letter, comparing himself to Lorenzo, and at its end, despite his own admitted baseness, he summons the nerve to complain of the malignity of his fortune. In the Dedicatory Letter to the *Florentine*

[4]"To many things reason does not bring you, necessity brings you" (*Discourses on Livy* 1.6.4); "It is necessary to a prince … to learn to be able not to be good, and to use this and not use it according to necessity" (*The Prince* 15.61). Translations of Machiavelli used are *The Prince*, ed. Harvey C. Mansfield, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); *Discourses on Livy*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield and Nathan Tarcov (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); *Florentine Histories*, trans. Laura F. Banfield and Harvey C. Mansfield (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).

[5]The nine shocking examples of doing evil that Strauss lists in the opening paragraph of *TOM* are certainly not deeds one would want to avow.

[6]The scholarly interpreters of Machiavelli, according to Strauss, fall into two camps: those who believe he was a patriot, so that his good end justifies evil means, and those who believe he was a scientist, so that he was not obliged to judge whether his advice was evil or not. Both camps agree that good comes out of evil, but both cover up the fact to themselves. They do not see Machiavelli clearly because, Strauss remarks, they "have been corrupted by Machiavelli" (*TOM* 7.12).

[7]Strauss notes that with this "I" "the individual Machiavelli steps forth" (*TOM* 24.11).

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Histories he speaks of the spirit and confidence with which he has written so as to execute "my enterprise" (*l'impresa mia*). Machiavelli is an "I" man.

Strauss presents himself in the Introduction to his book as a "we" man. The notable first sentence begins, "We shall not shock anyone…," by contrast to Machiavelli's willingness to shock his readers and his accent on himself. Strauss is in a "we" together with two sorts of people in the Introduction, his fellow scholars who interpret Machiavelli, and his fellow Americans, who claim not to follow Machiavelli's professions but may occasionally take his advice. But Strauss is not wholly a "we" man.[8] He uses the impersonal "one" frequently, and he also uses "I," sometimes to assert himself. In the first occurrence of "I" he says "I do not believe that we" can follow an interpretation of Machiavelli that had been made by "men of the competence of Spinoza and Rousseau" (*TOM* 26.13). One might say that here is Strauss the individual stepping forth. He had prepared his own "I" with a quoted "I" from Christopher Marlowe, who put it in the mouth of Machiavelli in the prologue to his play *The Jew of Malta*: "I hold there is no sin but ignorance" (*TOM* 13.9).

"I hold" makes an assertion, as it introduces an asserted truth which the speaker puts his weight behind and takes responsibility for. Perhaps one asserts because he has or there is no solid proof. But though less than solid proof, such an assertion is not a matter of faith alone; it might be an assertion reasonable to set down as the best possible premise or make public as the most practical one. This particular assertion is bolder even than any Machiavelli was able to make, and it follows another assertion, omitted by Strauss, which says, "I count religion as but a childish toy." If the only sin is ignorance, then virtue is knowledge—a truth associated with Socrates rather than Machiavelli. In quoting Marlowe, Strauss brings out the premise of the popular view hostile to Machiavellianism—that sin is not ignorance—and at the same time reveals the disturbing possibility that Machiavelli shares, or has appropriated, the premise of Socrates.[9] This is a further example of what can be learned about Machiavelli by taking seriously the popular view that he is a teacher of evil. But while taking it seriously you criticize and rise above it.

Machiavelli in the first person is associated with the number 13. In this book, more than in his other books, Strauss displays his discoveries of how philosophers use numbers to hide their meaning, but also to convey it if only you stop to look and count things that are in plain view but that most people assume are inadvertent (and in most books they usually are). For

[8]Nor does Machiavelli forget to say "we." See Strauss's comments on the many referents of his "we" at *TOM* 48.33, 69.13.

[9]Quoting this phrase in his book *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), 177, Strauss says, "This is almost the definition of a philosopher." In this quotation, as opposed to that in *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, Strauss inserts periods indicating an omission ("I … hold").

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example, in the *Discourses* there are 13 instances of Machiavelli's beginning a chapter in the first person, ten in the singular, three in the plural (*TOM* 312n22). All his major works except the *Discourses* have a multiple of 13 chapters (*The Prince*, *Florentine Histories*) or speeches (*The Art of War*). The *Discourses*, as Strauss was the first to reveal, has the same number of chapters as Livy's work has books: 142, which is one short of a multiple of 13 (*TOM* 38.34). Now Strauss uses "I" a total of 17 times in *Thoughts on Machiavelli*. He left a manuscript note of the tally, indicating that this number was not inadvertent.[10] Seventeen is the number used in the philosophic tradition to denote nature.[11] Strauss appears to be asserting the principle, upholding the cause, of "nature," just as Machiavelli asserts his own cause, his "enterprise" of conquering fortune and hence nature. When one counts the paragraphs in *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, a number within Strauss's power to secure, the result is 221, or 13 × 17. Strauss borrows Machiavelli's number for himself to put his bet on nature as it can be understood, Machiavelli puts his on chance as ruled by himself.

Yet Strauss leaves open the possibility that Machiavelli might be right; more than that, he elaborates the reasoning by which Machiavelli reaches his conclusion. Machiavelli's conclusion can be stated in summary form: It is that liberty must be refreshed by the self-imposed necessity of human beings through their politics, substituting for divinely imposed commands that must be interpreted by human beings through their politics. Human politics replaces divine politics, which can happen because divine politics is human politics disguised. Divine politics in Machiavelli's time and place was Christian, and he decided to turn Christian politics on its head, using the peculiarities and contrivances of its divine politics as advantages for himself. His purpose is to dispose of the priests as they have been, misgoverning through divine politics, and install in their place new republics and principalities of his manufacture in which priests are subordinates. To do this, Machiavelli must become a teacher of evil, and thus make himself responsible for what is known still as Machiavellism. Strauss, while showing a certain disdain, as opposed to disgust, for Machiavellism, does not show the way out of it but contents himself with presenting the problem in greater depth than it has been. The way out is somehow through, or to, natural right, but Strauss did not want to specify what it is. He did not want to become a prophet like Machiavelli, and he did not want Straussians to become a movement of partisans of natural right save in a general sense that excludes a political movement or party advocating "natural right."

[10]Occurrences in the text are: 26.13, 43.31, 45.32, 50.35, 90.7, 127.30, 133.32. In the notes: 303n33, 309n49 (2×), 312n21 (3×), 311n14, 316n40, 320n.80, 325n165. There are no occurrences in chapter 4.

[11]See e.g. *TOM* 301n9; cf. 337n118.

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In *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, therefore, Strauss does not refute Machiavelli but contents himself with giving him his due. His appreciation is new, and it is twofold. For the first time he shows that Machiavelli is a philosopher, not just a prophet, and that he is worthy of inclusion in "the Great Tradition" of philosophy (or Socratic philosophy). It follows, though Strauss does not say, that philosophy departments today are remiss if they do not include Machiavelli among the greats whose names and thought they think they know. At the same time, and also for the first time, he shows that Machiavelli is the founder of the Enlightenment and of modernity, more precisely as he says elsewhere, "the founder of modern political philosophy."[12] Not only did he belong to the philosophic tradition but he revolutionized it; he attempted to "uproot the Great Tradition."[13] Machiavelli is a philosopher and Machiavelli is the founder of modernity: these together are the message and the originality of Strauss's *Thoughts on Machiavelli*. Rather than answer Machiavelli's teaching of evil with a teaching of good, Strauss proposes "the recovery of the permanent problems" (*TOM* 14.12). For that recovery study is necessary, and study that does not assume the necessity of a solution. Strauss advises his readers to become students rather than to organize or join a political movement. To recover the permanence of problems it is necessary that Strauss stand up for nature, because nature is the guarantor of permanence. But he wishes natural right to appear as a problem, not as a solution, in order to establish the primacy of philosophy. In view of the nature of man, the crucial task of philosophy is political philosophy. His advice to his readers, then, is to study the history of political philosophy, the tradition that Machiavelli inherited, revolted against, and yet sustained and contributed to.

[12]Leo Strauss, *What Is Political Philosophy? and Other Studies* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1959), 40.

[13]*TOM* 59.6, in reference to *P* 15. On Machiavelli and the philosophic tradition, see also 23–24.11, Machiavelli continues and challenges the tradition of political philosophy; 56.3, *The Prince* traditional and antitraditional; 68.12, "the most exalted traditions, both philosophic and religious"; 81.23, liberation from a bad tradition; 120–21.26, Machiavelli's break with the Great Tradition although by no means its unworthy heir; 127.29, the birth of modern philosophy, greatest of all youth movements; 127.30, the classical tradition; 142.38, Machiavelli's "complete break with the Biblical tradition"; 167.55, "the fundamental error of The Great Tradition"; 173.59, "Machiavelli breaks with the Great Tradition and initiates the Enlightenment"; 232–33.45, Machiavelli challenges the religious teaching and the "whole philosophic tradition" or "classical political philosophy" or "traditional political philosophy," his "revolt against classical political philosophy"; 241.50, the tradition Machiavelli attacks; 242.51, Machiavelli "challenges the whole religious and philosophical tradition"; 290.82, Machiavelli opposed to classical political philosophy or the "Socratic tradition"; 293.83, Machiavelli breaking with the Socratic tradition; 295.85, a "stupendous contraction" appears to Machiavelli as a "wondrous enlargement."

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I will add one more introductory point in the form of a hint about Strauss's hints on how to deal with the problem of the alleged and apparent necessity of doing evil. This is to consider the importance of nobility. In the very first paragraph, after listing evil deeds that Machiavelli recommends us to do, Strauss says "if it is true that only an evil man will stoop to teach maxims of … gangsterism" (*TOM* 9.1). Thus good men habitually look down on evil deeds. Before they consider them, let alone calculate their utility, they reject them as beneath consideration. They reject them out of nobility; they will not *stoop* to evil. But Strauss wants to persuade the simple readers who reject evil and with whom he sympathizes that there is something noble about Machiavelli. Machiavelli has intrepidity, grandeur, and graceful subtlety (*TOM* 13.9). He took on the united force of common opinion, universal tradition, and all prior philosophers. Like Marlowe's Machiavelli, Machiavelli himself espouses a version of the maxim to which Socrates held when defending his life. Machiavelli reasons about everything and comes to a conclusion and a teaching that he holds, seeking to persuade but also in defiance of all doctrine and opinion hitherto. This is a noble man, to whom Strauss proposes to do justice. The hint Strauss gives is that the question of good and evil, raised in his first sentence, must be considered through the nobility that is promised as a consequence of philosophy in the last sentence, in which he concludes that philosophy "is of necessity edifying" (*TOM* 299.87). For to edify is to ennoble.

To be sure, Machiavelli's nobility is "perverted." To explain it Strauss brings theology to the aid of philosophy, remarking "the profound theological truth" that the devil is a fallen angel. The problem of evil with which Strauss's book begins is a question not only of morality but also of religion. Strauss will try to prove that Machiavelli's teaching is irreligious as well as immoral (*TOM* 12.7), and his book is much more devoted to religion, and more deeply, than the sort of scholarly production that is easily satisfied by Machiavelli's praise of religion.[14] Here he suggests that biblical and classical thought have in common an appreciation of nobility foreign to much modern thought after Machiavelli but not to Machiavelli himself. As against the nobility of looking down on evil, Machiavelli turns to the necessity that demands one do evil, and embraces its necessity in order to achieve some good; only necessity produces the human excellence or virtue (*virtù*) that is his version of nobility. His version looks down on and rejects the "childish toy" of religion that Marlowe's Machiavelli asserts. Machiavelli could not say "childish toy" himself but he made it possible for Marlowe to do so in his mouth afterwards. He himself had the nobility of the philosopher, who reasons about everything

[14]See Sebastian de Grazia, *Machiavelli in Hell* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), chap. 3; Maurizio Viroli, *Machiavelli's God*, trans. Antony Shugaar (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), chap. 1.

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(*D* 1.18, 58), and after concluding his reasoning, he has as well the nobility of the noble man who rejects.

Strauss indicates that in the end Machiavelli endangered human nobility by the manner in which he attempted to defend it. For if nobility requires the pressure of necessity, yet seeks always to oppose or even conquer necessity, it would destroy itself if it were to succeed. The nobility of philosophy requires, then, that philosophers be distinct from nonphilosophers, that there be an unchangeable "natural basis" supporting that distinction.[15] But if philosophy takes over religion and turns to propaganda for "the conquest of the future," thus overcoming necessity, the result would be "the inglorious death of the very possibility of human excellence" (*TOM* 297–98.86). It is the nobility of philosophy that impels it to distinguish between philosophers and nonphilosophers, nobles and ignobles, and that would make death by its own hand "inglorious."

That the devil is a fallen angel may suggest that the angel in its purity is the truth of human nobility, as the untainted goodness the hero wishes to attain. Or it could suggest the reverse, that the angel is but a sacralized copy, perhaps even a perversion, of human nobility. In the first case the Bible would show the essential truth of what human nobility wants, while rejecting its earthly or carnal distractions. In the second case, human nobility is a truth of human nature and the basis of the Bible, which perverts it as both angel and devil. Strauss says he believes that "the Bible sets forth the demands of morality and religion in their purest and most intransigent form" (*TOM* 133.32). He appears to leave open the possibility that philosophy, whether classical or Machiavellian, might find a reasonable substitute that does not attempt an impossible purity, that does not seek to remove the taint of unreason arising from every human being's (including every philosopher's) necessary concern with his own body.

When the philosopher asserts or affirms something, as in "I count" or "I hold," he "steps forth" as an individual; he lends "the weight of his name" to what he says (*TOM* 24.11, 10.2). What he says is not merely a philosopher's argument but also an assertion of individual human dignity or nobility, which philosophers share with nonphilosophers but which they often use to stand up to nonphilosophers. Any philosophic "teaching" has an assertive character in addition to its reasoning that gives it a certain stamp and often earns it the name of its author. Such a teaching if it catches on may begin a tradition, the Socratic tradition or the classical tradition for example, with which Strauss

[15]In Machiavelli's magnificent letter of 10 December 1513, he contrasts the "vermin" nonphilosophers with whom he spends his day to the philosophers' books ("the ancient courts of ancient men") with which he spends the evening: "I feed on the food that alone is mine and that I was born for." Here is a natural distinction given lively emphasis. But note that Machiavelli spends a good part of the day with the vermin.

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says Machiavelli has an ambiguous relationship: he both upholds and uproots it. Philosophy has its own nobility in what it rejects and in what it founds and maintains. Its nobility is both similar to political or nonphilosophic nobility, in asserting some point, and contrary to it because philosophy as such stands against common opinion. Even when philosophy lends support to common opinion, as does Strauss to the simple common opinion regarding Machiavelli, it does so on its own.

To act on one's own, or in Machiavelli's phrase to use "one's own arms," is to insist on one's dignity or nobility. That it is necessary as well is Machiavelli's assertion against the Bible, which says that man needs God, and the classical tradition, which says that he needs nature. Either tradition by itself, or the two in uneasy combination, maintain the doctrine of previous thought that man is a noble creature, even as a fallen creature in need of divine grace as in the Bible. Nobility is sustained in a tradition that recalls its origins and original founders, but tradition can hinder the nobility of one who wants to initiate a tradition as did Machiavelli. He speaks of the "wholly new prince" and he became one himself, setting a new tradition of Machiavellism. In these several ways, Strauss's account of Machiavelli draws on features of nobility.

To consider and explain Strauss on *The Prince* in an article, one is obliged to abstract from most of what he says about the *Discourses on Livy*. The amazing analysis of Machiavelli's use of Livy, by which Strauss shows that Machiavelli made Livy into his Bible, or *the* Bible according to him, must be set aside, together with many fascinating discoveries in that book revealed or hinted at and left to the study and the delight of the reader by Strauss. But Strauss himself wrote a separate chapter on Machiavelli's intention in *The Prince*, and he is careful to give equal weighting to the two books in which he is the first to notice that by Machiavelli's own word, each contains everything he knows. He particularly rejects the view of many scholars today that the *Discourses* rather than *The Prince* represents Machiavelli's view (*TOM* 29.16, 53.37, 132–33.32). Each book is a whole but each whole is partial, with its own point of view, and the two wholes must be put together. The "characteristic theme" of *The Prince*, Strauss says, is the founder, and that of the *Discourses* is morality and religion in peoples. But in each, one may infer, the characteristic theme must deal with the characteristic theme of the other and uncharacteristic of itself. Thus Machiavelli's thought has a "twofold character" shown in many dualities such as prince and people, potential and actual princes, virtue and vice, young and old as addressees, full and partial intention, explicit and implicit teachings, teaching and intention. Still, the twofold must come to unity.

Machiavelli says as much, Strauss shows in a footnote typical of the twofold generosity and parsimony he displays throughout the book, which will be worth a pause. In the text (*TOM* 222.36) Strauss says that Machiavelli uses the terms "form" and "matter" rather frequently but never speaks of the form of a natural being. In the footnote (*TOM* 337n118)

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he specifies "rather frequently": "In the *Prince* and the *Discourses* taken together, 'form' occurs 14 times and 'matter' 51 times." Now in the philosophic tradition 7 stands for *nomos*, or convention, law, and 17 for *physis* or nature, as said above. Strauss leaves it to the reader to add the two figures to make 65, a multiple of thirteen, Machiavelli's number, also as said above. What the numbers mean is that nature is matter and form is conventional and that both are made so by Machiavelli's enterprise. The 14 and 51, signifying the basic blocks of classical philosophy, make sense only when added together as 65: this is his philosophy in a nutshell. Also they mean that Machiavelli's two books are one—and of course that while reading, or in order to read, one must look for things to count.

Machiavelli's philosophy in a nutshell implies that Machiavelli was a philosopher, a point Strauss was the first to make about Machiavelli and the first point he makes, as noted above, in the Introduction. He proceeds in the first chapter on the twofold character of Machiavelli's teaching to elaborate the claim that the study of Machiavelli will contribute to the recovery of the permanent problems, that is, to the recovery of philosophy. Machiavelli, though occupied mainly with politics and morality, extends his concern to "worldly things" (*cose del mondo*), not only ancient and modern, but also to the invariable nature of the world, for example in the Dedicatory Letter to *The Prince*, to the nature of princes and peoples. In the *Discourses* he says he knows that "heaven, sun, elements, men" always have the same "motion, order and power," though he also disclaims "knowledge of things natural and supernatural" (*D* 1 pr., 1.56). Later on in his book Strauss clarifies the apparent confusion of Machiavelli's various statements about nature and things of the world, but he begins by declaring that "it is prudent to assume" that his knowledge and teaching are "all-comprehensive." Machiavelli's perspective includes but is not identical with that of the practicing politician, for he says "it is good to reason about everything" and addresses himself to "whoever understands" (*D* 1.18.1, *P* 15; *TOM* 17.6, 202.20–21, 233.45). In *The Prince* he says that many have held and hold the opinion that worldly things are governed by chance and by God, thus indicating that ordinary politics has a grander sense that goes beyond the government of men by men to the question whether men govern themselves or are governed by larger forces (*P* 25). This grander sense requires a view of the whole or of the world, hence philosophy. The prudent, provisional assumption that Machiavelli is a philosopher, required for investigating whether he is one, is soon transformed into certainty by Strauss. The seemingly occasional, seemingly casual remarks of seemingly amateur philosophy are deliberately chosen by Machiavelli for what they intimate.

Machiavelli has an enterprise (*impresa*) arising from within philosophy in its own defense and from without in the natural desire he has to "work, without any respect, for those things I believe will bring common benefit to everyone" (*D* 1 pr. 1). The enterprise is "to make oneself the head of a new

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thing that pertains to many," and it is both dangerous and difficult, "a matter too long and too high to discuss."[16] So Machiavelli says in the *Discourses*, but in *The Prince* he goes ahead to discuss it—as he promised, "without any respect." That phrase means without respect for any authority that might tell him not to reason about everything, particularly for the authority affirming the existence of the next world beyond this world. Machiavelli's knowledge of the world is of *this* world, and it tells him that there is no other world beyond this one. Further, it tells him that this world stands in need of defense against the encroachments of those who believe, and those who pretend to believe, in the next world, and who seek to challenge the sufficiency of this world and overrule its necessities. When Machiavelli speaks of the knowledge of worldly things he means it in a polemical sense against those who intervene in politics and morality, or who claim to rule, on the basis of precepts drawn from the alleged superiority of the next world.

To make this defense, Machiavelli reasoned and decided that he must change the character of philosophy. Strauss puts the change in two sentences:

> Classical political philosophy had taught that the salvation of the cities depends on the coincidence of philosophy and political power which is truly a coincidence—something for which one can wish or hope but which one cannot bring about. Machiavelli is the first philosopher who believes that the coincidence of philosophy and political power can be brought about by propaganda which wins over ever larger multitudes to the new modes and orders and thus transforms the thought of one or a few into the opinion of the public and therewith into public power. (*TOM* 173.59)

The philosophy that can use propaganda on its own behalf is "wholly new," to use Machiavelli's phrase describing his notion of a prince. The use of propaganda is not merely a new tactic of philosophy that itself remains the same; philosophy has a new power that necessarily changes the life of the philosopher by bringing him closer to "ever larger multitudes" whom for the first time he can "win over."

The change appears in chapter 15 of *The Prince* with the phrase that Machiavelli uses just this once in all his writings: the effectual truth (*verità effettuale*). This means that the truth of a thing is in the effect it can produce, not in the good that can be imagined and professed in it—the consequence rather than the *logos*. The effectual truth is found in the influence and the history of philosophy, but as truth it is itself nonhistorical and applies to philosophy prior to Machiavelli, including classical political philosophy. Plato and Aristotle are to be judged by the effects of their philosophy

[16] *D* 3.35.1. Strauss quotes and discusses the statement three times: *TOM* 19.6, 28.15, 105.16.

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rather than by the truth they sought.[17] Machiavelli's redirection of philosophy takes possession of all prior philosophy, just as modern philosophy calls itself "philosophy" and modern science "science." In this spirit Strauss can refer to the "intransigent character of Machiavelli's theoretical concern" and say that in his famous letter of 10 December 1513, he "united himself wholly with the ancients" (*TOM* 81.24, 121.26).[18] Yet he does his best not to obscure either Machiavelli's revolt against the classical tradition, as do other Machiavelli scholars, or the fact that he is heir to it. "Time and again," Strauss says, "we have become bewildered" by the fact that Machiavelli practices the "rules of noble rhetoric" of the classical tradition, directed to the few and protective of the many, precisely when breaking with it (*TOM* 120–21.26).[19] Machiavelli shows himself to be a noble fellow as he undermines the basis and repute of nobility. The simple view that Machiavelli teaches evil overlooks his nobility; the sophisticated view that he doesn't teach evil overlooks his intent to undermine nobility, and with it, morality.

Having established that Machiavelli is a philosopher, and a philosopher equipped with an agenda, Strauss uncovers the fact that Machiavelli himself is a prince, which proves to be the key to both the *Discourses* and *The Prince*. Strauss discloses this fact not all at once, "in a stroke," as Machiavelli says, but by degrees, as Machiavelli recommends (*D* 1.41). The guiding theme of *The Prince*, he says, is the new prince, which compels Machiavelli to consider the foundation of every society, regardless of whether it is "merely political or political-religious" (*TOM* 20.7). If philosophy must turn to the defense of this world, it must be concerned with the ways in which princes in this world are endangered by intrusions prompted by the demands of the other world, such as the "ecclesiastical principality" that appears suddenly in *The Prince* (*P* 11). Popes had been referred to (*P* 2, 3, 7, 8), but here (as opposed to *P* 1) the papacy is presented as a principality,

[17]So too is Machiavelli, and the view of Machiavelli backward from our time, which Strauss criticizes ("One cannot see the true character of Machiavelli's thought unless one frees himself from Machiavelli's influence"), is justified by Machiavelli's thought (*TOM* 12.8).

[18]Yet in that letter Machiavelli, as against Socrates, speaks of "the food that alone is mine." He is not the only philosopher but he is alone among philosophers. Cf. Plato, *Apology* 30c–31a. On the relation between Machiavelli and the ancients, see *D* 2.33 and on that, *TOM* 106–7.17 and Harvey C. Mansfield, *Machiavelli's New Modes and Orders* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 293–96.

[19]In the 33rd paragraph of chap. 3 in *TOM*, 134–35, Strauss lists 11 distortions by Machiavelli of Rome's ruling class that made them more Machiavellian than Livy reported them to be. The central distortion in the list cites the Roman senate's mistreatment of "women" by leaving them as prey to the Gauls (i.e., the "French"). By contrast, Strauss "tells it like it is," and does not distort a person like Machiavelli in order to erase the distinction between the ancients and the moderns. In chap. 4, however, he improves Machiavelli's arguments so as to provide a challenge to his readers.

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the pope as a prince. If the prince is to control his people, he must be able to fend off the priests who vie with him for control. "Prince" is an ambiguous term for Machiavelli, Strauss says: "it may mean a non-tyrannical monarch, or any monarch, or any man or body of men in a ruling position including the leading men in a republic, to say nothing of another meaning" (*TOM* 47.33). There we have a blatant enticement focusing attention on what is concealed. Immediately afterward, Strauss follows the numbers Machiavelli uses for hints to arrive at the conclusion that he "says in effect, that God is a tyrant" (*TOM* 49.34).[20] A tyrant is a kind of, or another name for, prince. Later he avows his suspicion that the term "princes" is sometimes used by Machiavelli to designate "superhuman powers" (*TOM* 130.30). But since human princes must take account of alleged superhuman powers, they must be wary of the influence of priests (*D* 1.14) or prophets whether armed or unarmed, such as Savonarola (*P* 6)—and to do this, must they not become prophets, like Numa, who brought religion to Rome for the sake of peace and obedience there (*D* 1.11)? Then what of Machiavelli himself, who studies the new prince and his necessities?

In chapter 2 of Strauss's book, on *The Prince*, he introduces the notion of a ranking of princes. When Machiavelli speaks of Philip V of Macedon and specifies that this Philip was "not the father of Alexander but the one who was defeated by Titus Quintus," he means to say, according to Strauss, that Philip V did not belong to the "highest class of princes" (*TOM* 61.7). It seems, then, that the other Philip, the father of Alexander, did belong to that class. He is the one likened to God, in the chapter of the *Discourses* in which Strauss concludes that for Machiavelli God is a tyrant, who became "prince of Greece" by modes that were "very cruel and enemies to every way of life, not only Christian but human" (*D* 1.26). Philip "transferred men from province to province as herdsmen transfer their herds." "The highest class of princes," the princes behind and above princes, that Strauss discerns in Machiavelli brings us to the border of the hidden territory Machiavelli holds in reserve to attract and enlighten his philosophic readers.

In further reference to the ambiguity of "prince," Strauss says that the new prince, a radical innovator, might have to found both a new society and a new religion, and he says that Machiavelli applies the term "prophet" to "men of the highest order" (*TOM* 71.15, 308n36). Of the four mentioned by Machiavelli, Moses, who founded the foundation of Christianity, fits this kind of prince better than Cyrus, Theseus, or Romulus (*P* 6). Strauss now introduces what he calls "the strange suggestion that he [Machiavelli] is a

[20]Cf. Machiavelli's reference to King Ferdinand first as one "whom it is not well to name" (*P* 17) and then readily named as "the present king of Spain" (*P* 21), and Strauss's treatment at *TOM* 186–87.12. Also note Strauss's odd reference on the next page to a "liberal theologian" who conceives God to be "a very wise and very powerful king" (*TOM* 50.35).

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prince" through his relationship with Lorenzo de' Medici to whom he has dedicated *The Prince* (*TOM* 83.25). That relationship is a kind of dialogue between Machiavelli, who first appears as a "man of mean and low state" in homage or servitude (*servitù*) to his master, and Lorenzo, seen at first as basking in his greatness. But the relationship changes as the work proceeds, Machiavelli gaining status as Lorenzo loses it. Machiavelli shows Lorenzo what he knows, starting from his knowledge of the "nature of princes," and gaining stature from his knowledge of the "civil principality" (*P* 9), the kind of principality Lorenzo holds, and from his knowledge of the art of war, by which one can win a principality and without which one can lose it (*P* 14).

With the proof of his competence that is in his book, Machiavelli also reassures Lorenzo of his loyalty or at least of his reliability. He recommends to a "civil" prince the kind of person who will give good counsel but who, out of "pusillanimity and a natural defect of spirit," will not be disloyal or seek to displace the prince (*TOM* 75.19; *P* 9). This is just the kind represented by Machiavelli, who as philosopher does not wish to rule directly but as modern philosopher wants to rule indirectly and thinks himself competent to do so. He discusses the case of the adviser who is more prudent than the prince he advises, stating optimistically that having such an adviser is testimony to the wisdom of the prince (*P* 22). He steps carefully over the matter of conspiracy against a prince, having been himself suspected of conspiracy against the Medici, by denying it could ever succeed (*P* 19).

Machiavelli will not be a prince in the ordinary way. He will be a prince in the way of Xenophon or Plato, who showed that he who knows the art of ruling, the political philosopher, is the true ruler, for the suggestion that Machiavelli is a prince is not really strange once he is recognized as a philosopher (*TOM* 83.25).[21] But he is a new philosopher and a new prince, "wholly new" as he insists the new prince must be. He will not see the conquest of his ideas, but since these ideas are true and based on the nature of things, including the means of propagating them, he can be confident, and enjoy the confidence, that he will conquer the world posthumously. His supreme virtue and his rule are hidden from ordinary princes like Lorenzo and yet effectual to the extent that such princes have the prudence to follow Machiavelli's reasonable commands. The commands will have the appearance of good advice, as useful remedies in dealing with necessities not imposed by him but inherent in the nature of worldly things. They will be accepted on the responsibility and to the glory of the ordinary princes, who will have greater success as a whole by following Machiavelli, and individually according to their virtue and good fortune.

The prophetic propaganda to persuade multitudes to which Strauss refers will be carried on in "spiritual warfare," another discovery of his in

[21]Machiavelli refers to Xenophon in his chapter on the art of war, *P* 14.

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Machiavelli. The idea of holy war is readily found on both sides of the Crusades[22] as well as in the Jihad of our time, and it was adopted to signify the spread of modern science by Francis Bacon and others of the Enlightenment. We are also familiar with the use of military language, such as "Onward Christian Soldiers," to describe the spreading of the Gospel. It is rife in the sermons of Savonarola, to which Machiavelli listened with much interest (*D* 1.11.5). Strauss introduces his discovery by noting that Machiavelli, the friend or father of new modes and orders, is the enemy of the established politics and morality, namely, our ways; he is our enemy. "Machiavelli's action is a kind of warfare. Some things which he says about strategy and tactics in ordinary warfare apply to his own strategy and tactics in what we may call his spiritual warfare" (*TOM* 35.24).[23] An example in the *Discourses* is the use of the "three inseparable parts of the modern army" in the three central chapters of its central book. These are given as infantry, artillery, and cavalry by Machiavelli, but in terms of spiritual warfare, what could the "modern army" be but the church? Strauss left the point to be elaborated by his readers,[24] as he did in the case of David and Goliath, given in *The Prince* (*P* 13) as an instance of relying on one's own arms (*TOM* 181–82.8, 163.52).

To explain the latter example of spiritual warfare: Machiavelli cites David's refusal of Saul's arms and his insistence on meeting the enemy with his own arms, a sling and a knife. But in the Bible we read that David, while refusing Saul's arms as not suitable for him, also relies on the help of the Lord—which is not consistent with one's own arms. And David did not defend himself with a knife but picked Goliath's sword up only after Goliath had been slain with his sling, and then used it to cut off Goliath's head. David made his enemy's arm his own and used it to cut off his head. From this detail we see that relying on one's own arms includes picking up the arms of your enemy and using them against him—which is just what Machiavelli is doing in appropriating and distorting this incident in the Bible. He suggests that men turn to the supernatural for aid out of their natural sense of their weakness combined with a natural ambition that is out of proportion with their capacities (*TOM* 52.35). If Machiavelli plays David in this charade, who is Goliath? In these two instances, one begins to get a sense of the enormity, both great and monstrous, of Machiavelli's enterprise.

[22]Machiavelli describes the Christian Crusade as a "generous enterprise" in which all the glory and honor gained at first were lost at the end, owing to the virtue of Saladin and the discords of the Christians (*Florentine Histories* 1.17).

[23]See also *TOM* 102.14, 171.58–173.59, 181.8.

[24]The three inseparable parts are called "the fundamental triad" by Strauss (*TOM* 314n36). The central part, artillery, is the 77th chapter in the *Discourses*, illustrating again the meaning attached to the numbers 11 and 7. For an interpretation, see Mansfield, *Machiavelli's New Modes and Orders*, 232–47.

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If Machiavelli is to become a wholly new prince, he must be a prophet, or prophet-philosopher, in order to oppose the ruling religion and morality, which sustain the weakness of the modern, Christian world. He must carefully control the boldness he displays so that it will undermine the authority he opposes without bringing on himself the fate of Savonarola. He must lead a conspiracy not only in his counsel to ordinary princes, who will appreciate certain "harsh truths" of the sort Machiavelli takes relish in expounding, but primarily to others, his highest class of recruits as Strauss says (*TOM* 61.7), who are philosophers capable of joining and furthering his enterprise. In face of the dangers one must encounter "to make oneself the head of a new thing that pertains to many," or the "leader of an army" such as his, he will lead a conspiracy comprising both doers and thinkers. The longest chapter in *The Prince* (*P* 19) as well as in the *Discourses* (*D* 3.6) is on conspiracy, whether against or on behalf of the ruler, and in both places, the discussion is complicated by the fact that Machiavelli is discussing his own moral and intellectual conspiracy as well as ordinary political conspiracy.[25] In presenting his own conspiracy, he must take care to allay the suspicion that he says must necessarily attach to "every man notable for his quality" (*D* 3.2.1), especially those who give counsel to princes (*P* 22–23). For a minister cannot help but think how he might do the job better than the prince he advises to do it well—and the prince cannot help but be wary of the ambition hidden in the advice said to be for his good.

Machiavelli's delicate situation is elaborated in two other discoveries of Strauss explained in his book: the parts of Machiavelli's text and their order; and the weaving of the chapters. The first is discussed in the seven paragraphs that open chapter 2 of *The Prince* (*TOM* 54.1–61.7), and the second is put in a bare statement, generously left without explanation by Strauss so that his readers can enjoy the thrill of discovery—somewhat as Machiavelli's princes are left to reap the subordinate, but apparently independent glory he allows for them.[26] To summarize the first point: Strauss identifies four parts in *The Prince*, chapters 1–11, 12–14, 15–23, 24–26. In three parts (not the second) there is an ascent and a descent, as there is also in the whole.

[25]The longest paragraph in chap. 2 of *TOM*, which is on *The Prince* and has as many paragraphs as *The Prince* has chapters, is the nineteenth (*TOM* 74–77.19) and concerns Machiavelli's conspiracy. If Machiavelli and Strauss are to be considered in parallel, should one conclude that Strauss is carrying on a conspiracy? But Strauss has no enterprise aiming at conquering the world (*D* 1.20); rather, he has in his book "no other purpose than to contribute towards the recovery of the permanent problems" (*TOM* 14.12). Strauss flicks away the danger of his enterprise—nothing but "harmless ridicule"—but he knows that his exposure and praise of Machiavelli's fraud will be almost as little welcome as Machiavelli's recommendation of fraud to princes.

[26]*TOM* 307n23; the statement is an addition to a footnote supplying references on another topic. See *P* 2, beg., for the "weaving" that Strauss gives clues for and calls attention to (*TOM* 69.13).

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But what marks an ascent is twofold. There is first an ascent from the customary, the hereditary, the established, the modern, and the ordinary—to the natural, the new, the revolutionary, the ancient, and the greatest; this is what Machiavelli teaches to us as required for the wholly new prince. But there is also an ascent of his own from Machiavelli the humble knower vis-à-vis Lorenzo, whom Strauss calls his "dreaded master," at the beginning in the Dedicatory Letter, to Machiavelli the adviser, the prophet, and the prince, telling Lorenzo what to do to redeem Italy, in the last chapter. The first is an ascent to chapter 6, followed by a descent to chapter 11, then an ascent to chapter 14 and a further ascent to chapter 19 or 20, and a descent to the end. The second is an ascent from beginning to end. But Strauss concludes his argument with the judgment that the end is a descent. What Machiavelli can teach theoretically is wholly new, whereas the advice he can give to Lorenzo is, as he brings *The Prince* to a close with a quotation from a poem by Petrarch, merely an "imitation made possible by the survival of the Italians' ancient valor" (*TOM* 61.7). It is necessary to go beyond even the chief of the Humanists, and it is enough for Machiavelli to indicate with a sample, as he does in the last chapter of *The Prince*, what he might do, how the house of the Medici and politicians everywhere would need to be educated, and why his time is not propitious for the achievement of his enterprise.

There is yet another pairing of ascent and descent Strauss finds in *The Prince*. Insofar as Machiavelli is a wholly new prince, he departs from the "orders of others" (*P* 15), or as Strauss says, the tradition of philosophy, the "Great Tradition." The new prince is a revolutionary, he must "uproot" the Great Tradition. His doing this is an ascent from tradition and convention to what is new and natural, an ascent that culminates in the peak of *The Prince* as a whole, and the center of its third part (chapters 15 to 23), chapter 19. Strauss identifies this peak of revolution in Machiavelli's discussion of the Roman emperors in the last two-thirds of that chapter: "The full revelation requires the universalization of the lesson derived from the study of the Roman emperors … presented in the first section of chapter 20" (*TOM* 60.6). The "revelation" is the need to combine Severus, the emperor Machiavelli praises the most in chapter 19, and both praises and calls a criminal in the *Discourses* (*D* 1.10.4), with the "philosopher Marcus," who received his throne and gave it to his son Commodus, Machiavelli says, by "hereditary right" (*P* 19.77, 80). With philosophy here joined to criminality and subtly connected to hereditary right, one sees that Machiavelli, having uprooted the Great Tradition, needed next to reestablish it in the philosophers who would succeed him and carry out his enterprise—hence the descent from newness based on the need for succession and "conserving" a state (as Machiavelli says can be learned from Marcus). The "universalization" of the revelation at the beginning of chapter 20 (*in modo largo*, in Machiavelli's phrase) consists in the prince's need to arm his "subjects," which means making them his "partisans" by trusting them to share his danger and his

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intent, which in turn means to enlighten them.[27] Bacon, Descartes, Spinoza, Hobbes, and others in Machiavelli's hereditary tradition showed their readers how to make use of reason, as opposed to revelation, to guide their lives.

The weaving Machiavelli discreetly avers (*P* 2, beg.) is in the relationship between his advice to princes below the highest level and his subdued declaration of how he must think for himself. In the first chapter of *The Prince*, Strauss notes, there are "13 subjects whose treatment might seem to require 13 chapters." These are the kinds of principalities or states listed there: dominions, republics, principalities, etc. These subjects show how Machiavelli relates himself to his readers and his subject matter: as over a dominion, a republic, a principality, etc. They must each be matched serially to the next 13 chapters, ending with chapter 14. Then in chapter 15, these 13 having been exhausted, there are 11 subjects—the 11 pairs of moral qualities—which will match with the next 11 chapters, to conclude with chapter 26. For example, the 6th subject, "altogether new," matches with chapter 7. Chapter 6, Strauss says, is a peak within the first part of chapters, from which chapter 7 descends (*TOM* 57–58.4). Then why should one have to match it with "altogether new," when it deals with "new principalities that are acquired by others' arms and fortune"? The answer is that chapter 7, in which Cesare Borgia is the hero, shows how Machiavelli can use the arms and fortune of others for himself. How can he do this, recommending that his actions be "imitated," and yet remain altogether new (*P* 7.32)?

Machiavelli had notably said in the previous chapter (*P* 6) that "all the armed prophets conquered and the unarmed ones were ruined." All unarmed prophets were ruined? The greatest example of an armed prophet for Machiavelli is Moses, and of an unarmed prophet, surely Jesus. Machiavelli does not mention Jesus, but no example could be more obvious. Besides, Strauss notes, Machiavelli has a stake in the success of an unarmed prophet, for what else is he?[28] Though Jesus was crucified he was not "ruined," even in worldly terms, because he conquered afterward through Christian propaganda. "By far the most important model for Machiavelli was the victory of Christianity," says Strauss (*TOM* 172.59). Yet one could also say that Jesus was ruined insofar as Christian doctrine disarms heaven by withholding actual arms from priests and spiritual arms from ordinary princes (*D* 2.2.2). Machiavelli will be the unarmed prophet whose spiritual warfare takes proper account of the power of ordinary arms in this world.

[27]In *P* 20 Machiavelli, discussing the use of fortresses by princes, brings his argument to the issue of relying on the people versus fearing them and thus relying on fortresses for security against them. "Fortress"—a "mode … used since antiquity"—is his exoteric expression for esoteric writing on the part of a philosopher.

[28]Strauss, *What Is Political Philosophy?*, 44.

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To follow further the idea of an unarmed prophet: If Jesus is an example for Machiavelli, or *the* example, one might look to see whether he portrays him in his books, suitably disguised of course, like his other blasphemies. Then one encounters his encomium of Cesare Borgia: "I do not know what better teaching I could give to a new prince than the example of his actions." Could Cesare Borgia, with his two names ("called Duke Valentino by the vulgar"), represent Machiavelli's portrayal of the most successful unarmed prophet who nonetheless erred in such a way as to cause his "ultimate ruin" (*P* 7.27, 33)?[29] The same thought arises in Strauss's presentation of the relationship between Machiavelli and Lorenzo, already noted, and in his analysis of the last chapter of *The Prince*, where he presents another of his solutions to well-worn problems of Machiavelli scholarship.

The problem of the last chapter is usually taken to be the sudden, surprising appearance of patriotic exhortation at the end of a treatise full of cold, "analytic," worldly politics. To this Strauss adds that Machiavelli makes the liberation of Italy seem easy, almost predetermined, an effortless culmination to a way prepared by "extraordinary things without example." Strauss agrees with the impression of change, while making it more precise as a combination of treatise and tract, and of general teaching and particular advice. But the change, we have seen, is not sudden. Now that Machiavelli has proved his competence and reliability to Lorenzo, he has become his adviser, or more, "the new sibyl," who shows how in fact the way to the liberation of Italy is not easy but hard. The borrowed miracles and the other religious sentiments of chapter 26 conceal, but also confirm, the difficulties of liberating Italy; Italy is ruled by chance at this time and hardly ready for the virtue of a Moses. In chapter 25 Machiavelli had indicated that "God is in truth nothing but chance" (*TOM* 74.18).

Recalling that "Moses was a mere executor of things that had been ordered for him by God" (*P* 6), we can see that Machiavelli's advice to Lorenzo, proposing to him a path like the one that God set forth to Moses, is pretentious even for a new sibyl. Machiavelli, who first addressed "homage" to Lorenzo, has exchanged places with Lorenzo. To show what he would like to do, he

[29]Cesare Borgia was the son of Alexander VI, related among Machiavelli's significant names to Alexander, son of Philip of Macedon, and both of them princes of the highest type. On the numerology of the latter two, see Mansfield, *Machiavelli's New Modes and Orders*, 32n12. In reading of individuals with proper names in Machiavelli, one must bear in mind his notion of the "effectual truth," which reduces ideas to their outcomes. Cesare also has the name of Caesar that Machiavelli warns against as never in its heirs and agents conforming to the "name of freedom" (*D* 1.52.3; thanks to Nathan Tarcov). One should also not overlook M. Furius Camillus, "the most prudent of all the Roman captains" (*D* 12.3), as another representation in the Christian republic; see Leo Strauss, "Niccolò Machiavelli," in *History of Political Philosophy*, ed. Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 315.

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sends Lorenzo on a mission as Moses, as an armed prophet, in which Lorenzo cannot succeed. But he also sends himself on a different and higher mission, as an unarmed prophet in imitation of Christ, in which he, Machiavelli, can succeed. Machiavelli will redeem Italy from the "barbarians" who oppress it; he will indeed redeem the world from the oppression of virtue by chance.[30] Machiavelli will in a sense redeem the world from its sins, as did Christ, but not through expiation and penitence. He will redeem them by showing that they are excused by human necessities, particularly those of survival that humans share with animals. Thus Strauss points out that Chiron, the teacher of princes—the Beast-Man—substitutes for Christ, the God-Man.[31] But because Machiavelli teaches openly what the ancients showed covertly, this "is a Chiron of an entirely new kind" (*TOM* 78.21). 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.[32]

At the beginning of chapter 26 of *The Prince* Machiavelli thinks to himself as to whether "someone virtuous and prudent" would have opportunity "that would bring honor to him and good to the community of men there." This is the only reference to the common good in *The Prince*,[33] and Strauss remarks that it has the same tenuous status as the optimistic prospect for success and the religious sentiments expressed in that chapter (*TOM* 79.22). Before Italy can be liberated it must be enlightened by a new code, a new decalogue directed to all humanity that is in accordance with truth and with the nature of things (*TOM* 83.25). In a footnote he directs readers to chapter 15 of *The Prince*, with its eleven pairs of moral qualities that, on analysis, become ten. These are pairs of virtues and vices that one must combine or alternate in a manner necessary to "all men … and especially princes" (*P* 15.61). One should also consult the list of actions of Cesare Borgia in chapter 7 of *The Prince* recommended for imitation "by all those who have risen to empire through fortune and by the arms of others," that is, by all men—where again eleven become ten.[34] Strauss himself gives a list of Machiavellian opposites: "the impetuous, the quick, the partisan, the spectacular, and the bloody over and against the deliberate, the slow, the neutral, the

[30]*P* 26, chap. heading. Are the kings of France and Spain such barbarians, or is the problem rather that the relation between virtue and chance needs to be rethought from its classic formulation by the Greeks?

[31]God is a teacher (*precettore*) to Moses in *P* 6, and Machiavelli gives precepts (*precetti*) to a new prince in *P* 7.

[32]Cf. Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 161–62, where he traces this difference between Aristotle and Machiavelli to the presence or absence of natural right, as he does not in *TOM*.

[33]Note especially its absence in *P* 22. See *TOM* 79–80.22 and 309n53.

[34]Thanks to Gladden Pappin on this point.

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silent, and the gentle" (*TOM* 82.24). Machiavelli "displays a bias" in favor of the first five, but practices all ten himself. Clearly the first five match the second five, so that we again have pairs that can be alternated.

The alternation of virtue and vice or, in the second code, of the modes of rhetoric in writing, serves to make virtue impressive.[35] Mercy, for instance, is more impressive when it is set off against examples of cruelty than when it comes to be expected and, as expectation edges into a sense of right, no longer gives rise to sentiments of gratitude. Machiavelli's new code calls for flexibility as opposed to Aristotle's ethics, which aims at developing a solid and reliable character, consisting of virtues understood as habits. Aristotle introduces character as a guide for humans to live their lives on their own, as opposed to submitting themselves to a divine code. Having a noble character is his version of Machiavelli's "one's own arms." The code of flexibility in Machiavelli that Strauss uncovers owes more to the Bible than to Aristotle, though to be sure the Bible understood "judiciously," which means attentive to political necessity and with the understanding that "goodness is not enough" (*D* 3.30.1). Machiavelli's little lesson in how to read the Bible occurs in a discussion of Moses, who appears not as God's executive but a man with "his own plans" (*disegni suoi*). Machiavelli's code imitates the effectual truth of the biblical code as he sees it—the commandments, not of a "very wise and very powerful king," or a "just king," but of an angry or suspicious tyrant who as such distrusts men of character (*TOM* 49–50.35, 57.4, 197.16). It is precisely character, with its independence and its incipient self-righteousness, that makes one unreliable in the schemes of a Machiavellian prince.

In the weaving of *The Prince*, the pair of qualities in chapter 15 that applies to chapter 19 on conspiracies is breaker of faith / faithful (*fedifrago/fidele*). This pair describes Machiavelli's conduct toward his princes. Imitating God, he does not guarantee them success or salvation, thus breaking the faith he seems to offer in his code—but improving on God, he leaves his princes free to gain their own glory and does not engross it all for himself, in this way keeping his faith to them.[36] The tyranny of God is appropriated for human use, and "one's own arms" are those that were formerly God's.

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,

[35]See Mansfield, *Machiavelli's Virtue*, 16–22.

[36]Machiavelli claims that God does not want to take away free will and "that part of the glory that falls to us" (*P* 26.103).

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the redeemer of mankind.[37] 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" (*P* 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.

In chapter 26 of *The Prince* Machiavelli finally gives advice to Lorenzo, the success of which will depend on the reliability of certain "extraordinary things without example brought about by God," reminding one of the miracles by which God paved the way for Moses. God, it appears, has cleared the way for Lorenzo with miracles resembling those that cleared the way for Moses. But these "extraordinary things" are attested to only by Machiavelli, as if it were he, Machiavelli, who was speaking to Lorenzo as did God to Moses when God, "so great a teacher," made Moses his "mere executor" (*P* 6). These will enable Lorenzo to become the redeemer of Italy. But Machiavelli omits the difficulties that lie in the way of liberating Italy. He speaks of the conditions of success in redeeming Italy only earlier in the book (*P* 3–5), when he considers the conquest of Italy by foreigners. Strauss infers that Lorenzo has no chance of seizing Italy and freeing it from the barbarians as Machiavelli exhorts him to do (*TOM* 72.17; *P* 26). Instead of imitating Christ, Lorenzo is to imitate Moses. But the support of Machiavelli's extraordinary things will not bring Lorenzo any closer to the promised land than the Bible's miracles brought Moses; Machiavelli in the midst of his assurances to Lorenzo actually indicates he will fail. Italy is not in fact ripe for revolution because it suffers under the domination of the "present religion" (*D* 1. pr. 2); the church that hindered the conquest of Italy by Louis XII[38] will hinder its liberation by a new Moses (*P* 3.13–15, 11.46–47; *TOM* 68.13). The transformation required for the real liberation of Italy is the new code to be brought to it by Machiavelli, now himself imitating the unarmed prophet Christ. The real liberation is "not the political liberation of Italy from barbarians but the intellectual liberation of an Italian elite from a bad tradition" (*TOM* 81.23).[39] Machiavelli, not the Lorenzo he

[37]On Machiavelli's imitation of Socrates, who brought philosophy down from the heavens into the cities of men, see *TOM* 13.8 (the quotation from Christopher Marlowe) and 19.6 (political or human things are the key to the understanding of all things).

[38]The "King of France" in Machiavelli's writings is an important example of a kind of spiritual prince. Note Machiavelli's occasional use of "France" (as well as "the King of France") to refer to the person of the king; in *P* 4.18 one sees on the same page "the state of France," referring to the state of the king, and "France" as a "kingdom."

[39]Note that the bad tradition, the Great Tradition, comes not from the barbarians but from the Greeks. To carry on the Great Tradition, Machiavelli must liberate the Italian elite from its influence.

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advises, will be "the new Moses," redeeming mankind by bringing it to a new promised land.[40] Himself a prince of the highest type, he will be a new Chiron discovering and bringing to all men the "all-important truth" enabling him to conquer posthumously (*TOM* 78.21, 83.25). Among those men are the men of action whom Machiavelli addresses as individuals, but also the group of "the Young," those whose interest is "primarily theoretical, either simply or for the time being," whom he addresses as an "indefinite multitude" (*TOM* 77.20). He will combine the unarmed and the armed prophet, spiritual warfare with conquest in this world.

Strauss distinguishes Machiavelli's "intention" in the titles of chapters 2 and 3 of his book, from his "teaching" in the titles of chapters 1 and 4. His teaching is graded according to rank in Machiavelli's spiritual army, the officers—the "simply" theoretical ones, or philosophers, who will cooperate in his enterprise of redirecting philosophy—and the ordinary princes of the world, theorists "for the time being," who will be acquainted already with the harsh truths of politics but need to have them grounded in new principles, replacing the old principles of Christianity that they already distrust or reject and of classical political philosophy of which they may not be aware (*TOM* 154.47, 159.50, 297.86). His new code teaches management and flexibility to all ranks. Machiavelli's intention is complicated by his own enterprise; it contains his teaching (*TOM* 15.1), but the teaching is inseparable from his strategy for bringing it to realization, for making the truth that he finds consciously effectual according to his intent rather than as the unintended outcome of a professed good.

With his habitual yet amazing penetration and originality, Strauss brings out in discussing *The Prince* Machiavelli's own personal "dialogue" with Lorenzo and in the *Discourses*, his approach to and appropriation of Livy. In each case Machiavelli begins as an awestruck subject and ends as a confident master, assuring Lorenzo that he can do what Moses did and telling Livy authoritatively what he should have said by putting words in his mouth. In chapter 1 on Machiavelli's twofold "teaching" Strauss introduces the need for studying Machiavelli's peculiar intention or intentions, and in chapter 4 he takes it upon himself to restate what he now calls "Machiavelli's teaching," now separated from Machiavelli's claim to be prince and prophet. He restates, perhaps improves, Machiavelli's argument as he carries it on a destructive path beginning from religion, moving to morality, then to the common good, to republican virtue, and culminating in the necessity and benefits of tyranny. Instead of reassuring his readers, both the simple and the not so simple ones, that doing good is better than doing evil, that man's nobility survives every challenge, that teaching evil is evil, Strauss compels them to face

[40]Lorenzo as described or advised by Machiavelli appears in *Florentine Histories* 8.36 as the "almost impossible conjunction" of two different persons, an ideal of Machiavellian flexibility (see *TOM* 241.50).

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the challenge that Machiavelli presents. In the settled routine of life, in the false sense of security promoted by Machiavelli's descendants, Machiavelli himself is all too easy to dismiss as a man of the Renaissance and as exaggerated or irrelevant to our time.

At the end of the last chapter, Strauss as it were recalls to himself and his readers that Machiavelli is wrong. After discussing Machiavelli's devotion to glory he brings to mind the higher conversion above glory to philosophy in Plato's *Republic* (*TOM* 288–90.81). This reminder dislodges a cascade of strong, even dismissive, criticism of Machiavelli's thought in the last ten pages.[41] His teaching is said to be "obviously opposed" to that of classical political philosophy or to the Socratic tradition. His love for Xenophon is confined to Xenophon's Cyrus; "he forgets Socrates." He is often compared to Thucydides, but unlike Thucydides, there is "nothing of tragedy" and tragedy is "forgotten." So too he forgets the soul; "he is silent about the soul because he has forgotten the soul." Earlier Strauss had said that Machiavelli suggests by his silence about the soul that it is unimportant for politics, hence that he did not forget but deliberately suppressed mention of the soul. This is a "manifest blunder" by Strauss, as if he had forgotten his crucial statement that a thinker of Machiavelli's caliber never "forgets" something relevant (*TOM* 35.24–36.26). Clearly when Strauss says Machiavelli forgets, he means he suppresses in such a way that we, who follow him unconsciously, forget (*TOM* 175.2, 290.82–294.85). To forget in this sense is to cause others to forget, to be mindful of what deserves to be removed from the mindfulness of one's readers and beneficiaries (*TOM* 176.3).

In *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, Strauss himself "forgets" natural right, a great theme of his works. But he inspires his readers to find it for themselves, not through learning a condensed doctrine of natural right from Strauss, a Straussian doctrine comparable to that of John Rawls, which could be taught in courses on contemporary political theory. Rather, his readers are advised by precept and example to study the Great Tradition to which he refers so insistently in this book, also known as the history of political philosophy and sometimes said to include the biblical tradition. Thus one secures the help of the ancients with whom Machiavelli had his conversations (letter of 10 December 1513), together with that of the moderns, who are heirs and critics of the ancients. One profits from the discords among philosophers and of philosophy with religion by having to think them through for oneself. The Great Tradition is great because it does not permit unthinking acceptance of a set of tenets; it helps one to think about fundamental problems rather than to act on fundamental solutions. Machiavelli rebelled against it, and with the "remedies" emerging from his "effectual truth" he tried to

[41]See the list of 11 mistakes of Machiavelli's at *TOM* 295.85. The second is that he does not see that moral virtue is "a requirement of philosophy."

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make us forget that tradition; he tried to make his new prince into a new tradition, thus a kind of hereditary prince that eclipses the tradition of "imagined republics and principalities" (*P* 15.61).

Strauss says in his next-to-last sentence that the notion of the "beneficence of nature or of the primacy of the Good" must be rethought by returning to the "fundamental experiences" from which it is derived. He closes with the statement (a correction of Hegel) that philosophy is "of necessity edifying." Here is the reassurance that the old-fashioned readers of Machiavelli, those who hold the simple opinion that he is a teacher of evil, have been awaiting. But Strauss forgets to explain why Machiavelli is wrong to put the primacy of Terror over that of the Good, and tells us to consult "fundamental experiences." What are they and how do they "contribute towards the recovery of the permanent problems" which is the purpose of "our critical study" (*TOM* 14.12)?

Strauss does not say. The "fundamental experiences" have to do with philosophy (as we see in the last sentence), not with the Bible (*TOM* 133.32). They might precede or they might begin philosophy, and if they begin philosophy, they might serve as a point of departure for philosophy or as its foundation. Or perhaps all of the above. I shall propose that the fundamental experiences are illustrated in the three things that Strauss says Machiavelli forgets. In Machiavelli's comments on Xenophon, he forgets Socrates and focuses on Cyrus, which is to say that he focuses on the acquisition of worldly things and forgets what is above acquisition. Above acquisition are both moral virtue and philosophy: does philosophy owe, or at least display, its elevation to its refusal to stoop to acquire? Machiavelli also forgets tragedy. In tragedy we respect the nobility of the noble person who loses or fails. We do not attribute every tragic fall to a mistake or bad luck; we sense "the sacredness of 'the common'" that Strauss says Machiavelli lacks. What is common to us dissolves into calculated self-interest unless it is held to be sacred. One's "sacred honor" sustains and yet at the same time shares the fragility of our enterprises that tragedy celebrates. We stand up to fate and nobly suffer for it. And last, Machiavelli forgets the soul. Having a soul gives us a seat in the arena where reason meets unreason, or resistance to reason. We cannot help but become aware of what is high and what is low, and of how they battle and how they come to a truce, or for some blessed few, a harmony. We also discover that we have to act as well as observe.

These are experiences of nobility that help explain nobility.[42] In speaking of Machiavelli's "perverted nobility," Strauss gives him an honor he could perhaps not claim for himself. He is not merely mistaken; like a fallen angel, he has gone wrong. But he is ennobled by his philosophy rather than by the enterprise against nobility that he called his own.

[42]Note the weight accorded by Strauss to "the immediate pleasure which we experience when we observe signs of human nobility" (*What Is Political Philosophy?*, 122).

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