

Leo Strauss

## Niccolo Machiavelli

Men often speak of virtue without using the word but saying instead “the quality of life” or “the great society” or “ethical” or even “square.” But do we know what virtue is? Socrates arrived at the conclusion that it is the greatest good for a human being to make speeches every day about virtue—apparently without ever finding a completely satisfactory definition of it. However, if we seek the most elaborate and least ambiguous answer to this truly vital question, we shall turn to Aristotle’s *Ethics*. There we read among other things that there is a virtue of the first order called magnanimity—the habit of claiming high honors for oneself with the understanding that one is worthy of them. We also read there that sense of shame is not a virtue: sense of shame is becoming for the young who, due to their immaturity, cannot help making mistakes, but not for mature and well-bred men who simply always do the right and proper thing. Wonderful as all this is—we have received a very different message from a very different quarter. When the prophet Isaiah received his vocation, he was overpowered by the sense of his unworthiness: “I am a man of unclean lips amidst a people of unclean lips.” This amounts to an implicit condemnation of magnanimity and an implicit vindication of the sense of shame. The reason is given in the context: “holy, holy, holy is the lord of hosts.” There is no holy god for Aristotle and the Greeks generally. Who is right, the Greeks or the Jews? Athens or Jerusalem? And how to proceed in order to find out who is right? Must we not admit that human wisdom is unable to settle this question and that every answer is based on an act of faith? But does this not constitute the complete

Reprinted from *History of Political Philosophy*, edited by Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey, 2d ed. (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1972; University of Chicago Press edition, 1981). ©1963, 1972 by Joseph Cropsey and Miriam Strauss.

and final defeat of Athens? For a philosophy based on faith is no longer philosophy. Perhaps it was this unresolved conflict which has prevented Western thought from ever coming to rest. Perhaps it is this conflict which is at the bottom of a kind of thought which is philosophic indeed but no longer Greek: modern philosophy. It is in trying to understand modern philosophy that we come across Machiavelli.

Machiavelli is the only political thinker whose name has come into common use for designating a kind of politics, which exists and will continue to exist independently of his influence, a politics guided exclusively by considerations of expediency, which uses all means, fair or foul, iron or poison, for achieving its ends—its end being the aggrandizement of one’s country or fatherland—but also using the fatherland in the service of the self-aggrandizement of the politician or statesman or one’s party. But if this phenomenon is as old as political society itself, why is it called after Machiavelli who thought or wrote only a short while ago, about 500 years ago? Machiavelli was the first publicly to defend it in books with his name on the title pages. Machiavelli made it publicly defensible. This means that his achievement, detestable or admirable, cannot be understood in terms of politics itself, or of the history of politics—say, in terms of the Italian Renaissance—but only in terms of political thought, of political philosophy, of the history of political philosophy.

Machiavelli appears to have broken with all preceding political philosophers. There is weighty evidence in support of this view. Yet his largest political work ostensibly seeks to bring about the rebirth of the ancient Roman Republic; far from being a radical innovator, Machiavelli is a restorer of something old and forgotten.

To find our bearings let us first cast a glance at two post-Machiavellian thinkers, Hobbes and Spinoza. Hobbes regarded his political philosophy as wholly new. More than that, he denied that there existed prior to his work any political philosophy or political science worthy of the name. He regarded himself as the founder of the true political philosophy, as the true founder of political philosophy. He knew of course that a political doctrine claiming to be true had existed since Socrates. But this doctrine was, according to Hobbes, a dream rather than science. He considered Socrates and his successors to be anarchists in that they permitted an appeal from the law of the land, the positive law, to a higher law, the natural law; they thus fostered a disorder utterly incompatible with civil society. According to Hobbes, on the other hand, the higher law, the natural law, commands so to speak one and only one thing: unqualified obedience to the sovereign power. It would not be difficult to show that this line of reasoning is contradicted by Hobbes’ own teaching; at any rate it does not go to the roots of the matter. Hobbes’ serious objection to all earlier political philosophy comes out most clearly in this statement: “They that have written of justice

and policy in general, do all invade each other and themselves, with contradiction. To reduce this doctrine to the rules and infallibility of reason, there is no way but first to put such principles down for a foundation, as passion not mistrusting may not seek to displace; and afterwards to build thereon the truth of cases in the law of nature (which hitherto had been built in the air) by degrees, till the whole be inexpugnable." The rationality of the political teaching consists in its being acceptable to passion, in its being agreeable to passion. The passion that must be the basis of the rational political teaching is fear of violent death. At first glance there seems to be an alternative to it, the passion of generosity, that is, "a glory, or pride in appearing not to need to break (one's word)"—but this "is a generosity too rarely found to be presumed on, especially in the pursuers of wealth, command or sensual pleasure; which are the greatest part of mankind." Hobbes attempts to build on the most common ground, on a ground that is admittedly low but has the advantage of being solid, whereas the traditional teaching was built on air. On this new basis, accordingly, the status of morality must be lowered; morality is nothing but fear-inspired peaceableness. The moral law or the natural law is understood as derivative from the right of nature, the right of self-preservation; the fundamental moral fact is a right, not a duty. This new spirit became the spirit of the modern era, including our own age. That spirit was preserved despite the important modifications that Hobbes' doctrine underwent at the hands of his great successors. Locke enlarged self-preservation to comfortable self-preservation and thus laid the theoretical foundation for the acquisitive society. Against the traditional view, according to which a just society is a society in which just men rule, Kant asserted: "Hard as it may sound, the problem of establishing the state [the just social order] is soluble even for a nation of devils, provided they have sense," that is, provided they are shrewd calculators. We discern this thought within the teachings of Marx, for the proletarians from whom he expects so much are surely not angels. Now although the revolution effected by Hobbes was decisively prepared by Machiavelli, Hobbes does not refer to Machiavelli. This fact requires further examination.

Hobbes is in a way a teacher of Spinoza. Nevertheless Spinoza opens his *Political Treatise* with an attack on the philosophers. The philosophers, he says, treat the passions as vices. By ridiculing or deploring the passions, they praise and evince their belief in a nonexistent human nature; they conceive of men not as they are but as they would wish them to be. Hence their political teaching is wholly useless. Quite different is the case of the *politici*. They have learned from experience that there will be vices as long as there are human beings. Hence their political teaching is very valuable, and Spinoza is building his teaching on theirs. The greatest of these *politici* is the most penetrating Florentine, Machiavelli. It is Machiavelli's more subdued attack on traditional political philosophy that Spinoza takes over bodily and

translates into the less reserved language of Hobbes. As for the sentence, "There will be vices as long as there will be human beings," Spinoza has tacitly borrowed it from Tacitus; in Spinoza's mouth it amounts to an unqualified rejection of the belief in a Messianic age; the coming of the Messianic age would require divine intervention or a miracle, but according to Spinoza miracles are impossible.

Spinoza's introduction to his *Political Treatise* is obviously modeled on the 15th chapter of Machiavelli's *Prince*. There Machiavelli says:

Since I know that many have written (on how princes should rule), I fear that by writing about it I will be held to be presumptuous by departing, especially in discussing such a subject, from the others. But since it is my intention to write something useful for him who understands, it has seemed to me to be more appropriate to go straight to the effective truth of the matter rather than to the imagination thereof. For many have imagined republics and principalities that have never been seen nor are known truly to exist. There is so great a distance between how one lives and how one ought to live that he who rejects what people do in favor of what one ought to do, brings about his ruin rather than his preservation; for a man who wishes to do in every matter what is good, will be ruined among so many who are not good. Hence it is necessary for a prince who wishes to maintain himself, to learn to be able not to be good, or use goodness and abstain from using it according to the commands of circumstances.

One arrives at imagined kingdoms or republics if one takes one's bearings by how man ought to live, by virtue. The classical philosophers did just that. They thus arrived at the best regimes of the *Republic* and the *Politics*. But when speaking of imagined kingdoms, Machiavelli thinks not only of the philosophers; he also thinks of the kingdom of God which from his point of view is a conceit of visionaries for, as his pupil Spinoza said, justice rules only where just men rule. But to stay with the philosophers, they regarded the actualization of the best regime as possible, but extremely improbable. According to Plato its actualization literally depends on a coincidence, a most unlikely coincidence, the coincidence of philosophy and political power. The actualization of the best regime depends on chance, on *Fortuna*, that is, on something which is essentially beyond human control. According to Machiavelli, however, *Fortuna* is a woman who as such must be hit and beaten to be kept under; *Fortuna* can be vanquished by the right kind of man. There is a connection between this posture toward *Fortuna* and the orientation by how many do live: by lowering the standards of political excellence one guarantees the actualization of the only kind of political order that in principle is possible. In post-Machiavellian parlance: the ideal of the right kind necessarily becomes actual; the ideal and the actual necessarily converge. This way of thinking has had an amazing success; if some-

one maintains today that there is no guarantee for the actualization of the ideal, he must fear to be called a cynic.

Machiavelli is not concerned with how men do live merely in order to describe it; his intention is rather, on the basis of knowledge of how men do live, to teach princes how they ought to rule and even how they ought to live. Accordingly he rewrites, as it were, Aristotle's *Ethics*. To some extent he admits that the traditional teaching is true: men are obliged to live virtuously in the Aristotelian sense. But he denies that living virtuously is living happily or leads to happiness. "If liberality is used in the manner in which you are obliged to use it, it hurts you; for if you use it virtuously and as one ought to use it," the prince will ruin himself and will be compelled to rule his subjects oppressively in order to get the necessary money. Miserliness, the opposite of liberality, is "one of the vices that enable a prince to rule." A prince ought to be liberal, however, with the property of others, for this increases his reputation. Similar considerations apply to compassion and its opposite, cruelty. This leads Machiavelli to the question of whether it is better for a prince to be loved rather than to be feared or vice versa. It is difficult to be both loved and feared. Since one must therefore choose, one ought to choose being feared rather than being loved, for whether one is loved depends on others, while being feared depends on oneself. But one must avoid becoming hated; the prince will avoid becoming hated if he abstains from the property and the women of his subjects—especially from their property, which men so love that they resent less the murder of their father than the loss of their patrimony. In war the reputation for cruelty does not do any harm. The greatest example is Hannibal who was always implicitly obeyed by his soldiers and never had to contend with mutinies either after victories or after defeats. "This could not arise from anything but his inhuman cruelty which, together with his innumerable virtues, made him always venerable and terrible in the eyes of his soldiers, and without which cruelty his other virtues would not have sufficed. Not very considerably do the writers on the one hand admire his action and on the other condemn the main cause of the same." We note that inhuman cruelty is one of Hannibal's virtues. Another example of cruelty "well used" is supplied by Cesare Borgia's pacification of the Romagna. In order to pacify that country, he put at its head Ramirro d'Orco, "a man of cruelty and dispatch," and gave him the fullest power. Ramirro succeeded in no time, acquiring the greatest reputation. But then Cesare thought that such an excessive power was no longer necessary and might make him hated; he knew that the rigorous measures taken by Ramirro had caused some hatred. Cesare wished therefore to show that if any cruelty had been committed, it was not his doing but arose from the harsh nature of his subordinate. Therefore he had him put one morning in two pieces on the Piazza of the chief town, with a piece of wood and a bloody knife at his side. The ferocity of this sight induced in the populace a state of satisfaction and stupor.

Machiavelli's new "ought" demands then the judicious and vigorous use of both virtue and vice according to the requirements of the circumstances. The judicious alternation of virtue and vice is virtue (*virtù*) in his meaning of the word. He amuses himself and, I believe, some of his readers by using the word "virtue" in both the traditional sense and his sense. Occasionally he makes a distinction between *virtù* and *bontà*. That distinction was in a way prepared by Cicero who says that men are called "good" on account of their modesty, temperance, and above all, justice and keeping of faith, as distinguished from courage and wisdom. The Ciceronian distinction within the virtues in its turn reminds us of Plato's *Republic* in which temperance and justice are presented as virtues required of all, whereas courage and wisdom are required only of some. Machiavelli's distinction between goodness and other virtues tends to become an opposition between goodness and virtue: while virtue is required of rulers and soldiers, goodness is required, or characteristic, of the populace engaged in peaceful occupations; goodness comes to mean something like fear-bred obedience to the government, or even vileness.

In quite a few passages of the *Prince*, Machiavelli speaks of morality in the way in which decent men have spoken of it at all times. He resolves the contradiction in the 19th chapter, in which he discusses the Roman emperors who came after the philosopher-emperor Marcus Aurelius up to Maximinus. The high point is his discussion of the emperor Severus. Severus belonged to those emperors who were most cruel and rapacious. Yet in him was so great virtue that he could always reign with felicity, for he knew well how to use the person of the fox and the lion—which natures a prince must imitate. A new prince in a new principality cannot imitate the actions of the good emperor Marcus Aurelius, nor is it necessary for him to follow those of Severus; but he ought to take from Severus those portions that are necessary for founding his state and from Marcus those that are appropriate and glorious for preserving a state already firmly established. The chief theme of the *Prince* is the wholly new prince in a wholly new state, that is, the founder. And the model for the founder as founder is the extremely clever criminal Severus. This means that justice is precisely not, as Augustine had said, the *fundamentum regnorum*; the foundation of justice is injustice; the foundation of morality is immorality; the foundation of legitimacy is illegitimacy or revolution; the foundation of freedom is tyranny. At the beginning there is Terror, not Harmony, or Love—but there is of course a great difference between Terror for its own sake, for the sake of its perpetuation, and Terror that limits itself to laying the foundation for the degree of humanity and freedom that is compatible with the human condition. But this distinction is at best hinted at in the *Prince*.

The comforting message of the *Prince* is given in the last chapter, which is an exhortation addressed to one Italian prince, Lorenzo de' Medici, to take Italy and to liberate her from the barbarians, that is, the French, the

Spaniards, and the Germans. Machiavelli tells Lorenzo that the liberation of Italy is not very difficult. One of the reasons he gives is that “extraordinary events without example that have been induced by God, are seen: the sea has divided itself, the cloud has led you on your way, the stone has poured out water, manna has rained.” The events without example do have an example: the miracles following Israel’s liberation from Egyptian bondage. What Machiavelli seems to suggest is that Italy is the promised land for Lorenzo. But there is one difficulty: Moses, who led Israel out of the house of bondage towards the promised land, did not reach that land; he died at its borders. Machiavelli thus darkly prophesied that Lorenzo would not liberate Italy, one reason being that he lacked the extraordinary *virtú* needed for bringing that great work to its consummation. But there is more to the extraordinary events without example of which nothing is known other than what Machiavelli asserts about them. All these extraordinary events occurred before the revelation on Sinai. What Machiavelli prophesies is, then, that a new revelation, a revelation of a new Decalogue is imminent. The bringer of that revelation is of course not that mediocrity Lorenzo, but a new Moses. That new Moses is Machiavelli himself, and the new Decalogue is the wholly new teaching on the wholly new prince in a wholly new state. It is true that Moses was an armed prophet and that Machiavelli belongs to the unarmed ones who necessarily come to ruin. In order to find the solution of this difficulty one must turn to the other great work of Machiavelli, the *Discourses on the First Ten Books of Livy*.

Yet if one turns from the *Prince* to the *Discourses* in order to find the solution to the difficulties not solved in the *Prince*, one goes from the frying pan into the fire. For the *Discourses* is much more difficult to understand than the *Prince*. It is impossible to show this without at first inducing in the reader a certain bewilderment; but such bewilderment is the beginning of understanding.

Let us begin at the very beginning, the Epistles Dedicatory. The *Prince* is dedicated to Machiavelli’s master, Lorenzo de’Medici. Machiavelli who presents himself as a man of the lowest condition, as living in a low place is so overwhelmed by his master’s grandeur that he regards the *Prince*, although it is his most cherished possession, as unworthy of the presence of Lorenzo. He recommends his work by the observation that it is a small volume which the addressee can understand in the shortest time, although it embodies everything that the author has come to know and understand in very many years and under great perils. The *Discourses* is dedicated to two young friends of Machiavelli who have compelled him to write that book. At the same time the book is a token of Machiavelli’s gratitude for the benefits he has received from his two friends. He had dedicated the *Prince* to his master in the hope that he would receive favors from him. And he does not know whether Lorenzo will pay any attention to the *Prince*—whether he would

not be more pleased with receiving a horse of exceptional beauty. In accordance with all this he disparages in the Epistle Dedicatory to the *Discourses* the custom that he had complied with in the Epistle Dedicatory to the *Prince*—the custom of dedicating one’s works to princes: the *Discourses* is dedicated not to princes but to men who deserve to be princes. Whether Lorenzo deserves to be a prince remains a question.

These differences between the two books can be illustrated by the fact that in the *Prince* Machiavelli avoids certain terms that he uses in the *Discourses*. The *Prince* fails to mention the conscience, the common good, tyrants (that is, the distinction between kings and tyrants), and heaven; also in the *Prince* “we” never means “we Christians.” One might mention here that Machiavelli refers in neither work to the distinction between this world and the next, or between this life and the next; nor does he mention in either work the devil or hell; above all, he never mentions in either work the soul.

Now let us come to the text of the *Discourses*. What is the *Discourses* about? What kind of book is it? There is no such difficulty regarding the *Prince*. The *Prince* is a mirror of princes, and mirrors of princes were a traditional genre. In accordance with this, all chapter headings of the *Prince* are in Latin. This is not to deny but rather to underline the fact that the *Prince* transmits a revolutionary teaching in a traditional guise. But this traditional guise is missing in the *Discourses*. None of its chapter headings is in Latin although the work deals with an ancient and traditional subject: with ancient Rome. Furthermore, the *Prince* is tolerably easy to understand because it has a tolerably clear plan. The plan of the *Discourses*, however, is extremely obscure, so much so that one is tempted to wonder whether it has any plan. In addition, the *Discourses* presents itself as devoted to the first ten books of Livy. Livy’s first ten books lead from the beginnings of Rome to the time immediately preceding the first Punic war, that is, up to the peak of the uncorrupted Roman Republic, and prior to Roman conquests outside of the Italian mainland. But Machiavelli deals in the *Discourses* to some extent with the whole of Roman history as covered by Livy’s work: Livy’s work consists of 142 books and the *Discourses* consists of 142 chapters. Livy’s work leads up to the time of the emperor Augustus, that is, the beginnings of Christianity. At any rate, the *Discourses*, more than four times as extensive as the *Prince*, seems to be much more comprehensive than the *Prince*. Machiavelli explicitly excludes only one subject from treatment in the *Discourses*: “How dangerous it is to make oneself the head of a new thing that concerns many, and how difficult it is to handle it and to consummate it and after its consummation to maintain it would be too long and exalted a matter to discuss; I shall reserve it therefore for a more appropriate place.” Yet it is precisely this long and exalted matter that Machiavelli explicitly discusses in the *Prince*: “One must consider that nothing is more difficult to handle, nor more doubtful of success, nor more dangerous to manage than

to make oneself the head of the introduction of new orders.” It is true that Machiavelli does not speak here of “maintaining.” Such maintaining, as we learn from the *Discourses*, is best done by the people, while the introduction of new modes and orders is best done by princes. From this one may draw the conclusion that the characteristic subject of the *Discourses*, as distinguished from the *Prince*, is the people—a conclusion by no means absurd but quite insufficient for one’s even beginning to understand the work.

The character of the *Discourses* may be further illustrated with two examples of another kind of difficulty. In II 13, Machiavelli asserts and in a manner proves that one rises from a low or abject position to an exalted one through fraud rather than through force. This is what the Roman Republic did in its beginnings. Before speaking of the Roman Republic, however, Machiavelli speaks of four princes who rose from a low or abject position to a high one. He speaks most extensively of Cyrus, the founder of the Persian empire. The example of Cyrus is the central one. Cyrus rose to power by deceiving the king of Media, his uncle. But if he was, to begin with, the nephew of the king of Media, how can he be said to have risen from a low or abject position? To drive home his point, Machiavelli mentions next Giovan Galeazzo who through fraud took away the state and the power from Bernabò, his uncle. Galeazzo too was then to begin with the nephew of a ruling prince and cannot be said to have risen from a low or abject position. What, then, does Machiavelli indicate by speaking in such a riddling way? III 48: when one sees an enemy commit a great mistake, one must believe that there is fraud beneath; this is said in the heading of the chapter; in the text Machiavelli goes further and says “there will always be fraud beneath it.” Yet immediately afterward, in the central example, Machiavelli shows that the Romans once committed a great mistake through demoralization, that is, not fraudulently.

How is one to deal with the difficulties that confront us in the *Discourses*? Let us return to the title: *Discourses on the First Ten Books of Livy*. The title is not literally correct but it is safe to say that the work consists primarily of *Discourses on the First Ten Books of Livy*. We have noted furthermore that the *Discourses* lacks a clear plan: perhaps the plan will become visible if we take seriously the fact that the work is devoted to Livy; perhaps Machiavelli follows Livy by following the Livian order. Again this is not simply true, but it is true if it is intelligently understood: Machiavelli’s use and nonuse of Livy is the key to the understanding of the work. There are various ways in which Machiavelli uses Livy: sometimes he makes tacit use of a Livian story, sometimes he refers to “this text,” sometimes he mentions Livy by name, sometimes he quotes him (in Latin) not mentioning or mentioning his name. Machiavelli’s use of and nonuse of Livy may be illustrated by the facts that he does not quote Livy in the first ten chapters, that he quotes him in the following five chapters and again fails to quote him in the following 24

chapters. Understanding the reasons behind these facts is the key to the understanding of the *Discourses*.

I cannot treat this matter conclusively within the space at my disposal, but will deal with it through a selection of the following five chapters or quasi-chapters: I proem, II proem, II 1, I 26 and II 5.

In the proem to I, Machiavelli lets us know that he has discovered new modes and orders, that he has taken a road that was never trodden by anyone before. He compares his achievement to the discovery of unknown waters and lands: he presents himself as the Columbus of the moral-political world. What prompted him was the natural desire that he always had, to do those things that in his opinion bring about the common benefit of each. Therefore he bravely faces the dangers that he knows lie in wait for him. What are these dangers? In the case of the discovery of unknown seas and lands, the danger consists in seeking them; once you have found the unknown lands and have returned home, you are safe. In the case of the discovery of new modes and orders, however, the danger consists in finding them, that is, in making them publicly known. For, as we have heard from Machiavelli, it is dangerous to make oneself the head of something new which affects many.

To our great surprise, Machiavelli identifies immediately afterwards the new modes and orders with those of antiquity: his discovery is only a rediscovery. He refers to the contemporary concern with fragments of ancient statues, which are held in high honor and used as models by contemporary sculptors. It is all the more surprising that no one thinks of imitating the most virtuous actions of ancient kingdoms and republics, with the deplorable result that no trace of ancient virtue remains. The present-day lawyers learn their craft from the ancient lawyers. The present-day physicians base their judgements on the experience of the ancient physicians. It is therefore all the more surprising that in political and military matters the present-day princes and republics do not have recourse to the examples of the ancients. This results not so much from the weakness into which the present-day religion has led the world or from the evil that ambitious leisure has done to many Christian countries and cities, as from insufficient understanding of the histories and especially that of Livy. As a consequence, Machiavelli’s contemporaries believe that the imitation of the ancients is not only difficult but impossible. Yet this is plainly absurd: the natural order, including the nature of man, is the same as in antiquity.

We understand now why the discovery of new modes and orders, which is only the rediscovery of the ancient modes and orders, is dangerous. That rediscovery which leads up to the demands that the virtue of the ancients be imitated by present-day men, runs counter to the present-day religion: it is that religion which teaches that the imitation of ancient virtue is impossible, that it is morally impossible, for the virtues of the pagans are only resplen-

dent vices. What Machiavelli will have to achieve in the *Discourses* is not merely the presentation, but the re-habilitation, of ancient virtue against the Christian critique. This does not dispose of the difficulty that the discovery of new modes and orders is only the re-discovery of the ancient modes and orders.

This much, however, is clear. Machiavelli cannot take for granted the superiority of the ancients; he must establish it. Therefore he must first find a ground common to the admirers and the detractors of antiquity. That common ground is the veneration of the ancient, be it biblical or pagan. He starts from the tacit premise that the good is the old and hence that the best is the oldest. He is thus led first to ancient Egypt, which flourished in the most ancient antiquity. But this does not help very much because too little is known of ancient Egypt. Machiavelli settles, therefore, for that oldest which is sufficiently known and at the same time his own: ancient Rome. Yet ancient Rome is not evidently admirable in every important respect. A strong case can be made, and had been made, for the superiority of Sparta to Rome. Machiavelli must therefore establish the authority of ancient Rome. The general manner in which he does this reminds one of the manner in which theologians formerly established the authority of the Bible against unbelievers. But ancient Rome is not a book like the Bible. Yet by establishing the authority of ancient Rome, Machiavelli establishes the authority of its chief historian, of Livy, and therewith of the book. Livy's history is Machiavelli's Bible. From this it follows that Machiavelli cannot begin to use Livy before he has established the authority of Rome.

He begins to quote Livy in the section on the Roman religion (I 11–15). In the preceding chapter he had contrasted Caesar as the founder of a tyranny with Romulus as the founder of a free city. The glory of Caesar is due to the writers who celebrated him because their judgement was corrupted by his extraordinary success, the foundation of the rule of the emperors; the emperors did not permit writers to speak freely of Caesar. Yet the free writers knew how to circumvent that restriction: they blamed Cataline, Caesar's luckless prefiguration, and they celebrated Brutus, Caesar's enemy. But not all emperors were bad. The times of the emperors from Nerva to Marcus Aurelius were the golden times when everyone could hold and defend any opinion he pleased: golden are the times when thought and expression of thought are not restricted by authority. Those remarks form in effect the introduction to Machiavelli's treatment of the Roman religion. He there treats the pagan religion as at least equal as religion to the biblical religion. The principle of all religion is authority, that is, precisely that which Machiavelli had questioned immediately before. But for the ruling class of ancient Rome, religion was not an authority; they used religion for their political purposes, and they did this in the most admirable manner. The praise of the religion of ancient Rome implies, and more than implies a

critique of the religion of modern Rome. Machiavelli praises the religion of ancient Rome for the same reason for which the free writers who were subject to the authority of the Caesars praised Brutus: he could not openly blame the authority of Christianity to which he was subject. Hence if Livy's history is Machiavelli's Bible, it is his anti-Bible.

After he has established the authority of ancient Rome and shown its superiority to the moderns by many examples, he begins to intimate the defects from which it suffered. Only from this point on is Livy, as distinguished from Rome—that is, a book—his sole authority. Yet shortly before the end of Book One, he openly questions the opinion of all writers, including Livy, on a matter of the greatest importance. He thus leads us step by step to the realization of why the old modes and orders which he has rediscovered, are new: 1) The modes and orders of ancient Rome were established under the pressure of circumstances, by trial and error, without a coherent plan, without understanding of their reasons; Machiavelli supplies the reasons and is therefore able to correct some of the old modes and orders. 2) The spirit that animated the old modes and orders was veneration for tradition, for authority, the spirit of piety, while Machiavelli is animated by an altogether different spirit. The progress of the argument in Book One is indicated most clearly. While Book One begins with the highest praise of the most ancient antiquity, it ends with the expression “very young”: many Romans celebrated their triumphs *giovanissimi*.

We are thus prepared for understanding the proem of Book Two. There Machiavelli openly questions the prejudice in favor of the ancient times: “men praise always the ancient times and accuse the present, but not always with reason.” In truth the world has always been the same; the quantity of good and evil is always the same. What changes is the different countries and nations, which have times of virtue and times of degeneracy. In antiquity virtue resided at first in Assyria and finally in Rome. After the destruction of the Roman Empire virtue revived only in some parts of it, especially in Turkey. So that someone born in our time in Greece who has not become a Turk reasonably blames the present and praises antiquity. Accordingly, Machiavelli is perfectly justified in praising the times of the ancient Romans and blaming his own time: no trace of ancient virtue is left in Rome and in Italy. Therefore he exhorts the young to imitate the ancient Romans whenever fortune gives them the opportunity to do so, that is, to do what he was prevented from doing by the malignity of the times and of fortune.

The message of the proem to Book Two could seem to be rather meager, at least as compared with that of the proem to Book One. This is due to the fact that the proem to Book One is the introduction to the whole work, while the proem to Book Two is the introduction only to Book Two and more particularly to the early chapters of Book Two. There Machiavelli first takes issue with an opinion of Plutarch, whom he calls a weighty author—he never

applies this epithet to Livy—an opinion also shared by Livy and even by the Roman people themselves: the opinion that the Romans acquired their empire through fortune rather than through virtue. Prior to the Roman conquest, the whole of Europe was inhabited by three peoples who defended their freedom obstinately and who governed themselves freely, that is, as republics. Hence Rome needed excessive virtue to conquer them. How then does it come about that in those ancient times those peoples were greater lovers of freedom than they are today? According to Machiavelli, this is ultimately due to the difference between the ancient religion and our religion. Our religion has placed the highest good in humility, abjectness, and the disparagement of the human things, whereas the ancient religion has placed the highest good in greatness of mind, strength of the body, and in all other things apt to make men most strong. But the disarmament of the world and of heaven itself is ultimately due to the destruction of the Roman Empire, of all republican life. Apart from her excessive virtue, the second reason for Rome's greatness was her liberal admission of foreigners to citizenship. But such a policy exposes a state to great dangers, as the Athenians and especially the Spartans knew who feared that the admixture of new inhabitants would corrupt the ancient customs. Owing to the Roman policy, many men who never knew republican life and did not care for it, that is, many orientals, became Roman citizens. The Roman conquest of the East thus completed what her conquest of the West had begun. And thus it came about that the Roman Republic was, on the one hand, the direct opposite of the Christian republic, and, on the other hand, the cause of the Christian republic and even the model for it.

Book Three has no proem but its first chapter performs the function of a proem. By this slight irregularity Machiavelli underlines the fact that the number of chapters of the *Discourses* equals the number of books of Livy's history, and Livy's history, as we noted before, extends from the origin of Rome until the time of the emergence of Christianity. The heading of the first chapter of Book Three reads as follows: "If one wishes that a sect or a republic live long, one must bring it back frequently to its beginning." While the heading speaks only of sects and republics, the chapter itself deals with republics, sects, and kingdoms; sects, that is, religions, occupy the center. All things of the world have a limit to their course—a limit set by heaven. But they reach that limit only if they are kept in order, and this means if they are frequently brought back to their beginnings; for in their beginnings they must have had some goodness, otherwise they would not have gained their first reputation and increase. Machiavelli proves his thesis first regarding republics, by the example of Rome's regaining new life and new virtue after her defeat by the Gauls: Rome then resumed the observance of religion and justice, that is, of the old orders, especially those of religion, through the neglect of which she had suffered disaster. The recovery of ancient virtue

consists of the reimposition of the terror and fear that had made men good at the beginning. Machiavelli thus explains what his concern with the recovery of ancient modes and orders means fundamentally: men were good at the beginning not because of innocence but because they were gripped by terror and fear—by the initial and radical terror and fear; at the beginning there is not Love but Terror; Machiavelli's wholly new teaching is based on this alleged insight (which anticipates Hobbes' doctrine of the state of nature). Machiavelli turns then to the discussion of sects; he illustrates his thesis by the example of "our religion": "If our religion had not been brought back to its beginning or principle by St. Francis and St. Dominic, it would have become completely extinguished, for by poverty and the example of Christ they brought that religion back into the minds of men where it was already extinguished; and these new orders were so potent that they are the reason why the immorality of the prelates and of the heads of the religion do not ruin our religion; for the Franciscans and the Dominicans live still in poverty and have so great credit with the peoples through confession and preachings that they convince the peoples that it is evil to speak evil of evil and that it is good to live in obedience to the prelates, and if the prelates sin, to leave them for punishment to God. Thus the prelates do the worst they can, for they do not fear the punishment that they do not see and in which they do not believe. That innovation therefore has maintained, and maintains, that religion." Here the return to the beginning was achieved by the introduction of new orders. Machiavelli doubtless says this here because he did not think that the Franciscan and Dominican reforms amounted to a simple restoration of primitive Christianity, for those reforms left intact the Christian hierarchy. But the introduction of new orders is necessary also in republics, as Machiavelli emphasizes in the concluding chapter of the *Discourses*: the restoration of the ancient modes and orders is in all cases, including that of Machiavelli himself, the introduction of new modes and orders. Nevertheless there is a great difference between the Franciscan and Dominican renovation and republican renovations: republican renovations subject the whole republic, including the leading man, to the initial terror and fear precisely because they resist evil—because they punish evil visibly and hence credibly. The Christian command or counsel not to resist evil is based on the premise that the beginning or principle is love. That command or counsel can only lead to the utmost disorder or else to evasion. The premise, however, turns into its extreme opposite.

We have seen that the number of chapters of the *Discourses* is meaningful and has been deliberately chosen. We may thus be induced to wonder whether the number of chapters of the *Prince* is not also meaningful. The *Prince* consists of 26 chapters. Twenty-six is the numerical value of the letters of the sacred name of God in Hebrew, of the Tetragrammaton. But did Machiavelli know of this? I do not know. Twenty-six equals 2 times 13.

Thirteen is now and for quite some time has been considered an unlucky number, but in former times it was also and even primarily considered a lucky number. So “twice 13” might mean both good luck and bad luck, and hence altogether: luck, *fortuna*. A case can be made for the view that Machiavelli’s theology can be expressed by the formula *Deus sive fortuna* (as distinguished from Spinoza’s *Deus sive natura*)—that is, that God is fortuna as supposed to be subject to human influence (imprecation). But to establish this would require an argument “too long and too exalted” for the present occasion. Let us therefore see whether we cannot get some help from looking at the 26th chapter of the *Discourses*. The heading of the chapter reads as follows: “A new prince, in a city or country taken by him, must make everything new.” The subject of the chapter is then the new prince in a new state, that is, the most exalted subject of the *Prince*. At the end of the preceding chapter Machiavelli had said: he who wishes to establish an absolute power, which the writers call tyranny, must renew everything. The subject of our chapter is then tyranny, but the term “tyranny” never occurs in that chapter: “tyranny” is avoided in the 26th chapter of the *Discourses* just as it is avoided in the *Prince*, which consists of 26 chapters. The lesson of the chapter itself is this: a new prince who wishes to establish absolute power in his state must make everything new; he must establish new magistracies, with new names, new authorities and new men; he must make the rich poor and the poor rich, as David did when he became king: *qui esurientes implevit bonis, et divites dimisit inanes*. In sum, he must not leave anything in his country untouched, and there must not be any rank or wealth that its possessors do not recognize as owing to the prince. The modes that he must use are most cruel and inimical, not only to every Christian life, but even to every humane one; so that everyone must prefer to live as a private man rather than as a king with so great a ruin of human beings.” The Latin quotation that occurs in this chapter is translated in the Revised Version as follows: “He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away.” The quotation forms part of the Magnificat, the Virgin Mary’s prayer of thanks after she had heard from the angel Gabriel that she would bring forth a son to be called Jesus; he that “hath filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich empty away” is none other than God himself. In the context of this chapter this means that god is a tyrant, and that king David who made the rich poor and the poor rich, was a Godly king, a king who walked in the ways of the Lord because he proceeded in the tyrannical way. We must note that this is the sole New Testament quotation occurring in the *Discourses* or in the *Prince*. And that sole New Testament quotation is used for expressing a most horrible blasphemy. Someone might say in defense of Machiavelli that the blasphemy is not expressly uttered but only implied. But this defense, far from helping Machiavelli, makes his case worse, and for this reason: When a man openly utters or vomits a blas-

phemy, all good men shudder and turn away from him, or punish him according to his deserts; the sin is entirely his. But a concealed blasphemy is so insidious, not only because it protects the blasphemer against punishment by due process of law, but above all because it practically compels the hearer or reader to think the blasphemy by himself and thus to become an accomplice of the blasphemer. Machiavelli thus establishes a kind of intimacy with his readers par excellence, whom he calls “the young,” by inducing them to think forbidden or criminal thoughts. Such an intimacy seems also to be established by every prosecutor or judge who, in order to convict the criminal, must think criminal thoughts, but that intimacy is abhorred by the criminal. Machiavelli, however, intends it and desires it. This is an important part of his education of the young or, to use the time-honored expression, of his corruption of the young.

If space permitted it, we might profitably consider the other chapters of the *Discourses* whose numbers are multiples of 13. I shall consider only one of them: Book Two, chapter 5. The heading of this chapter runs as follows: “That the change of sects and languages together with floods and plagues destroys the memory of things.” Machiavelli begins this chapter by taking issue with certain philosophers by stating an objection to their contention. The philosophers in question say that the world is eternal. Machiavelli “believes” that one could reply to them as follows: if the world were as old as they contend, it would be reasonable that there would be memory of more than 5,000 years (that is, the memory we have thanks to the Bible). Machiavelli opposes Aristotle in the name of the Bible. But he continues: one could make that rejoinder if one did not see that the memories of times are destroyed by various causes, partly originated in human beings, partly originated in heaven. Machiavelli refuted then an alleged refutation of Aristotle, of the best-known anti-biblical argument of the Aristotelians. He continues as follows: the causes originating in human beings are the changes of sects and of language. For when a new sect, that is, a new religion arises, its first concern is, in order to acquire reputation, to extinguish the old religion; and when those who establish the orders of the new sects are of a different language, they destroy the old sect easily. One realizes this by considering the procedure used by the Christian sect against the gentile sect; the former has ruined all orders, all ceremonies of the latter, and destroyed every memory of that ancient theology. It is true that it has not succeeded in completely destroying the knowledge of the things done by the excellent men among the gentiles and this was due to the fact that it preserved the Latin language, which the Christians were forced to use in writing their new law. For had they been able to write that law in a new language, there would be no record whatever of the things of the past. One has only to read of the proceedings of St. Gregory and the other heads of the Christian religion in order to see with how great an obstinacy they persecuted all ancient memo-



ries by burning the works of the poets and of the historians, by ruining the images and spoiling every other sign of antiquity; if they had joined to that persecution a new language, everything would have been forgotten in the shortest time. Through these extraordinary overstatements Machiavelli sketches the background of his own work, in particular of his recovery of his cherished Livy, the largest part of whose history has been lost owing to “the malignity of the times” (I 2). Furthermore, he here silently contrasts the conduct of the Christians with that of the Muslims whose new law was written in a new language. The difference between the Christians and the Muslims is not that the Christians had a greater respect for pagan antiquity than the Muslims, but that the Christians did not conquer the Western Roman empire as the Muslims conquered the Eastern, and were therefore forced to adopt the Latin language and therefore to some extent to preserve the literature of pagan Rome, and thereby preserve their mortal enemy. Shortly thereafter Machiavelli says that these sects change two or three times in 5,000 or 6,000 years. He thus determines the life span of Christianity; the maximum would be 3,000 years, the minimum 1,666 years. This means that Christianity might come to an end about 150 years after the *Discourses* were written. Machiavelli was not the first to engage in speculations of this kind (cf. Gemistos Plethon who was much more sanguine or apprehensive than Machiavelli).

The most important point, however, that Machiavelli makes through this statement is that all religions, including Christianity, are of human, not heavenly origin. The changes of heavenly origin that destroy the memory of things are plagues, hunger, and floods: the heavenly is the natural; the supra-natural is human.

The substance of what Machiavelli says or suggests regarding religion is not original. As is indicated by his use of the term “sect” for religion, he goes in the ways of Averroism, that is, of those medieval Aristotelians who as philosophers refused to make any concessions to revealed religion. While the substance of Machiavelli’s religious teaching is not original, his manner of setting it forth is very ingenious. He recognizes in fact no theology but civil theology, theology serving the state and to be used or not used by the state as circumstances suggest. He indicates that religions can be dispensed with if there is a strong and able monarch. This implies indeed that religion is indispensable in republics.

The moral-political teaching of the *Discourses* is fundamentally the same as that of the *Prince* but with one important difference: the *Discourses* state powerfully the case for republics while also instructing potential tyrants in how to destroy republican life. Yet there can hardly be any doubt that Machiavelli preferred republics to monarchies, tyrannical or nontyrannical. He loathed oppression which is not in the service of the well-being of the people and hence of effective government, especially of impartial and

unsqueamish punitive justice. He was a generous man, while knowing very well that what passes for generosity in political life is most of the time nothing but shrewd calculation, which as such deserves to be commended. In the *Discourses* he has expressed his preference most clearly by his praise of M. Furius Camillus. Camillus had been highly praised by Livy as the second Romulus, the second founder of Rome, a most conscientious practitioner of religious observances; he even speaks of him as the greatest of all *imperatores* but he probably means by this the greatest of all commanders up to Camillus’ time. Machiavelli, however, calls Camillus “the most prudent of all Roman captains”; he praises him for both his “goodness” and his “virtue,” his humanity and integrity, as good and wise—in a word, as a most excellent man. He has in mind particularly his equanimity, the fact that he had the same state of mind in good and in evil fortune, when he saved Rome from the Gauls and thus earned immortal glory and when he was condemned to exile. Machiavelli traces Camillus’ superiority to the whims of fortune to his superior knowledge of the world. In spite of his extraordinary merits Camillus was condemned to exile. Why he was so condemned, Machiavelli discusses in a special chapter (III 23). On the basis of Livy he enumerates three reasons. But, if I am not mistaken, Livy never mentions these three reasons together as causes of Camillus’ exile. In fact Machiavelli follows here not Livy but Plutarch. But he makes this characteristic change: he assigns the central place to the fact that in his triumph Camillus had his triumphal chariot drawn by four white horses; therefore the people said that through pride he had wished to equal the sun-god or, as Plutarch has it, Jupiter (Livy says: Jupiter et sol). I believe that this rather shocking act of *superbia* was in Machiavelli’s eyes a sign of Camillus’ magnanimity.

Camillus’ very pride shows, as Machiavelli surely knew, that there is a greatness beyond Camillus’ greatness. After all, Camillus was not a founder or discoverer of new modes and orders. To state this somewhat differently, Camillus was a Roman of the highest dignity and, as Machiavelli has shown most obviously by his comedy *La Mandragola*, human life requires also levity. He there praises Magnifico Lorenzo de’Medici for having combined gravity and levity in a quasi-impossible combination—a combination that Machiavelli regarded as commendable because in changing from gravity to levity or vice versa, one imitates nature, which is changeable.

One cannot help wondering how one ought to judge reasonably of Machiavelli’s teaching as a whole. The simplest way to answer this question would seem to be the following. The writer to whom Machiavelli refers and deferred most frequently, with the obvious exception of Livy, is Xenophon. But he refers to only two of Xenophon’s writings: *The Education of Cyrus* and the *Hiero*; he takes no notice of Xenophon’s Socratic writings, that is, of the other pole of Xenophon’s moral universe: Socrates. Half of Xenophon, in Xenophon’s view the better half, is suppressed by Machiavelli. One can

safely say that there is no moral or political phenomenon that Machiavelli knew or for whose discovery he is famous that was not perfectly known to Xenophon, to say nothing of Plato or Aristotle. It is true that in Machiavelli everything appears in a new light, but this is due, not to an enlargement of the horizon, but to a narrowing of it. Many modern discoveries regarding man have this character.

Machiavelli has often been compared with the Sophists. Machiavelli says nothing of the Sophists or of the men commonly known as Sophists. Yet he says something on this subject, if indirectly, in his *Life of Castruccio Castracani*, a very charming little work, containing an idealized description of a fourteenth century condottiere or tyrant. At the end of that work he records a number of witty sayings said or listened to by Castruccio. Almost all those sayings have been borrowed by Machiavelli from Diogenes Laertius' *Lives of the Famous Philosophers*. Machiavelli changes the sayings in some cases in order to make them suitable to Castruccio. In Diogenes, an ancient philosopher is recorded as having said that he would wish to die like Socrates; Machiavelli makes this Castruccio's saying, yet he would wish to die like Caesar. Most of the sayings recorded in the *Castruccio* stem from Aristippus and Diogenes the Cynic. The references to Aristippus and Diogenes—men not classified as Sophists—could profitably guide us if we are interested in the question of what scholars call Machiavelli's "sources."

Toward the end of the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle speaks of what one may call the political philosophy of the Sophists. His chief point is that the Sophists identified or almost identified politics with rhetoric. In other words, the Sophists believed or tended to believe in the omnipotence of speech. Machiavelli surely cannot be accused of that error. Xenophon speaks of his friend Proxenos, who commanded a contingent in Cyrus's expedition against the king of Persia and who was a pupil of the most famous rhetorician, Gorgias. Xenophon says that Proxenos was an honest man and capable to command gentlemen but could not fill his soldiers with fear of him; he was unable to punish those who were not gentlemen or even to rebuke them. But Xenophon, who was a pupil of Socrates, proved to be a most successful commander precisely because he could manage both gentlemen and nongentlemen. Xenophon, the pupil of Socrates, was under no delusion about the sternness and harshness of politics, about that ingredient of politics which transcends speech. In this important respect Machiavelli and Socrates make a common front against the Sophists.