MACHIAVELLI'S PLATONIC PROBLEMS

Neoplatonism, Eros, Mythmaking, and Philosophy in Machiavellian Thought

GUILLAUME BOGIARIS

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This book is dedicated to the memory of my maternal grandfather, Captain Dimitri Bogiaris (1913–1991), an exemplary husband, father, and grandfather who faced tremendous hardships so that I may have the luxury of engaging in intellectual explorations such as these.

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Introduction

As one reads Machiavelli's praise of Numa (the second king of Rome, who succeeded Romulus himself), who pretended to be intimate with a nymph, alongside Plato's myth of the metals, certain interesting core similarities reveal themselves. Particularly, that Machiavelli's discussion of Numa is prompted by a political problem, one that is only mentioned after said praise: what is one to do (especially when the one in question is a legislator or political leader) when one possesses a truth that does not contain in itself the necessary requirements to persuade people of its truthfulness through simple exposition?[1] Machiavelli here is not simply addressing a generic political problem, but a fundamentally *Platonic* political problem.

That particular question implies a series of interesting notions commonly absent from treatments of Machiavelli's philosophy. First, Machiavelli seems to posit that there are truths that one can possess or know. This alone is controversial: Machiavelli is not known, in the scholarship or otherwise, to dabble with concepts such as true knowledge (versus opinion) and its acquisition. Furthermore, this question implies that human intellectual potential (or at least that of Numa's constituents) is such that being exposed to something that is true may not be sufficient for us to recognize it as such, and therefore the legislator may have to resort to alternate modes of persuasion. This is not so controversial: Machiavelli is clear about both the need for deceptive manipulation and about the potential for human learning in the *Prince*, as he divides people into three categories according to their potential for knowledge acquisition, also known as the "three kinds of brains."

The three-brains theory of classification is a hierarchical one, and its role in broader Machiavellian thought has been almost entirely glossed over by Machiavelli interpreters, except, to my knowledge, a brief mention by Nathan Tarcov.[2] The simplest brain understands nothing and is useless, the second has

the potential to understand what is explained to it,[3] and the third can understand good and evil by itself, and has "inventiveness," that is, is capable of creative thinking.[4] Machiavelli expresses a clear preference for the third kind. If we superimpose that theory onto our reflection about Numa's constituents, this seems to imply that polities (or masses or large interest groups) are overwhelmingly composed of people with the first, lesser, kind of brain. If the proportion of the second (can comprehend with explanation) and third (comprehends by itself) kind of brains, added together, surpassed that of the first kind of brain (cannot comprehend anything) in numbers, then allegedly there would be no truths that do not possess in themselves the necessary elements to persuade people. It would suffice to explain the reasons behind these truths to the people for a majority of it to understand said truths and recognize them as truthful. It may also imply that there are truths that can only be grasped intuitively or emotionally, as opposed to rationally. In both cases, however, this speaks to a more fundamental problem of politics implied by Machiavelli's statement: good policies may not be recognized by the people for whom they are to be implemented, and as such the people's lack of cognitive refinement may hinder policy implementation, even if said policies would benefit them.

How did Numa circumvent that problem? He pretended to have supranatural knowledge of politics as a result of having been with a nymph. Supernatural beings such as nymphs were essentially considered demigods, and thus in possession of knowledge about human affairs that exceeded the maximal human potential. Accordingly, their knowledge would have been taken to be systematically superior to any form of human opinion. Numa was able to manipulate popular superstition into making his subjects believe in the quality of his policy and let it pass without protest. He did so through a lie about his access to a kind of political knowledge he knew his subjects were going to receive as not only above his and their own, but also as *de facto* correct by virtue of its divine essence.

In light of this, we have a right to wonder if Machiavelli thought lying and manipulation were the only ways out of the political conundrum created by low mass intelligence. Matters quickly become more complex as we realize that he clearly did not think so. (If he did, we might suspect he would have been more sympathetic to the idea of enlightened dictatorship as a viable political alternative, which he was not.) Ignorance and confusion in a city do lead, of course, to conflict, and prevent the implementation of good modes and orders. But "for as many are not capable of ordering a thing because they do not know its good, which is because of the diverse opinions among them, so when they have come to know it, they do not agree to abandon it."[5] Once a certain good policy is implemented, then, it seems that time (and we can assume positive consequences) will eventually convince the people of said policy's quality.

What is interesting here is that it appears—surprisingly—that there is an agreement in principle between Machiavelli and Plato with regard to a few matters. It will happen that a leader will consider a policy or set of policies that he knows to be good but that are nonetheless not perceived to be beneficial by the people. That is shown by Socrates and Adeimantus' agreements about the necessity of "lies in speech" that will lead to the crafting of the noble lie. Machiavelli and Plato apparently share a deep skepticism about the maximal potential intelligence of the masses. (It is true that as far as the canon of political thinkers go, this commonality is neither exceptional nor shocking, but bear with me.) Because they recognize that it may be harmful to bringing about a desirable state within the polity (although it is worth noting that they do not seem to agree on what that state is), they propose lying as an alternative method of political persuasion.

Not just any kind of lying will do. They both propose a type of lie that relies on the pretense of possession of supernatural knowledge otherwise inaccessible to the masses and irrefutable by virtue of its superior source. In the case of Socrates and Adeimantus, this takes the form of myth-creating, that is, pretending to know a fundamental truth about human origins and human nature that has implications about how society should be ordered to reflect human nature. In the case of Numa, it is a simple deception about access to supernatural knowledge via a nymph that allows him to pass legislation unimpeded by opposition from potential dissenters who lack an equivalent or superior authority to appeal to. Nevertheless, Machiavelli praises both the deceptive technique and the orders Numa decided to implement (despite omitting their exact nature).

Machiavelli's philosophy and the myth of the metals share another similarity. Like Machiavelli's classification of human beings according to their type of brain, the myth of the metals divides human beings into three distinct categories: the bronze and iron souls, who are to become *Kallipolis'* craftsmen (the lowest class); the silver souls, destined to be soldiers (the intermediate class); and the gold souls, philosophers also meant to become community leaders. Like Machiavelli, Plato supposed the highest members of the political hierarchy were intellectually superior types, whom he also thought distinguished themselves by the capacity not only to understand but also to create political orders. And what is Socrates, the essential philosopher, doing in the *Republic*, but creating myths in order to suggest the nature of the correct political order?

This rapprochement will likely surprise and shock more than a few. After all, Machiavelli evidently conceived of himself as someone who sought to bring political philosophy back toward reality, the "effectual truth" of things.[6] He thought that the difference between what political actors appeared to be and what they were (as well as the common man's inability to tell one from

the other) was essential to the art of political rule. He repeatedly encourages aspiring leaders to appear to be someone that commoners would neither hate nor comprehend. But he also recognized the possibility for images and aesthetics to be harmful. His famous injunction to depart from "imaginary republics and principalities that have never been known to exist"[7] is a good example of one of those instances where he acknowledges the harm done by inventions (made by others).

So did Plato. The *Republic* is filled with references to the (potentially harmful) power that images, imagination, and incorrect representations of the Good have on the human mind and therefore on politics. The well-known allegory of the cave[8] is a clear example of this. The essential ignorance of the cave-dwellers consists in the fact that they labor under the illusion that projections of representations of actual concepts (the famed shadows) constitute reality. It is the conviction that these projections are real that became known as the Socratic concept of "double ignorance," that is, not knowing that one does not know the nature of an object or concept. These shadows are the result of more or less durable representations of reality (puppets) being projected onto the cave-wall by a small fire presented to the reader as an approximation of the light of the sun (which symbolizes the Good). According to Socrates, both the fire and the puppets are the creations of politicians, artists, and craftsmen (the three classes of people Socrates investigates, since they are the ones who pretend to hold knowledge of human nature and society, as per *The Apology*). It is not surprising that from there, Socrates goes on to question the validity and social worth of the values communicated through Homeric myths such as *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*.

Certainly, Machiavelli's injunction to depart from imagined principalities and republics that have likely never existed[9] can easily be interpreted as a quip directed at *Kallipolis*, the ideal regime invented by Socrates and his interlocutors in the *Republic*. From there it is not too hard to jump to the conclusion that there is a deep intellectual hostility on the part of Machiavelli that is directed at Platonic tenets.

Before jumping to that conclusion, an important detail needs to be considered. The Platonism of Machiavelli's time was essentially monopolized by preeminent Christian scholars. That is to say that mainstream Renaissance Neoplatonism and Christianity essentially went hand in hand, and that one nearly always implied the other. Marsilio Ficino, the scholar almost solely responsible for the Platonic revival of the fifteenth century, was a Catholic priest, and all his entourage and fellow travelers in the enterprise of Platonic studies—who constitute the vast majority of influential Renaissance (Neo) Platonists and often known to us today as the Renaissance Humanists—consisted of devout Christians who saw Platonic philosophy and Christian doctrine as essentially symbiotic. This is important because while the

sincerity of Machiavelli's faith is still a hotly debated matter, his cynicism toward Christianity is a matter of course.

My work asks if it possible that if we do the work of distancing Plato from the Neoplatonists with whom Machiavelli was unarguably in disagreement, we could still say his philosophy aims to "destroy" the Platonic tradition? My answer is, in short, no. Plato's philosophy, either though manuscripts, translations,[10] or its general influence on Medieval and Renaissance thought, was an inescapable part of Machiavelli's intellectual world,[11] and themes such as education, knowledge of the good, virtue, and good laws are central to the philosophy of both thinkers. Essentially, the central point made in this book is the following: we should distinguish between the Platonic philosophy that belongs to ideal theory (which was adopted wholesale and Christianized by the Florentine Neoplatonists) and the practical political philosophy of Plato. Machiavelli rejects the former and engages with the latter. He seemed not to have taken Neoplatonic idealism seriously but received some of Plato's more practical political prescriptions seriously. As such, they can—and deserve—to be unpacked, and doing so teaches us more about Machiavelli's actual thought.

The Platonic contributions that do belong to ideal theory also seem to be the ones Ficino and the other Christian Neoplatonists regarded as Plato's most important contributions, and it is safe, as the literature asserts, to advance that Machiavelli was extremely unsympathetic to those arguments and more or less dismissed them all. Therefore, notions like the harmonious living of a strictly stratified hierarchical society; *Kallipolis* as a serious political project; the knowability of an absolute Good or Just that illuminates the path our political and apolitical actions alike must take, and so on, we can safely assume were not worthy of deep consideration for Machiavelli.

But behind these ideas exist a series of more practical political precepts I argue Machiavelli considers very carefully and produced nuanced, complex answers to. Behind the myths of enlightened and not-so-enlightened lawmakers lies the notion that (a) popular mass intelligence and intellectual potential is so low that citizens cannot know their own good, much less that of the city, and that consequently, (b) good policy may require lies and political manipulation from its instigators in order to bypass the problems created by (a). Furthermore, the "myth of the metals" and the organization of *Kallipolis* both rely on the practical proposition that philosophical education is essential for good leadership. Behind Diotima's notion that *eros* leads to philosophy lies the simpler implication that, at the very least, love (or loving) makes us better people. Every single one of these propositions is examined in detail by Machiavelli in either the *Prince*, the *Discourses*, the *Histories*, or his literary works, and sometimes repeatedly across several of these.

RELEVANT DEBATES IN THE LITERATURE

For some time, the conventional wisdom in the field has been that Machiavelli clearly and unequivocally rejected Platonism in bulk. (This is still true today, but less so, thanks to scholars like Bill Parsons, Miguel Vatter, Catherine Zuckert, and Erica Benner.) Plato is scarcely ever mentioned directly in Machiavelli's writings, and therefore scholars understandably approached Machiavelli's relationship to ancient philosophy by way of the authors featured most clearly into his life and thought. For example, researchers such as Paul Rassmussen and Eric Buzzetti,[12] when thinking about Machiavelli's relation to other ancient authors, essentially fly past Plato altogether and go straight to Xenophon. Granted, Xenophon was not received as a proto-Christian thinker by Renaissance Neoplatonists in the way Aristotle and Plato generally were, and Machiavelli mentions Xenophon by name more often than both Plato and Aristotle combined. As such it is impossible to ignore his presence in a book generally concerned with Machiavelli's relationship to ancient thought such as this one, and we will see how Machiavelli's treatment of Xenophon functions as a discussion on the role and importance of philosophical education for political leadership.

Machiavelli's affection for *De Rerum Natura*, the famous poem of Epicurean cosmology by Lucretius, has also been widely and excellently documented. It is relevant here because one can say that engaging Epicureanism is to engage Platonism by the v*ia negativa*, since the two schools of thought were famously pitted against each other.[13] As Machiavelli himself wrote, when it is impossible to denigrate one view, a covert way to do so is to praise one's enemy's enemy. As such it would be dishonest not to consider if his affection for Epicureanism was not an expression, at least in part, of some manner of skepticism toward Platonism.

It remains that Machiavelli's Lucretian proclivities may not have been imputable to some sympathy of his for Epicurean moral philosophy. Thanks to Ada Palmer's meticulous scholarship we know that Machiavelli's primary interest in the poem may have been the implications of atomism, and not its Epicurean ethical content. Palmer writes:

> It may seem surprising, then, that Machiavelli does not annotate the sections of the *De Rerum Natura* that focus on Epicurean moral philosophy, which 59 percent of readers marked. This indicates that Machiavelli was not particularly interested in the Epicurean views on love, virtue, and vice, which were, though radical by Christian standards of his day, considerably less radical than the consequentialist ethics Machiavelli was himself in the process of developing. Rather, Machiavelli the Radical Moral Philosopher is present in his exceptional interest in Epicurean cosmology, whose materialism and functionless gods

> enable one to divorce moral philosophy from divine concerns. He demonstrated particular interests in the arguments against deterministic providence, and in the swerve, centering on the question of how to make room for human free will in a materialistic universe.[14]

Palmer is, in a sense, extrapolating evidence from Machiavelli's marginalia (or rather what is absent from his copies of *De Rerum Natura*), strengthening notions she already held about Machiavelli's moral philosophy based on her reading of the *Prince* and the *Discourses*. She suggests Machiavelli looked into *De Rerum Natura* in order to consolidate a series of philosophical conclusions that she tacitly thought Machiavelli had already clearly formulated and intellectually committed to—like ethical consequentialism. In this sense Palmer's Machiavelli is not a devoted disciple of Lucretian Epicureanism, but rather a lonely innovator looking for intellectual support in the writings of fellow philosophers.[15]

After decades of hiatus, the subject of Machiavelli's Platonic entanglements—or lack thereof—has resurfaced forcefully in the literature. The dominant stance is nevertheless still to assume a *de facto* irreconcilable antagonism between Machiavelli and Plato. Among the most famous examples of this paradigm, we find Strauss brushing away the possibility of agreement between them, a position articulated at the dawn of the 1960s and more or less unchallenged for fifty years.[16] Those influenced by Leo Strauss, like Harvey Mansfield and Nathan Tarcov, later explained Machiavelli's relationship to ancient philosophy in the following manner: "For Machiavelli, the philosophy of his time—whether it was lingering Medieval Aristotelianism or Renaissance Platonism—was on more of less friendly terms with Christianity, and it was so involved in compromise with a difficult partner that it could not keep the distance necessary for attack or reform."[17]

On top of this, Machiavelli's conspicuous silence about fundamental aspects of Platonic philosophy signals, to them, a rejection of Plato,[18] which seems supported by Machiavelli's repeated invitations to consult Xenophon's work. In this reading, the lion's share of Machiavelli's productive engagement with ancient sources and a certain Socratic legacy happens through Xenophon. Although my argument is essentially compatible with theirs, it differs in that the truth of Machiavelli's discomfort with "Christianized" Platonism does not dispense us from a direct engagement with the question of Machiavelli's relationship with it, and, as this book hopes to show, such an enterprise is warranted because it helps us understand his thought better.

Mansfield later argued, in several brief instances scattered across his work, that there was intellectual enmity between Machiavelli and Platonism. He wrote in *Machiavelli's Virtue* that Machiavelli dismissed the distinction

between the practical and contemplative lives taken for granted by Plato and Aristotle,[19] and "that whereas for Plato theory (philosophy) invades practice, for Machiavelli it is the reverse."[20] Mansfield revisits Machiavelli's account of the life of Alexander the Great to demonstrate that Machiavelli rejected that Platonic invasion of practice by theory, and that idealistic philosophical attachments (e.g., the idea that the form of the city should mirror the human form) should not cloud our judgment regarding practical matters.[21] Machiavelli does not simply rejects "the polis of the classical political philosophers,"[22] in Mansfield's reading he also rejects the classical notion that philosophical training can be useful to the "practical" political life. (I challenge this philosophy-dismissive reading in my own treatment of Alexander's import in Machiavellian thought in chapter 4.)

Like Catherine Zuckert, Buzzetti, Rasmussen, and many others, he has argued that Machiavelli's "Xenophontic" proclivities can be safely interpreted to imply a rejection of Platonism, and that Machiavelli's insistence on *verità effetuale*, the "actual truth" of political and worldly things, is to be read, among other things, as a rejection of all manners of political and philosophical idealism, an intellectual stance Plato would have undoubtedly represented in Machiavelli's eyes.[23] On the basis of a deep dive into *Prince* XV, he asserts that "Plato and Aristotle seem clearly to be Machiavelli's adversaries [. . .]." Machiavelli is a professor of necessity, as opposed to a professor of goodness like the ancients.[24] This is largely evidenced, in his reading, by Machiavelli's statement that the effectual truth of political matters is that what is good is only "held" to be so (i.e., that it is only considered to be so as a matter of unfounded popular convention), and that the strongest evidence that it is in fact not truly good is that following the so-called dictates of goodness will ruin anyone who tries.

The long scholarly silence on the subject of Machiavelli's relationship with ancient political thought was broken a little over a decade ago with the publication of Erica Benner's *Machiavelli's Ethics* (2009), where she argued that Machiavelli's "manner and matter of writing are deeply indebted to Greek ethics," and thus that he is much closer to his contemporary humanists than had previously been assumed. She argues that misconceptions about Machiavelli's hostility to ancient sources stem from the erroneous assumption that he promoted the active life above the contemplative, and that contemporary readers assume he would have understood ancient Greek thought as primarily contemplative,[25] in part due to his hostility to the Neoplatonist pro-Medici elite (i.e., Ficino and his followers and friends). Over the course of the book, the very palatable thesis that Machiavelli's stance regarding Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy is more complex than a simple blanket rejection[26] becomes a defense of the view that Machiavelli is a moral

philosopher who was overall sympathetic to the philosophical project of Plato, Aristotle, and Xenophon.

Since then Benner has regularly reprised a version of her thesis according to which Machiavelli was fundamentally sympathetic to the Platonic philosophical enterprise broadly understood. Even counting Benner's efforts (and the counterreactions it caused), treatment of a philosophical debate between the two authors remains comparatively absent from the literature. Like Benner, I intend to argue that the conceptual relationship between Machiavelli and Plato's respective philosophies is not as antagonistic as is currently assumed by scholars in the field. However, this does not necessarily mean that Machiavelli directly intended to communicate some sympathy for Platonic thought to his readers.

Catherine Zuckert has figured among Benner's primary interlocutors on the subject. In her recent book *Machiavelli's Politics*, she developed to a larger extent the stance that Machiavelli's primary challenge to ancient philosophy is that it fails to show how it can improve the lives of the people in actuality.[27] Although her position is somewhat mediated later in the same monograph, she argues that it the overly theoretical nature of Platonic philosophy ultimately led Machiavelli to criticize it. Machiavelli's achievement was to propose a view of politics where he, the philosopher, showed "the ambitious how to organize the lives of their people so that they live more safely and prosperously."[28]

In her 2010 article reinterpreting the *Life of Castruccio Castracani*, she had begun this work by turning the conventionally pro-Socratic readings of this oft-neglected piece on their heads. Yes, Machiavelli's Castracani turned to ancient sources,[29] but readers should consider that Machiavelli depicts him as a political failure. Therefore, we can assume that the Socratic precepts Machiavelli puts in his mouth do not imply sympathy for Plato or Socrates' philosophical and political projects, contemplative or otherwise.[30] Seven years later, in "Machiavelli: A Socratic?," she reexamined the question of Machiavelli's philosophical allegiances through a comparative study of two books, Strauss's *Thoughts on Machiavelli* and Benner's *Machiavelli's Ethics*. She concluded, alongside Strauss, that Machiavelli is a "political philosopher" and not a philosopher largely understood and definitely not a thinker of the Socratic or Platonic persuasion, meaning that he refused the possibility that thinking men could live a life outside the political sphere.[31]

Since I began this project, some further work has been done on the subject, work that thankfully makes mine seem less controversial and isolated in a sea of disagreeing voices. Contrary to interpretations pitting Machiavelli against Platonic thought, and to Alison Brown in particular, Miguel Vatter argued in "Of Asses and Nymphs: Machiavelli, Platonic Theology and Epicureanism

in Florence"[32] that Machiavelli's philosophical poem *L'Asino* exemplifies a turn toward Platonic animalism. The poem emphasizes "the civil and natural components of ancient theology but departs from a political understanding of Platonism found in the Medici circles because of its critique of Christianity, while remaining closer to the political philosophy of Platonism than to Epicureanism."[33] Central to his argument is the idea that the animal images used by Machiavelli, especially the boar and the centaur, exemplify Machiavelli's attempt to re-appropriate a certain Platonic legacy from Mediciean Neoplatonist circles. In his reading, Machiavelli's poem suggests the possibility of a Platonic constitutionalism where the locus of political legitimacy rests with popular consent rather than enlightened rule, in essence the reading put forward self-servingly by Medici and their sympathizers.[34]

Giovanni Giorgini, in an essay in the recently published collection *Machiavelli on Liberty and Conflict*, aligns Plato and Machiavelli in two ways. According to him, Plato's philosophical project, like Machiavelli's, is predicated on the notion that the ruler will have to use evil means to achieve the good. Furthermore, Plato also identified the "central problem that would consume Machiavelli," namely, the problematic relationship between the ruler's virtue and chance, that is, that no matter how virtuous or capable, political actors were doomed to forever be at the mercy of *fortùna* to some extent.[35]

There is still no doubt in my mind that the most idealistic elements of Platonic philosophy, especially those having to do with the possibility or desirability of a ruler class dedicated to the contemplative life, have no place in Machiavellian thought. In fact, they are treated with contempt and dismissed by Machiavelli. But that angle of Plato's thought was mostly the one promoted by the Christian Neoplatonists, who dominated the Platonic revival of the time. The elements of Platonic thought they ignored, those closer to *realpolitik*, so to speak, for example, the necessity of deception in policy implementation, or the importance of keeping poetry and literature under the tutelage of philosophy to avoid dissemination of politically deleterious and unproductive ideas, are echoed in Machiavelli's work. Incidentally, these notions are the ones that Machiavelli's Neoplatonist contemporaries seem to have intentionally ignored.

Machiavelli's thought points to the fact that although philosophy is not the best life for the individual, philosophical knowledge is indispensable to well-conducted politics, whether the ruler himself possesses it or his entourage does. He suggests this in his criticism of the Socratic tenet according to which a life dedicated to contemplative philosophy is best, and by linking the knowledge of history to the knowledge of human nature, thus pointing to the importance of philosophical training for a prince. But this also means that through his invention and modification, Machiavelli may have perceived himself as a type of Numa-like character, that is, that he is manipulating truth

for the better, and at the same time warning us about over-reliance on the "empirical" data of historical examples, something we can avoid doing if we are well-trained (i.e., philosophically educated).

Therefore, when Peter Godman wrote that:

> [. . .] the problem raised at chapter 15 of *Il Principe* was the same as that being discussed by Marcello Virgilio, but Machiavelli's solution was contrary to that of his former colleague. The distinction between how men should live and how they do; the flight to an imaginary realm of ethics; the dissolution of a concrete discourse about human conduct into speculative theories and general rules—all subjects on which the humanist, in his lectures, was attempting to lay down the law—were rejected on the grounds that the distinction between perception and reality should be dismissed as meaningless.[36]

. . .he could not have been more wrong. The distinction between reality and perception is among most meaningful element of both Machiavelli's and Plato's arguments. When one departs from Platonic philosophy as exposed by the aforementioned Florentine Neoplatonists, it becomes easy to see that Plato and Machiavelli are equally concerned with the distinction between perception and reality, between received and effectual truth. In order to do this, however, we must turn to Plato's text rather than to those Neoplatonist reinterpretations, something that is still lacking in the literature when put in relation to Machiavelli's ideas. In fact, the ability to realize that what we take for political knowledge is in fact representation and myth is the first step to political knowledge in Machiavelli's and Plato's thoughts alike.

Is it right therefore to say that Machiavelli and Plato are thinkers we can now afford to approach as intellectual kin? No. But even though there are fundamental disagreements on concepts such as the relationship between love and human goodness, both authors were highly skeptical of received truths, both were simultaneously optimistic about the potential and wary of the power of storytelling and mythmaking, and both thought that the most capable political leaders would rise above common conceptions of virtue and justice in order to govern well, even though Machiavelli may have had someone like Xenophon's Cyrus in mind while Plato favored a more a Socratic type. To them, the distinction between perception and reality is far from meaningless: the ability to distinguish between them was the hallmark of (properly educated) exceptional leaders and citizens. Machiavelli's preoccupation with the *verità effetuale* seems to have been as central to his thought as Mansfield claimed it is; but rather than leading him to reject Platonism in bulk, it actually led to a deep and layered engagement with Platonic ideas that this monograph hopes to unravel and expose.

OVERVIEW OF THE WORK

This book aims to change the way we understand Machiavelli's relationship to Plato's philosophy (and, to a much lesser degree, deepen our understanding of Machiavelli's relationship to Xenophon), as well as to contribute to discussions of the place of religion, enlightened rulership, love, political education, Christian Neoplatonism and Christianity itself in his work.

In chapter 1, I show how several themes of crucial importance to Machiavelli had been, up until the production of his own work, the philosophical domain of the humanists, who were all associated to the school of devout Christian *aficionados* of Plato that gravitated around Ficino and his disciples. Philosophical, literary, and political education, the role of ancient examples, the likelihood of historical determinism, proper rulership: before Machiavelli, all these aspects of fifteenth-century intellectual life seemed to have been understood as essentially inseparable from (Christian) Neoplatonism by Machiavelli's Florentine humanist forebears. This chapter lays the groundwork for the subsequent parts of the book, so that as a whole it may strengthen the case that Machiavelli's unique and profoundly different takes on these issues constitutes, in part, an indirect conversation between him and those very Neoplatonists about the merits of Plato's political maxims. For example, Machiavelli's famous historical determinism was a result of following in the footsteps of humanists who were competing for Medici attention, and of co-opting their methods and ideas.[37] The chapter aims to show how the Christianization of Platonism by Marsilio Ficino, his disciples and friends, and later its political instrumentalization, has obscured the conversation regarding Machiavelli's engagement with Plato.

Chapter 2 argues that Machiavelli, in line with the Renaissance habit of weaving philosophical concepts in works of fiction (*fabulae*), attacked the notion that love (*eros*), philosophy and virtue have a symbiotic relationship. This veiled criticism is offered to us in four texts bound together by the theme of love and amorous pursuits: *Mandragola*, *Andria*, *Clizia*, and *Belfagor Arcidiavolo*. (It is worth noting that *Belfagor* has been to my knowledge almost entirely glossed[38] over by Machiavelli scholars and that the scholarship on the plays and other poems is comparatively scarce.) On the basis of the new evidence these texts offer, the chapter argues that Machiavelli's criticism of *eros* is not that it needs to be mitigated by practical concerns, but rather that it is entirely inimical to philosophical and political productivity. What the plays and *Belfagor* reveal is that *eros* is the enemy of good governance and virtue.

The third chapter is dedicated to what I believe is Machiavelli's critique of the power of mythmaking as it relates to enlightened philosopher-kingship (or dictatorship) as it is vehiculated by examples of (supposedly) divinely

inspired leaders. It starts from one of the most famous moments of the *Republic,* Socrates' and Adeimantus' conclusion that major political reform of the kind that would bring about the ideal city requires a lie; proper policymaking requires that founders and policymakers pretend to have supernatural insight into human nature and into policymaking. This insight has important implications for social ordering. The chapter examines how the examples of Numa, Lycurgus, Solon, and Savonarola show this to have been a central concern of Machiavelli as well. Machiavelli thought that the problem of low mass intelligence creates a conundrum for enlightened rulers like Numa who desire to legislate for a people who cannot know their own good. However, there is little chance that elites reign with the good faith Plato thought was the hallmark of the truly enlightened. This is to say that Numas are rare in comparison to Savonarolas, equally clever rulers who desire to oppress rather than rule with a view to popular interest. For Machiavelli, the use of lies about supernatural insight is a political tool much less versatile than it is intimated in the *Republic*, and it fails when not accompanied by good policy.

Chapter 4 is devoted to an examination of Machiavelli's own use of invention and mythmaking to point to philosophy's importance in political education. This comes through natural metaphors and allusions to Xenophon; Machiavelli juxtaposes the examples of famous philosopher princes with geographical images that, he intimates, are extended metaphors for political phenomena. A deep dive into the development of hunting, the art by which we are told some philosopher-princes learn about land-slash-political phenomena, reveals that Machiavelli, contra much of the prior literature, may have thought some philosophical education to be useful, if not essential, for good princes. Turning to Xenophon's Cyrus, whom Machiavelli invites us to study as one of those philosopher princes, reveals that this philosophical education is useful for princes insofar as it enables them to make the difficult ethical choices that are tragically inescapable for leaders, and perhaps even anticipate the blows of *fortùna*. Machiavelli's odd statements about land show he uses geography as a stand-in for political phenomena, that the hunters who know this land are also philosophically educated princes, and that this philosophical education helps one know when not to be good, and where the river of fortune may lead should one be swept away by its current.

SCHOLARLY CONTRIBUTIONS

This book raises a number of original points touching on several scholarly debates still very much alive in Machiavelli studies. Let me attempt to sketch them briefly in anticipation for the rest of the work. Ficino's Christian (Neo) Platonism was developed apolitically (although it was used by the Medici),

and unsurprisingly that leads him to understand Socrates' condemnation of the poets as a strict moratorium on literature and visual arts in the political sphere. Ficino is not alone in that interpretation. It is often said that Plato subscribes to the view that there is a perennial quarrel between philosophy and the arts, whereas Machiavelli offers a lot of his thoughts on politics from the perspective of literature, rhetoric, and poetry. Evidence that the two authors may be irreconcilable is usually found there. But that interpretation is incorrect: Plato only sees a quarrel between philosophy and the arts that are averse to it. He otherwise accepts the arts that are developed under the tutelage of philosophy: the famous noble lie, the myth of the metals, is precisely that. Machiavelli, too, was a proponent of the philosophically informed arts. Looking at the historical data, we discover that Machiavelli co-opted and subverted the methods and arguments of the Florentine humanists-slash-Christian Neoplatonists. His unique (and famous) brand of historical determinism, as well as his use of philosophically loaded fictions in the tradition of the Renaissance *fabulae*, can be traced back to educational treatises, arguments made in the decades immediately preceding Machiavelli's writing. This creates an invitation to examine Machiavelli's use of aesthetic and literary metaphors and myths as well as his treatment of leaders who use them effectively, like Numa.

Through such examinations, we discover that Machiavelli was skeptical of the ancient and renaissance tendency to fetishize love (*eros*) and used his literary works to criticize it. Machiavelli's three plays, as well as his short story *Belfagor Arcidiavolo*, can therefore be read as (1) veiled criticism of Machiavelli's contemporary and ancient notions on the power of love and (2) a clear example of Machiavelli's use of literature to communicate deeper philosophical points.

Furthermore, Ficino was the first to insert Numa into a conversation about religion and rule in Plato's work. Therefore, Machiavelli's own discussion of Numa may be interpreted as a re-appropriation, be it intentional or incidental. What comes out of in-depth analysis of Numa's significance to Machiavellian political philosophy is a problem has been mostly ignored by Machiavelli scholars up until now. It shows the usefulness of mythmaking in the political sphere, as well as the dangers associated with the fact that the efficiency of said mythmaking may be imputed to low mass intelligence, for better or for worse. In fact, for both better and worse: low mass intelligence leads, at times, to popular opposition to healthy policies, but also allows for the kind of manipulation that enables smart rulers to circumvent that opposition. Unfortunately, it also means that people are not intellectually well equipped enough to realize when these myths go stale and stop serving their purpose of fostering security and well-being (like, maybe, fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Christianity, in Machiavelli's view). That is why Machiavelli

covertly encourages the prince to study philosophy, so as to develop the tools necessary to be able to adapt and transcend myths. He does so by way of the metaphor of hunting.

Additionally, following the thread of the metaphor of hunting leads the attentive reader straight to Xenophon, specifically to Xenophon's Cyrus, another instance of a well-crafted story made under the tutelage of philosophy. A careful reading of Xenophon's account of the education of Cyrus reveals the importance of philosophy in Machiavellian political education. Machiavelli points to Cyrus in order to cement his idea about the importance of a leader's ability to transcend conventional morality with the help of philosophical training. The education of Cyrus, a character who displays an early propensity for philosophy and a penetrating intellect, mirrors the development of some the *Prince*'s central lessons (those literally offered in the middle chapters of the book). Machiavelli gestures toward the *Education of Cyrus* to signify to his readers how the *Prince* (and therefore princely education) is about the importance of philosophical education.

NOTES ON METHODOLOGY AND TRANSLATIONS

The translations of Machiavelli's chief works used in this book are: Harvey Mansfield's translation of the *Prince*, and his co-translated works (with Nathan Tarcov) of the *Discourses on Livy* and of the *Florentine His*tories (with Laura Banfield).[39] Although I am partial to the consistency and precision of the Mansfield et al. translations, I have also used Gilbert's collection of Machiavelli's work for cross-referencing purposes.[40] All references to the three plays come from Atkinson and Sices' 1985 translation,[41] which I also considered alongside Gilbert's translation and Machiavelli's original Italian.[42] All discussions of *l'Asino* and *Belfagor* refer to Gilbert's English translation.[43]

For the Neoplatonist works, I have used the bilingual editions of Harvard's recent *I Tatti Renaissance Library Collection*, translated by various scholars of stellar repute under the directorship of James Hankins.[44] There is one exception: for Ficino's commentary on the *Republic* and the *Laws* of Plato, I have used Arthur Farndell's translation,[45] which is to my knowledge the only recent edition available. The references to Plutarch and Livy are from the most recent Loeb Classical Library bilingual editions.[46]

The primary references for Greek works of Plato in this book come from Thomas Pangle's translation of the *Laws*;[47] most references to the *Republic* are drawn from Allan Bloom's translation; references to the *Symposium* are to the Loeb's most recent bilingual edition.[48] All references to the central works of Xenophon (*Education of Cyrus*, *Memorabilia*) are drawn from the Agora

Editions series published by Cornell University Press.[49] For Xenophon's lesser treatises not yet published in the Agora series, I have used available translations and compared them to the original Greek.

I have been trained in Italian, ancient Greek and Latin, and that the moments in my argument where the credence of my point relies heavily on a particular choice in the translation of certain words are always clearly indicated. When it is relevant to my argument, the original texts and the words on which the argument relies are made clear and referenced in the original language.[50]

NOTES

1. Niccolò Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield and Nathan Tarcov (University of Chicago Press, 1998), 34.
2. Nathan Tarcov, "Belief and Opinion in Machiavelli's Prince," *The Review of Politics* 75, no. 4 (2013): 586.
3. I use 'it' here because there is no indication that Machiavelli thought difference in gender implied ownership of one of the kinds of brains or another.
4. Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield, 2nd edition (University of Chicago Press, 1998), 92.
5. Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, 29.
6. Machiavelli, *Prince*, 61.
7. Machiavelli, *Prince*, 62.
8. Alan Bloom, trans., *The Republic of Plato* (Basic Books, 1991), 514a–20a.
9. Machiavelli, *Prince*, XV; Harvey Mansfield, *Machiavelli's Virtue* (University of Chicago Press, 1996), 197.
10. James Hankins, *Plato in the Italian Renaissance*, Vol. I (E. J. Brill, 1990), 298.
11. Harvey C. Mansfield and Nathan Tarcov, "Introduction," in Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield and Nathan Tarcov (University of Chicago Press, 1998), xxxvii; see also Ada Palmer and James Hankins, *The Recovery of Ancient Philosophy in the Renaissance: A Brief Guide*, Quaderni di Rinascimento 44 (Leo S. Olschiki, 2008); James Hankins and Ada Palmer, *The Rebirth of Platonic Theology*, Villa I. Tatti 30 (Leo S. Olschiki, 2013); James Hankins, *Renaissance Civic Humanism: Reappraisals and Reflections* (Cambridge University Press, 2004); James Hankins, *Plato in the Italian Renaissance*, 2 vols. (E. J. Brill, 1990); James Hankins, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Philosophy* (Cambridge University Press, 2007); James Hankins, "The Myth of the Platonic Academy of Florence," *Renaissance Quarterly* 44, no. 3 (1991): 429–75.
12. Paul J. Rassmussen, *Excellence Unleashed* (Lexington Books, 2009); Eric Buzzetti, *Xenophon the Socratic Prince: The Argument of the Anabasis of Cyrus* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2014).
13. Jill Kraye, "The Revival of Hellenistic Philosophies," in *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Philosophy*, ed. James Hankins (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 103.

14. Ada Palmer, *Reading Lucretius in the Renaissance* (Harvard University Press, 2014), 85.

15. Other scholars see Lucretius' influence on Machiavelli to be much more profound. Alison Brown, in her book *The Return of Lucretius to Renaissance Florence*, traces the story of various Lucretian influences on and around Machiavelli. She paints a picture of him as a thinker whose ideas subtly bear the mark of Lucretius' philosophy. She argues, for example, that Machiavelli's famous skepticism about the mortality of the soul (a deeply anti-Platonic stance) is in part due to his Lucretian sympathies. To Brown, Machiavelli's images and imagination are tools of political analysis aimed at discerning truth, an idea not coincidentally similar to Lucretius' idea that people get to the nature of things when adversity rips away the protective layer of appearances men wrap around themselves. In Brown's view, Machiavelli's plays convey the Lucretian notion that "life itself is spectacle like a theater, to be viewed as a spectator with the same imagination or fantasia with which we view theatrical representations."

According to her argument, most things of import in Machiavelli's thought can be traced back, in whole or in part, to Lucretius. Chiron the centaur and the animals of *L'Asino* reflect Lucretian attachment to savage primitivism. In accordance with Lucretius' thought, Machiavelli thought animals are better suited to survival than humans. And "Machiavelli's utilitarian account of the origins of justice [. . .] can be traced back to Lucretius and Epicurus [. . .]." In the end, all of these Lucretian moments in Machiavelli's thought mean to Brown that he was trying to convey the idea "that religion was based on fear and should be used in the service of politics and not as [the master of animals and humans]." While this much is certainly true, Brown seems to ignore an important part of the picture. My discussion of Numa, the central figure of this debate about the importance of religious manipulation in the *Prince*, will attempt to draw attention to what Brown misses.

Three years earlier than Brown, Paul A. Rahe had laid the grounds for her argument. It takes an even more uncompromising stance on Machiavelli's relationship to ancient Greek thought and Epicureanism. Rahe starts off strong, claiming that Machiavelli cannot have been beholden to Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon, Plato, Isocrates, Aristotle, Polybius, Cicero, Sallust, Seneca, Tacitus, Suetonius, or Titus Livy, "thought the Florentine read and profited from them all, he rejected the premise of differential moral and political rationality on which their thinking was grounded, and he drew conclusions concerning the ends of government diametrically opposed to theirs."

For all the intensity and uncompromising confidence of his thesis, Rahe's work is at best mildly persuasive. That Machiavelli had Epicurean influences and Epicurean sympathies is established convincingly. There is almost no argumentative work done to support the part of his position that excludes influence from all the other thinkers listed above that were not Lucretius and Epicurus. Rahe regularly gestures throughout his article toward passages that he thinks reflect Epicurean principles entrenched by Machiavelli in his works, but he offers very little exegesis to support these assertions. He sometimes wrongly assumes that certain so-called Epicurean elements of Machiavelli's thought imply incompatibility with other Greek thinkers. For example,

he interprets Machiavelli's description of the masses of commoners, the *vulgus*, as "a common crowd of men beset by superstition and care," to be an exclusively Lucretian concept. There is every reason to doubt that this is a strictly Lucretian or Epicurean concept. One of the few things generally known about Plato, Aristotle and Xenophon outside academic circles is how skeptical they were about the average human's intellectual potential, and how likely lowly-educated, non-philosophical types were to fall prey to opinion, as opposed to knowledge. This is an idea Machiavelli also shared. Rahe constantly mentions how "hard to distinguish" Machiavelli's discussion of key concepts like necessity and fortune are from the universe of *De Rerum Natura*, but he never cares to engage in the textual analysis that would be needed to convince his readers of the veracity of such a statement.

Rahe's case that Machiavelli eventually breaks with Epicureanism in spite of his intellectual debt to it is equally unconvincing. He argues that Machiavelli ultimately took issue with Epicureanism on account of the following precept: the best life can only be led outside of the public sphere. Rahe argues that to Machiavelli, there is no distinction between the personal, moral and political spheres and that consequently there is no reason for his interpreters to think that the garden of Epicurus is any less of an imaginary republic or principality than, say, Plato's *Kallipolis* or the New Testament's Kingdom of Heaven. In the end, the only really palatable proposition forwarded in this article is that *l'Asino* may be one of Machiavelli's most thoroughly Epicurean work. (This is the idea Brown seems to build on later in her book.) See Alison Brown, *The Return of Lucretius to Renaissance Florence* (Harvard University Press, 2010), 82–87; Gennaro Sasso, *Niccolò Machiavelli: Storia del suo pensiero politico* (Il Mulino, 1980), 511–13; Paul A. Rahe, "In the Shadow of Lucretius: The Epicurean Foundations of Machiavelli's Political Thought," *History of Political Thought* 28, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 39–52.

16. Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 59.
17. Mansfield and Tarcov, "Introduction," xxxvii.
18. Mansfield and Tarcov, "Introduction," xx.
19. Mansfield, *Machiavelli's Virtue*, 3.
20. Mansfield, *Machiavelli's Virtue*, 39.
21. Mansfield, *Machiavelli's Virtue*, 72.
22. Mansfield, *Machiavelli's Virtue*, 83.
23. Harvey Mansfield, "Machiavelli on Necessity," in *Machiavelli on Liberty and Conflict*, ed. David Johnston, Nadia Urbinati, and Camila Vergara (Chicago University Press, 2017), 39–43.
24. Mansfield, "Machiavelli on Necessity," 40–41.
25. Erica Benner, *Machiavelli's Ethics* (Princeton University Press, 2009), 10.
26. Benner, *Machiavelli's Ethics*, 38.
27. Catherine H. Zuckert, *Machiavelli's Politics* (University of Chicago Press, 2017), 21.
28. Zuckert, *Machiavelli's Politics*, 21.
29. Joseph C. MacFarland, "Machiavelli's Imagination of Excellent Men: An Appraisal of the Lives of Cosimo de Medici and Castruccio Castracani," *American Political Science Review* 93, no. 1 (March 1999): 133–46; and Peter E. Bondanella,

"Castruccio Castracani: Machiavelli's Archetypal Prince," *Italica* 49, no. 3 (Autumn 1972): 302–14.

30. Catherine H. Zuckert, "The Life of Castruccio Castracani: Machiavelli as Literary Artist, Historian, Teacher and Philosopher," *History of Political Thought* 31, no. 4 (Winter 2010): 592–95.

31. Zuckert, *Machiavelli's Politics*, 34–35.

32. Miguel Vatter, "Of Asses and Nymphs: Machiavelli, Platonic Theology and Epicureanism in Florence," *Intellectual History Review* 29 (2019): 1.

33. Vatter, "Of Asses and Nymphs," 106.

34. Vatter, "Of Asses and Nymphs," 105.

35. Giovanni Giorgini, "Machiavelli on Good and Evil: The Problem of Dirty Hands Revisited," in *Machiavelli on Liberty and Conflict*, ed. David Johnston, Nadia Urbinati, and Camila Vergara (Chicago University Press, 2017), 66–67.

36. Peter Godman, *From Poliziano to Machiavelli* (Princeton University Press, 1998), 279–80.

37. Benedetto Croce called it the oriental idea of circular historical repetition that dominated the work of all the Renaissance historians, especially Machiavelli. *E torna l'idea antica, anzi orientale, del circolo delle cose humane, che domina in tutti gli storici del Rinascimento, e nel Machiavelli a capo di tutti [. . .]*. The paraphrased translation is mine. Benedetto Croce, *Teoria et storia della storiographia* (Adelphi Edizioni, 1989), 262; see also Eugenio Garin, *Machiavelli fra politica e storia* (Giulio Einaudi editore, 1993), 12–13.

38. With a few scattered exceptions in the political theory literature, and a very recent one: Catherine Zuckert, "Machiavelli's Belfagor: Good Government, Domestic Tyranny and Freedom," *History of Political Thought* 41, no. 2 (2020): 249–63; Theodore Sumberg, "Belfagor: Machiavelli's Short Story," *Interpretation* 19 (1992): 243–50; Peter E. Bondanella, *Machiavelli and the Art of Renaissance History* (Wayne State University Press, 1973).

39. Niccolò Machiavelli, *Florentine Histories*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield and Laura F. Banfield (Princeton University Press, 1988).

40. Allan Gilbert, trans., *Machiavelli: The Chief Works and Others*, 3 vols. (Duke University Press, 1965).

41. James B. Atkinson and David Sices, eds., *The Comedies of Machiavelli* (Hackett, 1985).

42. Niccolò Machiavelli, *Il Principe e Discorsi* (Feltrinelli Editore, 1960).

43. Allan Gilbert, trans., *Machiavelli: The Chief Works and Others*, Vol. 2 (Duke University Press, 1965), 750–72, 869–77.

44. Marsilio Ficino, *Platonic Theology*, 6 vols., trans. James Hankins (Harvard University Press, 2004); Marsilio Ficino, *Commentaries on Plato*, 3 vols., trans. Machiael J. B. Allen (Harvard University Press, 2008); Craig Kallendorf, trans., *Humanist Educational Treatises* (Harvard University Press, 2002).

45. Arthur Farndell, trans., *When Philosophers Rule: Ficino on Plato's Republic, Laws, and Epinomis* (Sheapheard–Walwyn, 2009).

46. Livy, *History of Rome*, 14 vols., trans. B. O. Foster (Harvard University Press, 1919); Plutarch, *Lives*, *Vol. I: Theseus and Romulus, Lycurgus and Numa, Solon*

and Publicola, trans. Bernadotte Perrin (Harvard University Press, 1914); Plutarch, *Lives*, *Vol. X: Agis and Cleomenes, Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus, Philopoemen and Flamininus*, trans. Bernadotte Perrin (Harvard University Press, 1921).

47. Thomas Pangle, trans., *The Laws of Plato*, 1st edition (University of Chicago Press, 1980).

48. Plato, *Lysis. Symposium. Gorgias*, trans. W. R. M. Lamb (Harvard University Press, 1925).

49. Xenophon, *On Horsemanship, The Duties of a Hipparch, and On Hunting*, trans. H. G. Dakyns (Digireads.com, 2010); Xenophon, *Hiero the Tyrant and Other Treatises*, trans. Robin Waterfield (Penguin, 1997); Xenophon, *The Education of Cyrus*, trans. Wayne Ambler (Cornell University Press, 2001); Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, trans. Amy L. Bonnette (Cornell University Press, 2001).

50. For decades now, there has been something of an intellectual tug-of-war at play between "textualists" (most of them being followers and/or former students of Leo Strauss) and "contextualists" (commonly associated with Quentin Skinner and his intellectual sympathizers), to borrow Dr. Michelle T. Clarke's vocabulary. The expressions of enmity between these factions have ranged over time from profound, well-articulated and thought-provoking arguments to thinly veiled slander, name-calling and almost everything in between. I am generally sympathetic to the argument Dr. Clarke made in her *Political Studies* paper, and "textualist" sympathies will not fail to shine through my own interpretive and argumentative methods as well as my choice of translations and secondary sources, if they have not already. Clarke's very persuasive argument is reminiscent of Leo Strauss' points against what he calls "historicism" in the early pages of his famous book *Natural Rights and History*, although her paper mostly considers arguments put forth in publications of Skinner's that only came out after Strauss died. Clarke self-labels as a textualist and calls her intellectual counterparts "contextualists." There is no doubt in my mind that the "contextualists" she identifies would argue they are in fact the real textualists. For the purpose of clarity here I have co-opted Clarke's language but do not wish to weigh in on the debate regarding who are the so-called "actual" textualists and vice-versa.

This book's chapters alternate between "contextualist" and "textualist" approaches. The first chapter relies heavily on the intellectual and literary climate of the authors studied in order to make its argument. Chapters 2, 3, and 4, where, in my opinion, the weight of my original arguments and contributions lie, are heavily indebted to textualist methods and research. See Michelle T. Clarke, "The Mythologies of Contextualism: Method and Judgment in Skinner's *Visions of Politics*," *Political Studies* 61, no. 4 (2013): 767–68; Leo Strauss, *Natural Rights and History* (University of Chicago Press, 1965), 9–34; Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (University of Chicago Press, 1998); Nathan Tarcov, "On a Certain Critique of Straussianism," *The Review of Politics* 53, no. 1 (1991): 3–18; Nathan Tarcov, "Philosophy & History: Tradition and Interpretation in the Work of Leo Strauss," *Polity* 16, no. 1 (1983): 5–29; Nathan Tarcov, "Quentin Skinner's Method and Machiavelli's Prince," *Ethics* 92, no. 4 (1982): 692–709.

Chapter 1

Machiavelli, Florentine Neoplatonism, and the Medici

There has been some change in recent years, but political theorists generally overlook figures like Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499), Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1464–1494), Aneas Silvius Piccolomini (1405–1464), Leonardo Bruni (1370–1444), Angelo Poliziano (1454–1949), Pier Paolo Vergerio (1498–1565), and Girolamo Savanarola (1452–1498),[1] although they tend to be studied by historians and scholars of Italian literature. There seem to be two principal reasons for this. First, these figures were not, nor did they consider themselves to be, philosophers of politics or politicians. Even if all these contemporaries and near contemporaries of Machiavelli (1469–1527) dabbled in philosophy in one way or another, they were primarily priests, historians, poets, and writers. Second, the sheer philosophical density and intellectual impact that Machiavelli's work has exercised on the history of political thought may have eclipsed most of the thinkers around him from the scholarly spotlight of political theory. As a result, their thought, but most importantly their intellectual relationship to Machiavelli, has been somewhat understudied.

A quick examination of their works and the historical scholarship around it reveals that Neoplatonists circulated several ideas around Renaissance Florence and that Machiavelli integrated some of them into his work.[2] It seems that Machiavelli revisited ideas mostly held by poets and thinkers who were surrounding Marsilio Ficino, his entourage of Neoplatonists, and their ever-so-close Medici patrons. Delving in pre-Machiavellian humanist thought shows how profoundly Platonism, itself politically tied to the Medici, was intertwined with Christianity, but also associated with many themes and axioms Machiavelli would later subvert, as he is known to have done in other instances,[3] in his philosophical and literary works: hunting, philosophical preparation for the political life, and love. This chapter is therefore more

expositional than the others because the demonstration of its central thesis happens in the following three chapters. The work of showing the relevant themes of this book, Christian Neoplatonist themes, were floating around Machiavelli begins here: but the tripartite demonstration of Machiavelli's subversion of those ideas happens at the end of every subsequent section of this work.

The content of this chapter is rather straightforward. In spite of all the historical scholarship done about and around Machiavelli's life and thought, little of it mentions the sources that actually began the work of paving Machiavelli's so-called new path, a path that I argue should be understood, partially, as a reaction to the ambient Platonism of the time. Machiavelli certainly did something new, and I count myself among those who see in him the herald of a modernity that is profoundly at odds with important tenets of ancient Greek, Roman, and medieval philosophy.[4] But many of Machiavelli's intellectual convictions and his expository style seem not to have been entirely original. As I hope to show, the similarities between Machiavelli's arguments and theirs are simply too great to be strictly coincidental, especially once their chronological, physical, and social proximity are taken into consideration.

In this mostly historical section of the book, I trace the early incarnations of pre-Machiavellian humanist views of what was later to become Machiavellian themes through a quick survey of the works of Bruni, Vergerio, Piccolomini, Ficino, as well as some of the context surrounding the evolution of Neoplatonism in Florence. In doing so, I hope to lay the groundwork for the discussion of Machiavelli's position within these debates, and the distinction between Machiavelli's antagonism to the largely Christian Platonism of the Renaissance and his relationship to more practical aspects of Platonic philosophy.

PHILOSOPHY AND POLITICAL EDUCATION

The Italian humanists before Machiavelli, who, despite sometimes being in competition with Ficino and his friends for Medici attention, also intertwined Platonism with the Christian faith. They generally subscribed to the Platonic notion that good princes would also be good philosophers,[5] and emphasized the importance of a liberal arts education to princely upbringing. Without an appreciation for the humanities, princes could never become the enlightened rulers that humanists hoped they would be. Despite, at times, efforts to distance themselves from Ficino's school of Neoplatonists, these humanists were still deeply committed to a Platonic view of the state and of human excellence, and therefore philosophy also plays a central role in political education for them.

For example, Pier Paolo Vergerio articulated his view of pedagogy around a metaphor about mirrors, so as to underline the importance of self-awareness as well as that of imitation. He credits Socrates, of all people, as the original source of this knowledge.[6] The idea behind this image is that princes and free-born youths would look at themselves and aim either to preserve their pleasant appearance by not ruining it with a bad character or to improve their unpleasant features by striving for greatness. In other words, Vergerio thinks that according to Socrates' advice, to look at one's own reflections would foster virtue insofar as it would inspire good-looking people to avoid ruining their beauty by being dislikeable, and bad-looking people to improve on their ugliness by being of good character. Seeing one's own reflection becomes an image for the philosophical development of self-awareness. The knowledge of one's self, the examination of one's life without which said life is not worth living, is conveyed metaphorically via the image of physically reflexive self-contemplation. The action of looking at oneself in the mirror is also meant to convey a broader message about the importance of self-awareness that Vergerio would go on to argue that only the liberal arts can provide.[7]

To complement the use of their literal mirrors, well-educated youths should choose "living mirrors," excellent men of "high character," to emulate. There the mirror metaphor is meant to convey a need for mirroring actions. As an example, Vergerio mentions Publius Scipio's assertion that he was inspired by images of famous men (without mentioning his example, Xenophon's Cyrus) and Julius Ceasar's admiration for Alexander the Great (two figures we will return to later).

In a gesture that we have every reason to believe sincere, Vergerio is quick to remind us that none of his educational precepts are worth anything in the absence of religious education.[8] In doing so, however, Vergerio reveals another goal of education, until then just implied: respectfulness. While we have grounds to believe that Vergerio took for granted the objective truth of the Christian faith, his justification for religious education is not strictly moral. Youths should practice religion because no one will respect those who are contemptuous of the divine. It is important for leaders to be respected, and in a world where the existence of God is an accepted fact, denying it is stupidity, and stupidity breeds disrespect.

Education also necessarily includes military education, and consequently being fit is important. Taking a page from the ancients, Vergerio draws inspiration from the Spartans and Cretans, who not only raised their children outdoors, but made them hunt. However, the benefits of hunting are limited almost strictly to the physical: it teaches youths to run faster, jump higher, and endure thirst, hunger, cold and heat, which would later, he thought, result in better self-control.[9] In addition, it makes hunters bold, therefore more likely to act bravely in war, which is good not because it is

more conducive to victory, but because Vergerio does not think life is an intrinsic good. Readers are told to avoid aiming to live too long a life, on account of the effort it demands, the substantial resources it necessitates, and the virtue from which it distracts.[10] Unlike Machiavelli's, these specific prescriptions lacks a pragmatic emphasis: prolongation of life is neither a goal nor a good. One gets a sense that it is in bad taste, since Heaven awaits the virtuous.

Humanists also emphasized the importance of literary education. For figures like Leonardo Bruni, it was the true repository of wisdom. He argued that poems contain useful maxims for all occupations. According to him, the lessons of Homer and Vergil are to be directly lifted from the text. Hector tells Aeneas to be prudent and not reckless in the exercise of his generalship; Iris scolds Agamemnon for sleeping while so many depend on him and his leadership. Bruni urges his reader to read for precepts and take them at face value. The point seems to be that the reader should record them as commonplaces, and as such they can be used to direct behavior. Bruni justifies the utility and necessity of literary knowledge on the grounds that its universal appeal must signify universal worth.[11]

Thanks to the scholarship of James Hankins, we also know that Bruni himself intended his *History*, for which he is most well-known, to be "a work of moral education."[12] According to Hankins, Bruni's historical work shows a departure from ancient Greek notions of virtue, and offers a political theory more concerned with pragmatic solutions to the then-contemporary problems of Florence. Bruni, of whom Machiavelli was overtly critical[13] despite some surface agreement about the power of historical knowledge,[14] expected his readers to acquire some prudence thanks to the study of history, but also to "develop a theory of political success and failure."[15] While it is inferior to literature, history is useful to inform our practical judgments, in that if we know the outcome of events that remind us of a situation we find ourselves in (or have to counsel someone about), then knowledge of history can nudge us toward a decision or another.[16]

Philosophical education was also of paramount importance. Humanist and *future pope* Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini, in a letter addressed to Ladislas of Hungary titled "The Education of Boys," established the importance of the liberal arts traditionally associated with medieval education. Princes and future rulers should balance—not in equal proportion—their scholarly pursuits with exercise, because they will inevitably end up in one war or another, and fighting requires some amount of physical fitness.[17] He uses philosophy both in the sense of a specific discipline in which princes should be educated as well as the umbrella term designating the cumulative study of the seven liberal arts. In that sense someone who is studying grammar, logic, rhetoric, geometry, arithmetic, music, and astronomy is acquiring wisdom and being

philosophical. But philosophy, the discipline which has ethics for its subject of study, must be learned and practiced in parallel with these seven subjects.

Piccolomini's arguments for the study of each of the seven liberal arts are almost strictly instrumental: one should study rhetoric and logic (in more than one language) because graceful speech charms the peoples ruled and multilingualism ensures the prince is not dependent on any translator and can understand his subjects more directly;[18] grammar because it is a gateway to rhetoric and logic;[19] music relaxes the mind and makes rulers better resistant to hardship;[20] geometry "sharpens the intellect;"[21] astronomy is good because scientific knowledge guards one against the dangers of superstition. Piccolomini retells the story of Pericles, who avoided a general uncontrolled retreat by his soldiers frightened of an eclipse by explaining to them the phenomenon[22] and thereby preventing panic.[23]

Piccolomini, who had been careful to add history and literature to the seven traditional liberal arts, thought the real substance of education was philosophy, specifically the study of ethics and morality. History is useful to a young prince because it allows him to "[follow] the example of others" and distinguish useful from harmful actions. One must be careful, however, not to offer histories written in bad style and written by ignorant people for fear of corrupting young minds. Only experienced minds can learn from bad books; the young should only be exposed to good books.[24] Literature doubles as practice in ethics and written/oral expression, because the ancient writers and poets often stumbled on truths amidst otherwise (mostly) harmlessly false works ("roses amongst thorns" in Piccolomini's language) and because reading them provides countless examples of what great writing looks like.[25]

These disciplines are all subordinate to the real love of wisdom, which is Christian doctrine. Piccolomini thinks that the liberal arts naturally lead to the realization of the truth of Christian doctrine and also that the knowledge it brings with it can be brought in support of Christianity. It is not simply that we know the cardinal sins to be bad and moderation, charity, and modesty to be good: thanks to Socrates and Plato, we also have logical, rational demonstrative arguments that validate this. The seven liberal arts are philosophical in the sense that they constitute a part of wisdom and that the student of philosophy loves all wisdom. But "moral philosophy" has to be taught in parallel with the liberal arts, apparently because the natural conclusion of the liberal arts education (good Christian behavior) appears self-evident from the beginning. But since the teacher already knows how it all comes together, he can afford (since it is all true anyway) to teach them side by side.[26]

Education, which is philosophy, is ultimately about the care of the soul. He thought humans learned divine worship as well from Plato as they did from scripture.[27] Done well, the ultimate worth of that education (apart from salvation, of course) is "a refuge against the attacks of a stepmotherly

fortune."[28] And so for all his apparent pragmatism, Piccolomini's pedagogical goals are mostly otherworldly, like his humanists peers. None of them, however, attempted to equate Platonism with Christianity more assiduously than Marsilio Ficino.

FICINO'S COMMENTARY ON THE *REPUBLIC*

The "Ficinian" Neoplatonist agenda, that is, the principal Platonist project of the time, regarding ancient philosophy mostly consisted of inscribing Plato within the tradition of Christian thought. The Neoplatonists completed this task with varying degrees of persuasiveness; there are signs that Ficino, in his commentary on the *Republic*, smoothed over the less "Christian friendly" parts. At the very least he seems vested in assuring the continued circulation of Plato's work (meaning avoiding its condemnation by the Vatican) in Italy and Europe. As such, it is easy to reach the conclusion that Machiavelli is hostile to Platonic thought if we forget that he may be talking about the very particular picture of Plato that the Neoplatonists presented to the world. In short, Machiavelli is generally critical of Christianity, and the Neoplatonists tried very hard to dress Plato in Christian garb. From this perspective, of course, Machiavelli appears deeply unsympathetic to Plato's thought.

This is because the aspects summoned in justification of Machiavelli's hostility to Platonic philosophy are always the same ones Neoplatonists focused on when they developed "Platonic Theology," to put it in the words of James Hankins. Let us consider in more depth the example of Ficino and the influence he may have had on what is understood as Machiavelli's aversion to "Platonism" for the sake of this survey.

Ficino offers a series of conclusions about Plato rather than an argument, and a close reading of his work reveals many telling things about how he conceived of Platonic philosophy in general. Throughout his commentary, Ficino gives us enough material to be able to answer the following question substantially: what did Ficino think of the import and meaning of the *Republic*? It seems that he understood it as a work meant to be a practical book of political philosophy, but one where human understanding strives to grasp divinity. Ficino is almost entirely dismissive of the importance of education in the *Republic*, and thinks the *Republic* is a book about God: *logos*, understanding and rationality, bringing Plato closer to divinity.

His Platonism was strictly otherworldly. The Florentine Neoplatonists never treated Plato as serious philosopher of politics, nor did they care about the topic. According to Arthur Field, "[a]fter Cosimo de Medici had supported or caused every material, political, diplomatic, and artistic success imaginable, and while the orators were pronouncing him father of his country

and the greatest private citizen of the world, Marsilio Ficino convinced him that the 'things of the world' were really of little importance."[29] It is not at all difficult to imagine the Machiavelli who conceived of himself as the philosopher of the "effectual truth" of the world[30] to be fundamentally hostile to such a philosophical approach.

Ficino devoted his life to Platonic studies with an agenda: reconciling his fascination for the Platonic corpus with his religious conviction. This shines through Ficino's commentary on the *Republic*.[31] Under the guise of producing a summary of the work, Ficino wrote what he himself admits at the very end of the book to be an interpretive essay. Unsurprisingly, his understanding of the *Republic* reveals itself to be strongly determined by his faith. And while it is generally received as a book about political education, justice, or both, Ficino seems to think that it is a book about God. He understands Plato as someone whose philosophy confirms Christian insights. Part of this, however, is dependent on Ficino's omission of certain passages. It is unclear whether these omissions are deliberate[32] or simply circumstantial, since a line-by-line commentary on the *Republic* would be impossibly long and generally ill-suited to any coherent argument. Ficino's commentary, however, is different from modern scholarship in the sense that it is not driven by a central thesis; Ficino waltzes through the book, picks up on passages he finds interesting or useful, then briefly qualifies and explains them.

We get a general sense of Ficino's view of Plato in a short preamble to his discussion of the first book of the *Republic*. In his view, Plato is not a thinker or theoretical philosopher:

> [. . .] our Plato surpasses all other founders of States and lawgivers in this respect at least, that while all others, as human beings, have organized the state mainly for action, Plato, as if divine, guides the entire activity—both public and private—of the State mainly towards contemplation [. . .].[33]

Plato is, first and foremost, a founder of states and a lawgiver. There is no profound difference between Plato, Solon, Lycurgus, and other founders, except that Plato's ideas were better. To Ficino, Plato's project is just as real (and serious) as what we would now call "practical" politicians. Contra much later thinkers Ficino does not think that there is anything imagined about Plato's ideal regime: the city in speech is understood to be a serious and realistic political project. Certainly, it is an idea: *Kallipolis* (Plato's ideal city in the *Republic*) is understood—perhaps wrongly, since forms are supposed to be concepts and not merely images—by Ficino to be a form. Thus, it has a stronger connection to reality than what we merely perceive. Comprehension, after all, is superior to sense perception, and this allows Ficino to put Plato alongside actual lawmakers and founders rather than merely with theoreticians of

the state. Ficino sees *Kallipolis* as the earthly representation of the heavenly Jerusalem.[34]

This is problematic. Ficino thinks that the centrality of the contemplative life to *Kallipolis* means that citizens who contemplate the truth of God and act accordingly, that is, justly, will eventually constitute it by themselves. It is easy to see how Ficino can perceive his argument to be logical: *Kallipolis* is about justice (it *is* the just place); justice requires contemplation and comes from God; therefore, *Kallipolis* is where people contemplate divinity. However, serious students of Plato will know that this conclusion does not entirely do justice to what seems to be happening in the text. Plato is very clear about who can attain that state and how they can do it. After all, the myth of the metals[35] establishes that there is a clear distinction between three different kinds of people. There is a hierarchy of natures within human society that implies a difference in moral potential and intellectual capacity, and therefore political ability. (As we will see in the following chapters, this is an idea shared to a degree by Machiavelli.)

At the end of his discussion of the third book of the *Republic*, Ficino eventually mentions the myth of the metals,[36] but omits both its context and its nature. To him, it is simply a way to assert that people in general should practice that for which they are naturally talented.[37] But to do this is to forgo the importance that the myth has for *Kallipolis* and what it implies about human nature. Only the best and highest of the three kinds of people have in themselves the necessary material to have the potential to reach that state of contemplation. As the allegory of the cave suggests,[38] the path to the outside of the cave (where one can contemplate the truth) is long and arduous; it is unclear if most, let alone everyone, can ever make it out. Although *Kallipolis* is definitely a place determined by the possibility of contemplative knowledge (part of the reason why it is such a just place is that we suppose that lawmakers will be philosophers), it is an overstatement to say that its goal is to allow everyone to adopt the contemplative way of life. It may be better, but it is definitely not accessible to all. In fact, *Kallipolis* is predicated on the idea that its inherent justice entails the fact that not everyone can live the contemplative life and consequently deals with that in an appropriate (just) manner.

Ficino completely glosses over the role of myths and myth making, that is, lies, in the *Republic*. Socrates and Adeimantus imagine *Kallipolis* after a common realization about the dual nature of falsehood. There are actual falsehoods, that is, those which are complete and utter lies, and another kind, "falsehoods in words."[39] Socrates distinguishes between the two kinds of falsehood. He says that the former is in the soul, that is, that its inner core, its entirety, is untrue, while the latter one is false in its manifestation but intrinsically true. This falsehood points to the truth about ancient, godly things.[40] To Socrates and Adeimantus, the fact that most (or all) of us do not have

access to such a truth is problematic. Fortunately, the falsehood in speech, which is superficially false but substantially true, can help us. Because of its substantial truthfulness, it can point toward the truth and help us approximate it. *Kallipolis* is one such falsehood.

Yet the myth has several implications that directly bear on Ficino's attempt to postulate that Platonic philosophy and Christianity are seldom or never at odds. The difference between the golden souls and the other types is that only the best kind of men can really know the Good, and therefore rule. In other words, divine knowledge is not accessible to everyone, not because of a lack of personal effort on behalf of various individuals, but rather because some people (the majority, we should underline) simply are not born with the potential to access it. More importantly, the fact that the best regime has to be predicated on a myth that its founders (Socrates and Adeimantus) know for a fact to be (superficially) untrue suggest that politics cannot really be based on truth. If everybody could access truth and recognize it as such, then there would be no fundamental disagreements on how the state should be ordered. Consequently, truth and justice perhaps cannot be explained or comprehended, and it is better (and easier, and more effective) to make up a story about how things are simply the way they are because of some supernatural force whose will is arbitrary and unconscionable. A careful reader of Plato may ask if politics and lawmaking predicated on the existence of God and our interpretation of divinity will not be one such foundational myth.

This becomes even more puzzling in Ficino's discussion of the theme of the fourth book. So far Ficino had more or less discounted the importance of education in the *Republic*. Once again he overestimates the human potential for virtue. Ficino understands Plato's view of lawmaking in the *Republic* as being useless because "level-headed good men will be the living laws."[41] Yet Plato suggests many times that without some form of lawmaking, no political society can exist. Famously, in his retelling of the myth of Gyges (which Ficino completely overlooks), Plato presents us with an unsettling aspect of human behavior. Gyges finds a ring that renders him invisible, kills the king and marries the newly widowed queen of his realm, and thereby promptly seizes power.

Plato's alteration of the original story suggests that under the cover of absolute anonymity and without the fear of consequences that comes with visibility, human beings have disturbingly unjust, tyrannical, and selfish tendencies. Furthermore, that level-headed good men are laws in themselves is not exactly what Socrates says in the corresponding passage of the *Republic*, at 427b. Rather, he says that corrective lawmaking is useless because the internal harmony of the state depends on the citizens having internalized the norms implied by the way of life established through the noble lie:

> [. . .] the true lawgiver oughn't to bother with [corrective lawmaking], either in a badly governed city or in a well-governed one—in the former, because it's useless and accomplishes nothing; in the latter, because anyone could discover some of these things, while others follow automatically from the ways of life we established.[42]

More importantly, Ficino completely eludes the myth's implication as it relates to the importance of the senses' role in the political sphere as well as the importance of coercion to back the laws. The myth of Gyges strongly implies that visibility is of the utmost importance in politics. Without the possibility of being seen, and therefore of being caught, Gyges immediately dismisses his previous commitment to the social order under which he lived. His invisibility precludes the possibility of capture and conviction, and as a result it completely dissolves his respect for the rule of law.

The lessons of the myth of Gyges are profoundly Machiavellian. The importance of sensory data for Machiavelli insofar as it concerned our knowledge of politics scarcely needs to be argued for anymore. As we know from *Prince* XVIII, visual data plays a crucial role in politics. The prince must endeavor to appear to share the qualities his subjects value so as to avoid infamy. Men, writes Machiavelli, judge by their eyes rather than by their hands.[43] This point actually encompasses many lessons. First, to be seen, which is inevitable, is to be politically vulnerable. But the prince can turn that vulnerability into advantage if he is a master of deception. Images can be manipulated, and therefore the potential vulnerability that comes with exposure can become an asset. True knowledge is associated with touch. If he were not seen, the ruler could behave in any fashion without risk: Gyges' example confirms Plato's agreement with this supposedly original axiom of Machiavellian philosophy.

It is also worth mentioning that Machiavelli establishes a distinction between sight and touch. While seeing only delivers superficial data, the image of touch is used by Machiavelli to communicate substantial understanding. This may have been a jab directed at Ficino himself: in the beginning of his commentary on the *Republic*, Ficino had written that it is clear that "the eye surpasses the hand."[44] Everyone can access the superficial layers of a thing, but very few can get to its substance. It is difficult here not to see an obvious parallel between the superficial and substantial layers of truth that Socrates and Adeimantus discuss at the onset of the *Republic*. For both Plato and Machiavelli, there is a clear difference in intellectual potential among different people, and that difference implies a need for deception, but also a need to educate about the nature (and necessity) of that deception. Gyges' example also shows how Machiavelli and Plato understood the symbiotic relationship between coercion and the rule of law. In the absence of the possibility of

chastisement, Gyges gives full rein to his worst impulses. The potency of the rule of law, to both Machiavelli and Plato, is dependent on the states' ability to enforce it.[45]

What matters here is how obvious Ficino's motivated reasoning about the *Republic* is. Ficino, and the other humanists around him, not only rediscovered Plato, they also spent considerable effort to demonstrate how essentially Christian-before-his-time he was. The Platonism floating around Machiavelli in the fifteenth century would have stunk with an unmistakable odor of Neoplatonist Christianity. Certainly, Machiavelli would have been able to recognize that the two could be disentangled, but it remains that Platonism in Italy would have been irrevocably the stuff of Christians. And worse, it would have also been that of the Medici.

PLATONISM, CHRISTIANITY, AND THE MEDICIS

Florentine Neoplatonism was not just irretrievably bundled with Christianity: it was also practically fused to the Medici family, whose sponsorship was essential to its flourishing. It is a matter of historical record that Cosimo de Medici and Marsilio Ficino were notoriously close. Ficino, whom Machiavelli describes as "the second father of Platonic philosophy" was invited to stay with the Medici and eventually was gifted adjoining property by Cosimo to help him further his studies and "use him more conveniently."[46] Leonardo Bruni served, under the Medici, in almost every Florentine public council of importance, and: "Given how tightly the Medici controlled seats on these councils, [. . .], it seems clear that Bruni enjoyed special favor with the Medici."[47] His grandson, Lorenzo (to whom the *Prince* is dedicated), became a student of Ficino and patronized, among other, Angelo Poliziano and Giovanni (Pico) della Mirandola.[48] Michelle Clarke, who has recently done a spectacularly convincing job of unraveling how the relationship of the Medici and Florentine humanists was received by Machiavelli,[49] is worth quoting at length here:

> Rather, Machiavelli uses [the account of Florence's development as a hub of artistic and literary creativity] to suggest that humanists were actively recruited by the Medici to carry out an ideological agenda; one that Florentines should have recognized and opposed like Cato had prudently done. In addition to using *Histories* 5.I to highlight the idea that philosophy can have real political implications and to underscore the possibility that it can be detrimental to republican politics, Machiavelli mobilizes the wider narrative context of his discussion of Medici patronage in such a way as to suggest that humanist scholarship was nurtured and exploited for ideological ends. [. . .] Similarly, the *Histories* portray Lorenzo's carefully assembled stable of writers, poets, translators, and

> philosophers as ideologically akin to the physical fortifications that Lorenzo constructed just outside the city so that [he could keep enemies at bay and live quietly and safely].[50]

Clarke expertly sketches how the connection between these preeminent humanists and Medici was relevant to Machiavelli but overlooks the fact that they were also all devout Platonists. Building on Clarke's scholarship, the following chapters will argue that a juxtaposition of themes between Neoplatonist and Machiavellian writings shows that the common Platonism that united the Medici philosophers-on-retainer mattered indeed. While Clarke argues that Machiavelli criticizes Cosimo covertly by praising Cato's expulsion of philosophers from Rome, I aim to show in chapter 4 that this ire is only directed toward contemplative philosophers, like Ficino et al., and not students of practical philosophy who exercise their minds with a view to better rule.

The themes Machiavelli picks up and criticizes in his work would have not only been circulating in Italian intellectual circles, but they would also have been understood to be fundamentally tied to Neoplatonism, Neoplatonism to Christianity, and both to the Medici family. From there it is not a stretch to posit that Machiavelli's notoriously fraught relationship with both Medicis and Christianity would have probably spilled over to his relationship to Platonism, and therefore to his engagement with Christianity, Platonism, and the pedagogical and political philosophy of the Medici sympathizers - who were also the Neoplatonists and humanists of the time - which were all profoundly intertwined.

The argument developed here implies that Machiavelli's own take on the above-mentioned humanist themes culminates in him hitting, so to speak, three birds with one stone: the Medici, the Florentine Neoplatonists-humanists, and Plato. While the argument is not dependent on a reading of Machiavelli that is entirely hostile to Christianity, it does imply some antagonism, which it turns invites the oft very hotly debated topic of Machiavelli's own religious conviction, or lack thereof, which, in order to anticipate some criticism, will now be briefly discussed here.

It is fair to characterize of Machiavelli's view of Christianity as complex, and the literature supports this claim. Claude Lefort, in his critical examination of Leo Strauss' reading of Machiavelli on religion, quipped that Strauss spend too much time looking for covert signs of the obvious, meaning Machiavelli's impiety.[51] However, it is unclear whether Renaissance-era people even had the mental equipment to be atheists in the same manner as we understand atheistic attitudes today. Denis J.-J. Robichaud attempted to answer this question in the "Renaissance and Reformation" chapter of *The Oxford Handbook of Atheism*. Robichaud convincingly argues that it is impossible for us to know this with certainty given the fact that Renaissance

atheism is never clearly and comprehensively distinguished from religious heterodoxy, general impiety and the actual conviction that God or gods truly do not exist.[52] As such, it is impossible for us to affirm Machiavelli's disbelief in God with certainty. We may however, as I will argue in the remainder of this book, propose credibly that Machiavelli was not very pious from the standpoint of both contemporary and Renaissance understandings of Christian doctrine.

This reading is far from accepted throughout the discipline. Maurizio Viroli argued in his book *Machiavelli's God* that Machiavelli was a sincere Christian. His argument hinges not on a reinterpretation of Machiavelli's thought *per se* but rather on a particular picture of what he thought Machiavelli understood to be true Christianity. In Viroli's view, Machiavelli's Christianity is a religion centered on the love of freedom and compatible with the ancient virtues he so clearly admired. Viroli nonetheless admits that Machiavelli was in a very clear sense impious, that he "scoffed at the idea of Hell" and was "not interested in indulgences, predestination, divine grace, free will, or the presence of Christ in the Eucharist."[53] Machiavelli's Christianity may have been sincere, but it was also "particular," as Viroli himself concedes. This argument aligns with the conclusion reached by Robichaud. The charges of impiety and atheism often leveled at Machiavelli may well be directed at his heterodoxy and not indicative of genuine disbelief, and therefore to characterize Machiavelli as an atheist may be jumping to conclusions on the basis of inconclusive evidence.

Machiavelli's heterodoxy, in Viroli's analysis, does pit him against certain Renaissance conceptions of Christianity. The difference between Viroli's argument and that of scholars who traditionally read Machiavelli to be hostile to Christianity is that he reads Machiavelli as the intellectual adversary of only a certain conception of the Christian faith. This type of Christianity is incompatible with Machiavelli's because it is anathema to political liberty and a flourishing Florentine Republic. Machiavelli's famous jabs at Christianity therefore should not be interpreted as a condemnation of the faith as a whole. They are a condemnation of an "interpretation" of Christianity, and Viroli argues that if we are able to distinguish the "version" of Christianity Machiavelli thought compatible with his political thought from that which he thought was weak, Machiavelli reveals himself to be quite the passionate Christian. As such Viroli's argument fleshes out what he thought this Machiavellian Christianity was like and does not advance that Machiavelli's antipathy to some interpretation of the faith is inexistent. Therefore, Viroli's argument is not incompatible with mine. If Viroli is indeed right, then it is simply an interpretation of Christianity that Machiavelli condemns by way of Numa and the *pularii*[54] and not Christianity itself. This stands in sharp contrast with Tarcov's argument, according to which Machiavelli used the

very same *pularii* as a rhetorical device to illustrate the sharp distinction between the Roman subordination of religion to the state and Christianity's subordination of faithful princes to ecclesiastical authority.[55] I concede that both are plausible, and that in light of Robichaud's argument a positive proof that Machiavelli's "mental equipment" allowed for atheism in the sense we understand it today may be forever out of our reach.

More credibly, Sebastian de Grazia[56] (whom, if the introduction of *Machiavelli's God* is to be believed, somewhat inspired Viroli to write his interpretation of Machiavellian religious conviction) argued in chapter five of his seminal book *Machiavelli in Hell* that Machiavelli was more of a "reform clerical" than an "anti-clerical" thinker. *Pace* De Grazia, Machiavelli certainly believed Christianity to be the true faith, although his at times critical, at times approving stance toward the Roman Church and its popes suggest he would have preferred the Church to act more often in the best interests of Italy. This is something that does not discredit the possibility of sincere faith; De Grazia's account is highly plausible, not the least of which because it allows room for Machiavelli's variable level of piousness, but also relies less on an account of Machiavelli's personal psychology, unlike Viroli's.[57] The final chapter and conclusion of this book aim to add to this debate. As they will illustrate, it seems that Machiavelli's criticism of Platonic tenets, as it shines through his literary works and references to Plutarch, Livy and Xenophon, further highlights his cynicism regarding the Christian faith, and even suggest he may have thought of it as a politically expedient myth that had outlived its usefulness. As such, it offers further evidence that Machiavelli was unsympathetic to the dominant religion of his time and place. Proof of this can also be found in his writings on love.

NOTES

1. For a recent exception see Alison McQueen, *Political Realism in Apocalyptic Times* (Cambridge University Press, 2017).

2. The authors listed here are by no means intended to be an exhaustive list of contemporary or near-contemporary authors Machiavelli drew inspiration from. As Cary Nederman rightly noted in a recent article, Machiavelli's habit of reinterpreting texts and concepts received differently by his contemporaries extends to a variety of sources and topics. It seems, for example, that the idea of theorizing from history was in part co-opted from Polybius' *Histories* VI. But Machiavelli also apparently reinterpreted Polybius VI as a republican text instead of one expressing monarchist sympathies. Furthermore, it seems Machiavelli's account of the origins of societies, one that was clearly derived from Cicero, may have also had some "Polybian" roots. See Cary Nederman, "Polybius as Monarchist? Receptions of *Histories* VI before

Machiavelli, *c.*1410–*c.*1515," *History of Political Thought* 37, no. 3 (Autumn 2016): 462, 465, 478; Garin, *Machiavelli fra politica e storia*, 1–28.

3. For an example of Machiavelli criticizing his humanist contemporaries, see Michelle T. Clarke, "Machiavelli and the Imagined Rome of Renaissance Humanism," *History of Political Thought* 36, no. 3 (2015): 452–70.

4. See Leo Strauss, "Machiavelli," in *History of Political Philosophy*, 3rd edition, ed. Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey (University of Chicago Press, 1987).

5. Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought, Vol. 1: The Renaissance* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), 242–43.

6. Pier Paolo Vergerio, "The Character and Studies Befitting a Free-Born Youth," in *Humanist Educational Treatises*, trans. Craig Kallendorf (Harvard University Press, 2002), 13.

7. Interestingly, Vergerio also approaches pedagogical theory by way of the senses: the guiding image used to illustrate knowledge is that of seeing. Youths first develop an attitude vis-à-vis knowledge and virtue as a function of their looks. How they appear has an impact on the perspective from which the motivation to acquire knowledge will stem. We will return in chapter 4 on how Machiavelli famously picked up on the image of knowledge acquisition as a function of sight. In the famous dedicatory letter of the *Prince*, Lorenzo is told that the knowledge of politics is acquired through sight. Lorenzo can see the people, and therefore can know about them, but Machiavelli sees him as a prince and can therefore tell him about himself insofar as his political role is concerned. Sight, however, is insufficient for Machiavelli, as it can be deceptive. Another sense, touch, needs to be added to our collective of knowledge-acquisitive tools, because seeing only catches what is projected, while touch holds the power, in Machiavelli's imagery, to get to the essence of the object investigated.

8. Vergerio, "The Character and Studies Befitting a Free-Born Youth," 25.

9. Vergerio, "The Character and Studies Befitting a Free-Born Youth," 69.

10. Vergerio, "The Character and Studies Befitting a Free-Born Youth," 71.

11. Leonardo Bruni, "The Study of Literature," in *Humanist Educational Treatises*, trans. Craig Kallendorf (Harvard University Press, 2002), 113–17.

12. James Hankins, "Teaching Civil Prudence in Leonardo Bruni's *History of the Florentine People*," in *Ethik—Wissenschaft oder Lebenskunst?*, ed. Sabrina Ebbersmeyer and Eckhard Keßler (Lit, 2007), 144.

13. Clarke, *Machiavelli's Florentine Republic*, 50–51.

14. Hankins concludes that "[. . .] Bruni's mode of analysis, his subordination of virtue to the glory of the state, shows that his closest kinship as a political thinker is not with Polybius, Thomas Aquinas, or even Ptolemy of Lucca, but with Machiavelli." Hankins, "Teaching Civil Prudence in Leonardo Bruni's *History of the Florentine People*," 155.

15. Hankins, "Teaching Civil Prudence in Leonardo Bruni's *History of the Florentine People*," 146.

16. Bruni, "The Study of Literature," 109.

17. Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini, "The Education of Boys," in *Humanist Educational Treatises*, trans. Craig Kallendorf (Harvard University Press, 2002), 139.

18. Piccolomini, "The Education of Boys," 171.

19. Piccolomini, "The Education of Boys," 179.
20. Piccolomini, "The Education of Boys," 248–49.
21. Piccolomini, "The Education of Boys," 251.
22. As we will see in chapter 3, Machiavelli would have thought Piccolomini's argument essentially had it backwards: popular ignorance and superstition is more likely to be harnessed productively by good and bad princes alike.
23. Piccolomini, "The Education of Boys," 253.
24. Piccolomini, "The Education of Boys," 225.
25. Piccolomini, "The Education of Boys," 219.
26. Piccolomini, "The Education of Boys," 257.
27. Piccolomini, "The Education of Boys," 161.
28. Piccolomini, "The Education of Boys," 159. This anticipates Machiavelli's own view about how education can help us in the occasional fight against fortune, which will be discussed in chapter 4.
29. Arthur Field, *The Origins of the Platonic Academy of Florence* (Princeton University Press, 1988), 177.
30. Machiavelli, *Prince*, 61.
31. This book maintains the locus of Machiavelli's criticism of Plato is related to content primarily found in the *Republic* and the *Symposium*. Thankfully, Denis J.-J. Robichaud has already delved expertly into Ficino's own take on eros and love in Plato's thought, *De Amore*, and we will return to his scholarship later.
32. For more on the questionable sincerity of the Florentine Platonists' Platonism, see Hankins, *Plato in the Italian Renaissance*, Vol. I, 30–101.
33. Farndell, *When Philosophers Rule*, 3.
34. Farndell, *When Philosopers Rule*, 3.
35. Plato, *Republic*, 414d–15a.
36. Farndell, *When Philosophers Rule*, 16.
37. Farndell, *When Philosophers Rule*, 16.
38. Plato, *Republic*, 514a.
39. Plato, *Republic*, 382a–c.
40. Plato, *Republic*, 382d.
41. Farndell, *When Philosophers Rule*, 16.
42. Plato, *Republic*, 427b.
43. Machiavelli, *Prince*, 71.
44. Farndell, *When Philosophers Rule*, 3.
45. Zuckert, *Machiavelli's Politics*, 247.
46. Machiavelli, *Florentine Histories*, VII.6
47. Michelle Clarke, *Machiavelli's Florentine Republic* (Cambridge University Press, 2018), 52n71.
48. Machiavelli, *Florentine Histories*, VIII.35; Clarke, *Machiavelli's Florentine Republic*, 53.
49. See also Mark Jurdjevic, *A Great and Wretched City: Promise and Failure in Machiavelli's Florentine Political Thought* (Harvard University Press, 2014), 149–78.
50. Clarke, *Machiavelli's Florentine Republic*, 53–54.

51. Claude Lefort, *Le Travail de l'œuvre de Machiavel* (Gallimard, 1972), 259–305.

52. Denis J.-J. Robichaud, "Renaissance and Reformation," in *The Oxford Handbook of Atheism* (Oxford University Press, 2013), 179–94.

53. Maurizio Viroli, *Machiavelli's God* (Princeton University Press, 2010), 27, 88.

54. The *pularii* were a caste of Roman ornithomancers—specifically, they were chicken soothsayers—whose ability to weaponize superstition Machiavelli uses to exemplify how easily religious conviction can be manipulated for political purposes.

55. Nathan Tarcov, "Machiavelli's Critique of Religion," *Social Research* 81, no. 1 (2014): 197.

56. Sebastian De Grazia, *Machiavelli in Hell* (Random House, 1994), 89–92.

57. Cary J. Nederman, "Amazing Grace: God, Fortune and Free Will in Machiavelli's Thought," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 60, no. 4 (October 1999): 627–33; Cary J. Nederman, *Machiavelli: A Beginner's Guide* (Oneworld Books, 2009), 28–49; Erica Benner, *Machiavelli's Prince: A New Reading* (Oxford University Press, 2013), 296; Lefort, *Le travail de l'œuvre de Machiavel*, 302; Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 98–101.

Chapter 2

Machiavelli's Critique of Diotima's *Eros*

Italian Medieval and Renaissance literature famously extolled the power of human love. Love is not simply a pleasant experience or an uplifting feeling: it inspires us to be better. On his own account, Dante followed the love of his life, Beatrice, through hell and purgatory and finally ascended to heaven, fueled in part by the power of his sentiments. Closer to Machiavelli, Angelo Poliziano and Marcilio Ficino, arguably the two most preeminent Neoplatonists in Florence, rediscovered and disseminated Platonic eroticism as Machiavelli grew up[1] in a world in which Plato was already an unavoidable intellectual force.[2]

The idea of love rediscovered by Ficino finds its roots in Plato's *Symposium*,[3] and more specifically in a tale relayed by Socrates. According to his recollection of a conversation with the high priestess Diotima, Eros (love) is the child of Poros (meaning means, ways, resource) and Penia (deficiency, poverty, or need), born during a party for Aphrodite's birthday.[4] Because of this Eros must always seek and serve beauty, and:

> [. . .] true to his mother's nature, he ever dwells with want. But he takes after his father in scheming for all that is beautiful and good; for he is brave, impetuous and high-strung, a famous hunter, [. . .] desirous and competent of wisdom, throughout life ensuing the truth; a master of jugglery, witchcraft, and artful speech.[5]

Consequently, humans in love, in line with the nature of Eros, exhibit his characteristics and pursue the object of their desire with hunger and creativity. Thanks to love, human minds are led from appreciation of a beautiful body to that of beautiful bodies general, and on to beautiful souls. Self-interrogation about the nature of those things will lead them to love of knowledge, and

finally to the divine idea of the Beautiful itself.[6] Eros is to humans a type of stairwell or ladder toward the divine.[7]

Ficino entirely adopts this idea. Recalling his own work *On Love*, he writes in *Platonic Theology* that the beautiful bodies about which Plato wrote emanate with a beauty put in them by God. They radiate a beautiful divinity, and therefore it is to God that we are drawn when we ascend Diotima's metaphorical stairwell: "the soul burns with a divine radiance which is reflected in the man of beauty as in a mirror, and that, caught up by the radiance as if by a hook, he is drawn upwards in order to become God."[8]

This chapter aims to make two major contributions. First, to establish that Machiavelli, through his three plays and the short story *Belfagor Arcidiavolo*, engages with and criticizes Diotima's and the Neoplatonists' theses that love is conducive to human intellectual, emotional, and spiritual growth. In fact, love is more likely to make us wicked than virtuous. Second, that in doing so, he inscribes himself in a line of politically astute manipulators who have used literature to disseminate a philosophically controversial message.

Engagement with (Neo)Platonism by Machiavelli makes sense on two crucial levels here. First, on a strictly philosophical one. Machiavelli's philosophy, even if we refuse to follow the implications of *verità effetuale* as far as Mansfield,[9] is notoriously anti-idealistic. Without delving into the detail of which aspects of Machiavellian philosophy are more or less realizable in terms of actual policymaking, it is not too far-fetched to advance that an author who described himself as departing from political systems that were only ever imagined would have an intellectual bone to pick with the Plato who dreamed up *Kallipolis* and was the preeminent philosophical godfather of his intellectual epoch.

Furthermore, it is not just that Plato and Platonism would have been intellectually unavoidable for Machiavelli. As its been discussed in the prior chapters, the champions of Neoplatonism had been effectually recruited by Machiavelli's political enemies, the Medici. Marsilio Ficino in particular came to live with Cosimo de Medici, and the Medici family extended great financial support to Ficino himself,[10] as well as his friends and followers Poliziano and Pico della Mirandola. As we saw, the Neoplatonists were not simply intellectual opponents, but also a school of thought coopted by the Medici for political ends,[11] a fact of which Machiavelli was likely well-aware.[12] The philosophical enmity between them and Machiavelli effectively extended to politics.

Notwithstanding the contextual, political, and philosophical circumstances pointing toward the likelihood that the concept of eros would have been of interest to Machiavelli, this possibility makes sense from a biographical perspective as well. It is likely Machiavelli would have been inclined to turn his considerable intellect toward the topic of human love and affection.

Biographical accounts of his life and surviving personal documents attest clearly that love and human affection were central concerns of his.[13] Perhaps such a discussion was missed because, until very recently, scholars neglected Machiavelli's literary corpus in favor of his more straightforwardly political works.[14]

Machiavelli's plays and his short story are all tied together by the theme of love.[15] The three plays (*Clizia*, *The Woman from Andros*, and *The Mandragola*), as well as the short story *Belfagor the Devil who Married,* may be inscribed in the tradition of the Renaissance *fabulae*, that is, philosophically loaded works of literary fiction. In this case, the four *fabulae* are used by Machiavelli to convey soft criticism of Aristotelian virtue and hard criticism of the notion that eros is the spark and fuel of our pursuit of wisdom. Machiavelli seems to be telling his readers that eros is more harmful than helpful in our quest for knowledge, security and well-being.

It is not simply that Machiavelli rejects Diotima's idea that love[16] was essentially a gateway drug to philosophy understood literally as "love of knowledge." The literary characters Machiavelli created, and those he chose to revamp for us in his translations, show us that love—and its less noble companion lust, a sentiment often mistaken for love in Machiavelli's work and in human life—is the enemy of not only knowledge, but education, faithfulness, fiscal responsibility, and nobility of character. Far from a divine sentiment, it is human in the worst way. In order to show this, this section will first inscribe Machiavelli's works in the tradition of Renaissance *fabulae*, and subsequently expound their philosophical import regarding eros.

Scholarship on Machiavelli's literary works is scarce. Although, as covered in the introduction, there is some studies of the poem *l'Asino*, Machiavelli's other such works have either been absent from the scholarship for a long time (like the *Mandragola*) or never really been present at all (as were *Clizia*, *The Woman from Andros*, and especially *Belfagor*). There is however one notable exception: Catherine Zuckert argued very recently that *Belfagor* mocked conventional Christian morality (a thesis supported here, albeit from a different angle),[17] and wrote in 2017 that *Clizia* addresses:

> [. . .] the eros that, according Plato's Diotima, not only moves philosophers to seeks wisdom but also leads them to acquire all the other virtues as a result. But in [Clizia], Machiavelli indicated the reasons why he thought that eros—not merely sexual, but also in its more transcendent forms—needs to be controlled and disciplined by lower, more worldly concerns for reputation and wealth, if human beings are to live and prosper.[18]

This chapter will show that this argument is only partially correct. When considered alongside Machiavelli's other literary works, a pattern emerges. It is

not that Diotima's eros is only productive if mediated and harnessed toward the pursuit of a-philosophical concerns. Rather, eros is bad precisely because it transforms persons of superior philosophical insight into chaotic, impulsive rubes and tricksters who proceed to lose the goods they previously enjoyed as well as their philosophical or supernatural insight. To put it simply, the characters' good reputation and wealth in the plays are a feature of lives firmly camped in virtue or (a kind of) divinity: lives *before* they love and lust, *before* the whirlwind of eros seizes them. To Machiavelli eros has an effect precisely opposite to what Diotima asserts it has.

The story of Machiavelli as a writer of *fabulae* begins with Girolamo Savonarola's quarrel with late *quattrocento* humanists. Much has been made of the priest's influence on Machiavelli's philosophy, and rightly so.[19] Machiavelli treats Savonarola as an aspiring prince/unarmed prophet, a lesson in leadership and failure, and an example of the merits and dangers of using religion (perhaps in this case honestly) in order to achieve political ends. But an important element of Savonarola's influence on Machiavelli happens behind the scenes, so to speak, outside of what Machiavelli wrote on him in his books.

In *From Poliziano to Machiavelli*, Peter Godman masterfully traced the evolution of the Renaissance Humanists' relationship to classical philosophy. His account of the beginning of the change starts with Savonarola. The priest anticipates Machiavelli's famous criticism of humanistic studies— made through the metaphor of the fragmented Greek statue in the early *Discourses*—that his contemporaries are looking at the wrong ancient sources.[20] Being a friend of ancient philosophy did not prevent Savonarola from being highly critical of his contemporaries. Through Godman's analysis, one gets the clear impression that Savonarola criticized his intellectual peers not on account of their reverence for Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero, but rather for their inability to build on their legacy:

> We too, like the ancients, can add words and subtract them. . . for who today employs the archaic forms that were current in their times? Yet there are some who have so fettered themselves, who have enslaved their own intellects in the prison of antiquity so completely that they are even reluctant to diverge from its usage and wish to say nothing the ancient have not said.[21]

Too busy imitating the ancients, Savonarola's targets forgot to learn from them. Worse, they prioritized poetry over philosophy (like Bruni) and theology. Critical of misplaced intellectual focus before his time, Savonarola thought that simple imitation of antiquity was futile. While Machiavelli decried the emphasis of form over content by mocking unnamed contemporaries fawning over fragments of an ancient statue, Savonarola did the same

by reasserting the importance of philosophy over the study of poetry and rhetoric. Not that these endeavors were completely without merit, but they had to be pursued, to borrow Godman's words, "under the tutelage of philosophy."[22] According to Savonarola, then, philosophy and letters are really only valuable insofar as they act as a vehicle for deeper philosophical truths. We must be careful not to let our reverence for our great philosophical forbears limit our own capacity for intellectual innovation.

It is hard not to see how this has been completely internalized by Machiavelli. He approaches the value of past sources as did Savonarola: his philosophical enterprise also had to do with correcting his contemporaries' (and, to some extent, our) misplaced focus in terms of political education. Twice in the *Discourses*, in the prefaces to books one and two, Machiavelli warns his readers about the dangers of partial and misplaced interpretations:

> Considering thus how much honor is awarded to antiquity, and how many times—letting pass infinite other examples—a fragment of an ancient statue has been bought at a high price because someone wants to have it near oneself, to honor his house with it, and to be able to have it imitated by those who delight in that art, and how the latter then strive with all industry to represent it in all their works; and seeing, on the other hand, that the most virtuous works the histories show us, which have been done by ancient kingdoms and republics, by kings, captains, citizens, legislators, and others who have labored for their fatherland, are rather admired than imitated—indeed they are so much shunned by everyone in every least thing that no sign of that ancient virtue remains with us—I can do no other than marvel and grieve.[23]

On the one hand, this passage underlines that Machiavelli seems to think that, while it is not completely bad, this penchant for ancient art illustrates a tendency to turn to antiquity for the wrong content. Machiavelli's contemporaries do not seek the actually worthwhile contributions of the ancients; the reference to an "ancient statue" suggests that this attention is merely on art. On the other hand, it also tells us that Machiavelli perceives this focus to be doubly incomplete; after all, it is only a fragment of a work of art that is recovered. Furthermore, the large amount of labor invested in getting such an artifact seems to be excessive. A hundred pages later, Machiavelli reminds us that men praise ancient times, although sometimes unreasonably. This time around, he retroactively clarifies the initial metaphor: he is definitely not talking about the arts, but about politics and ethics. On these topics, the truth of ancient things is not wholly understood.[24] Like Savonarola he decries the intellectual prison in which other would-be Renaissance intellectuals have locked themselves. With the plays, he used the literary arts to build, sardonically, on ancient works and insights for political and philosophical ends.

All three of his plays tell the story of one or more lovers driven by their desire to obtain the attention or approbation of a woman. In the *Mandragola*, Callimaco seeks the attention of Lucrezia, a married woman who is desperate to conceive a child with her husband Nicia. In *Clizia,* Nicomaco competes with his own son in an attempt to have intercourse with Clizia, a young woman he has kept as his ward for most of her life (so . . . an adoptive daughter of sorts). In *The Woman from Andros*, a young man named Panfilo, who is cast as an example of Aristotelian moderation, strives to get out of a loveless arranged marriage in order to be with another woman, one whom he loves and has already impregnated out of wedlock.

All four stories are tied to the ancient world, and most specifically to Greece. Nicomaco's name suggests an allusion to Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics*, a point strengthened by Sofronia's description of Nicomaco's usually virtuous behavior.[25] *The Woman from Andros* is set in Athens, and the plot is resolved with a *deus ex machina* plot device wherein the central problem of the play, that is, that Filomena (Carino's love interest) is not Athenian, is revealed to be untrue. Carino, like Nicomaco, is described as a man who was an exemplar of Aristotelian virtue prior to his infatuation.[26] The *Mandragola*'s prologue announces to the audience that "ancient virtues flicker" over the course of the play.[27] In *Belfagor*, the government of hell is managed by the Roman god Pluto.

In accordance with the tale of Diotima, all the protagonists of Machiavelli's plays exemplify to various degree her narrative according to which eros is the child of Need and Resource: they all discover themselves to be profoundly distressed by the need they feel to reach their goal, and all of them become surprisingly resourceful and devious in their quests. Or more accurately, they all become experts at rallying acquaintances in order to accomplish their goals: Callimaco relies on the schemer Ligurio to hatch a plan to sleep with Lucretia, Nicomaco relies on his servant to let him sleep with his future wife, and Panfilo relies on Davos to undercut familial opposition to his marriage to the woman from Andros. In all the literary works, the astute and resourceful problem solvers are in fact the characters whose judgment is *not* impaired by desire. Davo the slave maneuvers to ensure his master Panfilo marries the woman he loves; Ligurio hatches the plan that lands Callimaco into Lucrezia's bed; Sofronia designs the trickery by which to discourage her husband (Nicomaco) from crass intergenerational adultery, and Gianmatteo the farmer rids himself of Belfagor—and rids Belfagor of his wife.

Unfortunately for them, none of their efforts leads to enlightenment. To the contrary, their unbridled eros has almost always the opposite effect. Nicomaco ends the play under the threat of public humiliation, shamed into subservience by his wife. Callimaco does get what he wants—to have intercourse with Lucrezia—but as readers we have every right to wonder

how "happy" that ending really is. Lucrezia, a deeply faithful woman, has been tricked into having sex with a man she did not want to be with, and it is unclear if she agrees to continue doing so because she likes Callimaco or because she fears exposure and dishonor. Callimaco has to continue to have a clandestine relationship with the woman he desires, and poor dumb Nicia has been made a cuckold. The child he so desperately wanted, when it comes, will most likely not be his. In the particular case of the *Mandragola*, in fact, the culmination of Callimaco's eros is the spoilage of divine sentiment: Lucrezia, the only sincerely religious character, is effectively desecrated and dishonored, her faith turned to an object of ridicule by Callimaco and his co-conspirator, Frate Timoteo. (Timoteo, a Catholic friar of insincere faith, has effectively ruined a congregation member's sincere faith.) Far from feeling love elevate his soul and improve his character, the erotically motivated young men of Machiavelli's imagination seek the companionship of those who have the accoutrement of the divine and effectively bring them down personally and spiritually.

In her discussion of this topic, Catherine Zuckert argued that *Clizia* engages Plato's *Symposium* because in it sexual and transcendental eros is mitigated by lowlier worldly concerns for reputation and wealth. Thus, core of its meaning is that the "root of the difference" between Socrates and Machiavelli is their relationship to that transcendental eros.[28] Zuckert notes, citing Salavatore di Maria, that Nicomaco's newfound "love" for Clizia is in fact unhealthy, unbridled lust, the expression of a late-life desire to overcome his own mortality step by step, impotence first.[29] Nicomaco, who is not a very self-aware old man, does not recognize this in himself and admits that from his own perspective theses desires are completely new, seemingly arose out of nowhere, and are not tied to any of Clizia's individual particularities (as would love, one hopes).

In Zuckert's reading *Clizia* tells us Machiavelli thought eros can only be mediated by the equal and opposing love a mother has for her children and their interests. The new order established by this mother, here Sofronia, is rooted in neither ancient nor Christian conceptions of virtue but rather more pragmatic concerns for material well-being informed by a mediation of every household member's desires.[30] The paper heavily implies that this "new order" is more typically Machiavellian, and that it is in this sense that the play acts as a critique of Christianity and ancient virtue.

This rings true, save for the fact that it is not ancient virtue as a whole that is criticized but rather the relationship it entertains with eros. Sofronia *liked* her old life and her household as it was ordered while Nicomaco's mind allowed him to maintain his Aristotelian composure. In this sense it is not ancient virtue as a whole that is criticized, but rather its inability to withstand the charge of powerful erotic desires, and to mistake the fundamental threat

to a good and ordered life that these desires represent for an ally on the road toward self-improvement.

Nicomaco exemplifies how erotic desire actually causes men to fall from virtue. Sofronia bemoans her husband's transformation as a result of his growing lust for Clizia: a year prior to the events of the play, Nicomaco was allegedly a "serious, resolute, considerate man" who had the respect of his peers and family, especially his son's, whom he would instruct about men and proper behavior "using modern and ancient examples."[31] This pedagogical technique is that of the political philosopher: Nicomaco was once smart enough to educate his son in the manner Machiavelli educates his interlocutors and readers in the *Prince* and *Discourses*.[32] And so, to cast Nicomaco's descent allegorically, one might say that he is no longer the gold-souled philosopher-ruler of the house that he once was. But what is he?

Sofronia's lament is doubly revealing when put in the context of her son's remarks a few scenes prior. Cleandro, who, like his dad, pines after Clizia, reflects on the nature of lovers during a self-pitying soliloquy. Like Diotima's, Cleandro's opinion is that lovers' desire makes them crafty and perseverant, willing to endure all sorts of hardships and discomforts in the pursuit of their beloved.[33] In his opinion, this makes lovers not like philosophers but rather like soldiers. Sofronia's reminiscence of Nicomaco's past character, added to her son's insights, reveal that for Machiavelli, eros causes one to fall from the status of philosopher to that of soldier. This seems true in the context of the play: as a result of this transformation, Nicomaco is quite literally fighting his own wife and son in the pursuit of Clizia.

The case could be made that this is precisely Machiavelli's critique of eros: there is no love, only lust, and lust messes with our heads. This criticism would be more potent if it were true that all of Machiavelli's characters displayed Nicomaco's brand of "love," thereby undermining the possibility Machiavelli thought there was a real distinction between love and lust. However, at least two out of four of the characters in our stories seem to have genuine feelings for the objects of their affection, or at least attachment of a kind nobler than Nicomaco's. For example, Panfilo's attachment to the titular woman from Andros stems very clearly from love and duty. (Although we are also told he fell in love with Filomena after noticing that other men desired her.)[34] Belfagor, who is a supernatural being, is described as entirely smitten by his wife. (The case of Callimaco, the young noble who desires Lucrezia in the *Mandragola*, is debatable, although readers have every right to doubt it: people with genuine feelings for others tends not to try to make a mockery of their faiths, muddy their preexisting relationships, and trick them into sex.)

The Woman from Andros is a more subversive jab at eros, in the sense that most of its characters do exhibit that mix of need and resourcefulness that love generates. It quickly becomes clear as the play goes on that although

Panfilo and his friends will eventually prevail, there is no real distinction between them and their antagonists (who are, by the way, their parents). Everyone is equally resourceful and conniving, unlike Nicomaco, who is so blinded by lust that he falls into Sofronia's obvious trap. The "erotically motivated" protagonists of the play have no comparative advantage or competitive edge. Panfilo wants to wed Glicerio, but Cremete and Simo (Panfilo's father) want to see him wed to Cremete's daughter, much to the chagrin of Carino, Panfilo's friend. As the play unfolds from act three to four the reader realizes that the young men in the throes of eros are never particularly ahead of their elders, who are not so possessed. Every member of every camp deploys treasures of wit and trickery in the hopes of achieving their goal.

Once more we are forced to contemplate the possibility that what Diotima had attributed to love, Machiavelli shows is only a consequence of self-interest. Her error, in Machiavelli's eyes, is to have mistaken eros for something greater and nobler than simply a more palatable form of selfishness. Machiavelli is laughing at us—and the Socrates of the *Symposium*—through his characters, as he renders their frankly disturbing actions acceptable on account of having been done in the name of love. None of Machiavelli's tales of eros led any of his protagonists, to paraphrase the *Symposium*, from beautiful bodies to the idea of beauty, to love of wisdom.

Furthermore, *Belfagor the Devil who Married* has the accoutrements of a reversed *Symposium*, in which Diotima's narrative of ascension is turned on its head. The story tells the tale of Belfagor, a demon from hell who is sent by his peers to investigate a particular aspect of the human condition: marital love. Hell's judges are starting to have some doubts regarding the fairness of their sentences because every other man who comes before them claims that the bad actions he has committed have been perpetrated for the sake of the love they had for their wives. The denizens of hell thus collectively decide to investigate that claim and send Belfagor as their emissary to earth, where he is to take human form and be subject to human needs and passions.

It is interesting to note here that Machiavelli strips love of its divine essence by making it a matter about which characters belonging to a caste of divine beings are wholly ignorant. Not because they are devils and love is a "godly" thing: even if the ruler of the underworld is not Satan, this play is still set in a world where Old Testament-inspired Christian demonology is real,[35] and therefore Belfagor, we assume, was at one point an angel. At the very least he should possess a vague remembrance of the concept or the feeling or be able to identify it as something belonging to the higher, godlier sentiments of man as one would recognize a noxious substance.

Belfagor takes the appearance of Roderigo, a rich Florentine nobleman (hell has sent him over with a sizeable but limited expense account) returning from years of living abroad and looking to marry. He meets and falls in

love with a woman named Onesta. The narrative is clear that his love for her is genuine. He spends all of his resources selflessly, setting up his wife's family in business and marrying away his sisters-in-law into good families. Eventually, Onesta, who, like Roderigo, was not very honest about her true nature, reveals herself to have an awful character. Roderigo progressively loses all his money as well as the companionship of most of the devils that came up to earth with him to aid in his quest. He eventually incurs a significant amount of debt and flees from Florence.

With his debtors in hot pursuit, Roderigo is hidden away by a nearby farmer named Gianmatteo, to whom he also reveals himself as Belfagor. In exchange for his help (and in line with his nature as the devil who appeals to sloth and laziness),[36] Belfagor secures Gianmatteo's cooperation by offering him a get-rich-quick scheme that is certain to bear fruit. The demon promises the farmer that he will possess the womenfolk of rich nobles and only leave on Gianmatteo's summons, thereby securing a hefty payday for the peasant. Belfagor honors his promise and first possesses the daughter of Messer Amadei, and after that the daughter of Charles, the King of Naples. He then goes on to possess the daughter of Charles VII, the King of France, but this time refuses to leave, in an attempt to doom Gianmatteo to death by hanging on account of his incompetence. (Belfagor is a demon, after all.) But Gainmatteo prevails. He manages to convince Belfagor that the wife he left hell to marry, Onesta, heard of his whereabouts and was on her way to get him back, which prompts Belfagor to scurry back to the depths of Hell in a panicked frenzy. Despite the obvious impossibility of that occurrence—the reader has had no indication that Roderigo revealed himself as Belfagor to Onesta and therefore no evidence suggesting she could recognize his human alter ego in him—the possibility that Gianmatteo is telling the truth is enough to make Belfagor cut his mission short and go away forever.

Belfagor's voyage seems along a weirdly upside-down version of Diotima's ladder. As an archangel who eventually fell, Belfagor starts from a divine(ish) place. He exemplifies the idea that there is a share of knowledge inaccessible even to supernatural entities. This is a setting in which they are in charge of judging the ethical worth of human actions, yet they ignore everything about the powerful human motivations behind these actions, such as, in this case, love, which has nothing divine about it in this world. In fact, it is so earthly and human that good *and* evil supernatural beings alike ignore everything about it.

Prompted by love, Belfagor does ascend to higher realms, although it is from the depths of hell onto earth and not from earth into the divine realm of forms. In a fictional world where heaven and God are real, Machiavelli implies that eros, if it has any power to elevate, is just enough to make one rise from the depths of damnation to more or less everyone else's level.

If anything, Belfagor, as Roderigo, discovers that love is much more of a handicap than an asset. His wife alienates all of his servants, including the devils who came with him in order to help in his quest. His affection for her clouds his judgment and leads him to make irresponsible financial decisions, splurging to make her happy, maintaining the appearance of wealth but getting into debt. Like Nicomaco, Nicia, and Callimaco, Roderigo is inhibited by his love and desire for a woman, not inspired by the inherent nobility of his feelings to turn to philosophical knowledge. In this case knowledge of human affairs would have been useful to avoid this pitfall: knowledge of love and its potential dangers could have helped our protagonist. But as he makes Roderigo suffer typically earthly ills as a result of his feelings, Machiavelli is re-appropriating eros by painting it as a strictly human impulse, not a divine one.

Belfagor also seems to reaffirm Machiavelli's contempt for the Catholic Church, further divorcing love and divinity. When Belfagor possesses his first victim, we are told that he made her reveal the hidden sins of many but also to speak Latin and debate philosophy. In addition to this, the holy artifacts brought to save the first possessed woman from Belfagor have no effect and are made ridiculous by him in their inefficiency. The Catholic Church is incapable of chasing evil away, something we imagine to be within its purview, if not its main task. Evidently, Machiavelli is poking fun at the Catholic establishment by making erudition the mark of evil. In a multi-layered jab at the Church, Machiavelli has Belfagor manifest the possession of the Amadei daughter by making her speak the scholarly language of the time, a language that is also that of the Church, the scholastics, and the Neoplatonists, all Machiavelli's intellectual opponents to varying degrees.[37] The Amadei recognize the mark of evil when their daughter starts to participate in the debates of these philosophers; Machiavelli is not so subtly accusing the Catholic Church of anti-intellectualism by associating love of knowledge with moral depravity. That, or the Amadeis are vehicles for Machiavelli's opinion of the Neoplatonists and recognize them and those, like them, who engage in the dominant philosophical debates of the time, as the true evil.

Belfagor is also, in a sense, a re-telling of an old Christian tale that is spun in order to make a point opposite than the original. The tale is set in motion by the fact that litany of men deflect responsibility for their sinful lives onto their wives. That episode is reminiscent of the moment immediately preceding the fall of man. Adam, like the men who end up at Belfagor's, also deflected moral responsibility onto his partner. Upon being asked if he had had of the forbidden fruit, Adam replies to God that he merely had fruit that was given him to him by his partner in a futile attempt to maintain plausible deniability. *Belfagor* playfully informs its readers that men apparently have not learned much from this episode and have yet to outgrow their tendency to deflect

blame. The story, however, cheekily suggests the damned may not be entirely wrong here, on account of the negative effects love has on men's behavior.

Whereas Diotima posited that love would bring human beings upwards, Machiavelli tells us it rather makes us focus inwards. We turn away from ideas and concepts as we get stupider and more shortsighted in an attempt to satisfy our most basic and animalistic desires. That Machiavelli thought human beings would prefer to be pigs satisfied rather that Socrates dissatisfied, to borrow from J. S. Mill, should not surprise us. The final encounter of the traveler of *l'Asino*, a man who had literally turned into a pig, tells its protagonist how much better he is for it. What is truly fascinating here is Machiavelli's use of Platonic rhetorical motifs, for example, the use of literature and myth, to erode the edifice of commonly accepted yet politically noxious conventional wisdom to wash away assumptions Italian humanists had inherited from Plato himself.

The idea that love was a noble, divine, and powerful sentiment whose power needed to be extolled was not only paradigmatic in Machiavelli's intellectual world: it was also the position of his political and intellectual enemies. Belfagor's "divinity" matters because it allows Machiavelli to criticize both Christianity, the Neoplatonists (and by association the Medici), and the supposed powers of eros from the standpoint of superhuman insight, while *Clizia* and *The Woman from Andros*, appropriations of ancient sources that they are, cement Machiavelli's critique in ancient wisdom. He hides behind plays of which he is mostly not the original author, stories created by the very ancients his opponents revere, as well as literature casting divine actors, to disseminate his unpopular opinion about love. In doing so, he is able to disentangle the mythical eros from a certain acquiescence of the positive aspects of ancient virtue as well as the literal and metaphorical grasp of the Christian Neoplatonists and their patrons. This shows that Machiavelli took the power of such myths and stories seriously, something further confirmed by his discussion of famous mythmakers such as Savonarola, Numa, Solon, and Lycurgus.

NOTES

1. Denis J.-J. Robichaud, *Plato's Persona: Marsilio Ficino, Renaissance Humanism, and Platonic Traditions* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), 123.
2. Hankins, *Plato in the Italian Renaissance*, Vol. 1, 298.
3. Albert James Smith, *The Metaphysics of Love: Studies in Renaissance Love Poetry from Dante to Milton* (Cambridge University Press, 1985), 1.
4. Plato, *Symposium*, 203b.
5. Plato, *Symposium*, 203d.
6. Plato, *Symposium*, 201b–12c.

7. Plato, *Symposium*, 211c.

8. Ficino, *Platonic Theology*, Vol. 4, XIV.I.4.

9. Mansfield, *Machiavelli's Virtue*, 3; Mansfield, "Machiavelli on Necessity," 39–43.

10. Field, *The Origins of the Platonic Academy*, 3.

11. Clarke, *Machiavelli's Florentine Republic*, 53.

12. Vatter, "Of Asses and Nymphs," 106.

13. Maurizio Viroli, *Niccolò's Smile: A Biography of Machiavelli*, trans. Anthony Shugaar (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000), 49, 224; James B. Atkinson and David Sices, eds., *Machiavelli and his Friend: Their Personal Correspondence* (Northern Illinois University Press, 1996), 277–78, 290–93, 311–12.

14. With some exceptions: see Nederman, "Amazing Grace"; Diego von Vacano, *The Art of Power* (Lexington Books, 2007); Edward King, "Machiavelli's *l'Asino*: Troubled Centaur into Conscious Ass," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 41, no. 2 (June 2008): 279–301.

15. Interestingly, Leo Strauss wrote that "Machiavelli has two great themes, glory and the pleasures of love [. . .]." Unfortunately, there is little elaboration by Strauss on that statement. See Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 295.

16. Love understood here as the sentiment of romantic affection, not "love" understood as political fealty and loyalty that Machiavelli contrasts with fear in the famous passage of the *Prince* where he argues it is better for a prince to be feared than loved by the people.

17. Zuckert, "Machiavelli's Belfagor," 249–50.

18. Zuckert, *Machiavelli's Politics*, 364.

19. See Brown, *The Return of Lucretius to Renaissance Florence*; Alison Brown, "Philosophy and Religion in Machiavelli," in *The Cambridge Companion to Machiavelli* (Cambridge University Press, 2010); John M. Najemy, "Papirius and the Chickens, or Machiavelli on the Necessity of Interpreting Religion," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 60, no. 4 (October 1999): 659–81; Marcia L. Colish, "Republicanism, Religion, and Machiavelli's Savonarolan Moment," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 60, no. 4 (1999): 597–616; Jurdjevic, *A Great and Wretched City*, 16–52.

20. Machiavelli, *Discourses*, 5.

21. *Possumus ergo et addere et minuere sicut illi potuerunt, nam et multa iam mutata sunt. Quis enim hodie dicit vostras et volt et intellegere et alia multa, quae apud antiquos erant usitata? Quidem enim adeo perstrinxerunt se et carceri antiquorum intellectum proprium adeo manciparunt, ut nedum contra eorum consuetudinem aliquid proferre nolit, sed ne velint quidem dicere quid illi non dixerunt.*

Girolamo Savonarola, "Apologeticus de Ratione Poeticae Artis: Liber Quartus," in *Scritti Filisofici*, Vol. I, ed. Giancarlo Garfagnigni and Eugenio Garin (Angelo Belardetti Editore, 1982), 250. Translation by Peter Godman in Godman, *From Poliziano to Machiavelli*, 31–31n1.

22. Godman, *From Poliziano to Machiavelli*, 73.

23. Machiavelli, *Discourses*, 5.

24. Machiavelli, *Discourses*, 123.

25. Zuckert, *Machiavelli's Politics*, 374–75.

26. Machiavelli, *The Woman from Andros*, 47.
27. Machiavelli, *Mandragola*, 161.
28. Zuckert, *Machiavelli's Politics*, 364.
29. Zuckert, *Machiavelli's Politics*, 378.
30. Zuckert, *Machiavelli's Politics*, 371.
31. Machiavelli, *Clizia*, 317.
32. This is likely multilayered. Others have already noted how the name Nicomaco seems to evoke the *Nicomachean Ethics*, yes, but also Machiavelli's own first name, Niccolò. This other commonality between author and protagonist, this one a pedagogical propensity, likely also serves as another instance of comedic self-deprecation by the author, himself a known philanderer, who was not above laughing at himself in his literary work. See Viroli, *Niccolò's Smile*.
33. Machiavelli, *Clizia*, 299.
34. Machiavelli, *The Woman from Andros*, 107.
35. Zuckert, "Machiavelli's Belfagor: Good Government, Domestic Tyranny and Freedom," 251, 254.
36. Zuckert, "Machiavelli's Belfagor: Good Government, Domestic Tyranny and Freedom," 254–55.
37. We are told Belfagor possesses the daughter of Louis VII of France, who lived from 1120 to 1180. Therefore, we can deduce that the tale is set in the twelfth century. I do not wish to get ahead of myself and assert that it is not a coincidence, but interestingly, the twelfth century marks the beginning of the resurgence of the Neoplatonists that would culminate into the founding of the Platonic Academy of Florence. See Arthur, *The Origins of the Platonic Academy of Florence.*

Chapter 3

Myths and Policymaking in Machiavelli and Plato

Over the course of his admonition of Homer for propagating inaccuracies against the gods, Socrates discusses, at the end of *Republic* II,[1] what kinds of lies there are.[2] According to him, there are two: lies in the soul and lies in speech, also known as true lies and noble lies. The lie in the soul (true lie) is a "true" lie because it is entirely false. Here "true" means "real." It is "truly" a lie. By this Socrates implies that the lie is superficially and substantially false. The lie in speech (soon to become the noble lie) is "in speech" because it is superficially false but substantially true. The accoutrements of the thing said are untrue, but the words point to something true, in the sense that people who believe the lie start to behave as if they had understood the truth.[3] In this sense lies in speech are supposed to act like a drug, or medicine, that prevents friends and enemies alike from doing something potentially harmful to themselves or others.[4]

Lies in speech are like tales or myths: they gesture toward ancient truths that are difficult to articulate in words or that cannot simply persuade.[5] The truth is "ancient" because, like all Platonic truth, it must by definition have always been. (Truths do not appear, they simply are.) However, this does not mean that it is easy to discover or to articulate once discovered. This may be because of the fact that they are not self-explanatory. However, given the fact that Socrates, Cephalus, and Polemarchus have just been discussing the conundrum posed by giving a mad friend his just deserts,[6] it is intimated we need lies in speech because they are a politically expedient means to govern people who do not know where their own interests lie.

Citizens are to rulers what mad friends and difficult family members are to their loved ones: people about whom they must (and generally do) care

deeply, all the while realizing that they are not equipped to know, much less act, in their own best interests. In light of this unfortunate reality, Socrates, Glaucon, and Adeimantus reach the conclusion that a city in harmony is one where everybody occupies their rightful place, that is, the place for which they are better suited by nature. Because this is a difficult pill to swallow, a myth must be crafted to prevent misguided desires for social mobility or disproportionate enrichment[7] to upset the harmonious but fragile arrangement of the city in speech. Every citizen must be told that a metal has been mixed with their soul,[8] and that the specific type of metal put in each person implies something about the station they are made to occupy and purpose they are meant to fulfill. Thankfully, the same intellectual limitations that prevent people from recognizing the necessity of this harmonious social hierarchy also makes them gullible enough to accept the myth and its implications—although Glaucon admits that the transubstantiation of the lie into accepted socio-political lore will not be easy to accomplish, even considering that most citizens are not very sharp.

This leads the three Greeks to the necessary realization that ideal leaders must be parent types, in the sense that citizens are to some extent like misguided children who desire many things that are bad for them, but also in that the care they must have for their wards has to be genuine. We can, and hopefully will, recognize true rulers by the fact that they will rule selflessly, as parents do. (Ideally). And if we are to believe Socrates' metaphor of the ship of state, we will also recognize them by how they abstain from competing with others for power and how uninterested they are to actually rule.[9] These selfless enlightened types will be, as has been famously established, a kind of caste of philosopher-kings. More importantly, these legislators and at times founders will have to rely on mythmaking to rule.

This chapter aims to demonstrate that Machiavelli similarly pondered the problems created by low mass intelligence and considered the viability of the mythmaking solution in his works. It seems Machiavelli also thought, like Socrates, Glaucon, and Adeimantus—as well as the three fellow travelers of the *Laws*[10]—that something about peoples made it difficult for them to recognize and implement good policy that is in their best interest. Unlike the aforementioned Greeks, however, Machiavelli seems to suggest that reliance on myth is less essential for political persuasion than good character and genuine commitment to one's policy. Myths are useful, but only as facilitators that allow lawmakers to address the problem of confusion that steams from low mass intelligence. In this chapter, I argue that Machiavelli's consideration and ultimate rejection of this Platonic thesis about mythmaking in the *Republic* is apparent through the contrast established between Numa (and to a lesser extent Lycurgus and Solon) and Savonarola.

LOW MASS INTELLIGENCE AS A POLITICAL OBSTACLE

Much has been written on class conflict in Machiavelli,[11] little about class characteristics outside the oft-dissected Machiavellian maxim that the people desire not to be oppressed while elites desire to oppress.[12] In *Prince* XXII, Machiavelli offers a general axiom about human intelligence through a discussion regarding the particulars of princely intellects. People's intellectual potential, a characteristic that Machiavelli refers to as their "brains" much like we do today, belongs to one of three categories. There are people who understand things by themselves, people who understand when things are explained to them, and people who will never understand either. The difference in quality and potential between those three categories is steep: the first is excellent, the second good, the third completely useless.[13] Furthermore, we can deduce what category a person belongs to by scrutinizing who they surround themselves with and seek advice from. (Machiavelli says that of princes in particular, but there is no indication that this advice is not generalizable to anyone.)

Relatedly, Machiavelli clearly did not believe that we are that committed to a need for evidence in order to change our minds nor that we generally have the potential to recognize evidence for what it is and evaluate its worth as acceptable or unacceptable proof. The very historical evidence he values so much leads him to repeatedly identify low mass intelligence as a major obstacle on the road to accomplish large and small political goals, from founding a great polity to simply making good policy.[14] Machiavelli discusses this on at least two occasions.

A first example is offered late in the *Discourses:* blinded by a "false type of good," the people of Rome backed a Senate resolution to establish a dictator during a great famine. Pushed by the Senate's desire to keep the people subdued, the dictator then eliminated a wealthy roman noble, Spirius Maelius, who had decided to feed the hungry using his vast private grain stores.[15] This comes after Machiavelli had mentioned, citing Dante earlier in the book, that "a false image of the good" leads men (in this case the people) to desire their own ruin[16] and make them mistake policies conducive to life with policies conducive to death or ruin. According to Machiavelli's Dante, the people often cry "death" to their life and "life" to their death. This tendency to think something fatal good and something good fatal is exacerbated if the people has previously been deceived by a "false image of the good." Furthermore, it is therefore vulnerable to political manipulation because the multiplicity of opinions about the good present in large groups obfuscates truly good policies. As it was discussed earlier, Machiavelli tells us this at the beginning of the *Discourses:* the diverse opinions among a multitude prevent

it from being able to order anything because it obfuscates the goodness of good things.[17]

Machiavelli's other axiom of political life, superimposed onto the classification of brains, intimates that he thought the third kind of brain to be prevalent in human society. The most common evidence for this is that Machiavelli's whole *oeuvre* is peppered with mysterious invocations that his writings are all for a special kind of people able to understand them,[18] which suggests that even the middling kind of brain might be quite rare.[19] The fact that the people are easy to sway in directions unconducive to their security and well-being also suggests the third kind of brain is the most common. If most, and therefore crowds, could either understand things by themselves or when explained to them, they would not seek advice or leadership from the wrong people. From this we can deduce that groups must be composed of those unable to distinguish good from bad policies, and that their voices—which by nature will be disunified and create the confusion Machiavelli thinks is typical of large groups of people—will drown out those of the perceptive and educable people.

It is especially likely to happen if they have been misled or manipulated before, because crowds' realization they have been manipulated has an effect opposite to collective wizening. Rather, it generates a suspicion and paranoia that make it more likely to mistake a good policy for its total opposite (and vice versa) than to lead to a group awakening that would enable, from then on, good collective decision-making. In fact, the problems are even worse than this. It is not simply that the people are collectively unable to differentiate between good and bad policies, it is that they prefer policies that seem spirited to ones that seem not to be, even if the spirited policy conceals ruin and the safer-but-seemingly-cowardly policy conceals prosperity or prevents loss.[20]

False images of the good lead to the problem Machiavelli identifies in *Prince* XV and XVI, that is, that ethical confusion and mistakes about what constitutes proper behavior lead to a result opposite to our expectations. For example, peoples prefer fiscally liberal princes and governments: fiscal responsibility is called stinginess and avarice, while liberality is welcomed as generosity.[21] Unfortunately, as Machiavelli knew, the taxation necessary for fiscal liberality is despised as institutional greed. The only solution, therefore, is to be liberal with resources that are not ours, in the sense that they are acquired by conquest. It is hard to believe Machiavelli would have spent two chapters on this argument if popular persuasion (or education) was an option.

Based on the discussion about the three kinds of brains, we can surmise Machiavelli thought a significant amount of human beings to be completely un-educable. After all, low mass intelligence likely would not be an obstacle to good governance if two-thirds of the population possessed the first or

second kind of brain. It is not a surprise then that Machiavelli assumed people would tend to judge by appearance rather than substance.[22] To appear to be something or someone would become more important than actually being that thing or person when it comes to the avoidance of popular disapproval. Hence the famous passage of the *Prince*:

> Everyone sees how you appear, few touch what you are; and these few dare not oppose the opinion of many, who have the majesty of the state to defend them; [. . .] for the vulgar are taken in by the appearance and the outcome of a thing, and in the world there is nothing but the vulgar [. . .].[23]

Note the important characteristics of crowds (and their intellectual capacity) in this passage. Most members of a polity belong to a group unable to truly discern the nature of men and their actions; they exert a sort of normative pressure power over their dissenting and likely smarter peers; finally, a side effect of their political incompetence is that they care strictly about appearance and outcomes, missing substance, and method.

Although most people may not be educable, Machiavelli also thought the people have the ability to hold on to good policies once they are made for them. Catherine Zuckert argued that the multitude is an apt keeper of good laws because it is hard to sway. In her reading, said multitude also possesses various conflicting humors and opinions that make policy change difficult. Thus, the multitude is a stable repository of good laws once they are passed and become a new *status quo*.[24] It may be hard, or even impossible, to implement good policies (or eliminate policies that were once good but have outlived their usefulness) by relying simply on persuasion and the ability of the people to know what is good for them. This is why we may need a philosophically educated noble liar like Numa: simply explaining why a good policy is good will probably not work.

John P. McCormick devoted a section of *Machiavellian Democracy* to this problem.[25] The book is largely concerned with demonstrating that Machiavelli's political philosophy is a sort of democratic theorist. Of course, the problem of low mass intelligence stands in the way of that reading, and McCormick seems to acknowledge that there is no way around it. While the people's desire not to be oppressed generally causes its political judgment to be superior on average to that of other political actors, this does not mean that their judgment is "always wise or invariably conducive to freedom."[26] McCormick is right, and doubly so as he adds that Machiavelli's thought is bereft of actors who can exercise perfect judgment, such as philosopher-kings. But Machiavelli also thought a certain type of enlightened ruler (like Numa) could do as much good or more than the people, in part because of their ability to create truly superior policies and because their knowledge of

the caveats created by low mass intelligence allowed them to manipulate it, but for good.

NOBLE MYTHMAKERS: NUMA, LYCURGUS, AND SOLON

Machiavelli's understanding of the difficulty humans have in making sound political judgments, both in isolation or in groups, is important because it leads him to consider the Platonic problem posed by mythmaking as a facilitator for policymaking and policy implementation. He does so in the context of his discussion of Numa's reign as second king of Rome. The first in-depth foray into Numa's legacy happens in *Discourses* I.11, in a chapter about the religion of the Romans. Numa is there presented has an effective and clever lawmaker who grasped something important about good orders. He is "a prudent individual knows many goods that do not have in themselves evident reasons with which one can persuade others."[27]

This interesting passage points to a particular problem of political leadership. Prudent individuals may be aware of some truth but cannot persuade others of it through sheer exposition. Something can be good and either (a) not possess the necessary characteristics to manifest its goodness to others, or (b) the people who need to be persuaded of the goodness of said thing cannot be persuaded of it with reason. And so, to put it in the words of Nathan Tarcov: "Recourse to God seems necessary only to persuade those lacking the ability to perceive the reasons known to be prudent."[28]

In light of the hierarchy of brains, this is hardly shocking. In fact, the hierarchy makes it more likely that the problem of persuasion is imputable to the people and not to the thing or policy. Men are hard to convince or educate not because they are rational creatures in need of evidence to change their minds, but because they are intellectually lazy, generally incapable of understanding certain things, or cognitively incapacitated by the confusing power crowds have when they debate political issues.

This poses an obvious challenge for members of the executive and legislators. Even if it is not democratic, a state that respects its subjects should ensure policies have at least some popular support. Even tyrannies should be weary of policies that enjoy no such support, or worse, are consistently met with virulent, widespread hostility, like the attempted appropriation of people's possessions or loved ones.[29] The solution? Recourse to God.

Clarifying what Machiavelli means by "God" here is essential. After all, Socrates and his friends do not have recourse to God, they had recourse to a myth. To understand how this is also what Numa was doing requires first that we remember this is not an appeal to the Christian God: this chapter is

about the religion of the Romans, and Numa predates Jesus by roughly eight centuries. For Machiavelli, having "recourse to God" means pretending that you receive direct or close-to-direct advice from a source your people will accept to be both real and essentially imparting upon you knowledge imbued with an extended, superior perspective.

The *Discourses* provide us with two examples of lawmakers who, like Numa, needed the pretension of divine inspiration to implement great reforms. Lycurgus, the first example, took power at a juncture where the people—and even the current Spartan leadership—were considerably sympathetic to the idea of his rule. Plutarch tells us the Lacedaemonian people thought their kings lacked leadership, and the kings thought the people insolent. Lycurgus, on the contrary, had a "nature fitted to lead, and the power to make men follow him."[30] Allegedly an eleventh-generation descendent of Heracles,[31] he is described by Plutarch as an industrious, rigidly simple, gentle, calm, and merciful man who could show compassion even to mortal enemies within his own ranks.[32]

Both the Spartan kings and their people hoped that Lycurgus would bring change that would benefit them. Although he faced virtually no opposition, the policies he thought necessary were so revolutionary that he felt he needed the additional support of divinity to back his initiatives. Note the similarity in the usage of the semantic field of drugs and medicine between Plutarch's account of Lycurgus' decision to rely on people's credence in the supernatural and Plato's account of Socrates and friends when they elect to do the same:

> Returning, then, to a people thus disposed, he at once undertook to change the existing order of things and revolutionize the civil polity. He was convinced that a partial change of the laws would be of no avail whatsoever, but that he must proceed *as a physician would with a patient who was debilitated and full of all sorts of disease; he must reduce and alter the existing temperament by means of drugs and purges*, and introduce a new and different regimen.[33]

Here too the process of improving a city through large-scale systemic reform is analogous to medicinal care administered via drugs and by someone who has the well-being of the "patient" community at heart. Here too that person is cast, in the voice of a supernatural authority relayed by the reformer himself, as an enlightened, superior being that has a privileged relationship with the divine:

> Full of this determination, he first made a journey to Delphi, and after sacrificing to the god and consulting the oracle, he returned with that famous response in which the Pythian priestess addressed him as "beloved of the gods, and rather

> god than man," and said that the god had granted his prayer for good laws, and promised him a constitution which should be the best in the world.[34]

Plutarch does not mention that anyone other than Lycurgus corroborated or relayed the content of his conversation with the priestess—a conversation that not only casts Lycurgus' proposed reform as a god-sent "best constitution in the world," but also establishes Lycurgus himself as a person *more god than man*. It is later confirmed that the reforms in fact came from Lycurgus and not the gods: Plutarch writes a few paragraphs down that Lycurgus was so eager to implement this "form of government" that "he obtained an oracle from Delphi about it."[35] Later still, the new system's effect of both curtailing executive overreach and educating the kings about the danger of overreach[36] (thus robbing them of the desire for it) is lauded by Plutarch, who attributes it to the "wisdom and foresight of Lycurgus,"[37] as opposed to giving credit to the gods for it.

The supposedly divinely inspired Lycurgus then proceeds to enact a three-step plan: first, secretly befriend and unite top Spartan elites; second, send thirty of the most preeminent among them armed in the public place to surprise and terrify the opposition; third: establish a senatorial body of twenty-eight men to balance the tyrannical excesses of the kings on the one hand, and the democratic excesses of the people on the other hand.

Despite the concessions made toward democracy, Lycurgus, like Machiavelli, remained deeply skeptical about the quality of his people's decision-making power. Given their nature and tendency to veer excessively toward democracy, Lycurgus imposed two additional regulations on the power of popular assemblies. First, they must deliberate outside so that their good counsel is not rendered unserious because of the distracting and therefore corruptive power of artistic embellishment and artwork inside halls and other buildings. (Popular assemblies do not have the required attention span to deliberate about politics if there is *any* distraction.) Second, they may not put forward any motion, but only accept or reject motions proposed by kings or senators. Later, the Spartan kings, under the guise of divine sanction once again, added a clause specifying that the people may not adopt an idea when its policy goal had been distorted by amendments and line-item vetoes:

> Afterwards, however, when the people by additions and subtractions perverted and distorted the sense of motions, laid before them, King Polydorus and Theopompus inserted this clause into the *rhetra*:[38] "But if the people should adopt a distorted motion, the senators and kings shall have the power of adjournment;" that is, should not ratify the vote, but dismiss outright and dissolve the session, on the ground that it was perverting and changing the motion contrary

> to the best interests of the state. And they were actually able to persuade the city that the god authorized this addition to the *rhetra* [. . .].[39]

Lastly, Lycurgus strove to eliminate material inequality from Sparta by redistributing private and public land, replacing gold and silver currency with iron (so that it would be worthless outside of Sparta and too heavy to accumulate and transport in great quantity), and lastly by making all rich and poor eat their meals together in common mess halls.[40]

The story of Solon is similar, although he was less successful in the long run. Prior to his ascension to the helm of the Athenian government, the city was divided in "as many parties as there were diversities in its territory,"[41] each with its own opinion about governance. At a stalemate, roughly one-third advocated for the establishment of a democracy, one-third for an oligarchy, and another for a mixed government. Furthermore, extreme inequality between rich and poor worsened the discord already present in the city. At a complete impasse, the people of Athens begin to agree about one thing: the need for reform implemented by someone all can trust.

Cue Solon, "the one man least implicated in the errors of the time; [. . .] neither associated with the rich in their injustice, nor involved in the necessities of the poor," but who nevertheless enters public life reluctantly.[42] He is welcomed by few in the hopes that he will establish a tyrannical government that will benefit their party. The rest, however, accept his leadership because they realize exactly how tough his job is going to be. Note, again, the similarities between Plutarch and Machiavelli's accounts regarding the difficulty of political persuasion:

> Many citizens, too, who belonged to neither party, seeing that it would be a difficult and laborious matter to effect a change *by means of argument and law*, were not reluctant to have one man, *the justest and wisest of all*, put at the head of the state.[43]

Solon comes to power propelled by a rumor of divinely ordained legitimacy: "some say" that he received an oracle at Pytho according to which the pilot's task on the metaphorical ship of Athens was his. (Here again the language is akin of that used by Socrates in the *Republic*.) This unfortunately is not sufficient to assert his authority, and in order to implement his reforms, he tricks both the rich and poor camps into thinking he will give them what they want.

This is not quite what happens, and Solon's policies are fascinatingly similar to those implemented by Lycurgus. He abolished all debts (but did not redistribute land) in Athens even though this caused him to incur substantial personal loss; softened penalties related to various crimes where death had once been used as a the only punishment in every case no matter how small;

left magistracies in the hands of the oligarchs but introduced various institutions so that the other classes, down to the poorest, would have a share in the government and some decisional power; further protected the masses by reforming the judicial system so that everyone could now sue for damages incurred, regardless of the plaintiff or defendant's social station.[44] Finally, he created a council of four hundred common citizens from each of the Athenian tribes that had the purpose of deliberating on public matters before the people did, so that the people would only deliberate about matters that had been previously narrowed and defined.[45]

In what will come as no surprise, the story of Numa follows a similar pattern. Prior to his accession to the Roman throne, the disappearance of Romulus had left a gap in leadership that elites had attempted to fill, much to the dissatisfaction of the people who accused the senators of having defiled Rome by changing the monarchy into an oligarchy. After deliberation, all parties agree to send for Numa who had been "so universally celebrated for his virtues" that even those who had not participated in the nomination process approved the choice enthusiastically. Like Lycurgus, Numa's birth story suggested something supernatural about him, having been born "by some divine felicity" on the exact day Romulus was reputed to have founded Rome. (August 21st.) As were Lycurgus and Solon, Numa was celebrated for his exemplary character: Plutarch reports that he was naturally virtuous, disciplined, enduring, and a student of wisdom.[46] Like the would-be philosopher-kings of Socrates and his young friends, his education consisted in the subjugation of his passions by reason.[47]

Numa is reported to have essentially transcended material concerns, conquered greed and his other passions, and chosen a life of relative isolation. It is fair to say he had not set his sights on the Roman throne. Like most recluses, legends and stories were generated to explain his eccentricities. In fact, Plutarch tells us that the rumor according to which he had married the nymph Egeria came out of his idiosyncratic habit of taking long walks in the woods by himself:

> Then Numa, forsaking the ways of city folk, determined to live for the most part in country places, and to wander there alone, passing his days in the groves of the gods, sacred meadows, and solitudes. *This, more than anything else, gave rise to the story about his goddess.*[48]

Here Plutarch himself, instead of relying on the language of hearsay and supposition used in discussions of Lycurgus and Solon's supposed relationships to divinity, directly casts doubt on the story. Of all three accounts of divine interactions, Numa's leaves him the most incredulous. He underlines, immediately after mentioning the stories about Numa's lonely strolls, that the

story of Egeria's love for the second king of Rome bears odd resemblance to the ancient stories of at least three other cultures, and is generally reminiscent of the kinds of things people tend to invent about men who have found happiness in solitude and study of divinity. While it may be possible that a god would enjoy the company of such holy men, according to Plutarch, it is very hard to believe they would take sexual pleasure in human bodies and appearances.[49] (Livy, who later echoed Plutarch's disbelief as Machiavelli would echo his,[50] wrote that there is no mention of Numa having to do much more than simply say he was talking to the Nymph Egeria for his people to believe him.[51]) Plutarch concludes that "there is no absurdity" in the alternative explanation that Lycurgus, Numa, and leaders like them lied about divine sanction given the magnitude of their innovations and the "headstrong and captious" character of their subjects. To produce such a fabrication was not really wrong of them either, since the deception turned out to be "the salvation of the very ones against which it was contrived."[52]

Returning to Numa's story. Citing his love of study, peace, and isolation, he immediately declined the invitation to become king of Rome. At the behest of friends and family, he eventually relents and accepts for the sake of avoiding being the indirect cause of a civil war and other violence.[53] His first policy is to disband a body of three hundred bodyguards created by Romulus, and to create three high priest positions (one to Romulus himself). Afterwards he sets out to turn Rome toward peace, a difficult undertaking that he seemingly achieved by manipulating Roman superstition through his supposed intimacy with Egeria, as well as some theatrics. After seeking divine guidance, he effectively softened the Romans:

> [. . .] for the most part by sacrifices, processions, and religious dances, which he himself appointed and conducted, and which mingled with their solemnity a diversion full of charm and a beneficent pleasure, that he won the people's favor and tamed their fierce and warlike tempers. At times, also by heralding to them vague terrors from the god, strange apparitions of divine beings and threatening voices, he would subdue and humble their minds by means of superstitious fears.[54]

Numa appears to have changed Rome almost entirely through religious reform and education. So much so that readers are told that, in the end, Romans accepted all his claims of divine interaction, no matter how "fabulously strange," and did not think anything too "incredible or impossible" if he wanted them to believe it.[55] Among the most clever acts made with the purpose of conditioning Romans to peace, Numa got Romans to worship Faith so that they would see their oaths and promises as sacred[56] and Terminus (the God of boundaries), specifically through bloodless sacrifice, so

that his subject would internalize that boundaries were to be celebrated, and respected without bloodshed.[57]

Like Solon and Lycurgus, Numa tackled inequality. In order to eliminate destitution and poverty-driven crime, the Romans were encouraged to focus on agriculture, an activity which Plutarch recounts was administered to them as a kind of "peace potion." Finally, Numa divided the people in groups according to their trades and arts, so that the Roman people would no longer be polarized on account of belonging to two distinct tribes.[58]

Notice the pattern here. Each of the three figures Machiavelli quoted as examples of men who had recourse to some myth in order to pass good policies that could not be recognized as such by their primary beneficiaries have in their stories elements starkly reminiscent of the *Republic*, and we can say with confidence that Machiavelli was certainly not oblivious to the strong Platonic overtones of the stories he directs his readers toward. The evidence is telling: all three of the central figures of said stories are men of exceptional and exemplary character who come to power reluctantly. Stories of divinity, divine sanction, and supernatural insight are woven into all of Plutarch's accounts, which are also fraught with overt references to Plato, and are still understood, as they would have been, at the very least, as a reflection on Platonic political doctrine.[59] Uses of the divine is overtly understood as an intentionally deceptive tactic, even in the one case where the legislator seems to be a genuinely religious man. Policy administration is illustrated with the language of medicine and drug prescription. The similarities in the policies they pass by simulating divine approval are also worth underlining. All three heads of state attempted to reduce economic and social inequalities, create institutions to ward off tyranny and check executive power, and reduce to some degree the vulnerability of women and other underprivileged groups in their societies.

Additionally, there is further historical evidence suggesting Machiavelli would have known that a gesture toward Numa, whom to this day is read as a figure that "anticipates Plato's philosopher-king,"[60] brought Plato into the conversation. The rapprochement between Numa and Plato was duly established by his time: Neoplatonists had already spilled considerable amounts of ink to create it, and Ficino mentions it in his commentary on the *Republic*. (This is odd: Numa, of course, was no longer alive when Plato wrote and there is no evidence Plato knew of him, so Ficino's comparison is somewhat unprompted by Plato's dialogue itself.) In other words, there is a tradition of identifying Numa as a figure that invites Platonism into the conversation. To Ficino, Numa is a prime example of a divinely inspired mythmaker. He sees in Numa a real-life example of Minos, the Cretan king who received advice from Jupiter in order to rule his people. Ficino seems to think, against literally all other interpreters of Numa's life, that the Roman king was sincere when he claimed to have received divine inspiration.

Ficino thinks Plato would have approved of Numa in the same manner he approved of Minos: on account of their establishment of a type of theocracy. He praises Numa for having governed the state with religious laws after having contemplated God.[61] What is interesting is that Ficino apparently completely misses the point. Not one person—not even Numa himself—seemed to have been sincerely invested in his deception. It is treated, by ancient and Renaissance sources alike, as an obvious and basic lie that banked on popular gullibility and aimed at making policy implementation easier for the king. Yet Ficino reads into it a prime example of Platonic governance. Numa becomes a real-life incarnation of the philosopher-king of *Kallipolis*, but one that has been reinterpreted as compatible with Christianity.

Ficino may or may not have truly thought that Numa was sincere about his conversations with Egeria, or actually compatible with Christian doctrine. (It is more likely that he was, however bizarre that seems from our standpoint.) In spite of these obvious oddities, proving that Ficino meant this more or less ironically, or that he was covertly aware of his inaccuracies, would be tremendously difficult. Suffice it to say, however, that Ficino's unprompted mention of Numa in a book otherwise dedicated to Plato means that the figure of the Roman king would have been previously associated with discussions of Platonic leadership by the time Machiavelli wrote the *Discourses*.

Machiavelli's discussion of Numa may in part have been an act of reappropriation from "Ficinian" Platonism. It inserted Numa within the Platonic tradition of noble liars, political manipulators who consciously used superstition in order to facilitate the implementation of good policies that would otherwise be impossible to implement due to the people's inability to really know what is good for them. Machiavelli would have agreed that Numa is a figure emblematic of Platonic politics, but not in the sense Ficino meant him to be. By recasting Numa's significance, Machiavelli is establishing a connection to an aspect of Platonism with which his own thought is compatible, and covertly attacking a Neoplatonist Christian interpretation of the *Republic*.

Is this to say that Machiavelli covertly sanctioned the ruling of a so-called enlightened class? That we find him, in a sense, to agree on some level with the famous Platonic fantasy? After all, although he is somewhat critical of Solon, his approval and admiration of Numa, and even more so of Lycurgus, is a well-known fact. It is possible that Machiavelli tried to salvage Numa's legacy from the Neoplatonist interpretation, and in doing so re-appropriate some Platonic intellectual heritage. Machiavelli did seem to agree with Plato about the generally low intelligence of the masses, but also about the potential benefits that can be brought about by benevolent gold-souled types who rule selflessly and in good faith. Perhaps, at times, a clever and astute manipulator with a genuinely good, selfless character can come to power and effect truly positive change.

One must also remember that Machiavelli mitigates his praise of Numa in *Discourses* I.19. In it, Machiavelli contrasts weak and strong princes:

> I say therefore, with these examples that after an excellent prince, a weak prince can maintain himself; but after a weak one, no kingdom can be maintained with another weak one, unless it is like that of France, which its ancient orders maintain. Those princes are weak who do not rely on war.[62]

According to Machiavelli, Numa only held Rome in peace because Romulus, who came before him, had been warlike. And it is undoubtedly true that it is unwise to set out to pacify a people while its neighbors are still aggressive. After Numa, Tullus remodeled his rule on that of Romulus, and Ancus, Tullus's successor, wanted to govern in peace but had to resort to war, because his neighbors thought him "effeminate" and he could not risk being perceived as weak even if he wanted peace.[63] Consequently, Machiavelli concludes, a prince like Numa will be able to hold a principality unless the times or fortune turn against him, while princes like Romulus will be able to hold their principalities unless they are confronted with an "obstinate and excessive force."[64]

The standard interpretation of this passage's meaning was best articulated by Nathan Tarcov: recourse to God is necessary to all those who want to introduce new orders, and arms can easily be introduced to a religious but unarmed people, but religion can only be introduced with difficulty to an armed but irreligious people. Nevertheless, *Discourses* I.19 suggests that religion is what weak princes substitute for "virtue and war."[65] Machiavelli's affirmation in *Discourses* I.11 that Numa was superior to Romulus is thus reversed eight chapters later.

Numa, however, does not absolutely qualify as a prince who did not rely on war. The accounts of his life show quite clearly that he had no other choice than to turn the Roman people toward peace. He was in fact chosen because there was simply no more war to be had, and to keep pursuing it was unsustainable. As such we cannot say Numa eschewed war in favor of peace: he was chosen specifically because he was the right man to accomplish a tremendously hard task, even according to Machiavelli's alleged pro-war inclinations: introduce religion and peace to a people that had been raised on war and arms. (Let us also note that Numa, albeit indirectly, further entrenched war into Roman culture by deifying Romulus, his warlike predecessor.) Since it is perfectly normal that during Numa's estimated forty-seven-year reign neighboring or subjugated peoples forgot the sting of their past defeats, it makes sense that his successor Tullus would need once more to imitate Romulus, and that perhaps this job was not quite finished by the time Ancus took the reins of the state, despite the fact that he would have preferred peace to war.

Furthermore, the argument defending the superiority of literal arms over the figurative arms represented by new social norms relies on Machiavelli's—at best ambiguous—account of the different kind of threats faced by peaceful and warlike princes. Peaceful princes are vulnerable to changing times and fortune, while warlike princes are only vulnerable to obstinate and excessive force.

Regarding fortune, Machiavelli is abundantly clear no one is ever completely shielded from it, and as such we must assume warlike princes should also be wary of its reversals. (Machiavelli's writings abound with exemplary evidence of this, the most famous of which is probably Cesare Borgia.) It is extremely unclear how virtuous warlike princes being subjected to excessive and obstinate force in spite of their virtue and arms does not in itself qualify as unfavorable fortune.

Regarding the second threat, changing times. The virtue of Numa and the other mythmaking princes lied precisely in their ability to recognize that the times were indeed changing and required political reform the likes of which could only be achieved by first accomplishing the momentous task of introducing religion to a warlike people. The weak princes are not just the peaceful, they are the peaceful princes unable to adapt to changing times. The opposition between Romulus and Numa is mediated and clarified by the example of Ancus, which suggests that the truly weak princes are the ones who do not rely on war *when war is an option*.

Note also how paradoxical this axiom is. Princes of peace should fear times changing and reversals of fortune, while warlike princes should fear obstinate and excessive force coming at them. This means, in other words, that warlike princes should feel threatened by other princes who see war as the only viable option where there may be others. According to Machiavelli's own advice, no principality is safe *unless* we have more Ancuses and Numas who can tell when war is *truly* necessary and embrace it when it is.

All of this to say that even a generous reading of *Discourses* I.19 remains simply too ambiguous to state with confidence that Machiavelli thought Romulus to be unequivocally superior to Numa. At best it is sufficient to advance tentatively that it is possible Machiavelli thought Numa would have avoided war even if it had become necessary, which would indeed implied that Numa was not a truly virtuous prince. It seems more likely that Machiavelli recognized that arms, like war, can be understood literally as well as figuratively, and that the ability to recognize which arms to use and which battles are to be fought is an essential aspect of princely virtue. Romulus, Lycurgus, and Numa all had this ability and that is why they took different paths in response to different challenges.

In what follows, I want to suggest there is a "but" (or rather, a *ma*, as Machiavelli himself writes so often): when those stories are

considered alongside an analysis of another famously clever myth maker in the *Discourses*, their effect is mediated. In fact, Machiavelli qualifies his assessment of the effectiveness of myths in relation to rulers' characters by inserting the story of Savonarola's own attempt at mythmaking right after that of Numa. In doing, he lands somewhere strikingly similar to Plato's own reassessment of the power and usefulness of myths in the *Laws*.

SAVONAROLA: IGNOBLE MYTHMAKER

The structure of Machiavelli's text itself invites comparison between Savonarola and Numa (et al.) In *Discourses* I.11, "Of the Religion of the Romans," with which this chapter is preoccupied, ends on the introduction of Savonarola, the first in the whole book. Setting aside the amusing fact that three out of the four notable examples in a chapter purportedly concerned with the religion of the Romans are not Roman, attentive readers will notice that Machiavelli's final example demonstrating the effectiveness of manipulation by religion is actually a story of failure.

Savonarola, we are told, convinced the Florentines, who did not think themselves to be credulous and unrefined men, that he spoke with God, and that without really having seen anything extraordinary that lent credence to his claim.[66] Notice that Machiavelli does not tell us the Florentines were refined, but rather that they did not *think of themselves* as coarse. Like the Romans and Greeks subjects discussed earlier, they believed the story of divine proximity without proof, mostly because of Savonarola's reputation, his erudition, and "the subject he took up."[67]

What subject did he take up? Only much later in the *Discourses* is that mentioned: Savonarola attempted to introduce a popular appeals procedure for criminal sentences doled out by the Florentine Signoria and the Eight of Security—the council responsible for public safety from "internal and external threats."[68] The friar unfortunately revealed himself to be massive hypocrite: after long, difficult, yet successful labors to see his reform passed, one such appeal was denied to five citizens condemned to death, and Savonarola never said a word concerning the incident. Consequently, public opinion shifted, and he started to be perceived more as a hack driven by ambition than a true advocate of popular empowerment through legal change.

Savonarola, as is well known, eventually burns at the stake in 1498.[69] This happens despite the fact that he allegedly knew he would need to be and stay armed,[70] but failed because the people stopped believing in the new orders he had tried to bring about once his duplicity was exposed. After the deception, he did not have the ability to make his former followers believe in him again. His example reveals, by contrast, important aspects of Machiavelli's

use of Numa, Lycurgus and Solon. When it comes to philosopher king types, it seems that we will know them by their policy, sober approach to power, and commitment to popular empowerment.

More importantly, for all the ink spilled about arms and the importance of being armed, remember that that Numa, Solon, and Lycurgus largely *pacified* their peoples. Even Lycurgus, the least peace loving of all three, made himself famous in part for his compassion toward his would-be assassins, even though they were traitors from his own people. This suggests that the essence of what Machiavelli thought it meant to be "armed" needs to be reinterpreted and understood more broadly.

The successful reformers Machiavelli praises alongside Savonarola only ever armed themselves with a genuine desire for egalitarian reform, civil peace, and a somewhat cynical yet realistic approach of how they could use their own people's limited capability to recognize good public policy and separate myth from reality—unlike Savonarola, who used the same for his own gain and advancement. All religions may indeed be man-made (as per Tarcov),[71] and Machiavelli's writings about Numa, Lycurgus, Solon and even Savonarola further support this interpretation. *But one must not act as if they were*. Savonarola's callous behavior lifted the curtain that allowed for shameless suspension of disbelief: if he did not believe in his own reforms, then either they were not divinely inspired, or Savonarola's faith was obviously insincere or weak. The two eventualities lead to the same logical stance.

This new reading furthers the conversation regarding the question of Savonarola's merit in Machiavelli's mind. As Jurdjevic aptly noted in his summary of the debate, the field is essentially divided in two camps. On the one hand, those who maintain that Machiavelli had a poor opinion of the friar, among which Jurdjevic lists Colish, Sasso, and Weinstein,[72] and others like Najemy and Martelli who thought Machiavelli "fascinated" by the man. (These readings, as presented, are not fully incompatible.) Jurdjevic joins this debate by positioning himself squarely alongside Najemy and Martelli on the basis of the parallel Machiavelli establishes between Savonarola and Numa. In Jurdjevic's reading, Numa's implicit presence in the background of Machiavelli's account of Savonarola's action betrays Machiavelli's sympathy for the friar. The contrast reveals Savonarola to have been effectively better than Numa, since he accomplished similar feats without having his job made easier by a people relatively uneducated and coarse.[73]

The problem with this reading is that Jurdjevic completely misses that Machiavelli did not actually think Numa's people to be particularly coarser than the Florentines. He writes that while the Florentines certainly thought themselves more refined and impervious to the kind of manipulation both Savonarola and Numa engaged in, they immediately believed and followed Savonarola because of his reputation, his erudition, and the nature of his

policy proposal. In fact, it is possible to say Savonarola put even less effort into deceiving the Florentines than Numa did the Romans. At the very least Numa consistently performed some charades around his lie in order that it retain an iota of credibility: he often retired by himself without witnesses to "consult" Egeria, took long solitary walks in nature, presented as an honestly devout man, and so on.

Additionally, Jurdjevic pays no attention to the actual politics promoted by either men. The question is settled, in his view, as soon as we see that Savonarola accomplished a similar feat with an audience supposedly more difficult to manipulate. There is no mention of how Machiavelli ends both of these stories for his own audience, despite the fact they are two very different conclusions painting very different pictures. Numa established orders so sensible and stable that generations of Romans benefited from his policymaking talent; Savonarola was exposed as a two-faced liar who pretended to support the people in order to further his own ambition; he was subsequently deserted by his followers and burned at the stake a few years after his deception was exposed. Even if Savonarola had actually managed to enthrall a tougher audience, he did not honestly commit to and believe in his own policy, which cost him both his orders and his life.

In conclusion, let us briefly go back to Machiavelli's treatment of Lycurgus, Numa, and Solon's alleged divine inspirations. Through it, Machiavelli puts his readers (and presumably himself as well) in the same predicament as Glaucon, Adeimantus, and Socrates at the end of the second book of the *Republic*. As they discuss the relationship between truth and myths, the three Greeks readily agree that truth, it if is constant and independent of us in its existence, must therefore be the most ancient thing (and also will exist for eternity). They agree that the Good, God, or the Gods are all valid terms by which humans refer to these ancient objective truths. But the problem the three men encounter is that their present source regarding the most ancient things, the Homeric myths, cannot possibly be correct, since they attribute to the Gods characteristics that are definitely incompatible with virtue and the teaching of virtue. Because we know virtue through God or the Good, that which is not virtuous cannot possibly be related to the Good.[74] Unfortunately, men assume a kinship between ancient, timeless truths and ancient, timeless tales because both can allegedly be traced back to the Gods (who are the repository of all things timeless and true). The challenge is to replace the pedagogically nefarious myths (i.e., the Homeric myths in this case) with more appropriate ones (i.e., myths that "point to the truth of ancient things"), or at the very least to separate the pedagogically damaging myths from the good ones.

Recent scholarship by Miguel Vatter supports the thesis that Numa shows that there is more intellectual kinship between Machiavelli and Plato on

this than previously assumed in the literature. Vatter rightly underlines that Numa was, in Machiavelli's eyes, critical to the development of the Roman Republic because he extended the good orders from the elites to the people. The fact that Numa is celebrated in the *Discourses* as a ruler who has instilled good modes and orders is interpreted by Vatter as a sign that it does not suffice to say Numa's lying was strictly political manipulation. Given the lasting positive effects of Numa's manipulation, we must conclude that he grasped a number of fundamental truths of politics that he needed to act upon in spite of his subjects' subpar political intellect or their socially counter-productive desires. Therefore, we need to interpret Numa as a noble liar in the Platonic sense. He treated religion not as sheer superstition but as a vehicle for philosophical truths, "a way in which philosophical insights can become accessible to the many who are not yet philosophically educated."[75]

Vatter convincingly brings Machiavelli and Plato together on this issue by way of al-Farabi. Al-Farabi was clear about his agreement with Platonic philosophy and wrote political philosophy that largely anticipated Machiavelli's own. Based on this, Vatter concludes that making a rapprochement between the three is warranted.[76] Like Machiavelli, al-Farabi thought that princes should cultivate the art of war. This means not strictly military exercises, but any faculty that enables the prince to conquer the nations and cities that will not comply with the policies needed to lead them to civil happiness. The art of war implies a war on two fronts: one physical and one spiritual. Sometimes the war is with one's own people—say, if they are blind to the potential benefits of a policy of another for lack of education or intelligence—and as such the cultivation of the art of war has a philosophical element. Vatter's al-Farabi thus treated divine revelation as "a topic of political science," which he argues is a different way of saying what Machiavelli meant when he wrote that a crucial princely skill was to interpret religion prudently and according to necessity. The prudent interpreters of religion are military commanders as well as students of philosophy.[77]

It is in that sense that our situation as students of Machiavelli's philosophy is similar to the Greek trio's. Although Machiavelli may not have thought that there was such a thing as an objective, timeless truth or Good, certainly there was enough regularity and repetition in human political affairs that we can know certain things about politics definitively. But acquiring this knowledge necessitates that we be able to approach ancient examples correctly and pay attention to the right things: pick apart the pedagogically useless (or deleterious) stories from the useful ones that point to truth.[78] For example, it is possible Machiavelli did not regard the tenets of revealed religion (in particular Christianity) as true,[79] and as such it may well have been one of the harmful myths readers are invited to abandon. (We will revisit this possibility in the conclusion of this book.) Like Socrates and his younger interlocutors,

Machiavelli's readers must pick apart the good stories from the bad ones in order to get to his teachings but also to learn about his way of teaching us politics.

Machiavelli seems to take to its logical conclusion Socrates' allegory of the ship of state. He shows that if philosopher-kings were as selfless, enlightened, and unwilling to rule as Socrates and friends imagined them to be, it makes sense that they would create institutions that ward off tyranny by fragmenting executive power and then abdicate. Numa, Lycurgus and Solon divided and checked, rather than consolidated, the authority of their governments. The philosopher-king hypothesis implies the necessity of a single such ruler, because the combination of their reluctance to rule, egalitarian tendencies and penchant for checks and balances, which are the true signs of their intelligence, implies they are more likely to create solid, balanced institutions meant to last rather than establish a hereditary caste of people like them. Reproducing themselves intergenerationally is an impossible challenge, since they belong to a of group in which they know, given what their use of lies say about their acute awareness of low mass intelligence, there are very, very few members.

It is worth noting here that my argument implies Plato and Machiavelli to be, as odd as it may seem, in agreement to some degree, a thesis very widely rejected in the literature.[80] The truly interesting implication of this argument, however, is that it apparently brings Machiavelli closer to the Plato of the *Laws* than the Plato of the *Republic*, to whom the Neoplatonists connected Numa.

The usefulness of myths as a persuasion tool is qualified in Plato's other dialog that involves the imaginary founding of a city. In the *Laws*, three Greek men of respectable age (as opposed to Socrates and two much younger interlocutors)—an Athenian stranger, a Cretan named Kleinias and a Spartan Megillus—entertain a long conversation about hypothetically founding a good city. Over the course of that conversation, mythmaking evidently comes up: truth is still a hard thing to persuade people of.[81] Yet this time it is not the essential foundation of good orders it was made to be in the *Republic*. Rather, myths are a sort of last resort to be used when rational persuasion has failed.[82] Again good policymaking is likened to the administration of medicine, and lawgivers to doctors. But this time a contrast is established between "slave doctors doctoring slaves" and "free doctors doctoring free men." Lawgivers who simply issue commands are essentially brutes or "slave doctors," while proper rulers attempt to persuade their citizens and only use myths parsimoniously as facilitators, for pedagogical purposes. (Slave doctors doctoring slaves respect neither themselves nor their patients and therefore they simply issue commands. Free men must treat other free men graciously, and take the time to demystify their art.) The free doctors/lawmakers must explain the

disease to their patients, how it interacts with their bodies, and so on, using arguments that are akin to philosophizing.[83]

Machiavelli concluding the discussion of policymaking by way of myths with Savonarola's story has this same mediating effect. Through Savonarola's deserved misfortunes we see that, despite low mass intelligence, it is not so much the myths that matter but genuine commitment to good policy. Well-crafted myths are simply window dressing meant to facilitate persuasion given that men in crowds can be confused about the good. Contra Ficino, the main takeway of those stories is no longer the power of divine inspiration, but rather about the importance of an honest, good faith attempt to implement genuinely good policy that benefits all for as long as possible. Without this, not even a credible claim to divine inspiration can save you.

There is some harmony between Plato and Machiavelli with regards to the fact that proper governance requires that at some level of the policymaking process, there may be a need for a philosopher-turned-policymaker or philosophically capable and philosophically educated person. That person is necessary to help craft the expedient myths indispensable to the ideological compliance of the not so philosophically inclined. (The rest of us.) Where I think the two thinkers differ, as I intend to expose below, is that, whereas Plato would think the myth to point to a genuine Truth, Machiavelli would not say the myth is rooted in a particular timeless truth, although both would agree that philosophical inclinations and agreement are necessary to recognize the myths/falsehoods as falsehoods while simultaneously understanding their necessity. In the next chapter, we will see that Machiavelli sends this message via aesthetic metaphors and through his gestures toward Xenophon.

NOTES

1. Plato, *Republic*, 382a.
2. Robichaud, *Plato's Persona*, 29.
3. Plato, *Republic*, 382a–c.
4. Plato, *Republic*, 382c.
5. Plato, *Republic*, 382c.
6. Plato, *Republic*, 331c.
7. Plato, *Republic*, 422e–23a.
8. Plato, *Republic*, 414d.
9. Plato, *Republic*, 488a–89d.
10. Plato, *Laws*, 663e.
11. John M. Najemy, "Society, Class, and State in Machiavelli's Discourses on Livy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Machiavelli* (Cambridge University Press, 2010); Kent M. Brudney, "Machiavelli on Social Class and Class Conflict," *Political Theory* 12, no. 4 (1984): 507–19; John P. McCormick, *Reading Machiavelli*

(Princeton University Press, 2018); John P. McCormick, *Machiavellian Democracy* (Cambridge University Press, 2011); John P. McCormick, "Subdue the Senate: Machiavelli's 'Way of Freedom' or Path to Tyranny?" *Political Theory* 40, no. 6 (2012): 714–35; John P. McCormick, "Machiavellian Democracy: Controlling Elites with Ferocious Populism," *American Political Science Review* 95, no. 2 (June 2011): 297–313; John P. McCormick, "Machiavelli Against Republicanism: On the Cambridge School's 'Guicciardinian Moments'," *Political Theory* 31, no. 5 (2003): 615–43; Yves Winter, *Machiavelli and the Orders of Violence* (Cambridge University Press, 2018); Gabriele Pedullà, *Machiavelli in Tumult: The Discourses on Livy and the Origins of Political Conflictualism* (Cambridge University Press, 2018).

12. Machiavelli, *Prince*, IX.
13. Machiavelli, *Prince*, XXII.
14. Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, 106.
15. Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, 277.
16. Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, 106.
17. Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, 29.
18. For example see *Prince*, XV; *Discourses*, I.I.
19. Or that Machiavelli himself does not think he is doing a great job of explaining his points and thus needs to rely, as an author, on the first kind of brain—that which understands by itself—which is also interesting but beyond the scope of this chapter.
20. Machiavelli, *Dicscourses*, 106.
21. Machiavelli, *Prince*, XVI.
22. This is an idea Machiavelli may have lifted directly from Xenophon's *Hiero*. In the dialogue, the tyrant expresses the same idea: "'I don't find it at all surprising,' Hiero replied, 'that the mass of mankind are taken in by tyranny, since the rabble tend to assess happiness and unhappiness by external appearance'." Xenophon, *Hiero the Tyrant and Other Treatises*, 12.
23. Machiavelli, *Prince*, 71.
24. Zuckert, *Machiavelli's Politics*, 173.
25. McCormick, *Machiavellian Democracy*, 81–85.
26. McCormick, *Machiavellian Democracy*, 83.
27. Machiavelli, *Discourses*, 35.
28. Tarcov, "Machiavelli's Critique of Religion," 195.
29. Machiavelli, *Prince*, XVII, 67.
30. Plutarch, *Lycurgus*, V.1.
31. Plutarch implies later, in his narration of the life of Solon, that this partially helped Lycurgus pass his reforms, along with his great authority, abundance of friends, power, and his preference for force over persuasion. See Plutarch, *Solon*, XVI.
32. For example, after an impetuous young nobleman named Alexander, upset about wealth redistribution, attempted to assassinate him and succeeded in taking out one of his eyes, Lycurgus took him home and made him his friend after he quelled his uprising. Plutarch, *Lycurgus*, XI.1–3.
33. Plutarch, *Lycurgus*, V.2–3. Emphasis added.
34. Plutarch, *Lycurgus*, V.3.
35. Plutarch, *Lycurgus*, VI.

36. Lycurgus' reforms had such a lasting educative power that 130 years after his death, his successor Theopompus appointed ephor leaders to the Senate, thereby quelling unrest amongst the Spartan serf class and curbing the growing power of the senate. Theopompus allegedly responded to his wife's criticism that he was diminishing his power by answering that it was in fact stronger, since it would last longer. See Plutarch, *Lycurgus*, VII.

37. Plutarch, *Lycurgus*, VII.3.

38. The *rhetra* is the alleged response from the oracle to Lycurgus, on which Lycurgus based the legitimacy of his reforms. It specified powers and constitution of the senate and other branches of the Spartan government.

39. Plutarch, *Lycurgus*, VI.4.

40. Plutarch, *Lycurgus*, VIII–IX.

41. Plutarch, *Solon*, XIII.

42. Plutarch, *Solon*, XIV.1–2.

43. Plutarch, *Solon*, XIV.3–5. Emphasis added.

44. Plutarch, *Solon*, XVII–XIX.

45. Interestingly, Numa, Lycurgus and Solon also implemented in their respective cities several reforms that redefined heterosexual marital relationships that seemingly had the effect of empowering to a degree the women of Rome, Athens and Sparta (or at the very least making them less vulnerable). An in-depth discussion of these policies are unfortunately beyond the scope of this argument, but certainly warrant further investigation. See Plutarch, *Solon*, XX and *Lycurgus*, XV–XVI. See also Michelle T. Clarke, "On the Woman Question in Machiavelli," *Review of Politics* 67, no. 2 (2005): 229–56 and Hanna Pitkin, *Fortune is a Woman: Gender and Politics in the Thought of Niccolò Machiavelli* (University of Chicago Press, 1984).

46. Plutarch, *Numa*, III.4–6.

47. Plutarch, *Numa*, III.5; Plato, *Republic*, 413d–e.

48. Plutarch, *Numa*, IV.1. Emphasis added.

49. Plutarch, *Numa*, IV.3.

50. Najemy, "Papirius and the Chickens," 670.

51. Livy, *History of Rome Books 1–2*, trans. B. O. Foster (Harvard University Press, 1919), I.19.

52. Plutarch, *Numa*, IV.6–8. Worth noting that even though Numa likely pretended to be intimate with a nymph, his extreme piety seemed by all accounts sincere. Also interesting is that his reported intimacy with Pythagoras, the Greek mystic slash philosopher slash mathematician is given as much, if not more, attention by Plutarch.

53. Plutarch, *Numa*, VI–VII.1.

54. Plutarch, *Numa*, VII.3.3.

55. Plutarch, *Numa*, XV.

56. It is highly plausible that this led to one of the great developments of Roman culture Machiavelli celebrates at the very beginning of the chapter where he introduces Numa, namely that citizens of Rome eventually began to fear "to break an oath much more than the law." See Machiavelli, *Discourses*, I.11.1.

57. Plutarch, *Numa*, XVI.1–2.

58. Plutarch, *Numa*, XVI–XVII.

59. For a more thorough overview of the scholarly discussions on this issue, see Hugh Liebert, "Plutarch's Critique of Plato's Best Regime," *History of Political Thought* 30, no. 2 (Summer 2009): 251–71.

60. Liebert, "Plutarch's Critique of Plato's Best Regime," 254.

61. Farndell, *When Philosophers Rule*, 31–32.

62. Machiavelli, *Discourses*, I.19.2.

63. Machiavelli, *Discourses*, I.19.3.

64. Machiavelli, *Discourses*, I.19.4.

65. Tarcov, "Machiavelli's Critique of Religion," 196–96.

66. Machiavelli, *Discourses*, I.11.5.

67. Machiavelli, *Discourses*, I.11.5.

68. William J. Connell, "The Humanist Citizen as Provincial Governor," in *Florentine Tuscany: Structures and Practices of Power*, ed. William J. Connell and Andrea Zorzi (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 146; Machiavelli, *Discourses*, I.45.2.

69. Machiavelli, *Prince*, VI.

70. Machiavelli, *Prince*, VI; *Discourses*, III.30.1.

71. Tarcov, "Machiavelli's Critique of Religion," 198.

72. Jurdjevic, *A Great and Wretched City*, 24.

73. Jurdjevic, *A Great and Wretched City*, 29.

74. Plato, *Republic*, 379c–83c.

75. Miguel Vatter, "Machiavelli, Ancient Theology, and the Problem of Civil Religion," in *Machiavelli on Liberty and Conflict*, ed. David Johnston et al. (University of Chicago Press, 2017), 120.

76. For a similar point on this topic, see Paul A. Rahe, *Against Throne and Altar: Machiavelli and Political Theory Under the English Republic* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 56–70.

77. Vatter, "Machiavelli, Ancient Theology, and the Problem of Civil Religion," 122.

78. For a different discussion of Machiavelli's "mythologizing" of Caterina Sforza and Cesare Borgia to convey philosophical and political points, see Viroli, *Machiavelli's God*, 109–21.

79. Cary Nederman argued that Machiavelli in fact thought that while Machiavelli may not have been a great friend of the Catholic Church, he may have firmly believed in the existence of God. As such, he also believed that politics and political success were in part a function of one's standing in Divine eyes. Relatedly, Maurizio Viroli has argued in *Machiavelli's God* that Machiavelli favored an interpretation of Christianity more republican in nature. According to Viroli, Machiavelli wanted to see Christianity renew itself, shed some of its antiquated *accoutrements*, and re-emerge in Italian life as a religion of liberty, where salvation and good moral standing are closely related to service of the common good. In his interpretation, the new, transformed Christianity Machiavelli wanted to see would become an integral part of good republican orders in a thriving and free Florence. Although I do not think this is the correct reading, Viroli's argument is compatible with mine. It is possible Machiavelli thought the Christian Church to have once been a politically expedient myth that had outlived its usefulness. In that sense, the new republican Christianity that Viroli

argues Machiavelli hoped to see emerge from the chrysalis of the old, politically deleterious Christian Church could well fit the description of the new, healthier political myth I argue Machiavelli thought should replace fifteenth century Italian Christianity. However, Viroli's argument (as does Nederman's) implies Machiavelli truly and honestly believed in God. I return to a brief discussion of Machiavelli's relationship to Christianity in the conclusion of this book. See Nederman, "Amazing Grace," 627–33; Nederman, *Machiavelli: A Beginner's Guide*, 28–49; Cary J. Nederman, *Lineages of European Political Thought: Explorations Along the Medieval/Modern Divide from John of Salisbury to Hegel* (The Catholic University of America Press, 2009), 277–303; Viroli, *Machiavelli's God*, 208–94.

80. See Mansfield and Tarcov, "Introduction," in Machiavelli, *Discourses*.
81. Plato, *Laws*, 663e.
82. Plato, *Laws*, 903b.
83. Plato, *Laws*, 722e–23b, 857c.

Chapter 4

Hunting, History, and Philosophy in Machiavelli's Princely Education

Thanks to his extensive correspondence and to the work of several meticulous biographers, we know Machiavelli to have been an avid consumer of philosophy and literature.[1] Yet, despite his well-documented interest in Epicureanism[2] and his evident knowledge of ancient Greek thought, very few authors of the philosophical canon directly made it into his major works. Because of this, and on the basis of *Prince* XV, it is generally accepted that Machiavelli shunned the life of contemplation, regardless of its potential import on politics.[3] But now, nearly forty years since Lefort—in his seminal work *Le travail de l'oeuvre de Machiavel*—attributed Machiavelli's admiration of Epaminondas to his being a "philosopher-prince,"[4] debates regarding the place of philosophy in princely education have resurfaced.[5]

Machiavelli's view on the topic is generally understood to exclude any philosophical components. A prince, we are told, must cultivate his body and his knowledge of geography by hunting. He should also sharpen his situational analysis skills with a wealth of historical examples from which to draw inspiration when he is confronted with tough choices. A deeper examination of these two elements of the prince's education, however, suggests that Machiavelli did not intend his injunctions to learn history and practice hunting to be taken only in a literal manner. In order for this to come through, the reader must turn back to first the literary tradition of hunting as a metaphor for philosophical training from antiquity to the Renaissance and second to the interconnectedness of geographical metaphors, historical knowledge, and human nature in Machiavelli's thought. Such an analysis reveals that while Machiavelli may have indeed been hostile to the life of philosophical contemplation for its own sake, philosophical abilities and philosophical knowledge are crucial components of a prince's education.

The argument developed in this chapter goes as follows. If we pay careful attention to Machiavelli's treatment of geographical knowledge, the invitation to refer to Xenophon's *Education of Cyrus* paired to his discussion of hunting in *Prince* XIV,[6] and the historical and mythical figures Machiavelli uses to demonstrate the usefulness of hunting, it becomes clear that hunting is not to be interpreted strictly literally. Furthermore, some other parts of the *Prince* and the *Discourses* suggest that a good prince should have some philosophical training and acumen.

Given that there is a literary tradition of using hunting as an extended allegory for philosophical practices, it is possible Machiavelli partially followed suit in *Prince* XIV. This makes sense for a few reasons: first, the hunter princes Machiavelli praises in this chapter (Philopoemen and Cyrus) are figures known, thanks to ancient literature, to have had famous philosophical propensities that were also, but not only, thematically tied to their love of hunting. Furthermore, reading philosophical practice into Machiavelli's praise of hunting is the only thing that really solves the puzzle of Machiavelli's odd error about world geography being roughly the same all over. This is because:

(a) Machiavelli routinely uses geographical metaphors to describe key aspects of political life, especially the nature of men and princes;
(b) he knew geography not to be identical all over the world, but did think human nature and political phenomena had fixed, stable, and knowable (sometimes cyclical) elements, and therefore;
(c) his literal statement that hunting is good because it improves a geographical knowledge useful in all circumstances is nonsensical and inconsistent with his personal and professional training, but the allegorical statement that philosophical training teaches about the metaphorical geography of princes, their people, and fortune is perfectly consistent with his thought.

This chapter discusses the evidence for (a) and (b) in an attempt to demonstrate (c), considers the implications of this argument for the literature, and attempts to elucidate why Machiavelli did not make his most straightforward case for the philosophical education of princes. As such, it contributes to the literature in the following ways. First, it develops the connection between images of nature as representations of political concepts in Machiavelli's thought. Second, it unearths the tradition of using hunting as an extended metaphor for philosophical practice that Machiavelli inscribes himself in. Third, it proposes a resolution to an ongoing debate in the field that has been recently resuscitated by Benner and Zuckert. Finally, it builds on these heretofore-undertreated elements of Machiavellian philosophy to show how the author conveys that philosophical training can help political actors adapt

better to the blows of *fortunà*, thereby challenging the conventional wisdom in Machiavelli studies that nothing can help political actors know and anticipate its famously terrible effects better.

POLITICS AND IMAGES OF NATURE

Machiavelli often equates teaching politics with painting or drawing, not only in the sense that it implied artistic talent but also that political concepts often entertained a certain kinship with geographical ones. Geography, geographical representations, and political knowledge are first linked in the dedicatory letter of the *Prince*, wherein he tells Lorenzo that princes are so far above the people that it is like they are on top of a mountain while the people are down in a valley.[7] Each of the two parties can see and study the other but not itself (so the prince can know the people but not himself, and the people the prince but not itself), which generates a self-awareness problem that gets in the way of complete political knowledge. Later, he describes *fortunà*, easily one of his most important and difficult political concepts of his thought, in natural terms: a river that flows out of its bed and destroys the nearby landscape.[8]

These are not isolated examples, but rather a pattern that extends beyond the strictly "political" works of his corpus. For example, Circe's servant in Machiavelli's *The Golden Ass* reaffirms this thematic linkage between human character and geographical characteristics. As she points the lions to the narrator of the poem, the herdswoman specifies that only the magnanimous and noble are changed into that beast, and that few come from the narrator's city since its "hills are made desert and deprived of every splendid bough that made them less rocky and less rough."[9] The moral character of (presumably Florentine) men is likened to hills that were formerly beautiful and welcoming, but that are now inhospitable.

This is all completely in line with what we already knew of Machiavelli. Political knowledge, as he describes it, is dependent on aesthetic perspectivism. To borrow the words of Diego von Vacano: "[. . .] the totality of politics is so complex that only partial understanding can be achieved at any given time. In order to reach this kind of understanding, one's *perspective*, be it from the plain or the mountain, is critical."[10] Sheldon Wolin also touched on this point in *Politics and Vision*, and is worth quoting at length here:

> [. . .] Machiavelli went on to compare the political writer to a landscape artist who could best execute his canvas by situating himself in the valley so that he might faithfully render the towering mountains; and, conversely, he could best sketch the valley by occupying the heights. In the metaphor the valley symbolized the people, the mountains the prince; the political theorist, as painter, was

> superior to both, moving with equal facility to either position, and capable of prescribing for one or the other.[11]

Wolin's insightful analysis into Machiavelli's use of geographical representations to signify political knowledge invites us to consider whether we can interpret the other instances where Machiavelli resorts to images of nature and geography as metaphors for political phenomena best known about with the help of a philosophical perspective. (After all, it is the philosophically adept political theorist who facilitates our understanding by way of images.)

In the famous passage where Machiavelli discusses the importance of hunting for a prince, political and natural phenomena are linked once again. The prince, we are told, should never remove his mind from the art of war. He shall do this both with "actions" and "with the mind," by studying ancient histories as well as hunting, so that he may know the local terrain.[12] In enjoining the prince to hunt, Machiavelli praises the knowledge acquired through it with the same vocabulary with which he described political knowledge in the dedicatory letter of the *Prince*. It is true that he could have been talking of metaphorical landscapes then and of literal landscapes now. But this possibility quickly becomes less plausible as Machiavelli begins to attribute to hunting benefits that it cannot possibly bring. In his view, hunting will help a prince "recognize how mountains rise, how the valleys are hollowed out, how plains lie, and to inform himself on the nature of rivers and swamps."[13] That it is useful because:

> [. . .] the hills, the valleys, the plains, the rivers, and the marshes that are in Tuscany, for instance, have a certain similarity to that of other provinces, so that from the knowledge of a site in one province one can easily come to the knowledge of others.[14]

This statement that geography is somewhat similar throughout Italy (or the world—Machiavelli could be referring to either in that passage) is obviously false, although puzzlingly so. Even more so when it is repeated in the third book of the *Discourses*,[15] where, however, it is not Italy specific, but extended to the whole world. According to it, once a hunter has acquainted himself with a particular area, he can generalize his knowledge to all others. It is highly improbable that a man as well traveled as the former ambassador of the Florentine Republic thought this to be true. That error alone is evidently not sufficient to assert that such a mistake signifies that Machiavelli is subtly referring to philosophical knowledge instead of simply being mistaken about geography. But hills, plains, and rivers have already been conceptually tied to crucial elements of Machiavelli's political teaching: the prince, the people, *fortunà*. The reader is left to wonder why Machiavelli would tell

such a blatant lie unless it served some purpose. And if these landscapes are to be understood here as images of concepts, what of hunting? Untangling these questions require that we follow Machiavelli's own invitation to turn to philosopher-hunter princes to learn more.

THE HISTORY OF HUNTING AS METAPHOR FOR PHILOSOPHY

At the end of *Prince* XIV, Machiavelli links hunting to Xenophon's *Education of Cyrus*. Turning to Xenophon's work reveals that Machiavelli is inscribing himself into a tradition of authors including Plato, Xenophon, and Ficino who used hunting as a symbolic placeholder for philosophical exercise. While that may seem far-fetched to some, it is worth remembering that hunting as a metaphor for philosophical exercise had become something of a literary trope by Machiavelli's time.

As he was likely aware, there was an established tradition in classical Western thought that understands hunting as a metaphor for philosophical exercise. It apparently began with Xenophon himself, who, as Machiavelli (not coincidentally) mentions in the same chapter as hunting, wrote one such treatise. In it, Xenophon describes hunting as training for war but also as an activity conducive to virtue. Hunting is a sort of preparation or training for philosophy and the pursuit of knowledge. It should be practiced by young men who "desire to grow up to be good men, not only in war but in all else of which the issue is perfection in thought, word and deed."[16]

Xenophon credits Cheiron as the original teacher of the art of hunting. Because of his "uprightness," the Gods commanded the centaur to teach young heroes how to hunt, which in turn would lead them to learn chivalry and nobility.[17] Close examination of the lives of all these heroes, says Xenophon, reveals that they owe their greatness to their dedication to the art of hunting in their youth, because it led all of them to virtue.[18] The great benefit of hunting is that its physical component teaches youths resilience and perseverance. Its strategic component turns them toward public service and the proper treatment of their friends.

Moreover, and in a manner that links philosophy and hunting more directly, Xenophon asserts that sophists have ranted against the practice of hunting in youths, but true philosophers see that hunting is actually training in virtue. (Xenophon uses the words "philosopher" and "hunter" interchangeably.) According to him, sophist-hunters are dangerous. But philosopher-hunters lead men to virtue and can cure the ailments of political communities, by ridding them of vice.[19] Sophist-hunters only hunt for the young and the rich in a

quest for personal gain. Philosopher-hunters, on the other hand, practice their art with self-restraint and benefit their friends.

Machiavelli and Xenophon's respective discussions of the mythical centaur Cheiron offer further evidence of the link between *Prince* XIV and *On Hunting*. For Machiavelli, the greatness of Xenophon's Cheiron is that he was such a skilled teacher of hunting that he led all the classical Greek heroes to virtue by way of it. William Parsons noted this in his recent book *Machiavelli's Gospel*:

> While Machiavelli cites the imitators of chapter 14 as models *of* imitation, he explicitly establishes that Chiron is a model *for* imitation. Importantly, Chiron was not merely an untamed and warlike beast: he was regarded as a wise and gentle centaur, with knowledge of war, prophecy, and medical healing. Chiron embodies the education that Alexander could approach only by combining the glorious history of Homer with Aristotle's philosophical corrective.[20]

Machiavelli's praise for Cheiron is due to his "two natures," that is, that of beast and of man. Cheiron, like hunting, becomes a metaphor for the need to be both physically and intellectually exceptional, to have beastly and rational parts completing each other. The covert lesson of ancient authors to which Machiavelli alludes seems to be that the hunter's skills by themselves are necessary for survival in the basest sense, yes, but that good practice eventually requires the development of our intellects, which in turn reveals to us an imperative to put these skills toward public service and the appropriate treatment of our friends. Hunting can act as the first echelon of the ladder of knowledge.[21]

Xenophon further develops the relationship between philosophers and hunters in the *Memorabilia*. In it, Socrates is referred to as a "hunter of friends."[22] As such, he will come to instruct another, Theodote, on how to take care of friends in a healthy and virtuous manner, which will turn out to be a mix of loyalty and philosophical mentorship. While both the "sophist-hunter" and the "philosopher-hunter" will bait their friends with a promise of satiation, only the philosopher-hunter will fulfill these desires in a manner conducive to virtue, one that does not consume the resources of his friends. To this hunting-savvy Socrates, immoderate appetites like thirst, hunger, or lust create a situation in which incontinent young men can be baited by their adversaries and subsequently defeated. Metaphorically, incontinence and desire cause the social downfall of these promising youths in a social setting, in a manner akin to the way animals are ensnared by drink or "quails and partridges" are drawn into nets out of lust.[23]

Socrates comes into this picture as a different kind of hunter. While sophists and political adversaries use the youths' desires to bait and ensnare them

with a view to consumption, Socrates hunts for friends. The immoderate youths come to Socrates via the same channels through which they go to politicians or sophists: out of desire for intellectual or sensory gratification. But, as we know, Socrates is not interested in "consumption:" he seeks neither sex nor riches, as is repeatedly made explicit throughout both Xenophon's and Plato's corpuses.

Later in the *Memorabilia*, Socrates returns to the metaphor of hunting over the course of a conversation about livelihood. As he learns that Theodote depends on her friends' charity to make ends meet, Socrates, who himself is in a very similar situation, enjoins her to also become a "hunter of friends" in order to ensure some measure of financial stability. The conversation, however, quickly departs from strictly material concerns. It is better to have a lot of friends than a lot of livestock, says Socrates, but one must know how to treat friends properly in order to retain their friendship.[24] Friends and friendships must be maintained in accordance with a particular art. The hunter must not ensnare friends by violence and retain them by force. This particular type of hunt requires repeated performance of the honest acts of care that true friends perform toward one another: congratulations in times of success, support in times of failure, and encouragement in times of adversity. Theodote's friend-retention power, like Socrates,' will depend on her ability to channel her friends' love of beauty first with her body and elevate it toward a love of concepts and knowledge with her soul.[25] In order for this to work properly, she must not offer her charms willy-nilly, but wait instead for people who desire to be satiated (like our aforementioned prey) and then offer her attributes; those already "full" will react with the disdain common to those offered extra food after a big meal. The sum total of skills required to ensnare and retain friends well, continues Socrates, are those "charms and spells" that he has worked on his own companions present during the conversation—Apollodorus, Anthistenes, Cebes, and Simmias. This art, a mix of knowledge of how to educate as well as how to placate friends, is what makes such a skilled "hunter." This art is evidently philosophy: not only is Socrates enjoining Theodote to become a figure eerily reminiscent of Diotima in Plato's *Symposium*, but we also know these four young men to have been following Socrates around on account of his philosophical acumen.

Machiavelli and Xenophon valued hunting on account of its physical and mental benefits. Xenophon thought hunting made men good because it taught them resiliency and perseverance on top of making them physically fit, but also because it turned them toward public service and the proper treatment of friends, for which the possession of philosophical propensities was indispensable.[26] Similarly, Machiavelli writes that princely education should involve both physical and intellectual training, hence the emphasis on hunting, an activity that provides both.

More instances of the hunting–philosophy link can be found in Plato's work. In the *Symposium*, the god Eros, whom Socrates ultimately argues facilitates youths' introduction to philosophy, is depicted by Diotima as a "famous hunter, always weaving some stratagem, desirous and competent of wisdom."[27] In the *Laws*, Plato writes of how the rulers of the city should also hunt as a preparation for ruling.[28] This proposition comes at the end of the discussion dedicated to education in the city. There we find that the legislators–philosophers should hunt—and that there is a kind of hunting that occurs in friendship. It can be of two kinds: one blamable, one praiseworthy. While the Athenian Stranger does not elaborate on the specifics of each, we can surmise from the rest of the Platonic corpus that hunting aimed at sensory gratification is the lesser kind, while Socratic friend-hunting is the higher, if only because Plato's Socrates is the absolute opposite of a gratification-driven character. (We remember from Alcibiades' lament in the *Symposium* that he is not interested in sex at all, and leaves drinking parties sober and fresh.) But not all kinds of hunting are good to the Athenian Stranger. He argues that fishing is too easy and therefore encourages laziness; bird-hunting and hunting by night, on the other hand, require too much setting of nets, traps, and snares and are conducive to shrewd and deceptive behavior. Only the hunt of terrestrial mammals is really conducive to virtue because it promotes physical fitness and the type of courage that is divine.[29]

The thematic connection between hunting and philosophical practice continued into the Renaissance.[30] In his discussion of the early books of the *Republic*, Ficino also noted the connection between philosophy and hunting. While Xenophon's Socrates was a hunter of friends, Ficino's Socrates was a hunter for justice. The process of dialogic investigation by which Socrates and his friends try to elucidate the nature of justice is equated to a form of hunt imbued with the allegorical meaning Machiavelli subscribed to as well.

The connection between hunting, education, and philosophy has been treated in the literature before. Harvey Mansfield noted that Machiavelli thought Xenophon to be in line with his design for a "politicized virtue."[31] Mansfield's analysis of the relationship between the art of war and philosophy suggests that Machiavelli and Xenophon might have agreed with the Socratic principle that knowledge of war requires knowledge of strategy. Strategic planning necessitates knowledge of human character, and thus ends up being nothing short of philosophical knowledge.[32] One ascends from knowledge of war to that of strategy and then of man. In this sense, the connection between hunting and philosophy is no longer established though Socrates, but also simply through the type of knowledge that training for war requires.

Erica Benner delved into the symbolic meaning of the practice. She argued that Machiavelli first cues the reader into its allegorical significance through his repetition of the word *cognizione*. *Pace* Benner, the unusually

high frequency with which this particular word and its associated semantic field, that of reflexive forms of knowledge, are used, indicates that Machiavelli thought there was a connection between hunting and philosophical inquiry.[33] She notes that the discussion of hunting in the *Discourses* recalls Plato's maxim that everyone should acquire knowledge of their country, since that knowledge is easily transferable elsewhere. (Benner also picks up on the oddity of Machiavelli's geographical statements and concludes that they are better read metaphorically.) Her writing goes on to argue that Machiavelli gestures toward Xenophon's Cyrus as an expert-hunter as well, something linked to his virtue, or appearance of virtue. She concludes that:

> Machiavelli's discussions of hunting provide important, seldom-noticed evidence of his affinities with Socratic ethics and political philosophy. His hunting teaches princes and citizens how to improve their defenses not just by acquainting them with physical terrain, but by urging them to reflect in a philosophical way on the civil conditions for maintaining a strong state. He concurs with Socratic writers on who held that an adequate military of political *scienza* must rest on a bedrock of practical philosophy.[34]

Recently, Catherine Zuckert took issue with this reading in her book *Machiavelli's Philosophy*. Zuckert is unwilling to read any second or third layer of meaning, or any covert lesson, in Machiavelli's injunction that the prince should practice hunting in order to prepare for war and get to know the terrain of his own territory. The point of hunting is to train the body via exercise. Reasoning with one's subordinates, far from a roundabout way to mean philosophical exercise, is simply so that through rational inquiry about war together with the prince, said subordinates will know what to do if they have to make military decisions in his absence.[35]

Zuckert contends that Benner makes the connection between Socratic philosophy and hunting too hastily. In her reading, Benner fails to notice that the texts on which she based her reading are almost exclusively the non-Socratic writings of their authors. Zuckert clearly means to imply that these non-Socratic writings are meaningfully non-Socratic, in the sense that Socrates' absence from them signifies some manner of departure from examination and promotion of the Socratic way of life in these works:

> Benner, [in] *Machiavelli's Ethics*, takes Machiavelli's discussion of hunting as a metaphor for education as "evidence of his affinities with Socratic ethics and philosophy" (124) without noticing that the texts she cites from both Xenophon and Plato are non-Socratic (Xenophon's *Education of Cyrus* and Plato's *Laws*). Machiavelli clearly and explicitly embraces Xenophon's depiction of Cyrus

> as a *political* man, but as Strauss [in *Thoughts in Machiavelli*], 291, notes, Machiavelli hardly mentions Socrates (Xenophon's other "hero") or Plato.[36]

Without wishing to commit a sin of *argumentum ad temperantiam*, the right answer lies somewhere in between the two arguments. Zuckert ignores the fact that Machiavelli inscribes himself in a pre-existing tradition in which hunting is already established, in some respect, to signify philosophical learning allegorically. This tradition is one in which Socrates is *de facto* inscribed. What this means is that there is a real possibility that Socrates is absent from those texts but that the mention of hunting as a stand-in for philosophical practice is meant to bring him into these otherwise non-Socratic works. (Furthermore, he is present in the *Memorabilia*, a profoundly "Socratic" text which neither Zuckert nor Benner mention yet is relevant to the discussion of hunting as philosophy.)

Because the association between hunting and philosophy is established via the characterization of Socrates as a type of hunter, there is scarcely any need to mention him by name, since hunting implies a sort of Socratic innuendo. Zuckert does little work to solidify the premise on which her argument against Benner is based, namely, that Socrates' absence from these texts is pregnant with meaning. Surely the conspicuous absence of Socrates should be considered when trying to understand these texts, but to assume that this signifies a symbolic dissociation from him without further justification is something of a big jump. Zuckert dismisses Benner's whole argument solely on the grounds that Socrates is not in the texts Benner cites, but it seems it would be more accurate to conclude that Socrates' absence means that perhaps the metaphor of hunting is simply meant by Machiavelli to convey the importance of philosophy *per se*, and not necessarily *Socratic* philosophy.

On the other hand, Benner is too attached to the Socratic component of her argument regarding philosophy in Machiavelli's thought. There is no doubt that Machiavelli rejected the life of contemplation, for princes and citizens alike. That does not mean however that all philosophy and philosophical exercise are necessarily incompatible with political education and praxis. Some knowledge of philosophy, a modicum of philosophical practice, is essential to the rearing of a great prince.

It is correct, however, to underline that Benner neglects the more active component of hunting. We should not be too quick to dismiss the possibility that hunting can mean "philosophy and exercise" and not strictly "philosophical exercise." We may interpret Machiavelli's hunting–philosophy equation to be active, practical political philosophy and not strictly a contemplative Socratic approach while also accepting that hunting, understood literally, is also a valuable activity. Furthermore, accepting that hunting is also a metaphor for philosophical exercise does not tie it to a particular brand of

philosophical approach. Benner's equation of philosophy as equal to Socratic philosophy seems insufficiently supported by evidence,[37] just as Zuckert's rigid distinction between philosophy and politics and/or political theory. While we may criticize Zuckert because Socrates' absence may not mean anti-Socratic innuendo, we may equally criticize Benner on the grounds that citing students of Socrates is not clearly meant to convey sympathy toward Socratic philosophy. The correct interpretation may assume hunting to be a stand-in for philosophical education and philosophically informed intellectual gymnastics. Exercise for the mind and the body. Machiavelli re-appropriates the metaphor of hunting, redefining its meaning in the process. In his works, the trope of hunting sheds its Socratic vestments.

This is, however, not the only instances of scholars noting the hunting–philosophy connection. Some work has already been done arguing that *Prince* XIV touches on the theme of philosophical practice and encourages it. Benner cites Plutarch's description of Philopoemen to make the point that he was "a philosophical soldier-prince par excellence, [. . .]."[38] Parsons simultaneously abandons Tarcov's assertion that Philopoemen "never thought of anything but the modes of war" and pushes further the implications of Tarcov's corollary point regarding Philopoemen's discussions with his friends, according to which they bring the ancient prince closer to Machiavelli himself.[39] To Parsons, Philopoemen (whom Machiavelli mentions as an example of a hunting prince) also represents a type of proxy for Machiavelli on the grounds that his "life's work, spirit and education mirror closely Machiavelli's own."[40] Philopoemen does not simply hunt: he asks questions and interrogates his friends about strategy and tests himself and others with hypotheticals. While Tarcov maintains that this makes him a better leader since he knows to reinforce his opinions with reasons, Parsons, argues that his "cogitations [. . .] resemble philosophical activity," a point with which I wholeheartedly agree.[41] As a philosophically inquisitive prince, he is an example of a ruler who tries to understand things both by himself and through interaction with others. (Plutarch describes him as someone who "applied himself to the writings of philosophers."[42]) So thorough was Philopoemen's inquiry that he never encountered a situation he did not know how to deal with.[43] His philosophical practice was an essential part of his princely education.

Philopoemen is not alone in having practiced philosophy as part of his training. Chapter XIV of the *Prince* mentions two more examples. The first one is Alexander the Great, who was famously tutored by Aristotle. Machiavelli does not mention Aristotle, but rather the mythical Greek warrior Achilles, as the object of Alexander's imitation. (It is worth noting here that the crowning achievement of Cheiron, whose significance is discussed above, was the tutelage of Achilles.) Machiavelli also knew, thanks to Plutarch's *Lives*, that Alexander's *Iliad* had been revised by Aristotle.[44] As such, Vickie Sullivan,[45]

and Parsons along with her, are right to intimate that Machiavelli tells us here that such guidance comes with philosophical training: "Alexander's example demonstrate that classical philosophy can help enable conquest."[46]

So can Cyrus' example. In fact, Xenophon's *Education of Cyrus* offers a more in-depth development of the themes in *Prince* XIV. As we are taken from Cyrus' adolescence to his early adulthood, he is revealed as a Machiavellian prince before his time, and his education gives us valuable insight into Machiavelli's view of the role philosophy occupies in princely education.

It is hard not to notice that a substantive thematic commonality between *Prince* XIV and the *Education of Cyrus* is that, above all else, the young Cyrus loves to hunt. His love of hunting is discussed by Xenophon with the lexical field of love of knowledge and curiosity, which suggests once again that "hunting" is a loaded metaphor for philosophical propensities. We are also told that he had "a sharp mind," that he "loved to learn," and that he was constantly asking questions to whoever happened to be around him "about how things happened to be."[47] Thus, very early in his life, Cyrus shows signs of a philosophical inclination. This inclination, which goes hand-in-hand with his love of hunting, leads him to desire to push boundaries and explore and hunt outside the bounds of his grandfather's (Astyages) estate. Astyages eventually submits and permits him to do so provided that his uncle and a group of guards accompany him. As soon as they reach the park, Cyrus resumes his intellectual inquiry and starts to ask a myriad of questions. He asks about the approach their party should take in case a wild and dangerous beast appears, and questions his companions about which beasts "one should not approach and which one should pursue boldly."[48] In short, he shows the same type of inclination that Machiavelli praised in Philopoemen and that Parsons identified in his book.

Hunting leads Cyrus to learn many lessons about politics, which are often echoed in Machiavelli's *Prince*. The first lesson is that hunting is good practice for war. Shooting animals is good for marksmanship and killing prepares the hunter to take the life of human beings. Hunting also trains its practitioner in the art of the deception and manipulation of beasts, and if need be, humans as well.[49] The second lesson comes from Cyrus's father, Cambyses, who instructs his son that hunting is practice at "knowing how to do both good and harm to human beings."[50] Cambyses continues and tells Cyrus that the inevitability of dissimulation and manipulation in politics is a lesson only adults can learn. Smart young people like Cyrus need to reach a certain level of maturity before they are taught this important lesson for the same reason young children are not taught about sex right away: they have neither the knowledge of human beings necessary to understand it nor the maturity to use it well.

This is almost exactly the same lesson as the most famous teaching of *Prince* XV, wherein Machiavelli tells us that a prince must "learn to be able not to be good, and to use this and not to use it according to necessity."[51] No ruler can possess and practice the virtues held to be good, and therefore he must learn to deceive people into thinking he possesses these traits. *The Education of Cyrus* shows the protagonist learning these philosophical lessons as a result of a guided reflection on the practice of hunting.

HISTORICAL KNOWLEDGE, *FORTUNÀ*, AND PHILOSOPHER-HUNTER PRINCES

Let us briefly go back to Machiavelli and his odd geographical mistakes. Even if we account for his ignorance of the geography of the newly-discovered Americas, Machiavelli, like anyone who had gone from France to Italy, Germany, Switzerland, and so on (as he had during his time in the Florentine government)[52] could only know that statement to be obviously and utterly incorrect. This would be the case even if Machiavelli had been talking strictly about Italy, which seems more likely since the original Italian text mentions similitudes (*similitudine*) between provinces (*provincia*) over countries and how knowledge of one (in this case Tuscany) facilitates the acquisition of knowledge about the others (which is a mistake of a lesser degree, but still a significant one). Anyone who has traveled Italy from North to South (as Machiavelli had) knows this to be grossly false. All of this is to say that we are left to ponder the reason behind Machiavelli's deliberate insertion of such an obvious inaccuracy.

The answer demands that we remember that Machiavelli did not subscribe to a constructivist view of human nature:

> Whoever considers present and ancient things easily knows that in all cities and in all peoples there are the same desires and the same humors, and there always have been. So it is an easy thing for whoever examines past things diligently to foresee future things in every republic and to take the remedies for them that were used by the ancients, or, if they do not find any that were used, to think up new ones through the similarity of accidents.[53]

This fact, paired with the hypothesis that hunting is a metaphor for philosophical training, helps us solve the puzzle posed by Machiavelli's obvious inaccuracies. There is only one thing that (a) makes political knowledge possible and (b) stays the same throughout time, and it is the constancy of human nature and human behavior.

Machiavelli simply did not think men changed fundamentally in nature across time or location. He quite clearly thought that history could be treated

as a repository of data from which he could draw in order to prescribe courses of actions and analyze political situations. Without historical knowledge, the prince cannot be a true virtuoso. Machiavelli wrote that "every history is full of examples" and that "time, which they say is the father of every truth, exposes [the hidden causes of malignity]."[54] To him history is not only useful insofar as it has a predictive power; it is also a tool of moral education. The careful study of history gives scholars and princes additional insight into actions. Complete knowledge of a situation can only be gleaned from the meditative return afforded by historical musings; witnesses and contemporaries, by association, therefore only get a partial picture of what is happening, and as such their judgment risks error. Time is the father of truth, not simply a clarifying factor. To borrow the words of Cary Nederman, "human action has a constant and predictable pattern" that is "relatively insusceptible to variation or erasure."[55] Thanks to this characteristic of human behavior, we can use the data provided to us by historical records of past events and actions to predict how current events might unfold, provided that we observe a certain similarity of characteristics between both past and current events, as well as the men and women embroiled in them.

According to Raphael Major, "Machiavelli shares the view that human beings have been and always will be fundamentally the same."[56] Indeed, Machiavelli suggests that men, like every other component of our world, do not change, when he writes, in a mocking tone, "as if heaven, sun, elements, men had varied in motion, order, and power from what they were in antiquity."[57] Machiavelli obviously believed that under similar circumstances and provided they have received a similar education, men will act in similar ways, given their unchanging nature, and that true virtue therefore exists in itself, unchanging. In other words, Machiavelli did not think that human nature was in flux.

Furthermore, according to Giovanni Giorgini, Machiavelli was eager to appear close to Xenophon and Plutarch—an argument that furthers the development of Florentine historical determinism traced above:

> The importance of the examples of the past, the exemplarity of "great men," has a central role in Machiavelli's political vision: since human nature is in his view fixed, and since history therefore tends to repeat itself, the possibility to imitate the example of the great statesmen of the past is actual and real. Moreover, if we read such educational biographies as Xenophon's *Ciropaedia* and Plutarch's *Lives*, we realize that the great statesmen of the past did exactly this: they chose eminent men as models to imitate.[58]

In sum, Machiavelli, pushing the Bruni-an envelope about historical knowledge even farther, tells us that we can learn about politics in general, as well

as context-appropriate political behavior, if we study history carefully. By this he seems to mean that there exists an undisclosed number of political axioms that always have been and will always be true. This is because, as has been rightly noted by Mansfield,[59] Machiavelli seemed to have thought that nothing was ever really new, or ever really changed, in the heavens as on the earth. Actions only appear to be different while in reality they are not. Machiavelli thought that the apparent diversity of human behavior was in reality no different than the (apparent) change in the makeup of the heavens. According to him, men, like the sun, the moon and the stars, behaved cyclically and repetitively. Consequently, people's actions can be adequately predicted if we study them carefully, something for which we can use history. Therefore, meticulous reflection on past human actions could help the political analyst (or agent) to predict future behavior as the astronomer can predict the motion of the stars.[60]

Yet it is true, as Mansfield notes, that while Machiavelli took "a long step in the direction of scientific determinism" he did not completely surrender to it, because he retained the idea that human life is, to a degree, always under the influence of an otherwise chaotic component:[61] *fortùna*, the impersonal and unforgiving goddess of chance. Although one can brace against it, no amount of historical (or other) knowledge can help us predict how and when *fortùna* will manifest herself. Machiavelli's philosophy thus leaves a place for this unknowable and unpredictable element of human existence.

Despite this and the fact that circumstances do change, knowledge of history helps us recognize the substantial similarities between events, identify patterns, and inspire political actors to react correctly based on the knowledge they have of past decisions and their results. There is a link between geographical situation and knowledge of human character. Men who are born in a given region, we are told in *Discourses* 3.43, almost always show the same nature,[62] a political and moral nature that Machiavelli attaches to landscapes, as he does in the *Golden Ass*. Consequently, knowledge about regions entails knowledge about the nature of the men who inhabit it; men are like Machiavelli's landscapes in that they are mostly similar throughout the world, so familiarity with one can easily be transposed into familiarity with all, since men's moral and political nature is as constant and knowable as heavenly motions. This knowledge of literal and metaphorical "human" regions is acquired via hunting, as per *Prince* XIV. Therefore, hunting is at least partially connected to the acquisition of knowledge of human nature, which is philosophy. Literal hunting helps with literal landscapes, and the hunting that we learn about through Xenophon and Philopoemen, as Machiavelli encourages us to do, helps us know the landscapes of politics.

Considering that valleys, etc. are placeholders for political concepts, and that hunting doubles as an image for philosophical training, the statement

about studying local geography can be transposed as follows: if a prince hunts he will learn about rivers, mountains, plains, marshes and hills which are the same everywhere; if a prince studies philosophy, then he will learn about other princes and governments, peoples and *fortunà*. Consequently, he will acquire an understanding of the "regions" that are *truly* the same across the world, that is, the geography of human behavior and political phenomena.

This goes against Mansfield's own treatment of hunting to some degree. What this chapter shows is that not that (*pace* Mansfield), hunting is an image of war, and because war is an image of politics, therefore hunting is also an image of politics. *Nature and representations of nature* are images of politics.[63] Hunting is the art by which we acquaint ourselves with this nature (an image of politics), *à la* Philopoemen the philosopher-prince (*pace Prince* XIV). Therefore hunting is an image of the art by which we learn of politics, as Philopoemen did: philosophically. Hunting is an image of philosophy.

One of the most interesting implications of this argument is that it demands we reassess the role of *fortùna* within Machiavelli's philosophy. As we saw earlier, Machiavelli associates *fortùna* with a natural element: it is as a river, ever-flowing, implacable, and prone to flooding. But since geographical metaphors are also allegorical placeholders for political phenomena, and that Machiavelli tells us that hunting-philosophizing is necessary to know landscapes-politics, then it may well mean that he also thought philosophy could give us some insight into the nature of *fortùna*. Knowledge of geography means knowledge of mountains (princes), plains (peoples) and also rivers (*fortùna*). And while geographical knowledge can do nothing for princes who are swept by rivers, it can enable them to anticipate where the river is carrying them. Philosophical knowledge may not shield princes from the blows of *fortùna*, but it may help to better roll with them.

This solves the problem encountered by Alison McQueen in her article "Politics in Apocalyptic Times: Machiavelli's Savonarolan Moment." In it, she hypothesizes that Machiavelli had used natural imagery to describe fortune so as to suggest the possibility that men can (a) know about its nature and (b) learn to control it. McQueen argues that Machiavelli describes fortune as a river because "in quiet times, prudent men may prepare for [the] extraordinary onslaughts [of the river of fortune flooding] by building dams and dykes."[64] The image of the river is used by Machiavelli to tell his readers that fortune can be tamed with the help of "technological mastery and foresight."[65] Since there are no provisions about how to acquire precise knowledge of fortune, McQueen concludes that Machiavelli's own argument leads him straight back to "the opinion he had intended to disprove" and that "fortune remains impersonal and unintelligible."[66]

My argument implies that there are, if we pay more attention to the other uses of natural imagery in the *Prince* and *Discourses*. It is not so certain

that Machiavelli used the image of a river to inspire prudent men to build metaphorical "dams," but more likely that this image was meant to go in conjunction with his instructions regarding princely education in geography via hunting. In the big picture of politics Machiavelli paints, where every element of political life can be depicted as a geographical or natural feature, fortune is a river, and rivers are part of the natural landscape. Princes gain knowledge of the lay of the land and its different elements by being philosopher-hunters. Machiavelli did offer a prescription about how we might prepare to deal with fortune's twists and turns: not by putting our faith in uncertain future progress, but rather by revisiting past histories and training our philosophical minds.

WHY IS MACHIAVELLI NOT MAKING HIS MOST STRAIGHTFORWARD CASE?

An important objection remains to be addressed here: why would Machiavelli go through all the pain of obscuring his own points about the potential benefits of philosophical training? Even if we accept the argument that sometimes authors conceal their most controversial points behind layers of symbolism and rhetorical sleight of hand, the argument that philosophy could be somewhat beneficial to princely education was scarcely controversial in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Florence. (If anything, the opposite may have been more likely, judging by what we saw in chapter 1.)

Furthermore, the question of what philosophical training brings to the metaphorical table of a prince's education remains unanswered. So far it has been established that in a rare moment of agreement with Plato, Machiavelli did seem to think some philosophical upbringing could teach the prince important lessons. But precisely *what* lessons they are is still unclear. Therefore, the argument that Machiavelli agrees with Plato on the fact that philosophical education is good for princes, but *not* because it leads them to the same teachings Glaucon, Adeimantus et al. discovered under Socrates' guidance in the *Republic* has not been fully fleshed out. In this last section of the chapter, I argue that in order to discover the moral lessons that Machiavelli thought philosophy could impart to princes, one needs to pay attention to (a) the context related to the circulation of the *Rhetorica Ad Herennium,* a popular treatise that seemed to have greatly impacted Machiavelli, and also to (b) Xenophon's *Cyrus*, whose story Machiavelli invites us to consult in *Prince* XIV in order to learn more about philosophy/hunting. This is to say, oddly, that clarifying Machiavelli's position about philosophical education as it relates (or not) to Socrates' and Plato's teaching requires that we follow his invitation to read and think about Xenophon, and as such a close reading

of Xenophon's *Education of Cyrus* is necessary, so to speak, in order not to leave any argumentative loose ends.

Understanding hunting in a layered fashion that contains a gesture toward some philosophical exercise, may not have been as obscure a reference to Machiavelli's readers as it is to us. As it has been exposed already, there had been quite a long tradition of famous authors likening hunting and hunters to philosophical practice. From Socrates to Xenophon, Plato, Plutarch, and Ficino, it is quite possible that the implication was more obvious then than it is now. Given the abundance of evidence—references to Xenophon's expertise on hunting, Cyrus, Philopoemen, and Plutarch—Machiavelli and his readership may indeed have thought the double meaning to be rather clearly implied. Perhaps then Machiavelli was not articulating his *most* straightforward case, but he may have been making a reasonably well-understood reference.

The more substantial answer to this question is that Machiavelli's controversial teaching is not that princes should study some philosophy to learn about men, politics, and fortune. Rather, the controversy lies in what lesson Machiavelli seemed to have thought philosophical inquiry imparted upon princes. In order to flesh out what precisely that is, we must first take a detour through the history of the *Rhetorica Ad Herennium,* and then return to the substance of the philosophical lessons Cyrus learns at the end of his education and that Machiavelli had invited us to pay attention to.

According to Virginia Cox, a rhetorical treatise titled *Rhetorica Ad Herennium* circulating during the early years of Machiavelli's life, and that Machiavelli would doubtlessly have read, laid the groundwork for the (in) famous moral elasticity generally understood to be advocated in the *Prince*. The argument here is that this moral stance, present in *Ad Herrenium*, is also presented in the *Education of Cyrus* as the final lesson of Cyrus' moral and philosophical education. Through natural metaphors and the layered meaning of hunting Machiavelli had intimated that princes are not entirely disarmed in front of *fortùna*; through references to Cyrus the philosopher-hunter prince he also shows us that politics requires moral flexibility.

Cox admirably shows how *Ad Herennium* advocates a shift in valuation from the morally good or desirable to interrelated considerations of reputation and security, of which the latter is always to be preferred. Thanks to Cox's work[67] it seems clear Machiavelli was convinced directly or indirectly by the rhetorical strategy of *Ad Herrenium* (pointing to the disputability of strong moral claims about proper political behavior), its argument about what is politically desirable (security), and the moral flexibility required to bring it about. In fact, by bringing up Cyrus, Machiavelli makes a subtle rhetorical move of his own to intimate that his argument, and by association that of *Ad Herrenium*, go back as far as the ancient world.

Cox is not the only one who offered an analysis of the influence of Roman rhetoric on Machiavelli's work. In *Machiavelli*, Maurizio Viroli examined the influence of Cicero's work and that of the *Rhetorica Ad Herrenium* on Machiavelli's political theory. Viroli's analysis of the import of that tradition is radically different, and rather less compelling, than Cox's. For Cox, Machiavelli took not only a stylistic page from the *Rhetorica*, but also a philosophical one. In her reading, the author of the *Prince* is inspired formally and intellectually by the *Rhetorica*. Cox does a wonderful job of inscribing Machiavelli's moral argument in a tradition continued in *Ad Herrenium*, as well as exemplifying how he also used the rhetorical tactics proposed by the work to subvert traditional humanist arguments. What Machiavelli's *Prince* did with the contents of *Ad Herrenium*, to paraphrase Joseph Femia, is to present an unconventional message in a conventional manner.

Viroli, however, takes a radically different approach. It becomes apparent right at the beginning that he is anxious to discredit readings of Machiavelli as both philosopher and proto-political scientist and uses Machiavelli's clear debt to the Roman rhetorical tradition to make his case. In his eyes, Machiavelli's rhetorical proclivities imply a *de facto* incompatibility with readings of Machiavelli as author or social scientist; a proposition he seems to assume is self-evident. (It is not.) The argument is convincing insofar as he shows Machiavelli as an apt writer able to use figures of speeches and draw on the rhetorical tradition to convince. However, Viroli assumes continuity between Ciceronian rhetoric and *Ad Herrenium*'s, a point that Cox's work (published a year prior) had made clear is incorrect.

In fact, the great strength of Cox's argument is how it shows how Machiavelli's impressive subversive powers, inspired stylistically and intellectually by *Ad Herrenium*, succeeded in breaking with the Ciceronian tradition while staying under the radar; rejecting humanist axioms in the most humanistic way. Viroli seems blind to this; because he assumes Machiavelli's rhetorical inspiration means we should read the *Prince* as a strictly rhetorical work, he flip-flops between two ill-fitting arguments. On the one hand Machiavelli's debt to the rhetorical tradition implies that we should neither think Machiavelli offered his advice as truths nor that his works suggest a particular vision of ethics or moral theory. On the other hand, this same debt to the rhetorical tradition visibly strengthens Machiavelli's commitment to republicanism, liberty, and justice. (It seems that Viroli thinks that commitment to these three principles are neither moral nor philosophical implications.)[68]

The lesson of *Ad Herrenium* is the controversial teaching Machiavelli thought philosophical education would reveal to princes, and it is confirmed, in part, by the fact that this very lesson is the culmination of Cyrus' own moral education, toward which Machiavelli tells us to turn if to learn more

about the benefits of "hunting." The early chapters of the *Prince* and the *Discourses* have the same progression as Cyrus' philosophical upbringing, *sans* the Cyrus narrative. Cyrus is an intellectually curious child who is quickly inculcated with notions of the rule of law, modesty, and magnanimous behavior, moral commitments he carries with himself (despite some conflicts) up until his father's final revelation about morality and politics. Cambyses' behavior and his words suggest that he thought his son needed a foundation of strict moral commitments in order to use the revelation of moral relativism responsibly. And Machiavelli seems to agree with that.

At first, Cyrus is brought up like every other young noble Persian child. He is taught gratitude, moderation, obedience, how to eat, and drink in reasonable amounts, and how to use spears and bows.[69] Cyrus loves "beauty and honor" and quickly develops an affable and noble character. He is modest and satisfied with little despite his high status. He repeatedly displays generosity by sharing his food and other luxuries with servants and friends regardless of their status.[70] In other words, Cyrus is someone conventionally understood to be, even in twenty-first century terms, an admirable person. We could even go as far as to say that he would not be a bad Christian (at this stage of his life),[71] if it were not for the fact that he was a few centuries early. But as he matures and develops the philosophical propensities mentioned above, the moral assumptions that frame his worldview are challenged one after the other.

It begins while on a trip to his grandfather's estate. Cyrus greatly enjoys his time there and adapts quickly even though he realizes that there are some cultural differences between his people and his grandfather's. As the trip draws to an end, Cyrus realizes that he does not want to leave, but would rather stay as his grandfather's ward. Although not much is made of it, his mother's (Mandane) reaction to Cyrus' demands has profound philosophical implications. Mandane is worried that Cyrus will learn a theory of justice unsuited to life back in Persia and consequently complicate his return. Mandane's concern implies that justice is circumstantial and not transcendental. She expresses her reservations as follows: in Persia justice is understood to be more egalitarian than in Astyages' kingdom. She means that Cyrus' father Cambyses (and his people) take what is equal to be just. Indeed we are told earlier in the book that Cyrus' education placed great emphasis on gratitude and giving to everybody their due.[72] Furthermore, Cambyses is legally accountable for his actions and governs not according to his preference but according to the law and to what the city itself takes to be its greater good. Mandane says that when Cambyses rules, "not his soul but the law is his measure,"[73] a practice she calls the "kingly" way. In contrast, Astyages is a tyrant and as such is not beholden to this notion of justice. Rather, he aggregates resources with little or no regard to redistribution. Neither Mandane,

Astyages, nor Cyrus attempt to evaluate which of the two approaches is better or truly just. They are simply taken to be different, which suggests that the three interlocutors consider justice to be determined contextually.

Cyrus, moreover, has started to express some doubts *vis-à-vis* the validity of Persian justice. He has already realized, after being asked to rule on the issue of a stolen tunic, that to follow the letter of the law rigidly might end up landing one in uncomfortable or absurd territory. In the tunic case, both the tunic thief and its original owner end up with a better-fitting tunic as a result of the crime, yet Cyrus is still beaten for not voting to punish the thief. This is in spite of the fact that the overall outcome of said thief's "crime" was beneficial to all parties, including the "victim's."[74] Cyrus is made to respect strict property rights, but failed to give each boy their due in terms of the best-fitting tunic. As such, inflexible respect for the letter of the law ultimately fails to yield a result that respects the Persian precepts of ruling mentioned above. Additionally, the ruling style of his grandfather shows that counter-intuitive methods can sometimes yield positive results. And so, with a somewhat sophistic argument, Cyrus convinces his mother that he will not return spoiled or immodest, since Astyages' brand of leadership (i.e., absolute rule) has successfully "taught all the Medes to have less than [he does]."[75] What the young Cyrus implies here is that living under Astyages entails some acceptance of scarcity, which renders the possibility of Cyrus' spoilage null. Mandane is convinced and leaves Cyrus in Medea.

The real blow to Cyrus' worldview comes upon his return home. As they ride, Cambyses meets Cyrus on his way back to Persia and instructs his son about the demands of leadership. The gist of Cambyses' point is that leadership requires sacrifice and that the leader should always shoulder more hardship than his soldiers. Doing so will make him loved and admired by the soldiers, which will make them more obedient. But by "sacrifice" Cambyses means making hard decisions that may hurt friends as well as enemies from time to time.[76] In short, Cyrus must learn to be "a plotter, a dissembler, a wily, a cheat, a thief, rapacious, and the sort who takes advantage of his enemies in everything."[77] Doing so makes a man not only just but also law-abiding, in Cambyses' view. Cyrus is understandably shocked and demands an explanation as to why his father went through the trouble of raising him in a spirit exactly opposite to that lesson if he had planned all along to undo that education.

Cambyses' answer is that this particular lesson is not suited to everyone. According to him, the Greeks used to teach it to all their youths, and this had the unfortunate consequence of making deceivers and dissimulators of everybody. Some unscrupulous citizens started using these tactics at the expense of their kin in the pursuit of personal gain. Therefore, says Cambyses, this lesson is now only taught to those who exhibit the intellectual maturity necessary to

learn when to be and when not to be conventionally good with friends and/or enemies.[78] Cambyses remains persuaded that the "Greek lesson" is correct, despite initial decisional mistakes about the proper scope of its dispersion. If the result excuses, then it may be just to deceive and steal from one's friends. In other words, Cyrus is told that his earlier reflex to attribute the right-fitting tunic to each of the boys despite the fact that the swap originated from a crime was actually valid. Unfortunately, the judge who presided over Cyrus had to beat him, presumably because Cyrus was not mature enough to learn the truth about justice yet and/or could not be seen overtly propagating this alternative theory of the right, lest Persian society devolve into the same disorder caused by the Greeks' mistake. Cyrus' father tells his son the same lesson Machiavelli tells us via Agathocles: it is not only results or intellectual and/or leadership potential that matters, but also the nature of the person taught. The knowledge to recognize the circumstances under which a leader must temporarily cease to be good is too dangerous to be put in the hands of people who have the potential to become monsters. Only those intellectually mature enough, that is, philosopher-hunters, as Machiavelli subtly invites us to see via Cyrus, can handle this revelation, a revelation that would later be repeated in *Ad Herrenium*.

NOTES

1. De Grazia, *Machiavelli in Hell*; Viroli, *Niccolò's Smile*; Atkinson and Sices, *Machiavelli and His Friends*; Corrando Vivanti, *Niccolo Machiavelli: An Intellectual Biography* (Princeton University Press, 2013).

2. Palmer, *Reading Lucretius in the Renaissance*, 85; Rahe, "In the Shadow of Lucretius," 39; Jill Kraye, "The Revival of Hellenistic Philosophies," in *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Philosophy*, ed. James Hankins (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 103; Brown, *The Return of Lucretius to Renaissance Florence*; Brown, "Philosophy and Religion in Machiavelli."

3. Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*; Strauss, "Machiavelli," 291–99; Mansfield and Tarcov, "Introduction," xx; Zuckert, *Machiavelli's Politics*, 359; Zuckert, "The Life of Castruccio Castracani"; Catherine Zuckert, "Machiavelli: A Socratic?," *Perspectives on Political Science* 47, no. 1 (November 2017).

4. Lefort, *Le travail de l'œuvre de Machiavel*, 645, 671.

5. Benner, *Machiavelli's Ethics*; Erica Benner, *Machiavelli's Prince: A New Reading*; Parsons, *Machiavelli's Gospel: The Critique of Christianity in The Prince* (Rochester University Press, 2016); Zuckert, *Machiavelli's Politics*; Zuckert, *Life of Castruccio*; Zuckert, *Machiavelli: A Socratic?*

6. For another analysis of Machiavelli and Xenophon, from the perspective of Xenophon's *Anabasis*, see Buzzetti, *Xenophon the Socratic Prince*.

7. Machiavelli, *Prince*, 4.
8. Machiavelli, *Prince*, 98–99.
9. Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Golden Ass*, trans. Allan Gilbert (Duke University Press, 1998), 765.
10. von Vacano, *The Art of Power*, 139. This opinion is shared by Mary G. Dietz. See Mary G. Dietz, "Trapping the Prince: Machiavelli and the Politics of Deception," *American Political Science Review* 80, no. 3 (September 1986): 795.
11. Sheldon S. Wolin, *Politics and Vision* (Princeton University Press, 2006), 181.
12. Machiavelli, *Prince*, 59.
13. Machiavelli, *Prince*, 59–60.
14. Machiavelli, *Prince*, 59.
15. Machiavelli, *Discourses*, 298.
16. Xenophon, *On Hunting*, I.
17. Xenophon, *On Hunting*, I.
18. Xenophon, *On Hunting*, XII.
19. Xenophon, *On Hunting*, XIII.
20. Parsons, *Machiavelli's Gospel*, 91. Emphasis in the original.
21. Remembering the previous chapters, let us not miss the interesting fact that Machiavelli apparently turns Diotima's teaching on its head here: the ascension towards development of philosophical propensities no longer begins with an act of affection, but one of aggression.
22. Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, III.11.15.
23. Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, II.1.4.
24. Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, III.11.4.
25. Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, III.11.10.
26. Xenophon, *On Hunting*, XIII.
27. Plato, *Symposium*, 203d–e.
28. Plato, *Laws*, 823b–23d.
29. Plato, *Laws*, 842a.
30. Farndell, *When Philosophers Rule*, 11.
31. Mansfield, *Machiavelli's Virtue*, 12.
32. Mansfield, *Machiavelli's Virtue*, 199–200.
33. Benner, *Machiavelli's Ethics*, 122–23.
34. Benner, *Machiavelli's Ethics*, 124.
35. Zuckert, *Machiavelli's Politics*, 75.
36. Zuckert, *Machiavelli's Politics*, 75n59.
37. Benner, *A New Reading*, 170–75.
38. Benner, *A New Reading*, 172.
39. Tarcov, "Belief and Opinion in Machiavelli's Prince," 586.
40. Parsons, *Machiavelli's Gospel*, 85.
41. Parsons, *Machiavelli's Gospel*, 86–87.
42. Plutarch, *Philopoemen*, X.IV.4.
43. Machiavelli, *Prince*, 59–60.
44. Parsons, *Machiavelli's Gospel*, 90.

45. Vicky Sullivan, "Alexander the Great as 'Lord of Asia' and Rome as His Successor in Machiavelli's *Prince*," *Review of Politics* 75, no. 4 (Fall 2013): 536.
46. Parsons, *Machiavelli's Gospel*, 90.
47. Xenophon, *The Education of Cyrus*, I.4.3.
48. Xenophon, *The Education of Cyrus*, I.4.7.
49. Xenophon, *The Education of Cyrus*, I.6.30.
50. Xenophon, *The Education of Cyrus*, I.6.31.
51. Machiavelli, *Prince*, 59.
52. De Grazia, *Machiavelli In Hell*, 16–20; Viroli, *Niccolò's Smile*, 29–49.
53. Machiavelli, *Discourses*, 83–84.
54. Machiavelli, *Discourses*, 15.
55. Cary Nederman, "Machiavelli and Moral Character: Principality, Republic and the Psychology of *Virtù*," *History of Political Thought* 21, no. 3 (2000): 350, 355.
56. Rafael Major, "A New Argument for Morality: Machiavelli and the Ancients," *Political Research Quarterly* 60, no. 2 (June 2007): 174.
57. Machiavelli, *Discourses*, 19.
58. Giorgini, "Machiavelli on Good and Evil," 59.
59. Harvey C. Mansfield, *Machiavelli's New Modes and Orders: A Study of the Discourses on Livy* (University of Chicago Press, 2001), 27.
60. Machiavelli, *Discourses*, 6, 84.
61. Mansfield, "Machiavelli on Necessity," 43.
62. Machiavelli, *Discourses*, 302.
63. Mansfield, *Machiavelli's Virtue*, 269.
64. Alison McQueen, "Politics in Apocalyptic Times: Machiavelli's Savonarolan Moment," *The Journal of Politics* 78, no. 3 (2016): 920.
65. McQueen, "Politics in Apocalyptic Times," 920.
66. McQueen, "Politics in Apocalyptic Times," 920–21; Nederman, "Amazing Grace," 617–38; Nederman, "Machiavelli and Moral Character," 349–64; Nederman, *Machiavelli: A Beginner's Guide*.
67. Virginia Cox, "Machiavelli and the *Rhetorica Ad Herrenium*: Deliberative Rhetoric in *The Prince*," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 28, no. 4 (Winter 1997): 1128–29; Virginia Cox, "Rhetoric and ethics in Machiavelli," in *The Cambridge Companion to Machiavelli*, ed. John M. Najemy (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 181.
68. Maurizio Viroli, *Machiavelli* (Oxford University Press, 1998), 73–113. For a more detailed and thorough account of the inconsistencies in Viroli's view that Machiavelli's intellectual enterprise was completely antithetical to a scientific undertaking, see also Joseph V. Femia, *Machiavelli Revisited* (University of Wales Press, 2004), 44–61.
69. Xenophon, *The Education of Cyrus*, 25.
70. Xenophon, *The Education of Cyrus*, 29.
71. Ptolemy of Lucca seemed to have thought so as well. In his *De Regimine Principium*, Ptolemy discusses how God was favorable to Cyrus because Cyrus showed great humanity toward God's chosen people. See Ptolemy of Lucca, *De Regimine Principium: On the Government of Rulers*, trans. James M. Blythe (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 165.

72. Xenophon, *The Education of Cyrus*, 33.
73. Xenophon, *The Education of Cyrus*, 35.
74. Xenophon, *The Education of Cyrus*, 35.
75. Xenophon, *The Education of Cyrus*, 33.
76. Xenophon, *The Education of Cyrus*, 55–56.
77. Xenophon, *The Education of Cyrus*, 54.
78. Xenophon, *The Education of Cyrus*, 55–56.

Conclusion

Let me end this book by saying a little about what, beyond Platonism, unifies the understudied aspects of Machiavellian thought I have tried to flesh out, and what hypotheses about his work they confirm and infirm. First, my interpretation further solidifies Machiavelli's well-established insistence on self-reliance as a key element of personal and political success. His work was already rife with injunctions to prioritize one's own means, such as the famous axiom according to which it is better to be feared than loved because "men love at their convenience and fear at the convenience of the prince," from which it follows it is better to be feared because "a wise prince should found himself on what is his."[1] Or the equally famous warning against usage of mercenaries and mercenary arms: "a wise prince has always avoided these arms and turned to his own," because victory with other people's means is not truly a victory. In fact, it is better to lose with one's own arms than win with that of others.[2]

Machiavelli's reflections on Platonism are perfectly consistent with his doctrine of self-reliance and independence. Without necessarily going as far as Tarcov when he wrote that self-reliance was specifically "at the core of Machiavelli's spiritual warfare," it is true however that it is at the core of his political teaching, and that reliance on one's own arms and one's own virtue cannot be compromised.[3] (Even if the meaning of "arms" and "virtue" may be flexible.) In the literary works one of the hallmarks of the negative power of Diotima's eros is that it renders otherwise good and capable men helpless, mopey and entirely reliant on friends, family, established religion and its cronies, and even complete strangers to accomplish their goals. Worse, love does not simply make men need others, it robs them of faculties and discernment they once had, as is the case with Nicomaco.

Likewise, Machiavelli's instruction that princes gain some historical and philosophical education aims to further their independence. Thanks to philosophical and historical knowledge, princes can use pattern recognition to identify and predict the consequences of certain types of political behavior as well as know enough about ethics to know when not to be good, that is, the threshold where a certain "badness" becomes necessary (the lesson of Cambyses). Most importantly, it diminishes the power and influence of the chaotic and almost entirely unpredictable force of *fortùna*.

That lesson, considered alongside the critique of philosopher kingship, adds to the scholarship in several meaningful ways. It furthers evidence of intellectual kinship between Machiavelli and Xenophon, warns peoples against (a) themselves, (b) overreliance on elites, and (c) the normative hold that pretensions of supernatural insight have over our behavior, especially Christianity's.

How? Well, Machiavelli obviously thought that people have preconceived notions of justice and correct behavior, if only because this is an obvious fact of the human condition that no one really fails to grasp. He constantly points to Christianity as the source of these assumptions. The most famous example of this is probably the fifteenth chapter of the *Prince,* in which Machiavelli announces his desire to depart from kingdoms and republics that are imaginary, or never known to have existed.[4] Regardless of whether one agrees that this particular quip is aimed at Christianity's kingdom of heaven and/or Plato's *Kallipolis*, it is hard to deny that the substance of the chapter is an injunction to abandon pre-existing assumptions readers may have had about the relationship between ethics and politics.

Machiavelli devotes the early part of the *Discourses* to the idea that justice is also circumstantial rather than fixed—an idea he seems to have gotten from Cicero. In his own all-too-often glossed over account of the state of nature, Machiavelli tells us that humans formerly lived scattered throughout the globe[5] and behaved like animals.[6] As the population grew, men banded together in societies, elected the strongest and bravest as their leaders, and obeyed them out of a desire for physical protection. From this arose early conceptions of good and bad: because everyone desired to eschew injury, any harm directed at the leader/protector generated hatred and reproach and was labeled ungrateful. As societies expanded, however, men realized that these leaders could use their superiority to harm their subjects as effectively as they fended off threats. In order to avoid this, people eventually created laws and institutions to which citizens and rulers were equally subject. These laws established punishment for actions against the people as well as against rulers. Citizens called the respect for these laws and the consequences of disobedience "justice."[7] After these institutions were established, they preferred rulers who showed a propensity to obey the laws rather than those who were

brave and strong, so that the likelihood that leaders would prey on citizens was reduced.[8]

This leads me to disagree with Catherine Zuckert, who proposed that Machiavelli's political theory is based on the premise that although human beings are weak and need to cooperate to ensure their survival,[9] they do not "accept the government of others gladly or freely."[10] She argues that government, insofar as Machiavelli is concerned, never appears naturally or spontaneously. This seems to me to be in direct contradiction to Machiavelli's account of the origins of government in the *Discourses*. It is *precisely because* human beings are weak that governments appear spontaneously. Without the cooperation made necessary by our weakness, we need to band in groups and form political societies. In Zuckert's account, governments come into being as a result of the desire of the powerful to dominate, and the internal rhythm of societies is set by the conflict created when the weaker elements of said societies devote their resources to not being oppressed. But this account clashes with Machiavelli's. In his version of the origins of government, the roles of oppressor and oppressed are quickly reversed as the oppressed eventually gain control of the narrative regarding justice and start to select rulers who comply with their moral invention. Zuckert overlooks the importance of moral manipulation in her explanation of the power dynamics that govern political societies in Machiavelli's philosophy.

As was established earlier, much of the discussion surrounding control and power dynamics within polities in Machiavelli's work has focused on an understanding of elites. This account has been articulated almost solely in terms of *landed* elites. When contemporary Machiavelli scholars think of the "great" or *grandi*, the oppressive side of the perpetual struggle between classes, they think of the materially rich and poor, not the intellectually well-off and limited. According to them, the *grandi's* tools of oppression come from their abundance of financial resources and physical means of coercion. It certainly does, but only to some extent. There is more to it, and very little thought is ever given to the possibility that Machiavelli also conceived of oppression in terms of control over the governing moral paradigms setting the boundaries of acceptable behavior within communities. There is no doubt in my mind that Machiavelli thought the Christian ethical paradigms were a much more potent tool of control than papal armies or Medici wealth. Ironically (and in a somewhat self-contradictory manner), scholars who dismiss the centrality of philosophy (and its power) to Machiavelli's political thought are also those who tend to argue that he vehemently disliked Christianity and its effects. Machiavelli's brief imagination of the origins of civil societies tell us quite clearly that the dominant notions of good and evil adopted by groups of individuals are a very real and effective tool of domination. Therefore we are left to wonder at the possibility that there is

another caste of *grandi*, one that is not simply the landed nobility and elites who have the physical means to oppress the people and guide policy according to their wishes, but also another, like perhaps priests and intellectuals (or their agenda-setting patrons), whose influence is more insidious because their means of control come to be internalized by the people.

The socially constructed nature of justice also features preeminently in the famous Wool Guild speech of *Florentine Histories* III.14. One of the most fascinating aspects of the speech is that its—anonymous, probably entirely fictional—author makes the same points as those from the *Discourses* above, but backwards. (Note that Machiavelli is once again using a fictional narrative to push a useful—if uncomfortable—idea.) The imaginary leader starts his speech from civil society and ends with primal discord. According to him, it is self-evident that he and his fellow agitators should refrain from taking up arms and continuing their crime spree-turned-uprising. He continues, saying that the poverty in which they existed had the advantage of safety over the danger that their desire of gain now finds them in. The problem, unfortunately, is that arms have already been taken up and discord already sown; safety not being an option anymore, the orator invites his audience to look past the illusion of a rigid social hierarchy and lawfulness rooted in justice. The threat of harm under which their actions now put them forces the scales to fall from their eyes. They realize that the only way to eschew punishment is to rise to the top of the social order. Now that weapons have been drawn, the social constructs that ensured everyone's safety are no longer useful, and the speech-giver is no longer careless to underline their arbitrariness. The myth of a social hierarchy based on ancestry is false; men are all equally ancient. Pretension that there exists any other meaningful difference between human beings is fraudulent as well, since everyone can see that stripped, that is, without man-made clothing and apparatus, everyone is alike. The peasant dressed in the noble's clothes, and with the noble's money, is unrecognizable from the original noble himself.

According to the Wool Guild orator, the pressure of necessity acts as a threshold modifying the moral value of a given action, a notion that is repeated over and over in the *Prince*. While this member of the Wool Guild is incorrect about the infamy incurred by the methods of conquerors, he is, however, correct, from a Machiavellian standpoint, about necessity (the concept) and about the value of social constructs once they cease to ensure one's safety. Although it was their own fault, the Wool Guild members are now in a situation where the rule of law, and conceptions of justice and divine retribution, are of no use to them anymore. The Christian Hell, which keeps other men in check, is a concept they can no longer afford to fear, since their immediate security is at stake. In their extreme peril, they are thrown back in the Machiavellian "pseudo state of nature" discussed above, and as such

the Christian myths necessarily lose their social usefulness. The speaker recognizes the myth's usefulness to other non-criminal members of society, but also realizes that their communal survival now hinges on transcending it.[11]

In other words, Machiavelli teaches his readers, like Mandane did Cyrus, that the notions of good, bad, evil, and justice are probably not rooted in objective truths and require to be approached with "prudent flexibility"—to put it in the words of Nathan Tarcov.[12] What we observe from this passage is a strictly need-motivated account of the origin of justice and social organization stemming strictly from men's fundamental desire not to be hurt. Machiavelli follows in the footsteps of Cicero once again. Men choose the strongest leaders and start calling the action of placating them "good" and that of not doing so "evil" or "bad." As men realized that their leaders' might was a double-edged sword, laws were put in place to ensure that the rulers only directed their strength at outside threats. Then they began calling the respect of those laws "justice," and labeling the action of being just as "good" or "noble."

In this account of government's origins, the people show themselves to be surprisingly creative in their endeavors to avoid injury. What we have, in fact, is an account of the development of politically expedient, normative inventions designed for harm avoidance. That the people would first select the strong and brave for protection and leadership positions and then invent legal accountability for all members of the polity shows some level of instrumental wisdom. Even if the interval between step one (raising strong protectors to leadership positions), step two (inventing legal accountability and extending it to community heads), and step three (selecting leaders according to their respect of the law) may have taken as long as the time between early ancient civilizations.

Unfortunately, it seems that we have lost sight of the true origins of government and the implications they should have on our understanding of good, bad, evil, and justice as concepts. Machiavelli's annoyance with our habit of considering the deontological precepts of Christianity or the virtue ethics of Platonism as rooted in objective truth culminates in the *Prince*. There is so much confusion about the origins of the good and the bad that concepts that were meant to facilitate our continued survival are now actively working against it: someone who is considered "good" is headed toward ruin, the exact thing that the concept of good, Machiavelli thinks, was invented to avoid. Like a metaphorical, later-day Cambyses, Machiavelli meets us, his intellectual wards, halfway through our journey into his book to teach successful princes, if they are smart enough and mature enough to understand, how *not* to be good in order to save ourselves. To bring security and well-being to ourselves and those we care about, we must, like Cyrus, abandon our previous moral assumptions.

According to this interpretation, Machiavelli is a teacher of evil in more ways than one: he suggests not only that Christian doctrine might be deleterious to our continued survival, but also that the concepts of "good" and "justice" are entirely instrumental. My interpretation also supports some of Strauss' final thoughts regarding Machiavelli's new modes and orders:

> His seeming discovery is only the reverse side of the oblivion of the most important: all things necessarily appear in a new light if they are seen for the first time in a specifically dimmed light. A stupendous contraction of the horizon appears to Machiavelli and his successors as a wondrous enlargement of the horizon. [. . .]. The good society in the new sense is possible always and everywhere since men of sufficient brain can transform the most corrupt people, the most corrupt matter, into an incorrupt one by the judicious application of necessary force. [. . .]. Yet before that grand revolt or emancipation can get under way, the hold which the old modes and orders have over the minds of almost all men must be broken.[13]

Machiavelli is a teacher of evil in a perspectival sense.[14] To propose that what we call goodness and justice are just politically expedient inventions conducive to eschewing physical harm is not evil from the perspective of the inventor. It is only evil from the perspective of the people who believe that their moral commitments are rooted in a higher objective authority. Deontological commitments logically entail that any different teaching is in one way or another a lesson on evil. From the perspective of Christianity, teachers of Islam and Judaism are teachers of evil in at least some minor respect when they attempt to inculcate their adherents with that portion of their doctrine that does not fit with the Christian one. So, of course, someone who questions the truth value of Christianity by way of his account of the origin of justice is a teacher of evil. But much like the teachers of different ethical theories, that same person is not going to be evil from their own perspective, although they doubtlessly will understand why they are understood to be so by others.

Human beings, through time, have been confused about the truth. In fact, anything that belongs to a higher level of abstraction than "pain is bad, avoid pain" seems to be impossible to agree upon collectively. This in itself is not so bad, since survival is a powerful motivator and has led us to band together into communities. The governance of these communities rapidly became problematic due to the hazardous mix of human ignorance, human stubbornness, and human stupidity. Plato, and good leaders like Numa, realized that the only way to implement good policy smoothly was to appeal to an authority that citizens would not contest. The lie does not have to be elaborate; as long as it does not entail that it is another *human* who knows better, disbelief will be suspended.

The appeal to supernatural authority comes in the form of useful lies: myths. These myths are strictly tools of political control. They are moral frameworks, that is, sets of behavioral guidelines attributed to a higher authority, put in place to keep our collective fear of being harmed by our peers from becoming reality. As such they are not an "expression of the deeply rooted beliefs and fears of ordinary people"[15] as much as they are inventions meant to prevent these fears from materializing. Legal accountability and divine judgment carry with them the promise that if anyone harms a fellow citizen, that person will, immediately, be harmed by the community in return and subsequently punished by God after leaving this world.

Unfortunately, these myths crystallized, and it seems that many of us forgot the origin of ethics and conventional morality: useful lies aimed at preserving social order, security, and well-being. In fact, we became so invested in those lies that we insist on perpetuating them although they are no longer conducive to security and well-being. These myths have become harmful.

Enter Machiavelli, who teaches us that not everyone can learn the truth about conventional morality, and that in fact not everyone should learn it. Learning "not to be good" entails a set of responsibilities that can only be trusted to people who have a certain nobility of character, that is, people who do not display a love of gain (to put it in Cambyses' words) or a disproportionate propensity toward cruelty (remember Agathocles). Then Machiavelli enjoins us to turn to classical philosophy via the metaphor of hunting in the *Prince*. By paying attention to the examples of Alexander and Aristotle as well as Xenophon's Cyrus, we learn that philosophy helps smooth over the harmful elements of these myths that make human cohabitation possible, not unlike Socrates' proposition to amend some Homeric poems in the second book of the *Republic*. From Xenophon, we learn that simulation and dissimulation are not in themselves bad. They are in fact as inherent in human society and human behavior as our propensity to avoid pain. The well-educated man, however, is he who remains aware of the mythical nature of society's moral foundations and is ready to infringe on them if need be, all the while recognizing their necessity. Machiavelli directs a few highly capable human beings toward philosophy so that they learn this and gain the ability to sort the good from the bad myths, that is, those conducive to human prosperity versus those noxious to communal harmony.

In that way, Machiavelli systematically strips Platonism of its idealistic aspects. If it can be said that Ficino dedicated his work to portraying Plato the philosopher as a divine figure[16] and Socrates as a person that "foreshadowed Christ,"[17] then Machiavelli brought them both back down to earth through targeted criticism. Can love make humans more resourceful than they would normally be? Sure, but it also makes us base, selfish, and actually turn downwards, not upwards. Love decidedly makes us more resilient and perseverant

in the pursuit of the object of our desire, but these new qualities come at the cost of our nobler tendencies and our capacity to focus on greater or more important—yet maybe unexciting—things, like taking care of our families or estates. Is philosophy essential to political education? Yes, but only if we understand philosophy narrowly. If Machiavelli were still with us, he would send his students to political science departments to study a mix of political behavior and political theory, and, as Cary Nederman and I argued elsewhere, probably theories of moderate deontology.[18] Furthermore, philosophical knowledge is only good insofar as it teaches princes the limits of moral and ethical reasoning in politics. Can we rely on benevolent, enlightened elites to make good policy for everyone in spite of popular opposition? Yes, but these elites are unlikely to seek political power and are essentially indistinguishable from power-hungry manipulators because the people as a whole is too limited and confused to know the difference before the damage is done. It could know the good from the bad by their egalitarian policies, but if the people could recognize the value of these policies, to "cry life to their life," to invert Machiavelli's use of Dante's words, there would be no need for these elites in the first place.

NOTES

1. Machiavelli, *Prince*, 68.
2. Machiavelli, *Prince*, 55.
3. Tarcov, "Machiavelli's Critique of Religion," 207.
4. Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 61–62.
5. Gennaro Sasso, *Studi su Machiavelli* (Casa editrice A. Morano, 1967), 168.
6. Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, 11–12.
7. It seems likely that this account was greatly inspired by, if not lifted, from *De Oratore* and/or the first four chapters of the first book of Cicero's *De Inventione*. In this part of the book, Cicero expresses doubts that early men have been turned, unprompted from what was certainly a form of primeval savagery into the kind of people that band together to form civil societies. Cicero laughs at the idea that a "mute and voiceless wisdom" led humankind out of savagery into a society of laws. He theorizes that the appearance of rhetoric is responsible for the appearance of civilization and, with it, the concepts of justice, good, and evil. To Cicero, early societies were doubtlessly steered by the desires and will of the strongest and most barbarous, and that only an equally strong and appealing speech could have ever tamed the savage impulses of these early "rulers." Only a speech "at the same time powerful and entrancing" could have convinced the strongest to submit to "justice without violence." What differs between Machiavelli and Cicero's accounts is that Cicero's story of human development tells a tale of two competing types of strength, physical, and intellectual, that eventually result in the appearance of civil society and the rule of law. To Cicero, rhetoric tames barbarity. In Machiavelli's account a group of

people who are clearly at a disadvantage engage in intellectual manipulation in order to create a narrative meant to be internalized by the potentially threatening elements of civil society, effectively neutering them. In this sense, Machiavelli certainly lifts his account of the state of nature from Cicero, but he also anticipates Nietzsche's concept of slave morality. See Marcus Tullius Cicero, *De Inventione; De Optimo Genere; Oratorium Topica*, trans. H. M. Hubbell (Harvard University Press, 1968), 3–11; von Vacano, *The Art of Power*, 84; Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (Vintage, 1989); Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (Vintage, 1989). For more on Cicero's *De Officiis* in relation to Machiavelli's *Prince*, see Marcia L. Colish, "Cicero's *De Officiis* and Machiavelli's *Prince*," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 9, no. 4 (Winter 1978): 80–93.

8. Machiavelli, *Discourses*, 11–12.
9. Zuckert, *Machiavelli's Politics*, 36.
10. Zuckert, *Machiavelli's Politics*, 56.
11. Machiavelli, *Florentine Histories*, 121–24.
12. Nathan Tarcov, Mark Blitz, and William Kristol, "Machiavelli and the Foundations of Modernity: A Reading of Chapter 3 of *The Prince*," in *Educating the Prince: Essays in Honor of Harvey Mansfield*, ed. Harvey Mansfield (Rowman and Littlefield, 2000), 41.
13. Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 295, 297.
14. Cary J. Nederman and Guillaume Bogiaris, "Niccolò Machiavelli," in *The History of Evil in The Early Modern Age (1450–1700)*, ed. Chad Meister and Charles Taliaferro (Routledge, 2019), 53–54.
15. Brown, "Philosophy and Religion in Machiavelli," 167.
16. Robichaud, *Plato's Persona*, 120–25.
17. Robichaud, *Plato's Persona*, 129.
18. See Nederman and Bogiaris, "Niccolò Machiavelli." Regarding moderate deontology, see Shelly Kagan, *Normative Ethics* (Westview Press, 1998).

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