Eros, Philosophy, and the Foundation of Politics in Machiavelli and Plato:
An Essay in Platonic Political Philosophy

Alexander S. Duff, B.Hum

Carleton University

© Alexander S. Duff, 2003

National Library
of Canada

Bibliothèque nationale
du Canada

Acquisitions and
Bibliographic Services

Acquisitions et
services bibliographiques

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Your file Votre référence

ISBN: 0-612-89831-8

Our file Notre référence

ISBN: 0-612-89831-8

The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

In compliance with the Canadian Privacy Act some supporting forms may have been removed from this dissertation.

Conformément à la loi canadienne sur la protection de la vie privée, quelques formulaires secondaires ont été enlevés de ce manuscrit.

While these forms may be included in the document page count, their removal does not represent any loss of content from the dissertation.

Bien que ces formulaires aient inclus dans la pagination, il n'y aura aucun contenu manquant.

Canada

Abstract

The theme of this study is eros, philosophy, and the foundation of politics. It is a subject of considerable dispute whether philosophy and politics are erotic activities. In this thesis, I endeavour to clarify the extent to which they are or are not. In beginning with Machiavelli's *Mandragola*, I mean to start from the surface of the phenomenon. The play depicts a love-less love affair. I follow up similar themes as they appear again in the *Prince*, a more explicitly political and polemically anti-philosophical work, where the eroticism of politics and philosophy is more amenable to direct approach. Plato's *Theaetetus* recommends itself as bearing at least a superficial resemblance to the works of Machiavelli. Here Plato considers the fluxist doctrines of Protagoras, similar to Machiavelli's. In this respect, the similarities between this dialogue and Machiavelli's teaching offer a welcoming path to a serious consideration of their deeper differences.

Acknowledgments

I should like to thank first of all my supervisor, Professor Newell, for his wise guidance and counsel, and the members of my committee, Professors Darby and MacIsaac, for their at once spirited and playful engagement over these years as my teachers. I have benefited from the instruction of my other teachers as well, among whom Professor Rajaei deserves grateful mention. My fellow students in the Political Science graduate programme have contributed most generously to my education. Of them, Mr Stephen Head ought perhaps to be singled out for his charming, if not helpful, grasp of numbers. Among my other friends, to the dear Mr Geordie Patterson I owe a debt of gratitude unspeakably great. I would be remiss if I did not thank Ms Anna Kim for her always patient and sound direction.

The members of my family, especially my parents and my dear sister, occupy a special place in the story of this thesis. Their love and support has perpetually sustained me, as even they could not imagine.

I should like to dedicate this, my first academic essay, to my grandparents, Malcolm Thomas Peddle, Barbara Joan Peddle, Jean Elizabeth Selkirk Duff, and Daniel Spencer Duff. Any love I have of learning, and it grows always, is thanks to them.

Table of Contents

Abstract	iii
Acknowledgments	iv
Introduction	1
Chapter One: Fraudulent Love in Machiavelli's <i>Mandragola</i>	5
Erotic removal from the world and the rule of gentlemen	5
The preference of private rule by conspiracy to open rule by the <i>kaloi kagathoi</i>	11
The eroticism of Christian piety	16
Messer Nicia <i>uno solo</i>	21
Chapter Two: The Suppression of Eroticism in Machiavelli's <i>Prince</i>	33
The claim against the rule of the <i>kaloi kagathoi</i>	35
Rule by fraud, the party of the church	45
Rule by force: acquisition as the virtue of parts, the party of Machiavelli	59
Chapter Three: The Concealment and Emergence of Eros in Plato's <i>Theaetetus</i>	75
Fluxism from Protagoras to simple elements	78
Theodorus, friend of fluxism	85
The preparation for the digression on the philosopher	89
The flight of the philosopher and his return to the city	96
The education and courage of Theaetetus	107
Conclusion	118
Bibliography	122

INTRODUCTION

In this thesis I investigate two related but ultimately divergent political philosophies which respond to the condition of a world of flux—what might be called a physics or ontology of motion. These are Machiavelli's teaching and Plato's Socratic correction of the presocratics in the dialogue *Theaetetus*. The point of connection between these two thinkers proves to be the absence of eros from the works under consideration. This absence is the focus of the following investigation.

Taking a synoptic view of Plato, we could say that eros refers to the phenomenon of human lack, of persistent neediness.¹ Implied in this need, however, is the very thing which is missing, and thus a connection to this very thing or things—that which would complete the lack and make it whole. This erotic condition characterises the various kinds of human life, receiving some expression in the pettiest desires through the most noble. In particular, political life and the life of philosophy are shown to be fundamentally erotic, to use a necessary metaphor. Each

¹ Philosophy emerges, Stanley Rosen reports, "in wonder at the heavens and their regular movements. This wonder is deepened but at the same time made more difficult by the famous doctrine of the erotic nature of philosophy. The god (or daimon) Eros stands for the power that raises the human soul up from everyday life to the transuranian domain of the pure forms of Platonic Ideas. It is only after this erotic revelation of the extraordinary that the philosopher returns to the surface of the earth and the cities of human beings, where he or she attempts to illuminate the ordinary, and thus to direct nonphilosophers to the central question of the nature of the good life.... Wonder directs us to cosmology, physics, mathematics, and (as we now call it) metaphysics, but these theoretical investigations are conducted by human beings, not gods, and their progress depends on the flourishing of the city, or, as we can also say, on the cooperation if not the unity of theory and practice." *The Elusiveness of the Ordinary* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 3. A complementary remark of Leo Strauss's: "Men are constantly deluded by two opposite charms: the charm of competence which is engendered by mathematics, and the charm of humble awe, which is engendered by meditation on the human soul and its experiences. Philosophy is characterized by the gentle, if firm, refusal to succumb to either charm. It is the highest form of the mating of courage and moderation. In spite of its highness or nobility, it could appear as Sisyphean or ugly, when one contrasts its achievement with its goal. Yet it is necessarily accompanied, sustained and elevated by eros. It is graced by nature's grace." *What is Political Philosophy?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), 40.

is concerned with a certain “whole”—politics with the city and philosophy with the cosmos or the whole itself. And this is the ground of the possible harmony or accord of the philosopher and the citizen. Ultimately, if this potential cooperation is ever to be actual, so to speak, it depends on an intellectual vision of the Ideas—the noetic perception of pure form—and the agreement of vision and speech. It is in this way that the Ideas might satisfy and regulate erotic need.

I do not suppose that Plato was under any illusion about the rarity or difficulty of such a satisfaction. But its very possibility is integral to the intelligibility of the Platonic dialogues, indeed, to the existence of a Platonic political philosophy properly so called. At the level of politics, such a possibility is limned most famously in the *Republic*, where a community of citizens might live in harmony with their erotic philosopher-kings. And in the *Symposium*, the erotic desire of citizens is shown to be compatible with the erotic desire of philosophers. These citizens are aptly called gentlemen, *kaloi kagathoi andres*, and represent at once the possibility and the tenuous fragility of a reasonable, which is to say philosophically guided, politics. In the following study, the *kaloi kagathoi* are thus an recurring signal of the rational possibilities of an erotic politics.

Let me remark as an aside, here, that I do not mean to obscure the extent to which, in Plato, the philosopher lives in tension with the city: the poetic presentation of the death of Socrates is resounding testament to this; but the meaning of the *Dialogues* themselves refers, I think, to the deeper requirement that some compromise or harmony between these is possible and indeed desirable.

Machiavelli's teaching, in large part, is directed against the political role accorded to the erotic *kaloi kagathoi* by Plato and the classical-Christian tradition which followed him. This consists in an extirpation of eros in all of its appearances, from the lightest pleasures of a love affair to the most profound matters of the intelligible structure of the cosmos. Thus, the *Mandragola* presents a love affair as the love-less conspiracy of an anerotic master, in a world where touch is more certain than speech or vision, and the only "harmony" between politics and philosophy is in bleeding potential philosophers of any erotic delight and turning them towards tyranny. The *Prince*, along the same lines, exposes the self-seductive fraud of gentlemanly politics as the dupe of erotic Christians. Violence and force is the truly "natural" ground of politics; stability is only an illusion.

Eros, politics, and philosophy being our themes, I begin with Machiavelli's *Mandragola* as I mean to start from the surface of the phenomenon. The play depicts a love affair, in fact a seduction. It is no surprise that in this light work of Machiavelli's there are intonations of all of his graver themes. I follow these up as they appear again in the *Prince*. In this, a more explicitly political and polemically anti-philosophical work, the eroticism of politics and philosophy is more amenable to direct approach.

The *Theaetetus* recommends itself as a consideration of the philosophical, and I suggest also the political, education of one student of Socrates who is more than once called *kaloi kagathoi aner*. The question of the erotic gentleman in the context of the fluxist doctrines of Protagoras relates the dialogue to the teaching of Machiavelli. This superficial similarity offers a welcoming path to a serious (but not

insufficiently playful, I trust) consideration of the deeper differences between Machiavelli and Plato. Along these lines, Plato elaborates in the voice of Socrates some of the relevant dangers for politics of the fluxism of a Protagoras or a Machiavelli. Here, then, we espy at least a sketch of a permanent alternative to a Machiavellian world.

Chapter One

FRAUDULENT LOVE IN MACHIAVELLI'S *MANDRAGOLA*

In the *Mandragola*, Machiavelli makes a splendid demonstration in dramatic form of the failings of the erotic “gentleman” of the classical-Christian tradition—we might fairly designate him the *kalos kagathos*—a lover of beautiful things incapable of duly executing a seduction. In the interest of preserving the phenomenon at this delicate first stage of our study, I shall follow the plot of this conspiracy—for the seduction properly executed is revealed as such—as it unfolds itself, with occasional reference to Machiavelli's *Discourses* to more fully limn certain suggestions from the play. As the plot unfolds, we shall see that the claim against the gentlemen is deepened to include the church and philosophers. Against this party of erotics, Machiavelli sets his own conspirators, both masters and executors.

Erotic removal from the world and the rule of gentlemen

The opening *canzone* is a veiled lamentation for and thus a reminder of the inescapability of the world. It begins with an illusory flight from the world, as spoken by shepherds and nymphs who “have chosen the solitary life,” “passing and consuming” their brief years in pleasure, in order to “flee this weariness,” that is, the “anguish and worries” guaranteed by ignorance of the “tricks of the world.” Yet it would seem that their life is not as “solitary” as they claim; they are not alone, after all, the shepherds with the nymphs. Their pleasures cannot be those of solitude. Moreover, they say that they have “come here / with our harmony, / only to honour this / glad festival – and sweet company” at the command of “the name of him who

governs you” (Song, before prol.).² Perhaps this refers to Machiavelli’s friend, Francesco Guicciardini, the papal governor of Romagna at whose request Machiavelli added this song and the ones between each act;³ or perhaps it refers to the Medici pope Clement VII, whose representative Francesco was; or perhaps it refers to Him who was represented by Clement. Even those who flee the world, it would seem, do so only at the grace of the ruler and remain subject to his rule. These shepherds and nymphs only enjoy their life of “festivity and joy” at the leave of “him who governs” (Song, before prol.). There is no removal from the world for anyone who is not alone.

The prologue sketches the relation between the author and his audience. As such its first word is “God.” The speaker, perhaps a stand-in for Machiavelli himself, refers to the kindness of the audience.⁴ This kindness (*benignita*), he says, appears to depend on his being agreeable (*esser grato*). This reminds us, following as it does the invocation of God, of the reciprocal connection between the God who so loved the world and the sect which adores Him. Christian gratitude derives from the provision of divine grace, *quid pro quo* as it were. We will not, then, be amazed should this turn out to be a theme, even a hidden theme, of the play to follow. The speaker goes on to express his wish that the audience “come to understand (*s’intendere*) / a new case born in the city” (prol.). Comparing this to Machiavelli’s epistle dedicatory in

² Quotations are from the Flaumenhaft translation. Niccolo Machiavelli, *Mandragola*, trans. Mera J. Flaumenhaft (Prospect Heights: Waveland Press, 1983). Parenthetical references are to the play, unless otherwise indicated: act and scene.

³ Flaumenhaft, 7 n. 5.

⁴ Mansfield calls this speaker “Machiavelli or his representative, a “composer” (*componitor*) said to be of no great fame.” Harvey C. Mansfield, “The Cuckhold in Machiavelli’s *Mandragola*,” in Vickie B. Sullivan, ed., *The Comedy & Tragedy of Machiavelli* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 8.

The Prince, where he expresses his wish that Lorenzo be “able to perceive (*intendere*) in a very short time all that I have come to know (*conoscere*),”⁵ the Italian *intendere* implies a less certain knowledge than *conoscere*. One translator of Machiavelli makes the connection to the common expression, *dare da intended*, which means “to fool” or “to pass off.”⁶ The inference, then, is that the kind audience, as with the magnificent Lorenzo, whose character depends on the benevolence or grace of another, are not expected to know in the same way that Machiavelli does.

In the course of setting the scene, which is shown (*apparato*) to the audience, the speaker introduces the characters. The emphasis is that the play is radically dependent on appearances, and therefore also opinions. The first is “a *dottore* / who learned in Buethius a great deal of law” (prol.). This is Messer Nicia., introduced as a doctor of law, very learned in the Latin Boethius.⁷ The connection to Boethius is illuminating. Boethius was secretary to the Ostrogoth king of Italy, Theodoric. He was accused of conspiring to overthrow the monarchy and restore the Roman Senate, and died in prison without revealing his part in the plot. Although he never professed Christianity, he is regarded as a Christian martyr. After his death his sons were consuls of Rome.⁸

Callimaco Guadagni is introduced as the lover of the play. The connection between him and appearances, and thus between love and appearances, is made at the

⁵ Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. Angello Codevilla (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 4.

⁶ Codevilla trans., 4 n. 6. He also remarks, “On the other side of the argument, note that the expression *intendersene* means to be well practiced in a discipline. Here, context argues for the [implication of fooling].” Likewise here.

⁷ Boethius is misspelled. Cf. Flaumenhaft, 9 n. 10; Michael Palmer, *Masters and Slaves: Essays in Political Philosophy* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), 114 n. 30.

⁸ Palmer, 106.

first. He is introduced as one of the “good companions” who “shows the signs and traces / of carrying off the honour and prize for courtesy (*gentilezza*)” (prol.). He is a lover of pleasure and diversion, and *appears* the perfect gentleman.

In the first act, we learn more about the character of Callimaco. His appearance here bears out his introduction as a lover, and these deficiencies in his character suggest he is not the “Machiavellian” character of the plot. According to his presentation here, Callimaco is subject to all the defects of the gentlemanly class. He is a creature of desire, indulgent in pleasures and self-gratifying attentions at the expense of properly subduing his passions and training in warfare; and moreover, he is without sufficient virtue to rely on anything more than hope. In his first words, he, a supposed master, bids his servant, a supposed slave, “...I want you (*io ti voglio*)” (1.1).⁹ His first word expresses a desire, and a lowly desire at that. In the first scene, he recounts his aristocratic life. An orphan, he left his fatherland, Italy, for Paris. Then, at the age of twenty, in order to avoid the strife of real politics and war, he chose “to live more securely” and in safety in Paris. There he contented himself easily and quietly; dividing his time between study, pleasure, and business; entertaining frequently; but “helping everyone and managing not to offend anyone,” oblivious to class, birth, and wealth. Then, owing to fortune, it happened that one of his dinner companions “awakened [in him] such a desire to see” by speaking of the beauty of Madonna Lucrezia. And so, without any thought for the politics of Italy, Calimaco returned, and upon seeing Lucrezia was “burning with such a desire to be

⁹ Unlike Messer Nicia and Lucrezia, whose first words are “I believe (*Io credo*),” and Ligurio, whose first words are “I do not believe (*Io non credo*),” (1.3) Callimaco’s second speech begins “I believe (*Io credo*).”

with her,” that he lost all his sense of place. The implied order is important: from (a) the life of refined pleasures, which exposed Callimaco to (b) the inflammatory powers of speech, he was inflamed with (c) the desire to see; this led to (d) his gazing upon the object of his desire, which in turn further inflamed him such that (e) he is now totally uprooted. The gentleman’s erotic character removes him from the things of the world.

Callimaco and Ligurio’s references to Lucrezia invite a comparison of Callimaco’s mad eroticism and Lucrezia’s alabaster quietude. According to Callimaco, Lucrezia’s “nature...makes war against” him. Indeed, it is said that she has a nature, a claim never made of Callimaco; she is as a stable Idea to the protean desire of Callimaco. She is “extremely honest,” which is to say most chaste, “and in all ways alien to the things of love” (1.1). Whereas Callimaco is driven by the excess of his erotic passion to reduce himself to a common level of speech and counsel with his servant, Lucrezia is much more controlled. She rules her household sufficiently well that her rich husband “lets himself be governed by her,” and far from being the equal of—or sharing common ground (as in speech) with—her servants, “she has no maid or servant” who is not isolated in fear of her. And unlike Callimaco, who appears onstage, in public seeking counsel from a slave, who claims to meet with all kinds of persons, Lucrezia is scrupulous in her public dealings. She makes no appearances in public, either for pleasure (e.g. evening gatherings) or business (e.g. with tradespeople). She is the picture of perfect composure and self-control, chaste, scrupulous. She has no evident connection to the erotic things, except for her and her

husband's desire to generate children. This single erotic crack in her "nature" will prove to be her undoing—there are no perfect "ideas" according to Machiavelli.

Callimaco's love has so elevated and removed him from the things of the world, that he is abstracted beyond the necessity which he might choose; he relies on hope or some imaginary version of his own desire. He claims: "There's never anything so desperate that there isn't some way of being able to hope for it, and though it might be weak and in vain, the longing and desire that a man has of carrying the thing through make it seem not so" (1.1). Just moments later he is even more hysterical:

But what can I do? What course can I take? Where can I turn? I've got to try something, be it great, dangerous, harmful, scandalous. Better to die than to live like this. If I could sleep at night, if I could eat, if I could converse, if I could take pleasure in anything, I would be more patient and wait for the right time. But there's no remedy here, and if I don't hold on to hope through some course, I'll die no matter what (1.3)

He is prepared even to substitute false hope for the object of his desire: "...so I can feed myself with some hope – at least if not true, false – by which I can nourish a thought which might partly relieve my many worries" (1.3). Callimaco's hope is his desire for an imaginary version of Lucrezia, one whose real vulnerabilities are masked over in favour of the image of a pristine Idea. His unreliable hope propels him to unreliable schemes: in the first place, an improbable design to dazzle Madonna Lucrezia in public, to woo her with all manner of magnificence away from her husband at the baths; in the second, to rely on a tricky, unfaithful sponger; and ultimately, to prefer even a false hope to an actual remedy. Callimaco is incapable of pursuing the object of his desire, precisely because he is too consumed with desire.

The preference of private rule by conspiracy to open rule by the kaloi kagathoi

In addition to appearing here as subject to all the typical faults of the gentleman, Callimaco is also incapable of properly conducting a conspiracy. Machiavelli devotes the longest chapter of the *Prince*, chapter 19, and the longest chapter of the *Discourses*, III 6, to the subject of conspiracies. What might be the relation between a seduction and a conspiracy? Machiavelli is emphatic that conspiracies are dangerous, dangerous for both princes and private individuals. He likens conspiracies to “open war” (*D* III 6.1),¹⁰ and says that “private men enter upon no enterprise more dangerous than this, for it is difficult and very dangerous in every part of it” (*D* III 6.1). The danger throughout this discourse is that men might lose their lives. Except for some hysterical outbursts by Callimaco to the effect that he will die if he cannot be with Lucrezia (“Better to die than to live like this.” [1.3]), this does not seem to be a serious possibility in the *Mandragola*—quite the opposite of serious, in fact. Private seduction, then, appears as the comical counterpart to the grave political undertaking of conspiracy. It comes as no surprise that for Machiavelli love might be the lighter counterpart to war, different only in degree, not at all in kind. He explains that conspiracies are dangerous in every one of their three parts: “in managing them, in executing them, and after they are executed” (*D* III 6.2); or “before, in the deed, and after” (*D* III 6.4). The dangers before, however, are “most important” (*D* III 6.4). We shall discuss these “dangers,” as they relate to the seduction of Lucrezia, here.

¹⁰ Parenthetical references to the *Discourses* will be marked with an italicized *D*, followed by the book, discourse, and paragraph number. Quotations are from Niccolo Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield and Nathan Tarcov (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

It might perhaps be overstating but it would not be misleading to say that Callimaco makes every error against which Machiavelli warns the conspirator. From the start, Callimaco shows himself to rely too much on the faith of his “co-conspirator.” Callimaco tells Ligurio that he has done a “little thing” (1.1) in his pursuit of Lucrezia: he has enlisted the faith of the parasite, “darling of malice,” Ligurio. His servant, Siro, warns him about the faith of such knaves, and Callimaco seems dimly aware of its inadvisability. But he does it anyway, reasoning at one point that helping him is in Ligurio’s interest (1.1), and at another that he can secure himself against Ligurio if the sponge cheats him by the threat of revenge (1.3). Machiavelli, of course, warns against this: “men most often deceive themselves about the love that you judge a man bears to you, nor can you ever secure yourself of it unless you make an experiment of it; and to make experiment of it in this is very dangerous” (*D* III 6.4). Likewise Machiavelli warns about speaking needlessly to persons, such as Siro, not involved in the conspiracy:

As to being exposed by a lack of prudence, it arises when a conspirator speaks of it with little caution, so that a slave or another third person hears you... or indeed when through levity you come to communicate it to a woman or boy whom you love or to a similar, flighty person. (*D* III 6.5)

Machiavelli proposes a single remedy for the dangers of “before” the deed: “The first and the most true—indeed, to say better, the only one—is not to give time” (*D* III 6.6). Callimaco’s scheme, on the contrary, depends on nothing so much as time: “What’s do I know? One thing’s born from another thing and time governs it” (1.1).

Time, for the purposes of plotting, is chance; to rely on time in a plot is to rely on chance; the successful plot requires its control.¹¹ Callimaco's plot has not got a hope.

Ligurio, by contrast, appears as the perfect executor of the plot. It is Ligurio who calms (such as it is) the hysterical erotic, Callimaco. At the end of the first act, he begins his correction of Callimaco's too public, too chancy plot: "I want you to do it my way, and ... to take up some other course I have thought up, which will be shorter, more certain, more likely to succeed than the baths." Following Machiavelli's prescription from *Discourses* III 6, Ligurio's scheme will control the matter of time; he explains to Callimaco: "And even if [Messer Nicia] were the man he is not, and investigated whether you are or are not a doctor, the shortness of the time ... will keep him from talking about it, or there won't be time to spoil our design" (1.3).

Through the second act, Ligurio remains the obvious master of the plot, contributing to its removal from the public baths to the private domain. When Messer Nicia, upon meeting Maestro Callimaco asks if there is any remedy other than the baths, it is Ligurio who interrupts, "Yes, there is! I want to answer that myself" (2.2), and then continues to give Maestro Callimaco, who is ignorant of the details of the plot, further instructions. When Messer Nicia and Siro leave to collect a specimen from Lucrezia, it seems that Ligurio explains the next segment of the plot to Callimaco offstage. At the beginning of scene six, Ligurio finishes discussing the design with Callimaco, and then Callimaco appears to direct Messer Nicia through the rest of the scene, until the next snag. Ligurio, as Machiavelli would advise

¹¹ Mansfield, 11.

(*Discourses* III 6), limits his co-conspirators to details on a “need-to-know” basis.

When Messer Nicia raises a problem with the plot, Lucrezia’s certain unwillingness to agree to it, it is again Ligurio who devises the remedy: that they proceed by way of Lucrezia’s confessor, led by her mother (2.6). By the end of the second act, at the direction of Ligurio, the plot has been led from the public to the private, to a timetable of his own, incorporating conspirators only partially informed of the plot as required by the chosen necessity (“the necessity that does not give time” [*D* III 6.6]).

The removal of the plot from the public baths to the less visible secrecy of Messer Nicia’s home is instructive as it informs the characterization of eros or love in the play and in Machiavelli’s thought more generally. Callimaco loves Lucrezia because she is beautiful. But the love of the beautiful is unstable because, on Machiavellian terms, it is unlimited. As Harvey Mansfield puts it: “once you give up respectability and the stability of the home and make love your principle, whether love of money, beauty, or whatever, promiscuity is the result. One who loves Lucrezia merely because she is beautiful will love the next woman who comes along who is more beautiful.”¹² The instability works both ways. As Lucrezia may be wooed at the baths by the grace or magnificence of Callimaco, there is nothing to prevent her from being seduced by the spectacle of another, more splendidly arrayed suitor, another erotic gentleman. At the baths and in public, the lust of the eyes has full play; “it does not seek the leisure of tarrying observantly, but rather seeks restlessness and the excitement of continual novelty and changing encounters.”¹³

¹² Ibid. 11.

¹³ Martin Heidegger, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, *Being and Time* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1962), 216.

This is duplicated at the political level, as Carnes Lord discusses in his allegorical reading of the play, in the contest between aristocratic gentlemen in the public sphere. Conspiracy is to be preferred as a more certain method of securing the government for ambitious aristocrats than any public arguments or magnificent displays; these would only expose the aspiring erotic to the competition of other ambitious aristocrats, in a competition without end.¹⁴ The unstable and unlimited love of the beautiful requires to be limited by necessity, both in the public contest of aristos and in the private escapades of philanderers; in the plot of the conspirator, this necessity is chosen. Ligurio's repair of the plot to the home of Messer Nicia is paralleled by his choosing to limit the time available to execute the plot: both involve the choice of necessity.

The public is here characterized as the baths, where the looks—we might say the *ideai*—of every individual are displayed in full illumination for the regard of everyone else. The sense given is that the public—the realm of appearances, of the common good, of common speech, of the magnificent display of beautiful things, of the deliberate consideration of ends, the location of justice, and the ground of community—serves only to inflame passions, incite dissent, and inspire unrealistic aspirations and otherworldly desires. It is the character of conspiracies and, Machiavelli shows us here, properly conducted seductions, to isolate the participants in privacy. The isolation of individuals, then, is the necessary consequence of the criminal enterprise that is the only grounds for politics or even a love affair. This is

¹⁴ Carnes Lord, "Allegory in Machiavelli's *Mandragola*," in *Political Philosophy and the Human Soul* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield), 165.

most important to Machiavelli's break with the classical and Christian tradition of thought: only from such extraordinary isolation—in private, out of sight, *uno solo*—can the ordinary “goods” of political life or love be secured. The more explicitly political implications of this will be considered in the following chapter on Machiavelli's more explicitly political work, *The Prince*.

The ordinary, visible public cannot be the ground of any connection between individuals for Machiavelli; the extraordinary collusion of isolated individuals in criminal conspiracy is the only secure ground. Hence, Callimaco trusts the rogue Ligurio before he trusts Siro, who has always been faithful.¹⁵ The conspirators, and the object of the conspiracy, are lured from the ordinary to the extraordinary by means of a trick: they are involved in a small crime, which is revealed to be only a disguised part of a bigger crime. Messer Nicia's small plan to send his wife to the baths turns into a big plot to kill a young man and to prostitute his wife; Brother Timothy, should we look ahead, is lured from a scheme to sanction an abortion into a bigger plot to trick Lucrezia into lying with Callimaco; looking further ahead, Lucrezia herself is lured from the smaller crime of sleeping with Callimaco once into the ultimate plot of taking him as her permanent lover. In passing, this explains, I think, the pattern in the play whereby the frequency and number of monologues increases as the plot unfolds, the monologues partly representing the greater isolation

¹⁵ Mansfield, 7.

of the conspirators as their involvement in the plot increases: seven of the ten monologues fall in the second half of the play.¹⁶

The Eroticism of Christian piety

To return to the plot of the play then: Machiavelli is concerned to portray the suppression of not just the eroticism of gentlemen, as in the figure of Callimaco, but also what might be called the eroticism of Christian piety. This becomes especially clear in the third act, but the first explicit indication of this in the play is given in Messer Nicia's testimony to Maestro Callimaco and Ligurio of his wife's practice of praying for hours before bed (2.6). At the risk of trying to explain a joke: Maestro Callimaco suggests that Lucrezia may be "badly covered" (*mal coperta*) at night. Messer Nicia, of course, doesn't get the joke, and offers that "she always has a good quilt over her, but she stays on her knees for four hours, stringing together Our Fathers before she comes to bed, and she's a beast for enduring cold" (2.6). The serious suggestion behind the joke is that Madonna Lucrezia sublimes all of her sexual desire—perhaps because it fails to be satisfied by Messer Nicia?—into otherworldly love. The implied cost of her Christian devotion is the failure to generate the children who would improve Messer Nicia's political fortunes. Or, the consequence of her erotic longing (in her case, mainly for children) going unfulfilled, is the inflammation of an otherworldly, Christian longing, expressed as excessive piety.

¹⁶ The monologues are Siro, 2.4; Messer Nicia, 3.7; Brother Timothy, 3.9; Callimaco, 4.1; Callimaco, 4.4; Brother Timothy, 4.6; Messer Nicia, 4.8; Brother Timothy, 4.10; Brother Timothy, 5.1; Brother Timothy, 5.3. Cf. Mansfield, 198 n.39.

Something similar is implied in her earlier failed attempt to become pregnant, recounted by Messer Nicia to Ligurio (3.2). Lucrezia had been told by one of her neighbours that if she went to first mass for forty mornings, she would become pregnant. After being hassled by one of the friars, however, she quit attending. As Carnes Lord puts it, “her piety would seem to render her vulnerable to the blandishments of men of this sort.”¹⁷ Again, not to explain a joke, but the subtext seems to be that had Lucrezia accepted the advances of the friar, she would have become pregnant as she wished. Her scrupulous, otherworldly piety appears to prevent her from producing an heir for Messer Nicia. Her otherworldly desires, expressed as scrupulous piety, blind her to the way she may satisfy her this-worldly desire for children. But these apparently different desires are expressions of the same eros. Eros itself is impossible to satisfy, and perpetually prevents itself from doing so.

Scene 3.3 is extremely important for Machiavelli’s depiction of the eroticism of Christian piety in the play. It presents a conversation between Brother Timothy and an unnamed woman.¹⁸ Brother Timothy’s first words, “If you want (*voi vi volessi*) to confess, I’ll do what you want (*voi volete*),” in their reference to want, recall those of Callimaco, “Siro, don’t leave, I want you (*io ti voglio*) for a bit” (1.1). Brother Timothy’s words, more explicitly than Callimaco’s, draw attention to the reciprocation of desire. As in the case of the erotic gentleman, I think here the

¹⁷ Lord, 156.

¹⁸ The scene (33), in its content and its numbering, reminds of conversations depicted between other pious women and a man of God. I remark in passing that, if one counts the prologue as the first scene, as I think ought to be done, then this is the thirteenth scene in the play; this scene has eleven exchanges.

reference to want signals the needy, which is to say erotic, foundation of the character of the two men; also in this case, to the similar ground of this woman's character.

The woman appears to be a frequent confessant: "Oh, how much I complained about it to you" (3.3). It sounds as if the sexual rapacity of her husband, possibly perverse, is what impelled her to these frequent confessions. So moved was she that she continues to consult the friar, even after his death; as she says: "still the flesh does pull; I can't help feeling it again when I remember it." Rather than permitting her to forget her husband's erotic savagery, her ardent and repeated confessions seem only to have deepened and intensified her recollected passion. In a similar fervour, she raises the danger of the Turk coming to Italy and then trembles at the threat of "that impaling." Her fright is not especially quieted by the friar's instructions to pray.¹⁹

This scene depicts what Machiavelli presents as the problem of the reciprocally seductive power of eros. The lust of the confessant's dead husband compels her to confess, which in turn inflames the memory of his past sins, which incites her to confess again, all of which is erotically pleasing, and inclines her to find more to confess and to pray about. The friar, for his part, seems similarly to feed off the needs, sins, and prayers of his congregation. He retains his place in the lives of his confessants by at once encouraging their piety and inflaming their lust, quenching pent up spiritual energy and then stoking it again. He himself doesn't seem to be free

¹⁹ Regarding the connection between erotic gentlemen and churchmen, Carnes Lord makes an instructive suggestion that is complementary to our purposes in the following chapter on Machiavelli's *Prince*: "It may seem pedantic to observe that the threat posed by the Turkish navy to Tuscany—as distinguished from the Adriatic coast of Italy—was at best a remote one. Yet this curious detail becomes less curious as soon as one sees that the relationship between the nameless lady and her late husband precisely parallels the relationship, as described by Machiavelli in the *Prince* and elsewhere, between the Romagna and Cesare Borgia." Lord, 157.

of this erotic cycle of confession either; more than any other character, he confesses himself to the audience five times.²⁰

The reciprocal absolution provided between confessor and confessed here, and if we follow Machiavelli's implication, between the erotic lover and beloved, is as illusory as its foundation, which is an imagined faith or trust. As we have seen especially in the first act of the play, Callimaco nearly exhausts himself lusting after the beauty of Lucrezia, this to the point that he relies more on his own hope than any scheme or plot of his own to woo the object of his love. His desire brings him out of himself. In this way he is, as it were, seduced by his own love and driven to fabricate imaginary hopes in which he puts his trust. For this trust-hope to be endowed with any security, it must be co-opted by the conspiracy executed by Ligurio and according to extraordinary orders, be rendered stable. Left to his own devices, Callimaco would remain consumed by his own desire, competing endlessly in public or at the baths for the return of his affections. In the confessant's case, likewise she is taken out of herself by the lust of her husband and her desirous memory of it; this, however, is co-opted by the confessor's need to hear her confession, his desire to forgive her sins, etc. Her trust is placed in the (imaginary) hope of absolution promised by Timoteo. His "co-option" of the confessant's desire is more like Callimaco's scheme to woo his love at the baths than it is like Ligurio's plot to return the conspiracy to the privacy of Messer Nicia's household. Like the endless displays of magnificence and contest in word and deed that would be required of Callimaco for him to win Lucrezia in public, the confessor's series of absolutions, vigils,

²⁰ The suggestion that the Friar's monologues are confessions is owed to Harvey Mansfield, 19.

masses, and prayers perpetuate the erotic yearning of the confessant. The satisfaction of each desire is shown to depend on an arbitrary, fabricated “standard” above the desire itself—for Callimaco this is the standard of beauty as displayed in public; for the confessant the standard is God’s grace or forgiveness—the effectual truth of which is only a recrudescence of the desire itself, forever repeated and perpetuated.

We espy here Machiavelli’s implied connection at the level of politics between the rule of gentlemen (the *kaloi kagathoi*) and the rule of priests. Each are kinds of erotic men who transform their own lusts into self-seducing artefacts that are either spectacular or awesome—for gentlemen these are their magnificences or other assorted virtues in the classical-Christian sense, and for priests these are the trappings of the Church and the figure of God Himself—and which command the obedience of “men in general,” who “judge more by their eyes... because seeing is given to everyone” (*P* 18, end).²¹ Again, the more strictly political implications of this will be treated in the following chapter.

In this comedy Machiavelli gives us two scenes showing the rule of priests. The first is 3.3; the second is the eleventh scene of that act, where with the help of Sostrata Timoteo tries to persuade Lucrezia to submit to her husband’s scheme. It is telling that in these two scenes Timoteo, who later on refers to his fellow priests in the same way he speaks of the generality of women, deals only with women. The effectual truth of erotic politics: the rule of priests unmans everyone.²²

²¹ Parenthetical references to the *Prince* in this chapter are marked by an italicized *P* followed by the chapter number. Translations are from Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 2d ed., trans. Harvey C. Mansfield (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

²² See Harvey Mansfield’s excellent discussion of this scene. Mansfield, 21-23.

Messer Nicia uno solo

We ought not to finish discoursing on the third act without remarking on the important monologue by Messer Nicia (3.7). This scene depicts Messer Nicia alone while the conspiracy to involve Brother Timothy in his acquisition of children and heirs is executed offstage, in the church. In enlisting Brother Timothy, Messer Nicia has thus far been pretending to be deaf.²³ Messer Nicia's outburst in this scene should be understood as the utterances of the master conspirator expressing his frustration in resting his trust in the surest trust available to him, the trust of necessity.²⁴ Conspiracy by its character trusts nothing—in this play every ordinary, conventional trust, be it master and slave, host and guest, mother and daughter, husband and wife, ruler and ruled, confessor and confessed, is betrayed²⁵—yet the conspirator, extraordinarily, must trust his fellow criminals. Messer Nicia's surest trust is forced by his having bound his co-conspirators to the necessity of the plot.²⁶ It is impossible for any of them to withdraw, as Brother Timothy, for his part, testifies in his confession to the audience (3.9).²⁷

I have suggested, perhaps alarmingly, that Messer Nicia is the master of the conspiracy. Let me ease the shock of such an assertion. Messer Nicia is the secret master of the conspiracy, using the "accident" of Callimaco's pursuit of Lucrezia to furnish himself with offspring, for the benefit of both his *patrimonia* and his *patria*.

²³ Mansfield notes: "Deafness is also a beautiful disguise for Messer Nicia, who can say what he will and have it explained away. One might remark, too, that deafness is the condition of an author: he speaks but does not hear what his readers say to him, unless he anticipates them." 17.

²⁴ Mansfield, 19.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 19.

²⁷ It may be important that this scene (3.7), which depicts the solitude of the master conspirator, is the seventeenth in the play, seventeen being the number for nature.

That this might be so is suggested by several clues, the first of which we have alluded to by reference to “accident.” In his account of the expulsion of the Tarquin kings and the founding of the Roman Republic in his *Discourses*, Machiavelli relates that “if the accident of Lucretia had not come, as soon as another had arisen it would have brought the same effect” (*D* III 5.1). The accident referred to is the rape of Lucretia by the Tarquin king Superbus; the effect was the expulsion of the kings and the founding of the Republic. The possible connection between Brutus in the *Discourses* and Messer Nicia in the *Mandragola* is strengthened by Machiavelli’s reference to Brutus in the title of one discourse, “That It Is a Very Wise Thing to Simulate Crazy (pazzia) at the Right Time” (*D* III 2). Throughout that discourse, Machiavelli refers to Brutus’ “simulation of stupidity (*stultizia*),” and instructs the addressee of the discourse, “men of quality,” to “play crazy (*fare il pazzo*), like Brutus, and make oneself very much mad (*matto*), praising, speaking, seeing, doing things against your intent so as to please the prince” (*D* III 2). Like Brutus, then, Messer Nicia disguises his intent, acting crazy, stupid, and mad, and uses the “accident” of Callimaco’s desire to acquire his own goods.

What sort of “accident” was the occasion of Callimaco’s pursuit of Lucrezia? In the chapter on conspiracies, Machiavelli refers to two conspiracies where, it seems, the real masters remained concealed, even from the executor and the other criminals involved. In both Marcia’s conspiracy against Commodus (*D* III 6.10) and Materianus’ conspiracy against Antoninus Caracalla (*D* III 6.11) the executors, constrained by the necessity imposed by the hidden master, remained unaware that

they were the instruments rather than the leaders of the conspiracies.²⁸ In this connection we are reminded that it was Cammillo Calfucci who first aroused Callimaco's lustful humour in Paris. Perhaps he was sent there as Messer Nicia's agent in order to nab the first idle fellow he found?²⁹ We also recall that Ligurio is acquainted with Messer Nicia when he is first recruited by Callimaco, and indeed, that Messer Nicia had the good sense not to be seen dining with such a rogue, unlike Callimaco (1.1). And that it was Messer Nicia who raised as problems those matters for which Ligurio had remedies (2.3, 2.6). At most Ligurio, who might *appear* to lead the conspiracy, claims, "I want to be a captain" (4.9).³⁰ Ligurio appears, then, as an agent of Messer Nicia's; the extent to which he is aware of this is ambiguous but unimportant according to the necessity of the plot.³¹

That Messer Nicia is the master of the plot should, by this point, come as no surprise. As we have seen, the Machiavellian alternative to rule by open, public orders with their consequent inflammation of erotic desire is the secret, private rule by extraordinary modes, by conspiracy. The true Machiavellian would have to be somehow outside of this cyclical order of erotic reciprocation, not consumed within it or an agent of it. The implication is that this would be the least erotic, strictly speaking, of men. Callimaco is the most nakedly erotic man in the play; his cuckold, Messer Nicia—his name recalls the Athenian general whose rival, a

²⁸ I owe this interpretation of this part of the *Discourses* to Harvey C. Mansfield, *Machiavelli's New Modes and Orders* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979), 331.

²⁹ Perhaps in consultation with the King of France?

³⁰ Mansfield, "Cuckhold," 27 n. 61.

³¹ Whether he is aware of the character of his involvement or not is irrelevant to the unfolding of the necessity of the plot; this much is illustrated by Brother Timothy's apprehension of his own involvement. The plotters are not governed by themselves, but by the necessity imposed extraordinarily by the choice of the master conspirator.

philosopher's student, bore Eros into battle as the standard on his shield—
 recommends himself as the least erotic. The contrast between Messer Nicia's, by and
 large calm, addresses to the audience and Callimaco's frantic, self-torturing,
 hysterically impassioned tirades draws attention to this.

We have already discussed Callimaco's outrageous discomfiture at his desire
 and pursuit of Lucrezia (1.1, 1.3); it is worth revisiting this theme and the
 philosophical ruminations to which it propels Callimaco (4.1) as it contrasts with
 what we have seen of Messer Nicia's first monologue (3.7). Despite—because of—
 the approach of the object of his desire, Callimaco remains discombobulated:

In how much anguish of spirit (*animo*) I've been – and still am! ... The
 more my hope has grown, the more my fear has grown. Miserable me!
 Will it ever be possible for me to live with so many worries, disturbed
 by these fears and these hopes? (4.1)

His lust drives him to speculate, no doubt drawing on some of his leisurely studies
 from Paris, about nature and fortune: "It's true that fortune and nature hold the
 account in balance; the one never does you a good turn that on the other side
 something evil doesn't surge up." This is the fourth of four mentions of nature in the
 play; three in total were made by Callimaco.³² By Machiavellian standards,
 Callimaco is obsessed with nature. It seems fitting though that the one most smitten
 by nature's grace should be most interested in nature itself. Callimaco relies on some
 knowledge of nature to guide him, as he says to himself: "Face your lot; flee evil.

³² Other references to nature in the *Mandragola*: 1) Callimaco is telling Siro about Lucrezia's "nature, which is extremely honest (chaste) and in all ways alien to the things of love," and which "makes war" against Callimaco (1.1). 2) Callimaco utters his hope that after meeting Lucrezia at the baths, "that place could make her change her nature" (1.1). 3) Lucrezia, remarking on the strangeness of her mother's design for her, says "if I were the only woman remaining in the world and if human nature had to rise again from me, I couldn't believe that such a course would be allowed me" (3.10).

But, not being able to flee it, bear it like a man; don't prostrate yourself, don't degrade yourself like a woman." This doesn't work, of course; erotics can bear nothing like men. He remains, to use his own metaphor, "a ship tossed by two different winds, which fears so much more the nearer she is to port," unable to "conquer [him]self." There is no glimpse here of the figure who might beat and strike down Fortune, or who might dam and dyke a raging river (*Prince* 25). Erotic men, failing to conquer or control nature, come to depend on it. The effectual truth of this, Machiavelli indicates in Callimaco's list of body parts and their afflictions that concludes this scene, is that their "arms give up their strength" (4.1).³³ The alternative to eroticism is relying on your own arms, which means not trusting nature, but rather choosing your own necessity.

Messer Nicia does not rely on nature because he is not erotic. By now, the fourth act, Messer Nicia's plot is operating by its own necessity, which is that of the characters involved as orchestrated by Messer Nicia. Ligurio remains the executor, which we are reminded of when he devises the trick to re-introduce the Frate into the scheme and when he prompts Callimaco to arrange to visit Lucrezia repeatedly (4.2); but this is all according to the conspiracy as arranged by the master Messer Nicia. Messer Nicia himself emphasises the difference between his potency (*potenzia*) and his eroticism. Maestro Callimaco, in his role as Messer Nicia's doctor, tells him in that the cause of his wife's sterility is most likely in his seminal organs; he goes on to say that perhaps Messer Nicia is impotent (*impotenzia*; 2.2). Stageplay aside, Messer Nicia accepts the first possibility and soundly rejects the second: "Me impotent? Oh!

³³ Cf. Mansfield, "Cuckhold," 23.

You make me laugh! I don't believe there's a tougher or more robust man than I am in Florence." That Messer Nicia could not generate children exposes the extent to which erotic men rely on natural chance to furnish them. Unlike them, however, he does not rely on chance; he relies on his own arms — he is the only character in the play who is armed (4.7). He does not go to God, as against what his neighbour advises his wife; indeed, he hasn't seen Brother Timothy in more than ten years.

In connection with Messer Nicia's anerotic nature, it will do to remark upon his immunity from the tendency to abstraction and otherworldliness that characterises erotic men. This begins in the lust of the eyes and is inflamed by speech, as in the case of Callimaco. There is a natural connection here between the visible and the public, the public being the arena for the display of classical-Christian virtue and the deliberate argument about politics; it is the location of justice understood as natural right, and the common ground of community, properly so called. All this from the lust of the eyes. Machiavelli, then, is deliberate in his elevation of the sense of touch at the expense of vision. This is most importantly done in the *Prince*, chapter eighteen:

Men in general judge more by their eyes than by their hands, because seeing is given to everyone, touching to few. Everyone sees how you appear, few touch what you are... For the vulgar are taken in by the appearance and the outcome of a thing (*Prince* 18, end)

The political and philosophic significance of this will be discussed in the following chapter; we restrict ourselves to the dramatic import here. Whereas Callimaco is led by his eyes, Messer Nicia is the only character in the play to proceed by touch. He first refers to this by the strange quotation, "from having seen with these hands,"

meaning “to make very sure” (4.8).³⁴ Most striking, however, is Messer Nicia’s role in the meeting of his wife and Callimaco. First, “so that nothing would be done under a hood,” he inspects the stripped Callimaco by lamplight (5.2). He explains his reason for this inspection thus: “Since I’d put my hands in the dough, I wanted to get to (*toccare* – touch) the bottom of it.” Messer Nicia goes further: “When I had seen that he was healthy, I pulled him after me, and led him into the bedroom in the dark; I put him to bed; and before I left, I wanted to get a feel for (*toccare con mano* – touch with my hands) how the thing was going, because I’m not used to being made to take fireflies for lanterns. ... Having touched everything, I left the bedroom” (5.2).

Leaving nothing to sight, lest he be duped by appearances—and the whole play consists in the manipulation of appearances and reputations—Messer Nicia touched everything, without any respect, to govern the thing with prudence. No doubt it is intentional that as the plot proceeds, operating more by its own necessity, as night falls and the sense of sight loses its power, the secret master Messer Nicia comes more to the fore as the governor of affairs: he appears armed (4.7); he is on hand to control the meeting of Callimaco and his wife; he gives the commands to Ligurio, Siro, and Callimaco (5.2). With the seduction executed, all that is required is to cement Messer Nicia’s new status as *paterfamilias*: he gives the orders, even to his wife who supposedly used to govern him (5.5, 5.6).

There remains a difficulty with Messer Nicia’s unerotic elevation of touch over sight, which corresponds to his preference of the private execution of the conspiracy to any public activity which might aim at the same end. What is the

³⁴ Cf. Flaumenhaft, 46 n. 75.

connection between the elevation of touch over sight and the acquisition of children? Why does Messer Nicia want children? We suggested earlier that this “desire” was the only erotic crack in Lucrezia’s otherwise impregnable armour. This is not quite the case for Messer Nicia. In the only conversation in the play that treats politics directly (2.3), Messer Nicia refers to his utter lack of status in the city.³⁵ But this does not seem to aggravate him greatly; he says: “I don’t need anybody” (2.3)—this on the way to produce a urine specimen from his wife for the doctor to the King of France. Yet he does wish for children. The suggestion is made that children are most important for their place in guaranteeing inheritance and assuring the line of succession, both important matters of public rather than strictly private affairs (2.6). The acquisition of public status, then appears as the possible motive for Messer Nicia’s plot for children. It remains ambiguous, though, whether this is really a private motive—for *patrimonio*—or public—for *patria*. And what has this to do with the elevation of touch? Our attention is drawn back to the *Discourses*, where we might ask similar questions of Brutus, the “father of Roman liberty” (*D III 1*), the same Brutus who was so wise to simulate craziness (*D III 2*).³⁶

In his discussion of Brutus’ “eminent work,” Machiavelli draws attention to the differences between his own account and that given by Titus Livy. Livy “expresses but one cause that induced” Brutus to simulate stupidity and expel the Tarquins from Rome, “which was to be able to live more securely and to maintain his patrimony (*patrimonio*)” (*D III 2*). Machiavelli will expose the heretofore secret

³⁵ Mansfield makes the point that this discussion is conducted between a master and a slave, and is thus not at all serious—fitting for a comedy. “Cuckhold,” 13.

³⁶ My discussion of Machiavelli’s *Discourses* in the following section owes much to the interpretation offered by Harvey C. Mansfield in his book *Machiavelli’s New Modes and Orders*, 306-311.

cause, however, that Brutus also wished “to have more occasion for crushing the kings” and liberating his fatherland (*patria*). Somehow then, in Machiavelli’s presentation, the unity of private and public motives will be shown in Brutus’ actions. We remain attentive to how this will be accomplished without recourse to the erotic.

The implied synthesis of motives is first seen in an episode involving the oracle of Apollo. The reference reminds of the appropriation of Apollo by philosophers as the god of the sun, light, and illumination; it also reminds of another word from Apollo, communicated via the oracle to Socrates. In this account, Machiavelli radically reverses the Socratic tradition. Brutus, upon hearing the word of Apollo, rather than fleeing the earth for the light above, fell to the earth to touch it (*D III 2*). The fuller account of this event in Livy reports that the one among Brutus and his companions who should touch his mother first would gain the “highest power in Rome.”³⁷ Brutus, deciding that the earth was his mother, touched the earth in secrecy from his companions. The second example Machiavelli modifies from Livy consists in changing the details of the suicide of Lucretia. In Machiavelli’s account, Brutus “was the first among [Lucretia’s] father and husband and other relatives to draw the knife from the wound and to make the bystanders swear that they would never endure that in the future anyone should reign in Rome” (*D III 2*). In Livy’s account, Brutus takes up the bloody knife and swears that he himself will kill the king; there is no involvement of anyone else in his commission.³⁸ Machiavelli offers Brutus as an example from which to learn.

³⁷ Mansfield, *MNMO*, 306. See Livy, *Ab urbe condita*, I 56.

³⁸ Mansfield, *MNMO*, 306. See Livy, I 58-59.

Machiavelli's revolution consists in the advice he gives to those who are given the word from Apollo. He addresses himself to "a man notable for his quality," "men who have quality" (*D III 2*), but who have not got the "forces" to "expose themselves" and make open war on the prince. These are men, like Brutus, who wish to be left alone, though they are "discontented with the prince." Machiavelli, as he will do, counsels against any sort of moderate compromise:

It is true that some say that with princes one should not wish to stand so close that their ruin includes you, nor so far that you would not be in time to rise above their ruin when they are being ruined. Such a middle way would be truest if it could be observed, but because I believe that it is impossible. (*D III 2*)

If a man of such considerable quality were to try to withdraw to a life of quiet, he would lead a life of "continual danger," as no one, least of all the prince, would believe that he truly did not desire power.

For men of quality—philosophers, those who have been given the word by Apollo—there is no escape from the melee of politics. Best to touch the earth, the *patria* that philosophers and non-philosophers share alike, and "make oneself very much mad, praising, speaking, seeing, doing things against your intent," than to fly away in the vain hope of contemplation. Best to enter into politics, at the level of politics. The men of quality are instructed to "see" as the tyrant does; i.e. this faculty is not to be let loose, to indulge in non-political, though delightful and spectacular, fantasies of immaterial ideas.³⁹ When the philosopher does this, ceases to gaze at the sky and sees as the prince does, he looks back to the foundation and finds at the

³⁹ Mansfield, *MNMO*, 308. Mansfield adds, "in Machiavelli's thought the faculty of sight is needed in politics to repel the influence of those who do not believe in the punishment they do not see but are able to persuade others to believe they speak with God without seeing anything extraordinary."

origins nothing that gives any independent support to the philosophic life; he will see only terror, whose comfort is political, not philosophical.⁴⁰ This is the public spirited appeal Machiavelli makes to his fellow philosophers, to join him in seeing as a virtuous prince.

What bearing does this have on Messer Nicia? As men of quality cannot afford to remove themselves from politics, neither can Messer Nicia. He cannot withdraw to study philosophy and law, Boethius and whatnot. Having appreciated the true consolation of philosophy as taught by Machiavelli, that there is no consolation in philosophy, he is obliged to enter politics himself. And as both the maintenance of respectability and the acquisition of sons and heirs are the necessary conditions to do this, these things he will do. Not because he has an erotic desire to do so, but because it is his chosen necessity. To do anything other would be to repeat the error of philosophers since Socrates, of abdicating the defence of this earthly *patria* against the heavenly realm.

⁴⁰ Mansfield, 1979, 308.

Chapter Two

THE SUPPRESSION OF EROTICISM IN MACHIAVELLI'S *PRINCE*

We have seen that the *Mandragola* is a conspiracy where fraud at once overcomes both the *nomos* and the natural isolation of individuals and then refashions the *nomos*, based on the natural isolation of individuals. There is little indication given there, however, of the role of force in Machiavelli's understanding of politics. This is fitting for a comical introduction to the more ostensibly grave matter of Machiavelli's political writings, here represented by the *Prince*. Regarding the light and the grave in Machiavelli, we could do worse than to consult Nietzsche:

But how could the German language, even in the prose of a Lessing, imitate the *tempo* of Machiavelli, who in his *Principe* lets us breathe the dry, refined air of Florence and cannot help presenting the most serious matters in a boisterous *allegriissimo*, perhaps not without a malicious artistic sense of the contrast he risks—long, difficult, hard, dangerous thoughts and the *tempo* of a gallop and the very best, most capricious humour? (*Beyond Good and Evil* 28)⁴¹

The lighter work treats fraud; it is supplemented by the graver work of force. It will do here briefly to introduce, in some cases reintroduce from the previous chapter, the themes to be treated here from the *Prince*. Part of Machiavelli's effort is directed to the elimination of the rule of gentlemen, the *kaloï kagathoi andres*. These men are erotically inclined to the finest bodily pleasures, to the public display of virtue in the dispensation of the public business and its attendant rewards, and to philosophy and other idle pursuits in ease and retirement. The "beautiful and good men" represent for Machiavelli a certain manifestation of the tradition of political thought inaugurated by Plato, Xenophon, and Aristotle and continued by Cicero, and from

⁴¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking, 1968).

which they received a certain endorsement. In the *Prince* they are represented by, among others, Cicero's hero Scipio. The trouble with this type, according to Machiavelli, is that they are too inclined to forget and neglect themselves for the sake of their own splendour. Their eroticism drives them out of themselves, as though to catch the same glimpse of their own admirable virtue that their individual subjects do. Against this type of ruler Machiavelli offers his own exemplars. In particular, Hannibal is contrasted with Scipio, but there are infinite others. Among these one finds no trace of the indulgence of the pleasures of the table, nothing of retirement or ease, a utilitarian treatment of magnificence, and above all the instruction to acquire and acquire by force. Here we can see the difference from the erotic gentlemen: whereas *kaloï kagathoi* are taken out of themselves, the acquiring men appropriate to themselves; the world is emphatically for-them; fortune is to be taken, beaten, and conquered.

The different estimation of force and violence is crucial, and appears in considerable relief in Machiavelli's treatment of a peculiarly modern kind of ruler, the churchmen. Rule by churchmen shares all of the defects of rule by gentlemen; indeed, Machiavelli gives the sense that rule by priests is the effectual truth of rule by erotic gentlemen. Each accomplishes their mastery, at best, by means of fraud, sometimes by the most spectacular fraud imaginable. But they are both too trusting, we might also say faithful, in the benevolence, stability, and peacefulness of the world to understand the requirement to rule also, and more fundamentally, by means of force; neither the gentleman nor the churchman is sufficiently in possession of his own arms.

Machiavelli's final preference is for the extraordinary rule of the new prince, who impresses form into matter. Here we detect the real ground of politics: fortune gives the opportunity, which provides the matter. There are no forms in nature; there are no natural wholes which might be the natural object of eros; any suggestion to the contrary is at best a fraud: there is no natural bloodline; the city is made of disparate humours; there are no Ideas; there is no whole properly so called. The marvel or wonder of the eyes that tricks lusty young men into trusting in any order to nature is better replaced with the surety of the hands and of touch. This carving up of fictional wholes is accompanied by a demystification, a demythologizing of politics in the name the effectual truth of the thing, which truth is always, again, emphatically for-the-prince. The effectual truth of Machiavelli's presentation of this effectual truth is an impressive reformulation of the business and place of the philosopher, he who might otherwise be understood to be the most erotic man of all.

The claim against the rule of the kaloi kagathoi

We shall begin with the most explicit discussion of eros or love in the *Prince*, in the chapter on nature, entitled "Of Cruelty and Mercy, and Whether It Is Better to Be Loved Than Feared, or the Contrary" (17.65).⁴² The chapter begins with "Descending next to the other qualities cited before," (17.65) a clear reference situating the discussion of cruelty, mercy, love, and fear in the context of Machiavelli's departure "from the orders of others" (15.61). Of this list of eleven or

⁴² Translations are from Mansfield's edition of the *The Prince*, with some modifications. Parenthetical references are to the chapter and page number of that edition.

so qualities, the precise import of which is extremely difficult to pin down,⁴³ cruelty and mercy are mentioned third, after (first) liberal-mean-avaricious and (second) giver-rapacious.⁴⁴ The descent, then, seems to be from the qualities associated with acquisition to some perhaps more associated with Christianity—what might otherwise have been considered a move upwards rather than downwards.

Is it shocking that Machiavelli goes on to advise the greater mercy of cruelty? Because the world is full of dangers, the prince would do well to follow the example of Cesare Borgia here, whose “cruelty restored the Romagna, united it, and reduced it to peace and faith” (17.65). The message then: unity, peace, and faith follow from cruelty, not from piety.⁴⁵ This is hardly shocking anymore, but it does create a problem, as the prince would like to appear merciful or pious, indeed would like to be loved, but must act cruelly. Machiavelli himself draws attention to the problem—this, properly, is our introduction to the question of love: “From this a dispute arises whether it is better to be loved than feared, or the reverse.” In his usual gambit, Machiavelli avoids even the odour of a moderate, middle course: “The response is that one would want to be both the one and the other; but because it is difficult to put them together, it is much safer to be feared than loved, if one has to lack one of the two” (17.66). He gives the reason, too: in addition to being exceedingly fickle and inconstant,

⁴³ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. Leo Paul S. de Alvarez (Prospect Heights: Waveland Press, 1980), 95 n.3; cf. Leo Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958) 338-39 n. 139.

⁴⁴ The title of chapter 16 would seem to prepare the reader for a discussion of the first “pair” of qualities, liberality and meanness. There is no explicit treatment of the qualities of giver and rapacious in that chapter. On the movement from chapter 16 to chapter 17, Clifford Orwin suggests a movement from Aristotle to Christianity. Clifford Orwin, “Machiavelli’s Unchristian Charity,” *American Political Science Review* (1978), 72: 1222.

⁴⁵ N.B. that “piety” is an equally good translation as “mercy.”

men have less hesitation to offend one who makes himself loved than one who makes himself feared; for love is held by a chain of obligation, which, because men are wicked, is broken at every opportunity for their own utility, but fear is held by a dread of punishment that never forsakes you. (17.66-67)

Love in the sense given here appears to connect the different parts of the city in a “chain of obligation.” These connections are perpetually being severed, however, owing to the inconstant, shifting, duplicitous, and criminal nature of men. Whatever ties bind the parts of the city together into an aggregate are “broken at every opportunity” by the members. The remedy that accounts for the wickedness of men is terror, “a dread of punishment.” Whereas love extends out beyond each individual, trying in vain to connect him to another, fear isolates and terrorizes, turns the individual back inward onto himself. In the words of one commentator, fear “subsists as a constant beneath the kaleidoscopic swarm of the appetites.”⁴⁶ Machiavelli’s promise is that this is the more secure foundation for politics.⁴⁷

The threat of punishment posed by the prince fashions the individual here into a being concerned above all with itself and the things that are most immediately for-itself, its property. The individual might retain residual attachments to his women or his father, but the things most surely for-him are the things that secure him: his property. Hence the rankings implied in Machiavelli’s advice to the prince. The prince ought to abstain from the women of his subjects, and to resist unwarranted processions against their blood. “But above all, [the prince] must abstain from the property of others, because men forget the death of a father more quickly than the loss

⁴⁶ Orwin, 1224.

⁴⁷ Consider the penultimate sentence of Leo Strauss’s *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), 323: “The quarrel between the ancients and the moderns concerns eventually, and perhaps even from the beginning, the status of “individuality.”

of a patrimony" (17.67). These things—and again, especially the property—are to be let alone less because they are positive goods belonging to the individual, strictly speaking, and more because they are tokens of the individual, signs of his own security. They remind him that he has something to lose. Thus, to "acquire love," the prince should restrain his own "rapine ways" and give his subjects more that they can be terrified of losing.⁴⁸ Naturally, beneath any wisp of love in this giving is the secure isolation of fear.

This is not Machiavelli's last word on the subject here. Somehow the figures of Hannibal and Scipio are meant to illumine the matter of cruelty and mercy, love and fear. On the side of love there is the *kalos kagathos aner* Scipio, "whose arms in Spain rebelled against him," this arising "from nothing but his excessive mercy" (17.68). In seeking their love, his exceeding generosity inflamed his troops' desires to such an extent that he could neither satisfy them or maintain discipline.⁴⁹ In Machiavelli's earlier account of Scipio he said that Scipio imitated Cyrus (14.60). In this passage, Machiavelli emphasised the intermediary role of the writer Xenophon: "And whoever reads the life of Cyrus written by Xenophon will then recognize in the life of Scipio how much glory that imitation brought him, how much in chastity, affability, humanity, and liberality Scipio conformed to what had been written of Cyrus by Xenophon" (14.60).⁵⁰ Scipio, then, we may take as the imitation of the

⁴⁸ Orwin, 1225.

⁴⁹ The following discussion of Hannibal and Scipio, and especially the treatment of Cyrus and Xenophon, is informed by W. R. Newell's illuminating paper, "Machiavelli and Xenophon on Princely Rule: A Double-Edged Encounter," *The Journal of Politics* (1988), 50:108-30.

⁵⁰ Newell remarks that Machiavelli omits any mention of Alexander having learned of Achilles through Homer, thus drawing further attention to the peculiar literary character of Cyrus. Newell, 122 n.14.

Xenophontic Cyrus.⁵¹ His gentlemanly virtues are those “written by Xenophon;” his successes and failures are consequent of these. The important term here is “written.” Thus, the question of fear and love leads to the question of the writers.

Of “the writers,” Machiavelli rebukes their mixed praise of Hannibal: “And the writers, having considered little of this, on the one hand admire his action and on the other condemn the principal cause of it” (17.67). The action that they admire is “that when he had a very large army, mixed with infinite kinds of men, and had led it to fight in alien lands, no dissension ever arose in it, neither among themselves nor against the prince, in bad as well as in good fortune” (17.67).⁵² Machiavelli gives the principal cause of the action: “This could not have arisen from anything other than his inhuman cruelty which, together with his infinite virtues, always made him venerable and terrible in the sight of his soldiers; and without it, his other virtues would not have sufficed to bring about this effect” (17.67). Machiavelli’s description of Hannibal as leading a massive army, “mixed with infinite kinds of men,” from all races, fighting far from home,⁵³ recalls the accomplishments of Cyrus, who did the same thing.⁵⁴ By this indication, Machiavelli suggests that Cyrus has suffered the same treatment at the hands of the writers as Hannibal, and alerts us to the deficiencies of the Xenophontic Cyrus and his *kalos kagathos* dupe, Scipio.

⁵¹ This point could be amplified by references to the relevant parts of the *Discourses*: II 12, II 13, III 19-22. Newell pursues these to persuasive effect in his article.

⁵² See *Discourses* III 21.4 for the parallel, where Machiavelli says that the action is “admired by all the writers: that although his army was composed of various kinds of men, no dissension ever arose in it, either among them or against him.”

⁵³ Cf. *Discourses* II 12.

⁵⁴ “...according to all accounts of his career,” Newell, 122-23.

To develop this point, we should notice Machiavelli's other mention of Cyrus in this section of *The Prince* and also discuss his other two references in this work to "the writers." The other nearby reference to Cyrus occurs in the sixteenth chapter, but the whole context is important. In the previous chapter, Machiavelli has introduced his intention "to depart from the orders of others" and to distinguish between "the effectual truth of the thing [and] the imagination of it" (15. 61).⁵⁵ With this in view he proceeds to give the above-mentioned list of qualities for which "all men" and "especially princes" are either blamed or praised. In the sixteenth chapter he treats the first "pair," "Of Liberality and Parsimony." Machiavelli's advice to the prince, apparently offered as a response to a hypothetical question, is that to gain a name for liberality without bankrupting himself, the prince must pursue a policy of imperial expansion. Indeed, "for the prince who goes out with his armies, who feeds on booty, pillage, and ransom and manages on what belongs to someone else, this liberality is necessary" (16.64). Here is the reference to Cyrus: he is one who could be a "bigger giver" because he led his armies on a career of international piracy and plunder, despoiling cities and nations. Importantly, there is no mention here of "the writers" and no suggestion of this being the Cyrus "written by Xenophon."⁵⁶ The absence is conspicuous, since the other models to be imitated from chapter 14, Alexander and Caesar, are both mentioned. The kind-hearted Scipio is nowhere to be found. Machiavelli gives the slightest clue: unmediated by the writer Xenophon,

⁵⁵ Though, on this point see Orwin, 1218.

⁵⁶ Newell, 122.

Cyrus appears more like Hannibal: more violent, more ferocious, and more cruel.⁵⁷ It seems that the writers, in an act of fraud, disguise the force or violence which the most impressive men display.

Machiavelli's two other mentions of "the writers" in *The Prince* bear out this suggestion that they disguise the importance of violence and force in princely rule. The first of these occurs in the fourteenth chapter. As I intend to discuss this chapter in some detail later, I will restrict my remarks here to the precise reference itself. In the course of discussing a prince's exercise of the body, he gives as an example Philopoemen, "prince of the Achaeans" (14.59):

Among other praise given by writers to Philopoemen, prince of the Achaeans, is that in times of peace he never thought of anything but modes of war; and when he was on campaign with friends, he often stopped and reasoned with them ... And he put before them, as he went along, all the chances that can occur to an army; he listened to their opinions, gave his own, supported it with reasons, so that because of these continued cogitations there could never arise, while he led the army, any accident for which he did not have the remedy. (14.59-60)

Plutarch's account of Philopoemen praises his "military conduct and warlike skill."⁵⁸

He "came off victorious in ten thousand encounters, to all which fortune had scarcely any pretence, so much were they owing to his skill," but Plutarch finds him lacking in

⁵⁷ Again, with reference to the *Discourses*, this point could be impressively amplified. Cf. Newell, 1988. It is worth remarking in passing that, compared to the *Discourses*, Cyrus appears in *The Prince* much more "on his own," that is without reference to Xenophon, than in the *Discourses*. In the *Prince*, Cyrus is mentioned without Xenophon at 6.22-23, 6.24, 16.64, and 26.102; the only mention with Xenophon is 14.60. In the *Discourses*, Cyrus is mentioned without Xenophon only once, at II 12.1, where he is compared to Hannibal. Every other mention of him is in connection with Xenophon as well: II 13, III 20, III 22, III 39. The *Discourses*, then, presents a much more "Xenophonic" version of Cyrus, whereas the figure in *The Prince* is, in general, more ferocious. This becomes especially clear in the parallels made between the non-Xenophonic Cyrus at *Discourses* II 12 and in the contrast between Hannibal and Xenophon's Cyrus at III 21.

⁵⁸ Plutarch, trans. John Dryden, *The Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans* (New York: The Modern Library, 1864), 466.

“justice and clemency.”⁵⁹ Plutarch’s judgment, recalling the judgment made of Hannibal by the writers, is mixed:

The love of honour and distinction was, in his character, not unalloyed with feelings of personal rivalry and resentment. He made Epaminondas his great example, and came not far behind him in activity, sagacity, and incorruptible integrity; but his hot contentious temper continually carried him out of the bounds of that gentleness, composure, and humanity which had marked Epaminondas, and this made him thought a pattern rather of military than of civil virtue.⁶⁰

We can see how Machiavelli’s judgment of the fellow would differ from “the writer” Plutarch, who no doubt has not expressed the effectual truth that all of Philopoemen’s virtues would have been for nothing without that of cruelty.

The third mention of “the writers,” this time in connection with Chiron, is not as straightforward, but nonetheless indicates the deprecation of ferocity and violence that Machiavelli is trying to undo. In chapter 18, Machiavelli instructs his reader that men rule in two ways: “one with laws, the other with force. The first is proper to man, the second to beasts; but because the first is often not enough, one must have recourse to the second. Therefore it is necessary for a prince to know well how to use the beast and the man” (18.69). For one who claims to depart from the orders of others, this alone will not satisfy. It is hardly revolutionary to refer to the legal and extralegal dimension of politics, or even to suggest that there is something beastly in man’s nature. As with the awareness that what men ought to do is far removed from what men usually do, this much was known from the first political philosophers to the

⁵⁹ Plutarch, 466-67.

⁶⁰ Plutarch, 436.

Christian humanists of his own day.⁶¹ Machiavelli indicates as much in the sequel: “This role was taught covertly to princes by ancient writers” (18.69). Machiavelli’s allusion to the covert communication of the ancient writers should alert us to his own practice, particularly as regards this matter. What he says the writers concealed was that the prince had to combine “both natures” of the beast and the man; what Machiavelli is concealing—at least at this point—is that the prince must combine “both natures” of the fox and the lion, not the beast and the man.⁶² It is not until the next chapter that he indicates as much, when he writes of Severus: “I want to show briefly how well he knew how to use the persons of the fox and the lion, whose natures I say above are necessary for a prince to imitate” (19.78). Behind these foxy dodges, Machiavelli suggests that there is nothing properly human, only beastly nature—here then, he departs from the orders of others. One final illustration: Machiavelli tells the prince that “it is necessary to appear ... merciful, faithful, humane [*umano* – “human” in Alvarez’ translation], honest, and religious” (18.70); but he tells the prince that when he opens his mouth, he should “appear all mercy, all faith, all honesty, all humanity, all religion” (18.70).⁶³ I take this to mean that as

⁶¹ Cf. Orwin, 1218: “Whatever Machiavelli’s innovation, this is not it. There would not have been, as is so often assumed, anything new in the discovery of a wide discrepancy between the purest goodness and the qualities most conducive to political success... We need only consider the impact of the fates of Socrates and Christ upon the traditions that sprang from them in order to see that this ‘Machiavellian’ insight had defined the central moral problem with which Machiavelli’s predecessors had wrestled. It is, in fact, for just so long as Machiavelli preserves the distinction between the morally best and the politically necessary that he remains within both the classical and the Christian traditions.” Orwin offers for consideration (n. 6) Thucydides V, 84-96, VII, 86; Plato, *Apology of Socrates*, *Gorgias* (esp. 508c-513c, 521b-522e), *Republic* 517a; Xenophon, *Education of Cyrus* III, I, 38-40; *Memorabilia* IV, viii, 4-11; *Apology of Socrates* 28; Seneca, *On Providence*; Epictetus, Fragment 13 (Oldfather, 1928, pp. 456-59) from Stobaeus, *Florilegium* I, iii, 50; Plutarch, *Lives of Phocion and Cato the Younger*, *Dion and Brutus*; Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*, and remarks that dozens more examples could be included.

⁶² Palmer, 87-88.

⁶³ Palmer, 88. Alvarez, 108.

important as it is for the prince to sound honest, even if he is not, it is equally important that he look human, even if he is not. What is misleading about the writers' teaching on Chiron is that they presented him as half-man, half-beast, when in truth he was all beast. What he taught Achilles to imitate was how to appear human. And this, in turn, is what is imitated by the other great models of chapter 14, Alexander and Caesar.

In order to turn this argument back to the question of love and fear, let me amplify the point about the writers. As Machiavelli says in his final mention of the writers, in the chapter whose subject is the fox, they were not unaware of the importance of fraud: "This role was taught covertly" (18.69). There is something self-seductive, though, about writerly fraud, and consequently they forget that the guarantee for fraud is force. Machiavelli's judgment of the writers' take on Hannibal applies to Xenophon and all the writers of the classical-Christian tradition generally; it bears repeating: "And the writers, having considered little of this [the paramountcy of "inhuman cruelty"], on the one hand admire his action and on the other condemn the principal cause of it" (17.67). They "admire his action," and from this stuff fashion the artefacts called virtue. They look to the marvellous ends—the actions—and, dazzled, fashion an account that takes no measure of the effective cause of these marvellous things. Their writing is not the truth—effectual, useful. Rather it is, in the classical sense, poetry—beautiful, attractive, "admirable." These charming baubles may be called by several different names: moderation, mercy, justice, charity,

courage.⁶⁴ They are delightful adornments as artificial as the golden “chain of obligation” which Machiavelli reminds is always being broken (17.66). Eros itself, inasmuch as it attaches to these poetic wholes, is itself artificial; and inasmuch as it does not know it is artificial, and claims to be otherwise, it is fraudulent.

What is fraudulent about love is its supposition that its objects are uncorrupted wholes.⁶⁵ But there are no wholes, only parts—and moving, shifting, inconstant parts, at that. Love, self-deluding, claims it is satisfied by natural wholes. But in truth it is a coalescing array of petty desires, wants, needs, yens, and it is never satisfied. “For one can say this generally of men: that they are ungrateful, fickle, pretenders and dissemblers, evaders of danger, eager for gain” (17.66). Their infinite yearnings and whims are only fleetingly quenched by tastes of the effluence of acquisitive expansion, the material “goods” of empire. These are best distributed by a prudent prince, one who is aware that the individuals who are his subjects will never be satisfied, but who knows how to shape their swirling appetites into discreet persons: by weighing them down with booty and isolating them in paralysing terror.

Love claims that it wishes to come to rest, that it will remain satisfied at the limits of the wholes it desires. This the supposed connection between love and peace. It is with this in mind that the writers, in their flattery of this delusion, forget or suppress the importance of violence, ferocity, force, and ultimately, fear. Machiavelli’s writing is dedicated to combating the party of peace, whose victory might only come by fraud; in his part he deploys both fraud and force.

⁶⁴ Indeed, the writer Xenophon called one of his “Cyrus.”

⁶⁵ Recall Callimaco’s estimation of Lucrezia.

Rule by fraud, the party of the church

Machiavelli's claim against the classical-Christian tradition of the rule of so-called gentlemen is that its effectual truth was the rule of churchmen. The classic writers, Machiavelli suggests, were capable of teaching rule by fraud, but did not sufficiently appreciate the more fundamental mode of force.⁶⁶ The result has been the greatest of all victories by fraud: the "conquest" of the classical world by Christianity, including the appropriation of the metaphysic of love and natural wholes. Machiavelli, by clues and indices, points to this in the *Prince*, showing how even more strictly pagan matters, such as magnificent adornments and the pleasures of the table, are co-opted by Christian fraud. In this section, I shall discuss this as well as the similar fate of even the most outstanding men of the Christian era, the foremost example being Cesare Borgia. In order to show how all these threads lead back to the church, I shall begin, then, with the master of this grand fraud, the Pope Alexander VI.

To say that Alexander is the master of the grand fraud is only slightly misleading; Alexander is more precisely the inheritor of the fraud. He is exposed as such in chapter 18 of the *Prince*, a chapter that introduces both the fox and the lion, but by means of a certain fraudulent deception treats only the fox. This is indicated by a certain misdirection in the title: "In What Mode Faith Should Be Kept by

⁶⁶ Consider Newell's judgment of Machiavelli's rhetorical use of the classic writer to whom he had the closest kinship, Xenophon: "The implication is that while Xenophon teaches well enough the need for fraud, he does not make his reader sufficiently aware of the need for force.... Xenophon does not make it clear enough that Cyrus' very legitimacy may have been a retroactive rewriting of history, consequent upon victories achieved at even deeper levels of violence and usurpation. ... Typically in the *Education of Cyrus*, "force" is the discreet background guarantee of "fraud" consummated in the foreground by Cyrus' many lengthy speeches." Newell, 125.

Princes”—the “mode” is that faith ought not to be kept, or only apparently to be kept. In a slight deviation from the list of qualities given earlier (15.61-62), astuteness is opposed to faithfulness, and “one sees *by experience in our times* that the princes who have done great things are those who have taken little account of faith and have known how to get around men’s brains with their astuteness” (18.69 – emphasis mine). Machiavelli’s indication that fraudulent, foxy astuteness is alive and well in the Christian era is re-emphasised again: “One could give *infinite modern examples* of this, and show how many peace treaties and promises have been rendered invalid and vain through the infidelity of princes; and the one who has know best how to use the fox has come out the best” (18.69-70 – emphasis mine). The foxiest of them all:

Alexander VI never did anything, nor ever thought of anything, but how to deceive men, and he always found a subject to whom he could do it. And there never was a man with greater efficacy in asserting a thing, and in affirming it with greater oaths, who observed it less, nonetheless, his deceits succeeded at his will, because he well knew this aspect of the world. (18.70)

In addition to Alexander being most capable of deceit, Machiavelli is attentive to emphasise that in the Christian era, there is no shortage of suckers. This is Machiavelli’s final mention of Alexander in the *Prince*, and by this point, he has shown that Alexander’s dupes include some most impressive men. Not the least of them: his son Cesare Borgia, and Louis XII, the king of France. Indeed, an important thread of the *Prince*, woven deceptively in and out through the first two thirds of the book, is the deceptive power of the church to co-opt and redirect the political energies of princes.

This thread first appears in Machiavelli's more or less explicit connection of magnificences, beautiful adornments, and other physical pleasures to the distraction they provide. Machiavelli begins the Epistle Dedicatory by drawing attention to such splendid trinkets: "It is customary (*sogliono*) most of the time for those who desire to acquire favour with a Prince to come to meet him with things that they care most for among their own or with things that they see please him most. Thus, one sees them many times being presented with horses, arms, cloth of gold, precious stones and similar ornaments worthy of their greatness" (ED.3). Machiavelli is clear, though, that for his part he will have nothing to do with this practice; his work is meant to be useful, not beautiful: "I have not ornamented this work, nor filled it with fulsome phrases nor with pompous and magnificent words, nor with any blandishment or superfluous ornament whatever, with which it is customary (*sogliono*) for many to describe and adorn their things" (ED.4). The devious implication of ornaments and gifts are not apparent with reference to the Epistle Dedicatory alone; that beautiful things are useless is hardly shocking. They acquire a more malevolent colour in the context of what Machiavelli says about Cesare Borgia's actions at Sinigaglia. In what Machiavelli calls a "turn to deceit"—or fraud—Cesare invited the barons to a meeting ostensibly designed to reconcile their parties. "The duke [Cesare] did not fail to fulfill every kind of duty to secure Signor Paolo, *giving him money, garments, and horses*, so that their simplicity brought them into the duke's hands at Sinigaglia" (7.29 – emphasis mine). There, at a stroke, Cesare eliminated "these heads" and made their partisans his own friends. Beautiful adornments are for dupes.

Before treating more fully these deeds of Cesare himself, we should examine those of Liverotto da Ferma, a proto-Cesare-type figure whom Machiavelli offers for our consideration in the eighth chapter. Machiavelli introduces Liverotto alongside the ancient example of Agathocles, whom Machiavelli is inclined to give nearly the highest praise: "For, if one considers the virtue of Agathocles in entering into and escaping from dangers, and the greatness of his spirit in enduring and overcoming adversities, one does not see why he has to be judged inferior to any most excellent captain" (8.35). It seems that the only thing preventing him from being "celebrated among the most excellent men"⁶⁷ is that he was insufficiently wily in the appearances he maintained to earn a lasting reputation as an excellent man. His modern counterpart Liverotto was not so spectacularly violent, but was more fraudulent; not only did he not gain an esteemed reputation, he did not even maintain himself in power, succumbing himself to deception.

The example of Agathocles shows what boldness and ferocity is missing from the sneaky but failed career of Liverotto and more generally, the failure of Christian princes in their reliance on fraud rather than force. That Agathocles and Liverotto are counterparts is indicated, I think, by the similarly strange use Machiavelli makes of

⁶⁷ Notice that according to Machiavelli's estimation, the best man (the new prince or founder) is of a higher order than the best captain. We thus ought to conclude that in Machiavelli's judgment, Agathocles is indeed a "most excellent captain." Notice also the similarity in Machiavelli's "rebuke" of Agathocles—"his savage cruelty and inhumanity"—and his praise of Hannibal—"his inhuman cruelty... together with his other virtues" (17.67). That Machiavelli should express similar judgments of them is prepared by his tacit association of Agathocles with Hannibal by the indirect means of mentioning that Agathocles was an opponent of Hannibal's father, Hamilcar, in a chapter and a section of the *Prince* concerned with patricide.

the word *deliberare* in describing their rise to power.⁶⁸ Agathocles “decided (*deliberato*) to become prince and to hold with violence...” and then

one morning he assembled the people and Senate of Syracuse as if he had to decide (*deliberare*) things pertinent to the republic. At this assembly he had all the senators and the richest of the people killed by his soldiers. Once they were dead he seized and held the principate of that city without any civil controversy (8.34-35)

Liverotto, *piccolo*, planned to do likewise, “as it appeared to him servile to be at the level of others, he thought (*deliberare*) that ... he would seize Fermo” (8.36).⁶⁹ But whereas Agathocles’ decision (*deliberare*) led him to execute the most spectacular and public display of usurpation and violence, Liverotto was not so bold. He set about to writing his uncle, and he “prayed Giovanni to please order” that he be received into Fermo with all resplendent pomp and honour (8.36). Then at a banquet, after beginning discussions, Liverotto moved the party from the table to more secret quarters. Only there did he commit the “parricide” (8.37). Within a year of his crime by fraud, Liverotto was strangled at Sinigaglia, “deceived by Cesare Borgia” (8.37). Machiavelli’s implicit contrast is between a most outstanding ancient crime, committed by extraordinary brutality, and a crime executed “in our times, during the reign of Alexander VI” (8.35). The example from the reign of Alexander VI—and Machiavelli explicitly draws attention to the timing⁷⁰—is all fraud, no force; it proceeds by writing and prayer, behind the spectacle of a pompous welcome, in a secret antechamber off of a banquet hall. And whereas Agathocles, “after infinite betrayals and cruelties, could live for a long time secure in his fatherland” (8.37),

⁶⁸ I owe this observation to Codevilla, 32.

⁶⁹ Codevilla, 33 n. 152.

⁷⁰ John T. Scott and Vickie B. Sullivan, “Patricide and the Plot of *The Prince*: Cesare Borgia and Machiavelli’s Italy,” *American Political Science Review* (1994), 88: 895.

Liverotto was duped within a year. As we shall see, Cesare, though approaching in some respects the virtue of Agathocles, at the decisive point shares the failings of the erotic Liverotto's reliance on writing, prayer, banquets, and secrecy.

Cesare Borgia represents Machiavelli's judgment of the limit-test-case of how far an erotic, Christian prince can go in the present times. That Cesare approaches the limit is revealed by Machiavelli's obviously admiring account of several of his deeds and his instructions, though restricted to certain deeds, that princes should "imitate" him. That he does not exceed the limit is expressed in Machiavelli's remark that Duke Valentino was the instrument of Alexander VI (11.46). Indeed, even that he is called Valentinois designates him as the vassal of the French king, who is himself revealed to be controlled by the pope.⁷¹ This is the fate of any erotic man, even the most impressively ferocious and duplicitous of "gentlemen," in the Christian world.

Something like this is implied but by no means emphasised when Cesare is introduced in the third chapter. Cesare is mentioned in the context of Machiavelli replying to a hypothetical objection to his assessment of Louis XII's failed invasion of Italy. Machiavelli indirectly sneers at Louis for having any faith in the faith of the pope, upon whom he depended. Machiavelli then recounts the first of two personal conversations that he relates in the *Prince*, which took place "when Valentino (for so Cesare Borgia, son of Pope Alexander, was called by the people) was occupying the Romagna." And as Machiavelli says: "For when the cardinal of Rouen said to me that the Italians do not understand war, I replied to him that the French do not

⁷¹ A similar case could be made for Machiavelli understanding the kingdom of France as the limit-test-case of an aristocratic, Christian monarcho-republic, but this would take us too far beyond the limits of this study.

understand the state, because if they understood they would not have let the Church come to such greatness" (3.16). Two important points about Cesare emerge here: (1) he is identified as the son of Pope Alexander, but the pope is suggested to be without faith;⁷² and (2) it might be supposed that the criticism Machiavelli here directs to the French might apply equally to Cesare, that had he "understood" the state, he would not have contributed to making the Church great.

Cesare is best known as the hero of chapter 7, "Of New Principates That Are Acquired by Others' Arms and Fortune." It is too often forgotten that, as the title suggests when compared to that of chapter 6, which chapter is one of the two high points of the *Prince*, this is a chapter of losers: Cesare Borgia is a model loser; he acquired his principate by the arms of others and by fortune. The reference at the beginning of the chapter to princes made by Darius (7.26) reminds of chapter 4, where a would be prince is instructed how to conquer principates like that of Darius.⁷³ The attentive reader would have to look from the reference in chapter 4—"Now, if you consider what was the nature of Darius's government, you will find it similar to the kingdom of the Turk" (4.18-19)—to the indications in chapter 19—where Machiavelli compares the Turk to the Sultan (19.81), and then remarks: "And you have to note that the sultan's state is formed unlike all other principates because it is similar to the Christian pontificate" (19.82)—to discover that the princes "made" by Darius are stand-ins for the princes made by the pope, Alexander VI: "These persons

⁷² If one were to follow Machiavelli's direction here to the eighteenth chapter, one would see how much Alexander is without faith.

⁷³ Machiavelli goes to no lengths to remind his reader that these are two different Darii. This one is Darius I (521-486 B.C.); the Darius of chapter 4 is Darius III (380-330 B.C.). cf. Mansfield trans., *The Prince*, 26 n.4; 19 n.5.

rest simply on the will and fortune of whoever has given a state to them, which are two very inconstant and unstable things" (7.26). The exemplary prince made by the pope is Cesare, who rested entirely on the will and fortune of his father. It is in this respect, then, that we should understand Machiavelli's recommendation of Cesare as an example: "I do not know what better teaching I could give to a new prince than the example of his actions" (7.26). It would not be outrageous to suggest that the reason Cesare is offered as an "example," and not as one to be "imitated" here,⁷⁴ is because Cesare is an example of the sort of "instrument" (11.46) that a new prince should be prepared to use.

Machiavelli's greatest praise of Cesare is reserved for the duke's decision (*deliberare*)⁷⁵ "to depend no longer on the arms and fortune of others" (7.28).⁷⁶ Since he began as one disarmed and reliant on the fortune of others, this decision on his part consisted almost entirely in a turn to deceit and fraud. To weaken the noble parties at Rome, "he gained to himself all their adherents, who were gentlemen, by making them his gentlemen and by giving them large allowances; and he honoured them, according to their qualities, with commands and with government posts, so that in a few months the partisan affections in their minds were eliminated, and all affection turned toward the duke" (7.28).⁷⁷ In these manoeuvrings against the nobles, his policy culminated in the deception referred to above, the elimination of the "heads" of

⁷⁴ To be "imitated" is what Machiavelli instructs of the four new princes in chapter 6 and the four models in chapter 14.

⁷⁵ Note that in communicating Alexander's decision "to make his son the duke great" and his decision to take the path of the Church, Machiavelli employs a different verb, *volere*, not *deliberare* (7.27).

⁷⁶ Machiavelli returns to the point in chapter 13, though again fails to offer Cesare as one to be "imitated," saying only: "I shall never hesitate to cite Cesare Borgia and his actions" (13.55) in connection with his decision to rid himself of auxiliary and mercenary arms.

⁷⁷ Gentlemen are especially fine dupes.

the Orsini at Sinigaglia. In a digression,⁷⁸ Machiavelli isolates a single instance of Cesare not proceeding only by fraud itself, instead combining the natures of the fox and the lion; this deed alone “is deserving of notice and of being imitated by others” (7.29). Finding the province of Romagna disunited and full of “robberies, quarrels, and every kind of insolence,” Cesare set to reducing it to peace and obedience through “good government” (7.29). So he “pre-posed there,”⁷⁹ placed there, Messer Remirro de Orco, “a cruel and ready man” (7.29). When Remirro had brought order to the province, and Cesare had set up a civil court, the duke moved to show that any cruelty that had been committed had been Remirro’s and not his. In this vicious display he combined the force and fraud for which Machiavelli will praise him: “And having seized this opportunity, he had [Remirro] placed one morning in the piazza at Cesena in two pieces, with a piece of wood and a bloody knife beside him. The ferocity of this spectacle left the people at once satisfied and stupefied” (7.30).

What singles out this instance from the rest of Cesare’s career is that it is entirely fashioned by Cesare. Remirro was nothing but that he was pre-posed, set up, by Cesare. In this act of creation, the duke was free from the “will and fortune” of Alexander. As such, he was liberated from the constraints of his own fraudulent manoeuvrings as well, free to exercise his own measure of violence. The lion emerged from behind the orders of the fox. With the opportunity of a disunited and rowdy province and the instrument of a “cruel and ready man,” Cesare impressed the

⁷⁸ That this is a digression proper is indicated by Machiavelli’s remark, “But let us return to where we left off” (7.30).

⁷⁹ The translation of *vi prepose* is Codevilla’s, 28 n.129.

form of peace and obedience into the matter. And there was no requirement to proceed by legal means: the civil court was as much “set up” by him as was Cesare’s minister—or for that matter, the two pieces with the block and knife in the piazza. Each is a viable means of government when Cesare is the master of the province. The results, of course, were excellent. The people were “at once satisfied and stupefied,” an extremely complementary designation from Machiavelli, which anticipates the high praise of “astonished and stupefied,” attributed to Severus’ people (19.78).

This remains the high point for Cesare. Regarding his descent, Machiavelli lists four modes in which Cesare might have secured himself, and says that of “these four things he had accomplished three at the death of Alexander; the fourth he almost accomplished” (7.31). If I am not mistaken, Machiavelli then goes on to indicate that Cesare failed to execute any of the four modes, and remained dependent on the “fortune and force” of others until his death (7.31).⁸⁰ I should respond to one possible objection here: obviously, Machiavelli’s presentation is not straightforwardly condemnatory. In this chapter, his next to last word on Cesare is the most effusive kind of Machiavellian praise, touching on many of the tropes he will reintroduce in the second half of the book. I shall quote this at length:

⁸⁰ The four modes were: “first, to eliminate the bloodlines of all those lords he had despoiled, so as to take that opportunity away from the [new] pope; second, to win over to himself all the gentlemen in Rome, as was said, so as to be able to hold the pope in check with them; third, to make the College of Cardinals as much his as he could; fourth, to acquire so much imperium before the pope [Alexander] died that he could resist a first attack on his own” (7.30-31). Of the lords, some saved themselves (7.31); of the gentlemen, the Baglioni, Vitelli, and Orsini came after him in Rome (7.32); and of the cardinals, Julius was his choice, despite having offended him in the past (7.33); and beyond the Romagna, his acquisitions—Tuscany, Pisa, Lucca, Siena—remained planned, not to say imaginary (7.31).

Thus, if I summed up all the actions of the duke, I would not know how to reproach him; on the contrary, it seems to me he should be put forward, as I have done, to be imitated by all those who have risen to empire through fortune and by the arms of others. For with his great spirit and high intention, he could not have conducted himself otherwise and the only things in the way of his plans were the brevity of Alexander's life and his own sickness. So whoever judges it necessary in his new principality to secure himself against enemies, to gain friends to himself, to conquer either by force or by fraud, to make himself loved and feared by the people, and followed and revered by the soldiers, to eliminate those who can or might offend you, to renew old orders through new modes, to be severe and pleasant, magnanimous and liberal, to eliminate an unfaithful military, to create a new one, to maintain friendships with kings and princes so that they must either benefit you with favour or be hesitant to offend you—can find no fresher examples than the actions of that man. (7.32-33)

Even this apparently most straightforward praise by Machiavelli reveals his effectual judgment of Cesare. The passage begins by restating Machiavelli's already given reason for citing the example of Cesare: for the sake of those who acquire the principate by means of the fortune and arms of others; he is the very model of a great near-miss. The sticking point is the suggestion that he be "imitated," a term Machiavelli usually reserves for those on whom he bestows the highest praise. I think this may be accounted for by noticing in this connection Machiavelli's suggestion that Cesare be "put forward," *preporlo*, which is the same word used for Cesare's installation of Remirro. Cesare is to be set-up by Machiavelli as Remirro was set-up by Cesare. In this light, it appears that the project of securing oneself against enemies, gaining friends, conquering by force and fraud, etc., is not Cesare's but Machiavelli's. These achievements redound not to Cesare, but to Machiavelli himself. This suggestion gains in credibility when the details of the enterprise as

presented here are compared to what Machiavelli writes in the rest of the *Prince*.⁸¹

After this presentation, Machiavelli retreats from the language of “imitate” back to recommending Cesare Borgia as an example (7.33).

This retreat prepares the way for Machiavelli’s ultimate judgment of Cesare, which is that he remained—despite his impressive duplicity and one instance of imitation-worthy ferocity—a pawn of the Church. In this Machiavelli implies that Cesare’s failure is more severe than is often assumed: “One could only accuse him in the creation of Julius as pontiff, in which he made a bad choice; for, as was said, though he could not make a pope to suit himself, he could have kept anyone from being pope” (7.33). Of course, this is not what was said; what was said is that “if he could not make pope whomever he wanted, at least it would not be someone he did not want” (7.32). The differences in the two statements point to Machiavelli’s suggestion. The “bad choice” made by Cesare was in not extinguishing the pope and the college of cardinals when fortune gave him the opportunity, for “he could have kept anyone from being pope.”⁸² In this connection, a brief reconsideration of Liverotto da Fermo is in order: this man, “during the reign of Alexander VI,” successfully extinguished the “first men” of the town, including his uncle, in what Machiavelli calls a “parricide” (8.35-37). These clues suggest what Cesare, had he been more daring, might have done: he should have, at a stroke, decapitated the church, extinguishing his father the pope and all the cardinals. This is the error that “was the cause of his ultimate ruin” (7.33). Ultimately, then, Cesare was an

⁸¹ Machiavelli’s scheme here roughly follows what he himself presents in the second half of the *Prince*.

⁸² I owe this argument and many of the points that follow to Scott and Sullivan, 896-97.

instrument not just of his father, but of the church and of God: "Then Alexander VI arose; of all the pontiffs there have ever been he showed how far a pope could prevail with money and forces. With Duke Valentino as his instrument and with the invasion of the French as the opportunity, he did all the things I discussed above in the actions of the duke. And though his intent might not have been to make the Church great, but rather the duke, nonetheless what he did redounded to the greatness of the Church" (11.46-7). Alexander used Cesare, then, the way that Cesare used Remirro;⁸³ and, after a fashion, Alexander was used by the church as he used Cesare—a chain of instrumentality, ending in the church, which is "exalted and maintained by God" (11.45).⁸⁴ This is the "ultimate" consequence of relying on the arms and fortunes of others.

By way of concluding this section, let me reconnect the fate of Cesare Borgia to the discussion of eros. In its first enchantment with pleasant and beautiful things—cloths, horses, magnificent arms, food, wine—eros begins to move out of itself in longing. In this direction it is encouraged by writing: writing both mediates the distance between the lover and the object of his desires and perfects the image of that very object. Given its own reign, eros would bind together the lover and the beloved, indeed, the distinction between one's own and the other would dissolve. In this, the eros of an individual makes even that individual not-one's-own, and as such, vulnerable. Machiavelli alludes to three levels of vulnerability in this deception. (1)

⁸³ Scott and Sullivan, 896.

⁸⁴ Regarding Alexander being an instrument of God: Patricide, p. 897: "As Machiavelli writes in his first *Decennale*, "When Alexander was slain by Heaven [*ciel*], the state of his Duke of Valence was broken and divided into many pieces." (Machiavelli, ed. Gilbert, *The Chief Works and Others* [Durham: Duke University Press, 1989], 3:1455)

In the first place, the individual is vulnerable to the deceptive and misleading movement that is erotic. Machiavelli's claim is that the distance between the lover and the other-thing-loved, the beloved, is never really traversed this way. Instead, the lovers become enamoured and dazzled by the appearances that face them. (2) It is behind these appearances that fraud and deceit do their real work. Here, then, is the explanation for the impressive workings of the *piccolo* fox, Liverotto, sneaking behind the magnificent pomp and ceremony of his banquet. (3) The deceptive character of eros is also self-deceiving, though. Eros buys its own bluff. It tricks itself into thinking that it can proceed by trickery alone, unaware that it is always vulnerable to both more subtle fraud and any show of force. This is implied in Liverotto's succumbing to the similarly fraudulent machinations of Cesare Borgia just one year later at Sinigaglia.

The Machiavellian alternative is the ferocious public spectacle. The examples here are Agathocles' murder of the senators and the richest citizens and Cesare Borgia's display of Remirro's broken body with block and knife. These public spectacles ought not to be confused with any classical notion of the public as the meeting space where citizens might speak, deliberate in the precise sense, and display their beautiful virtues. The ferocious spectacle has nothing "marvellous" about it, in the sense of *thaumazein*. It is not enticing to look at, but rather terrifying, not meant to lead erotic gentlemen to the public square, there either to tend the business of the city or to philosophize. Rather, it is precisely intended to scare such persons out of the public square. It is meant to strike down the deceptions that eros poeticizes. (1) The spectacle destroys the illusion that there is anything but a bottomless chasm

separating individuals, certainly no bonds of faith or trust. Any such trust imagines a cosmos of a certain apprehensible order, and thus a certain beneficent power. (2) It exposes any fraud that might be lurking behind public appearances by demolishing those appearances. When terror will not lurk, but rather struts boldly through the public square, there is no place for anyone peddling the fiction of a loving God. In this way, the ferocious spectacle accomplishes (3) the demonstration that fraud alone is not enough, that eros is always disarmed and always in need of its own arms. Eros barely has itself, let alone its own arms. Without its own arms, it relies on the arms of others. The case of Cesare Borgia shows that anyone who is not entirely for-himself is *ipso facto* for the reigning erotic fraud of the day, the Christian God.

Rule by force: acquisition as the virtue of parts, the party of Machiavelli

On Machiavellian terms, the rule of erotic gentlemen amounts to the rule by insufficiently forceful fraud which, in the emergency situation, amounts to the surrender of one's own arms to the church and to an imaginary God. What is true of the emergency situation is the "effectual truth of the thing." So, the effectual truth of the rule by men whose eros inclines them to act in accord with a faith or trust in an ordered cosmos or a benevolent deity is the rule of churchmen from behind the illusion of such a cosmos, reflected in the public orders. Machiavelli's characterization of the classical-Christian tradition amounts to a complete transformation of the tradition. In this section, I shall discuss the more strictly political manifestations of Machiavelli's preferred way, these being the emancipation of the acquisitive passions, the leonine violence that accompanies this, and the role of

the new prince or founder. From a consideration of these matters, I shall proceed to a discussion of certain aspects of what I have been calling their ground or foundation: Machiavelli's always implicit transformation of the mind into the body, made most explicit in the fourteenth chapter of the *Prince*; and his consequent or accompanying elevation of the sense of touch over that of sight, treated in chapter 18. And finally, I shall discuss the ontological implications⁸⁵ of these things—what amounts to the priority of the part to the whole, if not the complete dissolution of the whole—and the bearing this has on the question of love; for this discussion I will focus on Machiavelli's treatment of humours in chapter 9. I should remark in passing that it is here that we find the subject of the relation of the philosopher to the city most accessible.

Machiavelli's contribution to the repair of political life from the pernicious influence of Christianity requires what might be called the resuscitation of the lion. This is partly because in political life, the lion has been largely defanged by Christianity. As we have already discussed, Machiavelli is quite clear that there is no deficiency of rule by fraud or according to the nature of the fox in the present era; there are "infinite modern examples of this" (18.69). But the priority of the lion extends beyond the particular situation of the effeminizing tendencies of foxy Christianity. The restoration of the lion is most urgent, I am inclined to suggest, because the lion more than the fox works at the very foundations of political life.

⁸⁵ I use the term "ontological" with some hesitation. Machiavelli of course never provides a complete discursive account of Being or the beings. But he deliberately makes gestures in this direction. It is these that I aim to unpack in my discussion.

Let me respond to the very reasonable objections to this suggestion. I do not mean to suggest that the lion alone will suffice, but that it is more “natural” in the Machiavellian sense or closer to the origins. When Machiavelli introduces the two natures, he devotes almost the entire chapter to the faithlessness of foxes; his remarks on the lion are quite limited: “the lion does not defend itself from snares and the fox does not defend itself from wolves. So one needs to be a fox to recognize snares and a lion to frighten the wolves. Those who stay simply with the lion do not understand this” (18.69). This passage, which might be taken as at least partially critical of the lion, however, never disputes its priority. It suggests that the lion is less brainy but, I think, more “natural,” so to speak. Nature in this sense is body or matter without form or intelligibility. But the lion is closer to the terrifying origins than the fox: it “frightens” the wolves. It is the fox who cannot defend itself against the natural enemy, wolves. The lion in turn is susceptible to the workings of art, “snares.” And it remains ignorant; it does not “understand” its own limits, and its deficiencies are remedied by the foxes ability to “recognize.” The natures of the fox and the lion are introduced in a discussion of “two kinds of combat: one with laws, the other with force” (18.69). The subsequent identification of peace treaties, promise, and oaths with the fox would seem to vouch for associating the fox with the rule of law or convention—and this again corresponds to the fox’s association with the artifice of snares rather than the natural danger of wolves. Tacitly, then, it is suggested that the lion does its combat through force. The priority of this mode is reinforced by Machiavelli’s earlier remark:

The principal foundations that all states have, new ones as well as old or mixed, are good laws and good arms. And because there cannot be good laws where there are not good arms, and where there are good arms there must be good laws, I shall leave out reasoning on laws and shall speak of arms. (12.48)⁸⁶

In the lion, then, we see the priority of arms, force, fright, and the body, whereas the fox treats laws, artifice, the brainy things, and convention.

The association of the lion with nature is confirmed by the treatment of Fortune recommended to the new prince. Fortune is the governess of nature, providing the formless matter to the new prince.⁸⁷ The description of Fortune given at the beginning of chapter 25 recalls the ferocity and force of the lion:

And I liken her to one of these violent rivers which, when they become enraged, flood the plains, ruin the trees and the buildings, lift earth from this part, drop it in another; each person flees before them, everyone yields to their impetus without being able to hinder them in any regard. (25.98)

As an ontological account, this description of Fortune might remind of the musings of the Presocratic motion men. But where Machiavelli and these ancients share in giving priority to motion over rest, or becoming over being, I think the tenor of Machiavelli's presentation is slightly different. There is little sense in Machiavelli of the playful emergence and concealment of beings by chance and according to necessity; the suggestion of concealment, recession, and deception is more gentle than the impulsive violence Machiavelli depicts. Indeed, I think Machiavelli would find the shadings and moving beauty of the Presocratics to be too easily given over to the erotic give and take which those who privileged being accounted for with a

⁸⁶ Machiavelli implies something similar of friendship: "From the latter one is defended with good arms and good friends; and if one has good arms, one will always have good friends." (19.72)

⁸⁷ Consider Miguel Vatter's interesting discussion of Fortune: *Between Form and Event: Machiavelli's Theory of Political Freedom* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000), 167-193.

doctrine of eros. This difference accounts for the absence of a Presocratic political philosophy which Machiavelli supplies, and which truly is unique to him.⁸⁸ Unable to ground politics in the subtly shifting salients and retreats of becoming, Machiavelli here grounds politics in the obstinate violence of world-transforming founders. The violence and impetuosity of Fortune is reflected in the brutality and ferocity recommended to the new prince. Now, to be clear, Machiavelli does feign a moderate, even-handed approach, but this is no different than his usual gambit, and he concludes by recommending leonine ferocity:

I judge this indeed, that it is better to be impetuous than cautious, because fortune is a woman; and it is necessary, if one wants to hold her down, to beat her and strike her down. And one sees that she lets herself be won more by the impetuous than by those who proceed coldly. And so always, like a woman, she is the friend of the young, because they are less cautious, more ferocious, and command her with more audacity. (25.101)

Fortune is best won by her own ways, by the violent impulses she shares with the lion rather than with the cool-headed duplicity of the fox.

The raging, inchoate negativity of Fortune is duplicated in the energetic violence of the lion, and incorporated into the person of the new prince. Fortune is

⁸⁸ I shall discuss the Presocratic motion men in greater detail in the final chapter of this essay, where I will suggest that Plato gives intimations of the likelihood that, intended or not, in political matters an ontology of motion privileges the elevation of violence. It would extend too far beyond the boundaries of this essay to discuss the "sources" of Machiavelli's significant departures from earlier motion men. By way of indication, though, let me say that such an understanding of nature seems to owe something to certain Christian theologies which gave priority to an exceedingly capricious God of Will. I am more hesitant than some to attribute this directly to Saint Augustine, but would concede that he was perhaps influential at some degree of removal. More proximate to Machiavelli's time, and more directly relevant, I think, are certain Christian nominalists like William of Ockham. Consider the first chapter of Michael Gillespie, *Nihilism Before Nietzsche* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), and Stanley Rosen's study, *Nihilism: A Philosophical Essay* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968).

won by beating her, not by seducing her or tricking her. Compare the instruction to the new prince in chapter 6:

...since men almost always walk on paths *beaten by others* and proceed in their actions by imitation, unable either to stay on the paths of others altogether or to attain the virtue of those whom you imitate, a prudent man should always enter on the paths *beaten by great men*... (6.22 – emphasis mine)

As presented in chapter 6, the new prince has as his enemies the established laws (6.23)—and we have already seen the tacit association of the laws with foxes rather than lions. The leonine requirements of introducing new orders and modes are reinforced in the emphasis that founders be armed prophets, prepared to carry out their deed by “force,” and to make peoples believe by “force” (6.24).

The most leonine men are the new princes (cf. 18.78, 82). Perhaps the most striking, and revealing, remark that Machiavelli makes about his exemplary founders is that they had nothing “else from fortune than the opportunity, which gave them the matter enabling them to introduce any form they pleased” (6.23). As everyone knows, these four men include three pagan princes—the non-Xenophontic Cyrus, Romulus, and Theseus—and one biblical figure—Moses. In what may correctly be seen as a deflation of Christian claims by placing the biblical Moses on the same plane as the pagan princes, it ought not to be missed that Machiavelli “expands the claims of secular authority to an epochal scope formerly reserved for the instruments of God.”⁸⁹ This substitution of form-giving-founders for God parallels Machiavelli’s silent elimination of God from the government of worldly things at the beginning of chapter 25 (25.98). Fortune gives matter, turbulently and violently; the founders give

⁸⁹ Newell, 128.

form, with equal violence and force. It seems to require an act of leonine violence to introduce form to matter; and foxes seem to require the introduction of form in order to have appearances to manipulate and orders behind which to sneak. In the application of form to matter, the new founder enacts Machiavelli's instruction to use both the fox and the lion. I do not think, however, that Machiavelli supplies us with the requisite material to answer the question, Where does the form—the idea of the form, its look—come from?

I am inclined to think that what is called form in this context is just a happenstantial concatenation of material impressed by the impulsive explosion of will out of the founder. This is consequent to Machiavelli's lesson that even the most excellent human beings are most properly understood as subhuman beasts. There is nothing in Machiavelli's presentation here to account for humans as anything other than particular nodes where accidental impulses are unusually reflected or refracted. Whatever Machiavelli means by "necessity" becomes impossible to distinguish from contingency.⁹⁰ To substantiate this claim, I should like to discuss two passages from the text (chapters 14 and 18) where Machiavelli is more explicit than elsewhere in his reduction of mind to body and the concomitant elevation of the sense of touch over the sense of sight. This will serve as a suitable introduction to the ontological implication of Machiavelli's argument, the priority of parts to wholes, which bears directly on our question of Machiavelli's presentation of eros.

⁹⁰ Cf. Stanley Rosen, *The Ancients and the Moderns: Rethinking Modernity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 68-70.

The fourteenth chapter of the *Prince* discusses what might be called the education of the prince; the teaching has the effect of assimilating the mind to the body. Perhaps what is most impressive in this treatment of education is that Machiavelli is especially attentive that it should not lead to philosophy.⁹¹ The prince should devote himself to nothing but the art of war (14.58). That Machiavelli should put it this way is striking, as, despite the title of one of his major works being exactly *The Art of War*, the *Prince* in particular and Machiavelli's writings in general stand against the very idea of "art," at least in the classical sense of a rigorous technical knowledge characterized by the clarity bestowed upon the related activity by its end or telos. In what might, at first, be thought to be a restatement of the classical preference for the rule of knowers, Machiavelli allows that knowledge of the art of war amounts to being armed (14.58).⁹² "Therefore, [the prince] should never lift his thoughts from the exercise of war" (14.59). From this point, however, what appeared to be an aggressive modification—but only a modification—of the classical position will be shown to be instead a complete transformation; any title to rule will not be derived from "knowledge," at least not knowledge as any faculty of the mind or soul. This is already signalled in Machiavelli's retreat here from the association of war with art, instead referring to exercise, and the injunction not to "lift" his thoughts, as in to look up to the beings, the heavens, etc. He goes on to say that the prince can "exercise" in two modes, "one with deeds, the other with the mind" (14.29). He

⁹¹ Machiavelli signals the anti-philosophical tenor of this chapter when, in the opening paragraph, he applies so weighty a phrase as "the first cause..." to something so ephemeral (traditionally understood) as politics. As Mansfield points out, Machiavelli always reserves these grave, philosophical turns of phrase for strictly political matters. Harvey C. Mansfield, *Machiavelli's Virtue* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 343 n.16.

⁹² Mansfield, *Machiavelli's Virtue*, 266-67.

treats exercise by the mode of the body. At first there is nothing strange here, but then he begins to speak of learning, recognizing, and understanding—this in a discussion of exercise in the mode of the body; we have yet to come to the mind. Collectively, these formerly cognitive activities are called “knowledge,” and Machiavelli distinguishes this “knowledge” for its utility. He says it is “useful in two modes” (14.59). The first mode is defensive, but it in turn is shown to be mainly useful for the second mode. This second mode Machiavelli only discusses obliquely, suggesting that the knowledge is useful for comprehending “with ease every other site that may be necessary to explore as new” (14.59). As these sites are distinguished only by their not being in the prince’s native country, this sounds like nothing other than acquisitive, imperial expansion. When the word translated as “explore,” which might also be translated as “speculate on,”⁹³ is grasped as being the equivalent of the Greek *theoria*, then Machiavelli’s effect becomes indeed quite breathtaking: not only have lesser contemplative activities been reduced to the body, but speculative gazing itself, the activity of the philosopher as philosopher, has been both reduced to the body and transformed into the instrument of acquisitive, offensive, expansionist warmaking.

After this, we might expect that Machiavelli’s treatment of the exercise of the mind could hardly be so shocking. The instruction regarding the exercise of the mind is begun in the fourteenth chapter; I believe it is taken up again and completed after the introduction of the list of qualities praised and blamed in chapters 15 through 18,

⁹³ Cf. Mansfield trans., *The Prince*, 59 n. 2; Alvarez translates it as “examine,” 89; Codevilla translates it as “think of,” 55.

“In What Mode Faith Should Be Kept By Princes.” His advice in chapter 14 is that a prince should exercise his mind strictly for the sake of emulating the deeds of great men, among them Achilles. We recall that, in connecting this list of great men through the mention of Achilles to Machiavelli’s discussion of the beast-man Chiron in chapter 18, this revealed Machiavelli’s suggestion that princes were only the most ferocious and wily of beasts, disguised as human; this is as stupefying as his instruction to exercise the body through *theoria-as-conquest*..

The instruction on the exercise of the mind is completed only after Machiavelli has substituted the beastly fox in chapter 18 for what was earlier called mind. It is worth recalling that in the introduction of the persons of the fox and the lion, Machiavelli remarks that those “who stay simply with the lion do not understand” (18.69) the role to be played by each of the fox and the lion. So, fundamental as we have discerned the lion to be, this effectual truth is unknown to the lion himself; only the fox knows his own nature. (It follows that only the fox would know the proper place of the lion in political life, and only the fox would know when political life had become disarmed or insufficiently leonine. Machiavelli is foxier than Alexander.) It is the fox who properly knows how to use and to manipulate the appearances which are the stuff of the mind. The culmination of this instruction is worth quoting at length:

Men in general judge more by their eyes than by their hands, because seeing is given to [literally, touches] everyone, touching to few. 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; and in the actions of all men, and especially of princes, where there is no court to appeal to, one looks to the end. So let a prince win and maintain his state: the means will always be

judged honourable, and will be praised by everyone. For the vulgar are taken in by the appearance and the outcome of a thing, and in the world there is no one but the vulgar; the few have a place there when the many have somewhere to lean on. (18.71)

The mind as fox has nothing to do with *theoria*, with lifting the thoughts—looking up at the stars in wonder or idly gazing. Intellectual activities of the soul, such as these, are fundamentally erotic—the fox will have none of it. As such the mind-fox has no concern with or experience of wholes as wholes; it is only concerned with the parts of the world that touch the prince or that will touch the prince. What lies behind these parts might only be imagined anyway—best not to think about it, lest we seduce ourselves with our erotic speculations. It is the business of the fox to know how to use the things that touch the prince, and to control how the prince touches everyone else. Even appearances, the sneaking behind of which is the mode of the fox, are touchings: “seeing touches everyone;” Machiavelli’s is a radically materialistic world.⁹⁴ Appearances make up the stuff of opinions, and are the “end” to which the many look in order to judge and to praise. It is because touching is given to few that the prince can rule through fear and isolating terror; what Machiavelli here calls “the majesty of the state” includes the spectacular executions and displays which frighten individuals back into themselves where they touch nothing except perhaps their property. These spectacles are performed by the lion, but managed by the fox.

⁹⁴ Kenneth Blanchard, in an excellent article on the place of touch in Machiavelli’s “epistemology,” makes an interesting comparison to an example of Heidegger’s: “It is the interior of the thing that knits together the various images which it casts. But the interior also does something else: it “pushes out” against the world. The Being of an object, which in this case would seem to be hiding inside it, maintains the object by an act of force. It is this act of force, much more than the existence of additional forces, which distinguishes something real from the mere appearance of something in the perfect painting we verify by reaching out to touch.” Kenneth C. Blanchard, Jr., “Being, Seeing, and Touching: Machiavelli’s Modification of Platonic Epistemology,” *Review of Metaphysics* (1996), 49: 597.

The culmination of Machiavelli's teaching on the exercise of the mind is a radical destruction of the philosophical prejudice in favour of wholes. The world is only known, not as such, but as it is for-someone, in its parts that touch someone, which are incapable of being known even as "parts." At the most refined, the world is known as it is for-the-prince.⁹⁵ This is what is implied by the characterization of principates as "new:" all of the principates called new are only, strictly speaking, new for-the-prince.⁹⁶ The very fact that a city which is not, on its own terms anyway, "new" could be called new according to the effectual truth of the thing betokens that the city is not a whole. It has a certain being-for the conqueror as well as a being-for the populace, but no independent existence of its own or for-itself, i.e., as a unity. Any such claim to natural or conventional wholeness, as for example those made by hereditary princes of their bloodlines, is an imaginary fiction.

The denial of the true existence of any natural wholes has important implications for the understanding of eros. Machiavelli himself implies as much in some of his mentions of love and desire: the first immoral advice that he gives is to eliminate the bloodline of the natural, hereditary prince (3.9),⁹⁷ of whom it was first said that he was "more loved" (2.7). The bloodline for Machiavelli represents an imaginary whole, characteristic of the classical-Christian tradition, blended of claims to both convention and nature. It solicits "love" by fraud, hence its warrant for

⁹⁵ "The identification of BEING with a detectable force ... robs BEING of its independence: the existence of a thing is nothing other than its *effect on me*." Blanchard, 597.

⁹⁶ E.g. Milan is only wholly new for Francesco Sforza (1.5); Naples is only partly new for the king of Spain (1.5). Blanchard, 598. This is also why Machiavelli advises the prince to go and live in his "new" acquisition or to send colonies. The nearer the prince is to present and future troubles, then the sooner they will be felt and treated. (3.12). Cf. Blanchard, 599.

⁹⁷ Cf. Nathan Tarcov, "Machiavelli and the Foundations of Modernity: A Reading of Chapter 3 of *The Prince*," in Mark Blitz and William Kristol, eds., *Educating the Prince: Essays in Honour of Harvey C. Mansfield* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 32.

destruction by force. Nor is the city either naturally or conventionally a whole as it is presented in chapter 9.

The example of the city if worth expanding upon. In his explicit treatment of the parts of the city in chapter 9, Machiavelli distinguishes the parts, “humours,” by their desires: “For in every city these two diverse humors [the people and the great] are found, which arises from this: that the people desire neither to be commanded nor oppressed by the great, and the great desire to command and oppress the people” (9.39). Either the great make one of themselves prince in order to “vent their appetite under his shadow” (9.39) or the people make one prince to defend themselves with his authority. Machiavelli advises that the support of the people is more secure, not least because “the end of the people is is more decent than that of the great, since the great want to oppress and the people want not to be oppressed” (9.39). Neither of these desires is both positive and good.⁹⁸ The great have a positive desire, to oppress the people, but this is clearly not “good;” the people’s desire is at least “decent” and reliable, but it is, strictly speaking, negative. This longing for a “not,” as a negative, is a perpetual source of movement, energy, and tension.⁹⁹ In this way, it duplicates the negative movement of fortune herself: one might say that the people are openly fickle, and therefore more reliable than the great, who are secretly fickle and astute (9.40). Since there is nothing secretive, as opposed to explosive or raging, about Machiavelli’s fortune, its appearance within the city as the character of the people’s

⁹⁸ Pierre Manent, *An Intellectual History of Liberalism*, trans. Rebecca Balinski (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994) 15.

⁹⁹ Mansfield remarks that the nature of this desire and the accompanying necessity that the people must be ruled “sets the problem of government: to rule the people without their developing the intolerable sensation that they are being ruled.” Mansfield, *Machiavelli’s Virtue*, 307.

desire, the prince would do well to remain attentive to this humour, and thus not come to rely too much on fraud over force.

What is implied by the two desires is that there is no whole, neither of the city nor of the good. The desires cannot be reduced one to the other, they are radically disparate and irreconcilable. It might be suggested that the great have a certain intimation of the whole in their desire to rule the people, and thus to command the whole city. This much was implied in the classical-Christian tradition against which Machiavelli pits himself: it implied that acquisition was for the end of having, which in turn implied a conservative ontology of possessing or having rather than a radical ontology of getting or acquiring; and it denied the fundamental rift which cuts through the city by implying that it could be mended by virtuous rule, however unlikely.¹⁰⁰ The character of the great as described by Machiavelli, though, gives the lie to this: they are duplicitous and “astute;” any such claims on their part would be an imaginary fiction disguising the truth that even “having,” when everything is in motion, is just a sneakier word for “getting.” Accordingly, Machiavelli gives no voice to them.¹⁰¹ The preference for the alliance between the ruler and the people implies virtually the opposite: a radical ontology of motion and acquisition; the exposure of the fiction that getting aims at having and that, given that the world is naturally in motion, “having” is only a disguised and thus more insidious mode of “getting.”¹⁰² The desire of the people is more decent in part because it is more honest, and thus more effectually true. There is nothing of the “whole” implied in the

¹⁰⁰ Manent, *Modern Liberty and its Discontents*, eds. and trans. Daniel J. Mahoney and Paul Seaton (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), 56.

¹⁰¹ Unlike Aristotle. cf. Manent, *Discontents*, 60

¹⁰² Manent, *Discontents*, 56-57.

people's desire, as there is in that of the great. In the words of Claude Lefort: "in the supposedly full world of the Aristotelian city the people's desire causes a void, interjects determination and exercises the work of the negative. It endlessly reignited division and liberty because it always wants something other than what it eventually obtains ... because it is the desire of a power that would at the same time be a non-power."¹⁰³

These humours only exist in relation to one another. At an ontological level, this is owed more to the negative desire of the people than to the phony wholeness-desire of the great. It is this negativity that reasserts the ontology of acquisition, lest the great reimpose by massive fraud the stability of the cosmos. This fact matches the character of Machiavellian virtue that it is never clearly visible in itself, as if it aimed at the good after the model of the arts; it is clarified, such as it is, by contrast with vice.¹⁰⁴ The city as such only becomes visible in the fundamental incompatibility of its parts. Here, then, is the perspective of the Machiavellian philosopher: he takes his stand in the midst of the tension between the elements which are not a whole.¹⁰⁵ Here the philosopher, standing with the prince, finds the required distance from each part in order to stand outside it and understand it better than it understands itself. But fundamentally there is a partiality in this philosopher, as in the prince, for the people rather than to the great; this is because they share with the people in the negative rift between the parts.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Quoted and translated in Manent, *Discontents*, 58.

¹⁰⁴ Mansfield, *MNMO*, 188.

¹⁰⁵ Manent, *Discontents*, 59.

¹⁰⁶ Manent's analysis is impressive: "It seems to me then that modern political philosophy is more partial to the people than classical political philosophy ever was toward the Great. Aristotle's political

So whereas the philosopher in the classical sense was an erotic man whose passion was regulated by the vision of the beings, the Machiavellian philosopher's attention is directed to a negative void. Whatever passions are aroused—be they desire, fear, or despair—will find no regulation there. The classical political philosopher shared with the different parties of the city in the idea of the good. This permitted the philosopher to retain a perspective from within the city and yet to stand taller and see further and more clearly. Moreover, this remained the medium of communication between the citizens and the philosopher.¹⁰⁷ The Machiavellian philosopher, however, seems to stand completely outside the city, knowing its “effectual” truths better than the parts themselves, at the same as he is radically partisan. Machiavelli has little more than scorn for the attempt of the philosopher to withdraw from the hubbub of politics. This much was implied in *The Mandragola*. In a letter to a pope, Machiavelli wrote:

And the glory [of reforming republics and kingdoms] has been so esteemed by men who have not attended to anything other than glory that, when they have been unable to make a republic in deed, they have made it in writing, like Aristotle, Plato, and many others. They wished to show the world that if they were unable to found a civil association like Solon and Lycurgus, they did not fail because of their ignorance but because of their impotence.¹⁰⁸

Where the Machiavellian philosopher himself stands, however—both partisan and completely removed—where he is grounded, Machiavelli does not seem to provide us

philosophy does not reduce to ontology so easily; he is less partial because he treats the opinions uttered in speeches of both parties, which because they mistake themselves for the whole thus have some apprehension of the idea of the whole. Machiavelli's *umori* remain bestial and speechless.” Manent, *Discontents*, 59.

¹⁰⁷ Manent, *Intellectual History*, 16.

¹⁰⁸ From the *Discursus florentinarum rerum*, 31.32. Quoted and translated in Mansfield, *MNMO*, 278 n. 43.

the means to discern. The most one can suppose is that, like the founder who derives the "forms" to be impressed from who knows where, Machiavelli is self-grounding.

*Chapter Three***THE CONCEALMENT AND EMERGENCE OF EROS IN PLATO'S
*THEAETETUS***

It is my contention in the following chapter that Plato's *Theaetetus* bears a certain resemblance to those parts of Machiavelli's thought that I have tried to explicate in the previous chapters. The most obvious of these is the presentation of what I have sometimes called an ontology of motion or flux. What interests me most about the *Theaetetus*, however, is the differences it reveals between Machiavelli and Plato. In pursuing such a study, the similarities are revealed to be superficial but important, for they throw the differences into sharper relief. These differences appear, not first of all in the loftiest Platonic doctrines of the Ideas, intellectual vision, or recollection—all of which are absent from this dialogue—but in the more fundamental question of eros. As we have discussed in the two previous chapters, Machiavelli's politics consists, in an important part, in the extirpation of eros from all aspects of human life, perhaps most alarmingly in matters of love, but most importantly in matters of politics and philosophy. Likewise for Plato, an ontology of motion is accompanied by the disappearance of eros. But unlike with Machiavelli, Plato intends in the *Theaetetus* for eros to be present in its absence. Eros is covered over here, waiting for the reader to unmask it. By peeling back the disguise, so to speak, I aim to expose the substance of Plato's response to an ontology of motion. This response, which is considerably different than Machiavelli's, stands as a warning before-the-fact against, and a permanent alternative to, the excesses of a Machiavellian politics.

In presenting a “Platonic politics” in connection with a “non-Platonic ontology”¹⁰⁹ in the *Theaetetus*, Plato treats some of the same questions of political philosophy as in other dialogues, but on radically different grounds than might be expected of him. At their most general, how does the way of life of the philosopher accord with the requirements of the city? and what, if any, is the ground of this accord? Elsewhere, the psychic phenomenon of eros is revealed to be what binds the citizen and the philosopher to the wholes of the city and the cosmos. To illustrate: Whereas in the *Symposium* Plato presents the possibilities of a community of citizen *kaloi kagathoi* finding common ground with the philosopher in their similar erotic attachment to the Idea of the beautiful and education in virtue; and in the *Republic* the Ideas and the Idea of the Good are set in place as the capstone to the education of a citizen class that lives in harmony with their erotic philosopher-kings; nothing like this appears on the surface of the *Theaetetus*.¹¹⁰ Quite the contrary. Here Socrates discusses philosophy and politics in the least erotic of terms, without any reference to the Ideas. To find the Platonic politics in *Theaetetus*, it is necessary for the reader to reconstruct, following Plato’s own indications, the erotic character of the whole.

For the purposes of this chapter, I shall focus on how this appears in the example of the well known digression found at the centre of the dialogue: Socrates presents to the geometer Theodorus a sketch of those “reared in philosophy” and contrasts them with “public speakers,” where two types and the ways of life they

¹⁰⁹ At the risk of excessive pedantry, let me say that I have reservations about using the term “ontology” in a discussion of Plato, similar to those expressed with regard to Machiavelli, as Plato neither attempts a complete discursive account of the beings. Cf. all of the works of Stanley Rosen.

¹¹⁰ For a discussion of the *Symposium* and *Republic* along these lines, see W. R. Newell, *Ruling Passion: The Erotics of Statecraft in Platonic Political Philosophy* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2000).

represent appear irredeemably at odds, impossible to reconcile. I suggest that this presentation of the life of the philosopher is a deliberate and necessary distortion, which is by no means to say that it is totally false. It is required by the superficial abstraction from eros in this dialogue—itself required by the characters and predispositions of Socrates' interlocutors and their situation—and the consequent absence of any discussion of either the Ideas as the natural objects of eros as distinguished from epistemic knowledge. So while this portrait of the life of the philosopher is indeed a distortion, it is not completely without truth. This is revealed when the portrait is placed in the context of the rest of the dialogue, where eros is present in its absence. To put this more precisely, eros in the *Theaetetus* is concealed by its own vestiges as wonder (*thaumazein*) and play.

Let me amplify these points to form a more concrete introduction. The *Theaetetus* presents several variants on an ontology of flux or motion, most memorably in the mouth of Protagoras. Both the mathematician Theodorus and his brilliant student Theaetetus have what can only be called a strange affinity for Protagoras and these fluxist doctrines. The action of the dialogue with which we shall be concerned consists in (i) Socrates' teasing-out of the unstated but possibly violent implications for politics of this affinity; and (ii) Socrates' suggested correction by way of a turn to the human things. This Socratic correction is mainly for the sake of Theaetetus. It consists in showing Theaetetus the limits of Theodorus' education and in firing up Theaetetus' erotic energies which have been somewhat stifled by his abstract mathematicism; this occurs, not least, by involving Theaetetus in the erotic experience of conversation—in its jokes and wonder—and in providing him an

erotically grounded account of the nobility of the philosophic life and the courage required to sustain it. The result is supplied by the dialogue itself: Theaetetus is reported to be “a noble and good” man (142b),¹¹¹ who died a soldier’s death.

Fluxism from Protagoras to simple elements

That the *Theaetetus* presents several accounts of an ontology of flux is beyond dispute, and I shall not devote too much space to relating this. The importance of motion is implied from the beginning, with references to movement, war, and fluids. The frame dialogue begins with the Socratics Eucleides and Terpsion rushing around the city of Megara. Terpsion is looking everywhere for Eucleides, but the latter is in none of the expected places. He was attending to matters of war, the return of Theaetetus to Athens after the defeat of the Athenian army at the battle of Corinth (369 B.C.).¹¹² Theaetetus’ essences are, quite literally, flowing out of him (142ab).¹¹³ Theaetetus’ first answer to Socrates’ question, “What is knowledge?” gives priority to the many over the one, and the complex over the simple (146cd). That such an answer points to the origins or chaotic beginnings is brought out in Socrates’ reply, where he refers to the fluid mud which might be used for any of several crafts or ends (147a).

¹¹¹ Parenthetical references are to Stephanus pagination. Quotations are usually from the Seth Benardete translation, *Plato’s Theaetetus* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), occasionally amended. I have consulted the Lewis Campbell edition of the Greek, *The Theaetetus of Plato* (New York: Arno Press, 1973), reprinted from the 1861 ed.

¹¹² See Lewis Campbell’s introduction to his edition of *The Theaetetus of Plato*, lxxi-lxxii, for a discussion of the possible dramatic dates of the dialogue. I am inclined to the position that the frame is set in 369.

¹¹³ David Roochnik, “Self-Recognition in Plato’s *Theaetetus*,” *Ancient Philosophy* 22 (2002): 44.

What I shall call the first thesis about knowledge is Theaetetus' statement that "knowledge is nothing else but perception" (151e),¹¹⁴ offered only after Socrates' own peculiar but apparently fecund discussion of genesis and the origins (148e-151d).¹¹⁵ Socrates quickly associates this thesis with Protagoras' maxim, "man is the measure" (152a), and this soon yields Socrates' rather breathtaking appraisal of the history of wisdom. For its magnificence it is worth quoting at length:

I shall speak actually a not trivial speech. It says, "After all, nothing is one alone by itself, and you would not address anything correctly or of any sort whatsoever, but if you address it as big, it will also appear small, and if heavy, light, and all things in this way, on the grounds that nothing is one, neither something nor of any sort whatsoever. But all things—it's those we say are the things which are (not addressing them correctly)—come to be from locomotion and motion and mutual mixing; for nothing ever is, but always becomes (*genesin*)." And concerning this all the wise in succession except Parmenides converge (agree - *sumpheromai*),¹¹⁶ Protagoras and Heracleitus, and Empedocles, as well as the tip-top (*akroi*) poets of each kind of poetry, Epicharmus of comedy and Homer of tragedy. Homer with the line "Ocean and mother Tethys, the becoming (*genesis*) of gods" has said that everything is the offspring of flowing and motion. (152d-e)

Socrates then refers to these motion men as the army whose general is Homer (153a).

In the discussion that follows, Socrates is not above using a certain logical duplicity to radicalize the implications of the fluxist ontology: his discussion of greater and lesser numbers is a bit of a shell game (155a-c).¹¹⁷ I shall discuss in a later section of this chapter Socrates' psychagogic reasons for this duplicity. For now, I only mean to illustrate the fairly simple point that Theaetetus' first thesis amounts to a doctrine of

¹¹⁴ This may not, strictly speaking, be the first attempt at definition, but as it is the first that generates a sustained discussion between Theaetetus and Socrates, I will refer to it as such here.

¹¹⁵ Joseph Cropsey calls this Socrates' "obstetric autobiography." Cropsey, 159.

¹¹⁶ Benardete, 185 n.22

¹¹⁷ Roochnik, 39: "By treating all change, even relative change, as if it were absolute, Socrates exaggerates the position ("flux") he derives from Theaetetus definition of knowledge as perception."

kineticism that results in a total dissolution of being: Socrates eventually excises the verb “to be” almost entirely from his speech (156a-157c).

That the second and third of Theaetetus’ propositions are, for our purposes, equally fluxist, requires a more careful treatment. In the discussion of the first definition, Socrates raises a problem—that perception as knowledge is without falsehood (152c)—that is not satisfactorily addressed by the following two definitions: What is error?¹¹⁸ It is the failure to account for error that shows these definitions to be fluxist, i.e., incapable of discerning any true stability—that one might be alone by itself—amidst motion. In the discussion following the introduction of the second definition “true opinion is knowledge” (187b), Socrates leads Theaetetus through an extensive and tortuous series of arguments and illustrations trying to account for false opinion (188a-201c). I would like to suggest that Plato hints at the ultimately fluxist character of this definition in his use here of mucky and tactile, rather than visual, metaphors: wax blocks of different stickinesses, either “dirty as dung” or “excessively liquid or stiff” (194e); and birds which are not espied or considered for their appearance, but which are seized, grasped, and held (197cd). The definition falls on its implication with sophistry—its failure to account for error—when Socrates recalls the public speakers from the discussion of the Protagorean position (201ab; compare 172e)), and associates even the true-opining juror with the falsehood of the “tip-top” (*akroi* – 201c; compare 152e, quoted above) poets of Homer’s army.

¹¹⁸ Joseph Cropsey, “The Dramatic End of Plato’s Socrates,” *Interpretation* 14 (1986): 160.

The final definition begins and ends as a dream, a mathematician's dream, but a dream nonetheless.¹¹⁹ What Theaetetus heard someone say was that

true opinion with speech (*logos*) was knowledge, but true opinion without speech was outside of knowledge, and of whatever there is not a speech, these things are not knowable (*episteta*)¹²⁰—that's just the word he used—and whatever admit of speech are knowable. (201de)

Socrates offers for this hearsay “a dream in exchange for a dream.” The first things (*protai*), simple elements, are “composed” to make everything, and “they do not admit of speech” (201e). These compositions are given “names,” which in turn are “plaited together” (202b) to become a speech. Socrates suggests that “it's *likely* that so far this is just the way it is” (202d – emphasis mine) but then raises an objection. What displeases him is the apparently unbridgeable gulf between the elements, which may be sensed but about which nothing may be said, and the syllables, artificial compositions of elements which are given over to speech and epistemic knowledge (202d-203a). In the discussion that follows, I suggest that there is no satisfactory bridge of this gulf. Consequently, Socrates, in resolute defense of “a great and august speech” (203e), goes on to convince Theaetetus that on these terms, “an all and a whole do not differ” (205a). The effect of the identification of a whole with an all is to reduce form to countable matter, or thinking again to perceiving. An army, to use Socrates' example—or Homer's army to deepen the reference—becomes not a group

¹¹⁹ In the *Republic* Socrates has the following to say about mathematicians: “For all the other arts are directed to human opinions and desires, or to generation and composition, or to the care of what is grown or put together. And as for the rest, those that we said do lay hold of something of what is—geometry and the arts following on it—we observe that they do dream about what is; but they haven't the capacity to see it in full awakesness so long as they use hypotheses and, leaving them untouched, are unable to give an account of them.” (*Republic* 533bc, translation Allan Bloom)

¹²⁰ Benardete emphasises, along with Plato, that this word is unusual. Usually the word for “knowledge” in this context would be *gnosis*, as it is for Socrates at *Symposium* 202b, e.g. Benardete, 73 n.79.

of men with a distinct purpose—say, victory in battle or the profession of the doctrine of flux—but an indistinct mass, individual members (“elements”) of which might be exchanged for other individuals without effect. The absurdity is that Parmenides might be substituted for Homer. At this point the difference between perception and non-perception is unknowable—recall that nothing can be known of the perceived elements, not even whether they have being or nonbeing (202a)—and the doctrine of simple elements reverts again to fluxism.¹²¹ However “likely” is the definition of epistemic knowledge as “true opinion with a speech,” on its own terms it is unintelligible.¹²²

This point requires clarification. Stanley Rosen has remarked that in none of the four main discussions of the alphabet in Plato—found in the *Theaetetus*, *Sophist*, *Statesman*, and *Philebus*—is there any mention of words. “The speakers either restrict themselves to letters and syllables, or proceed directly from these to statements. Words appear only as strings of syllables, not as distinct structures in the paradigm of meaning.”¹²³ This has the effect of vitiating the force of the paradigm. Words are not constructed only by combining the names of syllables, as the critical reader would judge of Socrates example of his own name (203ab).¹²⁴ In what he admits is a circular argument, but which is necessarily so given that what is at issue are discreet wholes, Rosen continues:

¹²¹ It is no doubt important, but leads beyond the limits of this study, that Plato presents in this dialogue related by Eucleides to Terpsion something akin to the doctrine of logical atomism that Aristotle attributes to the Megarans, of whom Eucleides and Terpsion are representative. Illuminating for our purposes is Aristotle’s remark that this doctrine of theirs reduces to Protagorean flux. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1008b-1009a; 1046b27-1047b7.

¹²² Cf. Stanley Rosen, “Socrates’ Dream,” *Theoria* 42 (1976): 185.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 185.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 185.

The word is the crucial mediation-point between elements and statements. If the word had no elements, then we could not understand it. But we understand it in the context of statements. Words then become “simple” elements of statements, which in turn may perhaps be called “simple” elements of *logoi* or connected accounts.¹²⁵

The circularity derives from the unity of the wholes—names, words, and “connected accounts”—at each level of meaning. It is this unity that Socrates, and Theaetetus agreeing with him, cannot account for in the context of Socrates’ dream. The gulf between the simple elements which are perceived and those complexes which are fashioned from them remains.

Recalling that this definition is introduced as a dream of Socrates’, to which he then adds an undue gravity by calling it “a great and august speech,” we are reminded that Socrates is not always the kindest or gentlest of interlocutors. Theaetetus’ previous attempt at definition is not free of Socrates’ duplicity either—generously understood, perhaps, as his induction of labour pains. The discussion of knowledge as true opinion is handicapped at the start by Socrates’ dismissal, “for the moment” of “learning and forgetting on the grounds that they are between [true and false opinion], for nothing is pertinent here for our speech” (188a). The gulf that remains between the unknowable elements of sense perception and speech in the final definition, and the gulf that Socrates posits between true and false opinion early in the discussion of the previous definition have the same character. Each is untraversable according to the strictly binary terms that Socrates has laid out for the discussion.

A certain resolution to this is suggested by the words Plato crafts for Theaetetus at the profession of the final definition, that knowledge is true opinion

¹²⁵ Ibid., 186.

with a speech (201de – quoted above). He puts a nearly identical turn of phrase in the mouth of the young Socrates, as recounted by the series of narrators in the *Symposium*, in his conversation with Diotima. It is worth quoting at length:

[Diotima:] ...do you believe that whatever is not beautiful must necessarily be ugly?

[Socrates:] Absolutely!

[Diotima:] And whatever is not wise (*sophon*), without understanding (*amathes*)? Or were you unaware that there is something in between wisdom and lack of understanding (*metaxu sophias kai amathias*)?

[Socrates:] What is this?

[Diotima:] Don't you know that to opine correctly (*ortha doxazein*) without being able to give an account (*logon*) is neither to know expertly (*episteme*) (for how could expert knowledge be an unaccounted for [*alogon*] matter?) nor lack of understanding (*amathias*) (for how could lack of understanding be that which has hit upon what is)? But surely correct opinion is like that, somewhere between intelligence and lack of understanding (*metaxu phroneseos kai amathias*).

[Socrates:] What you say is true

[Diotima:] Then do not compel what is not beautiful to be ugly, or what is not good, to be bad. So too since you yourself agree that Eros is not good or beautiful, do not at all believe that he must be ugly and bad, but something between (*metaxu*) the two of them. (*Symposium* 202ab)¹²⁶

Diotima goes on to tell Socrates that Eros is the hermeneut between the divine and the human, and that Eros binds together the whole. The difference between Diotiman “correct” opinion and “true” opinion seems to involve the permissability of something “between.” Why there is error remains an unresolved question throughout the *Theaetetus*, but let me suggest that the error might be located “between”—in the gulf between true and false opinion (learning and forgetting), or that between the elements of sensation and speech (*words*, as Rosen suggests). Likewise, it is worth

¹²⁶ The translation is Seth Benardete's, modified only to be presented in this unnarrated form. *Plato's Symposium: a translation by Seth Benardete; with commentaries by Allan Bloom and Seth Benardete* (University of Chicago Press: Chicago and London, 2001).

suggesting that this gulf is traversed by the daemonic hermeneut, Eros, which in doing so binds together otherwise discreet wholes into *the* whole. This is, at most, implied by Plato; for the purposes of this dialogue, the gulf and the fluxism it entails remains.

Theodorus, friend of fluxism

The friendship of the fluxist Protagoras and the mathematician Theodorus must strike every reader of the *Theaetetus* as perplexing.¹²⁷ The final attempt at defining epistemic knowledge, however, and its characterization as a dream offers some path to relieve this discomfort. Aside from the mathematical character of that account, which is revealed to be another species of fluxism, the suggestion made elsewhere by Socrates that mathematicians only dream of being, but do not see it for what it is and cannot account for their own hypotheses of it, is illuminating.¹²⁸ As with the doctrine of simple elements, Theodorus cannot account for his own activity on its own terms. Theodorus himself lacks the erotic sense of his own limitations which would give him the requisite distance for this kind of self-reflection. This, and the implications of this, are perhaps best illustrated by an examination of his character in the dialogue. In this consideration, one vestigial trace of eros, in the form of the humorous or playful, appears.¹²⁹ Likewise, the dangerous implications for politics of anerotic science,

¹²⁷ Theodorus calls Protagoras his "friend" (162a) and "comrade" (171c). Socrates twice calls Theodorus Protagoras' "comrade" (161b, 183b) and at one point identifies him the "guardian" of Protagoras' doctrines (164e).

¹²⁸ *Republic* 533c, noted above.

¹²⁹ The importance of this erotic trace for the rest of the dialogue are discussed in the section below called "The erotic education and courage of Theaetetus."

perhaps more accurately expressed as the temper which is inclined to such a science, also appear.

Theodorus appears almost completely without eros; hence he appears comically harmless, but certainly not playful. He has a touch of the graceless boor to him. The first thing we hear from him is that he does not desire Theaetetus, the youth in question (143e). This is followed by his witless slight of Socrates; he calls him ugly: “[the lad] is not beautiful...as it is—please don’t get annoyed with me—he is not beautiful, but he resembles you [Socrates] in the snubness of his nose and the bulging of his eyes” (143e). Socrates seems to suggest that, even though Theodorus professes to teach harmony, he may in fact be amusical (144e, cf. 145d). If we take seriously Socrates’ suggestion that conversation is like wrestling, or some kind of erotic play (162b), it is hardly surprising that Theodorus declines to involve himself, “stiff as I am” (162b). Accordingly, he more than once denies his competency in or practice at philosophic conversation (146b, 165a). This sets him apart not just from Socrates, the lover of speeches (146b), but also his students; Theaetetus says that he and Young Socrates were conversing about powers, but there is no sign that Theodorus has had anything to do with this (147c).

Theodorus is an object of certain ridicule or humour, partly because the ridiculous and humorous reduces him to apoplexy. That is, he is the butt of the joke because he does not get the joke. When Theaetetus suggests that Theodorus might have been “speaking in jest,” Socrates replies, “This is not Theodorus’ way” (145c). Later in the dialogue, Socrates is trying to lure Theodorus into the conversation (164e-168e). His first attempt, when the conversation is pitched as erotic-philosophic

play, fails to draw in Theodorus (162ab). His later success derives from teasing the guardians of Protagoras, and then inviting Theodorus to join in with the rebuke of Socrates; this requires, of course, that Theodorus misses the humour in the first place. Socrates begins on this tack with the most ridiculous suggestion: that according to Protagoras, the man with one eye covered both knows and does not know the same thing at once (165bc). He follows this with a strict rebuke of himself (“not only are you yourself a swine” [166c]) in the voice of Protagoras—evidently Socrates does voices—and concludes with his regrets that his remarks were not so magnificent as those of Protagoras would have been (168c). Theodorus discerns that Socrates must be joking, but Socrates persuades him to join the discussion on precisely the opposite grounds, the requirement to give a serious (*spoudaios*) defence of the “august majesty” of Theodorus’ dead comrade. It is thus by taking Socrates’ jest too seriously that Theodorus joins the conversation to supply Socrates a “drubbing” and to reproach anyone who slips “unawares into conducting a childish species of speeches” (169cd).

It is an important consequence of Theodorus’ anerotic nature that where others would see playful give and take, either metaphorically or in speech, Theodorus sees contest and struggle. Without the binding power of the daemonic (*Symposium* 202e), there is no necessary connection between the pure, abstract, mathematical forms in his mind and the motion of becoming, including the motion of eroticism, that characterises the whole. Naturally, this disconnect manifests itself as a more or less violent compulsion—like trying to force or squeeze the oozing flow of becoming into

a stable container of some kind. Theodorus claims that the Heracleiteans are “wholly at war” against any kind of stability, presumably including geometry (180b):

And as for the possibility of staying by a speech and question, and quietly answering and asking in turn, there is less than nothing in them of that, or rather even nothing does not surpass these men when it comes to the small degree of quietness in them (180ab)

But if we take his account of the Heracleiteans at face value, there is no reason to suppose that these “comrades” are any more at war than children at play. That there is nothing necessarily warlike about the Heracleiteans’ speech is, I suggest, what Socrates discreetly implies in the sequel:

Perhaps, Theodorus, you’ve seen the men fighting, but you’ve not been with them when they are at peace, for they are not your comrades. But, I suspect, they point out things of this sort (i.e., the stable things) to their pupils at their leisure, whomever they want to make similar to themselves. (180b)

Even so delicate a remark from Socrates cannot calm Theodorus, who finds the suggestion so preposterous that he calls Socrates “*daimonie*” (180c). Theodorus’ agitation leads him to propose that he and Socrates abstract an argument from the Heracleiteans, as though speeches about being were akin to a geometry problem, and examine its merits themselves: “But we must take it off their hands and examine it by ourselves as if it were a problem” (180c).¹³⁰ He proposes, as it were, to cut off a portion of the becoming ooze, the better to handle and inspect it. The violence of such a procedure is nothing like the playful give and take of philosophical conversation.

¹³⁰ Cf. Benardete, 47 n. 54.

Theodorus' overreaction to the Heracleitean thesis is amusing but also, when considered as it might apply politically, troubling. It betrays a lack of measure or proportion—this might be what Socrates meant in his implication that Theodorus was amusic. Without any erotic awareness of his own limits and the limits of his epistemic prowess, he has no measure of where and when to apply it. Naturally, the geometer's graceless encounter with the limits of his science will be jarring, disruptive, or violent.

The preparation for the digression on the philosopher

These characteristics of Theodorus should alert us to the meaning of Socrates' portrayal of the orator and the philosopher. In this sketch, found at the centre of the dialogue, Socrates includes all of the comical implications for politics of Theodoran anerotic science, here making an appearance as philosophy. Over the course of the digression, however, this philosopher sheds the amusing excesses of the mathematician, and acquires more of the characteristics we associate with Socrates. The digression's comical first stages, I suggest, are intended to minimize the dangerous effects that amusic mathematicians can have on politics. In recommending that such mathematician-"philosophers" flee from politics, Socrates upsets the tendency of Theodorus and his ilk to gravitate to the sophisticated purveyors of an ontology of flux and motion. This first part of the digression is intended as much for Theodorus as for his student; the philosopher's return to the city to look at the human things, let me venture to suggest, is more likely to move Theaetetus than Theodorus.

It is important that the sketch is related to a peculiar divergence from the main dialogue between Theodorus and Socrates. Previous to the digression, Socrates is leading a more or less oblivious Theodorus to consider the everyday or ordinary implications of the Protagorean thesis that human being is the measure. Socrates is led to discuss the political things by first raising Theodorus' (and Protagoras') own claims to authority in wisdom as problematic.

Let us look at this exchange in some detail, as it leads up to and informs the sketch of the philosopher. As mentioned above, Theodorus is first drawn into conversation with Socrates by the prospect of giving the Athenian a drubbing and raising a serious and manly defence of his "dead comrade" (168d-169c). Socrates quickly directs the discussion away from the abstractly epistemic to the more humanly practical. This is signalled by the very important but very unremarked replacement of *aisthesis*, perception, with *doxa*, opinion (170a). The substitution is typical of the difference between the older and stiff Theodorus and the nimble, quicker-witted Theaetetus. Theodorus very quickly concedes a number of points that the imaginative reader could judge Theaetetus to have easily evaded; cumulatively these lead Theodorus to an impasse in the argument. Each of Socrates' first three arguments is assented to without even the hint of objection by Theodorus. Socrates begins by suggesting that each human being considers himself to be relatively wise in certain matters, and relatively ignorant in others, but in the state of emergency—in matters of war, health, or at sea—human beings yield to the knowers (*eidenai*) as their rulers (*archontas*) (170ab). Socrates notably skirts politics proper, but his reference to three well-known Platonic metaphors for politics telegraphs where the

argument is going: “And all human affairs surely are as full of people seeking teachers and rulers of themselves...as they are of those who believe in turn that they’re competent to teach and competent to rule?” (170b) Theodorus concedes this and the second point, “They’re convinced that wisdom [is] true thought and folly false opinion” (170b), without any indication that he sees the forthcoming difficulties in the argument. The reader is inclined to think that Theodorus is slightly flattered by the identification of knowing and ruling, or the suggestion that teachers are as soteric gods among men. The third point to which Socrates attains Theodorus’ unhesitating assent includes the reminder that Theodorus and other Protagoreans find others, i.e. those who disagree with them, to opine foolishly or falsely.

Thus far Socrates has attained Theodorus’ agreement by reminding him of his own claims to expertise and knowledge, reinforced by his presumption to teach and to rule the ignorant. Socrates begins to reduce this comfortable certainty by referring to the necessity of the argument—the implied connection between being or truth and speech or opinion—a bait sure to be snapped up by one who professes to speak truthfully about geometry. The turnaround in the argument consists in Socrates’ reference to the requirement that Protagoras’ maxim submit to its own implied necessity: that Theodorus and Protagoras’ circle have no claim over the “thousands” who do “battle” with them (170d). Theodorus’ turnaround is marked by his curse, “Yes, by Zeus, Socrates” (170e), and his sudden and now frequent invocation of necessity in his assent to Socrates’ arguments that follow.¹³¹ These arguments

¹³¹ “It seems on the basis of the speech at least to be a necessity” (170e); “It’s a necessity...” (171a); “It’s a necessity.” (171b).

demolish any coherence in Protagoras' claims. The culmination of Socrates' device is this:

Isn't it the case then that since it's disputed by all, the Truth of Protagoras would not be true for anyone, either for anyone else or for himself? (171c)

The rub of Socrates' remark is that if Protagoras' *Truth* is indeed true, then at best there is no way for anyone to know that it is so; there is no way for Protagoras' *Truth* to accommodate the fact of its being known to be true by a human being. Theodorus can only protest in reply that they're "running down my comrade too much, Socrates." (171c)

This remark of Theodorus' signals another shift in the conversation. So far, Socrates has played on two traits peculiar to Theodorus' character: first, his inclination to see himself as wise or expert; and second, his habit of thinking in rigid mathematical constructions and seeking the clarity offered by geometrical problems in all of his investigations. Following the necessity of the latter, Socrates exposes the absurdity of the former. His explicit introduction of politics into the discussion occurs at the moment when Theodorus' Protagorean account of knowledge is pitched in its most radical and self-forgetting form, when it is admitted that Protagoras' truth, if it is for anyone, is for no one.

From Theodorus' objection to their treatment of his friend, Socrates directs the conversation to politics by way of the everyday or what might be called common sense. Theodorus, for all his geometrical-scientific sophistication agrees with a very pedestrian, prephilosophic, common sense understanding of politics. This is first expressed in his hesitation to "run down" his comrade, an attachment that he is

incapable of expressing according to his own scientific expertise, but which appeals to his slightly prickly temper nonetheless. Socrates seems to identify the pedestrian character of Theodorus' attachment in his suggestion that Protagoras' wisdom has to do with his old age—"it's likely that he, since he is older, be wiser than us" (171cd)—not with his science, skill, or his possession of Truth. The identification of wisdom with age is hardly a philosophic fact; at best it is a political fact or a common sense fact. In the sequel, Socrates suggests that even Protagoras, were he present, would sneak away from the necessity that his Truth is for no one (171d). Protagoras is slipperier than Theodorus; he gets away. With Protagoras fled in spirit, Socrates begins again with Theodorus, after a fashion, from the everyday or prephilosophic facts:

But I suppose it's a necessity for us to deal with ourselves as the sort we are, and to say whatever are our own opinions on each and every occasion. And so, now in this particular case, are we to assert that anyone whatsoever would agree to this at least, the fact of another being wiser than an other and similarly more foolish? (171d)

The appeal is made to what seems true or obvious to most everyone; mathematical necessity is replaced with their own opinions. This replacement is re-emphasised in Theodorus' next few responses to Socrates. Where moments ago he referred to necessity, now he cites opinion.¹³² Moreover, the replacement of the radically abstracted form of "human being is the measure" with what "anyone whatsoever would agree to" (171d) furthers Socrates' attempt to return from the empyrean, i.e.

¹³² "It's my opinion at any rate" (171d); "I'm of the opinion, at least, that this is the way it is" (171e).

radically abstracted, realm of mathematical “clarity” to the human version of the question about knowledge.¹³³

The discussion concerning politics raises again the underlying Protagorean-Theodorean concern with hierarchy or rank. Both Theodorus and Protagoras make claims to a certain rank, owing to their wisdom or knowledge. Socrates, we have just seen, reversed Theodorus’ position partly on the basis of his pretensions to rule because he claims to know. And previously, Socrates had provoked certain ire for suggesting that a baboon (166c) might be as much the measure as human being. Here Socrates allows, indeed reintroduces, the Protagorean position that in matters of health, “not every mere woman and child, let alone every beast, is competent to cure itself” (171e). To wit, the business of identifying the healthy and making the patient like to it is the most serious of labours, fit only for the *sophos aner* atop the implied hierarchy of knowers.

The competency of the wise manly man, the *sophos aner*, according to Socrates’ reformulation, depends on his truthful apprehension of the being of health and of the being of political advantage. Truthful apprehension of their beings is the minimum requirement; changeable opinion will not do: “an advisor differs from advisor and another opinion of a city from another in light of truth” (172b). Notice that by “differs” Socrates means differs according to rank, to use our formulation. What remains a problem with Socrates’ reformulation of the Protagorean scheme is the agreement between the implied hierarchy of advisers and the only stable “political

¹³³ Seth Benardete has a more extensive discussion of this idea in the commentary that accompanies his translation of the *Theaetetus*, 117-26.

thing” being advantage. More particularly, the problem is the unstable, opinion-laden status of the noble:

Isn't it the case that...for noble and base things, just and unjust, and holy and not, of whatsoever sort they are that each city in its belief lays down for itself as lawful, these also are in truth for each, and in these things neither layman than layman nor city than city is in any way wiser? (172a)

Socrates alludes to the problematic status of the noble when in his second list of the political things he silently omits the noble and base:

But its in the former case, I mean in the just and unjust, holy and unholy things, that they're willing to insist that none of them is by nature with a being of its own, but the opinion resolved on in common, this becomes true at that time, whenever it's resolved on and for as long a time as it's so resolved. (172b)

The omission seems to point to Socrates' sensitivity to the problem, that the noble and the base are the very principles that are implied or demanded by Protagoras' aristocratic claims: that wise manly men are superior to women and children; that teachers-knowers ought somehow to rule; and that human beings are superior to beasts. Yet these very claims to nobility are subverted by the identification of wisdom with the mere manipulation of crude advantage. Socrates, in his reformulation, has drawn out the tension—best seen, it would appear, in political life—between what is advantageous or crudely good and what is noble. This tension would then be the subject of the “greater speech” to which he refers as overtaking them (172c). As it is, Socrates' treats the Protagorean claims to nobility in the digression in their own distorted form, that of the vulgar orator.¹³⁴

¹³⁴ Cf. Scott Hemmenway, “Philosophical Apology in the *Theaetetus*,” *Interpretation* 17 (1990): 343-44.

Socrates' attempt here to discuss politics with Theodorus is at best a partial failure. The incipient discussion seems headed for a consideration of the relation of the advantageous or good to the noble. But it is interrupted by Theodorus' suggestion that they are conversing at leisure, implying that there is no need to hasten to the greater speech: "Aren't we at leisure, Socrates?" (172c). The single remark is revealing. In the first place, it shows Theodorus' total ignorance of the lives of his friends and the business of the city, in this case, Socrates' impending capital trial. This alone might suffice to disqualify him from speaking about politics. But more seriously, Theodorus' ignorance seems to render him incapable of distinguishing between what Socrates has called a greater and a lesser speech. Without any knowledge of the kind that would inform him that Socrates the philosopher or citizen might soon die—that in the meantime he lives and converses under a certain compulsion or that the leisure Theodorus discerns is extracted by undetected or unremarked-upon means from another compulsion—Theodorus is totally unqualified to discern the greater speech from the lesser. Despite Socrates' attempts to humanize, which is also to say "to politicize," both Protagoras' maxim and Theodorus' hyper-theoretical, mathematical knowledge, Theodorus to this point remains ignorant of the very real limit of human life. Without this erotic awareness of human limits—implied in his ignorance about Socrates' death and the urgency that this gives to certain speeches over others, which urgency in turn partially reveals the natural nobility of certain speeches and beings—Theodorus' own admiration for his friend, the *sophos aner* Protagoras, and his own assumptions identifying knowledge with title to rule, these will remain unclarified. Theodorus is thus revealed as more or less unfit

for any education—not really a surprise—so it is with the dual purpose of (1) directing Theodorus away from politics, and (2) including Theaetetus in a joke caricaturing the philosopher as ridiculous, anerotic, and apolitical, that Socrates presents his portrait of the philosopher.

The flight of the philosopher and his return to the city

The digression is prompted by Theodorus' question, "Aren't we at leisure, Socrates?" Socrates can only grant that it is apparently so. By this point in the dialogue, the reader is well aware of the possible difference between what appears and what is, even if Theodorus is not. The digression proper is marked in its beginning and its end by Socrates' exclamation, "you extraordinary being (*daimonie*)."¹³⁵ (172c, 177b) The utterance seems intended to signal Socrates' amazement at Theodorus' lack of prescience, no doubt with regard to his own impending trial.¹³⁵ Socrates remarks how utterly ridiculous "those who passed much time in the practices of philosophy" (172c) must appear in court. Theodorus, however, has no clue what Socrates is speaking of, and asks him twice to explain what he means. His incomprehension prompts Socrates to conjure a most peculiar account of the philosopher's place before the city, an account that proceeds along an analogy comparing "those reared in philosophy" with free men to "public speakers," or "those who knock about court," with domestics (172c). On the face of it this seems to contravene Socrates' description of philosophy elsewhere as moved by the most consuming compulsion.¹³⁶ In this account, and in

¹³⁵ Cf. Benardete, 39, n. 42.

¹³⁶ *Apology* 23b, *Symposium* 203c-204b.

keeping with the concern in this dialogue for the surface appearance of the phenomena, Socrates offers no speculation about the deeper motivation, i.e. the erotic compulsion, which underlies the appearances of the philosophers and the orators.

Socrates describes the philosophers as always having leisure and being at peace. On these grounds he gives no account of why they choose to pursue one speech over another. There is no apparent urgency or any enforced limit to their task and hence no possibility of ranking the importance or nobility of the speeches undertaken. The only evident criteria is pleasure: "if the speech that comes along pleases them more than that which lies in front of them," (172d) these philosophers take it up. Their aim in this procedure is to "hit upon that which is." As we shall see, a certain disregard for "that which lies in front of them," which is to say for the given order of "that which is," is characteristic of these philosophers.

The orators, by radical contrast, are always "busy (*askolia*)" (172e), consumed, we may infer, with what is present at hand or "that which lies in front of them." Socrates emphasises the concern with becoming rather than "that which is" in his Heracleitus-recalling reference to the court's water clock, "in its flow bearing down on them." It is these men who have desire (*eptumesosi*), but they are so cramped and constrained by necessity that they may never speak of what they wish. Living like this, Socrates says, their souls grow stunted and corrupted—"sharp and shrewd," "small and not upright:"

for their enslavement since their youth on has deprived them of the possibility of growth, straightness, and liberality. It compels (*anangkatzonsa*) them to do crooked things imposing on their still tender souls great dangers and fears (173a).

They become expert only in lying, and become convinced only of their own powers, thinking themselves “dreadfully uncanny and wise” (173b).

At this point Socrates offers to give up his weird sketch, and return with Theodorus to the argument which they have dropped, this lest they “abuse too much in excess” the leisure they enjoy. Theodorus, however, prefers to hear Socrates’ more thorough-going account of the “chorus” of philosophers like themselves. When Theodorus refuses again to take up the “greater speech,” he repeats his earlier error of not apprehending the compulsion acting on Socrates and he underlines his conversational ineptness, having understood none of the caricature which preceded. He exacerbates this problem by likening speeches themselves to the slavish “domestics:”

we who are the choristers in this sort of thing are not subservient to the speeches, but the speeches are as it were our domestics, and each of them waits around to be completed whenever we decide. No judge or observer supervises us (173c)

The contrast of Theodorus, who identifies his own freedom with the mastery of slave-like speeches, and Socrates who could refer to himself as being “overtaken” by a greater speech, is striking.

This ignorant hubris seems to provoke Socrates to an even more ridiculous portrait of the philosopher. There was a certain abstracted, surface-level logic to the first sketch: from the outside, so to speak, there is often little evident order to a philosophic conversation; it might indeed appear as though the conversants were taking up and dropping speeches as they pleased. In this second, extended sketch, the philosopher is less recognisable. Socrates’ increased amusement or perhaps slight

pique is evident in the first words of his reply: "Let's speak then, since, it seems, you're of the opinion that we are to, about those at the top—for why should one speak of those who spend their time in philosophy so poorly?" (173c) So poorly, we judge, that they do not command speeches, perhaps so poorly that they need to ask questions like What is knowledge?

Socrates' presentation of the chorister-philosophers here has none of the characteristics, emphatically none, that we have come to associate with philosophy understood as the pursuit of wisdom. These "at the top" do not know their way to the marketplace, or where to find any "common assembly of the city" (173d). They know nothing of the laws or any of the serious (*spoudai*) business of the city. They know nothing of the erotic delights of banquets and flute girls, never even dreaming of these, Socrates emphasises. The chorister knows nothing of the city's conventions of nobility. And, of extreme importance, "he doesn't even know that he does not know these things" (173e). He abstains from the pleasures of the city not because of his concern for reputation—he has no such concern—but because he holds these things in contempt. His body alone resides in the city, whereas his mind (*dianoia*) flies beneath the earth, there to "[geometricize] (*geometrousa*) the planes," and above, "star gazing (*astronomousa*)" (173e-74a). The chorister is most concerned to explore "everywhere every nature of each whole of the things which are (*pasan pante phusin ereunomene ton onton ekastou holou*)" (174a) without being so troubled to condescend to the things near at hand.

The contrasting examples of Socrates and Theodorus illustrate the extremely peculiar character of this chorister sketch. That these choristers are introduced by

Socrates as “at the top,” and not spending their time “so poorly” in philosophy makes it sound as if their pursuit of wisdom is complete, that they in fact possess wisdom and are, indeed, not philosophers but wise men simply. In terms of the cave from *Republic VII*, we might think that these “at the top” stroll in the broad, sunlit uplands outside. The similarity, however, of these choristers to how Socrates referred to the motion-men poets—“tip-top,” *akroi* (152e)—alerts us to Socrates’ playful message. Most striking in this regard is that these wise choristers are characterized in the first place by what they do not know (*ouk isasi*). In the first list of things the choristers-at-the-top don’t know, we discern that these are matters of which men like Theodorus, not men like Socrates, are ignorant. Theodorus, we remember, is unaware of the very definite limit to Socrates’ leisure (172c) as determined by the courts, councilhouses, and laws. Socrates, for his part, is sufficiently familiar with the marketplace that he could plausibly refer to his time spent there in his defence speech. And he evidently knows his way, or can find his way, to the courthouse.¹³⁷ While it is true that Socrates had no care for the *spoudai* business of gaining office, that he could give some account for his lack of such interest in his apology demonstrates that this was not for lack of awareness. Quite the opposite, as he explains, his ever present need to investigate his own ignorance left him with no time to devote to the business of the city:

And because of this occupation, [seeking and investigating in accordance with the god,] I have had no leisure, either to do any of the things of the city worth speaking of... (*Apology* 23b)¹³⁸

¹³⁷ *Theaetetus* 210d, *Euthyphro* 2a; cf. *Apology*.

¹³⁸ Translation by Thomas G. West and Grace Starry West, *Four Texts on Socrates* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press).

And Socrates' familiarity with the pleasures of symposia and flute girls are accounted for by Aristodemus and Apollodorus.

This statement ought to be clarified. It is not perfectly accurate to say that Socrates knows about the erotic delights of wine and women, as well as the business of the city. Most conspicuously, Socrates describes himself as barren, that is, an erotic (150c, 150d, 157d). And if I am not mistaken, nowhere in the Platonic corpus does Socrates express any erotic interest in women.¹³⁹ The only Platonic account of Socrates' corporeally sexual nature is given by Alcibiades.¹⁴⁰ There Socrates is conspicuous for his lack of carnal interest in the beautiful young man.¹⁴¹ This denotes, however, not an obliviousness on the part of Socrates, as it would seem to do for the chorister. Rather, we get the impression that as with Socrates' dereliction of his duties to the city, he is compelled by finer pleasures or nobler duties to abstain from lesser ones. *Compelled* is the right word: Socrates is consumed by an erotic neediness which cannot be satisfied by anything but the practice of philosophy. In other words, his external moderation is compelled by an internal madness. There is nothing mad about the chorister; there is little evidence, indeed, of anything "internal" at all.

To what extent does Theodorus resemble the chorister in this respect? As discussed above, his first appearance in the dialogue shows him denying any erotic interest in the lad Theaetetus (143e). He draws attention, though, to his reasons for emphasising his disinterestedness: "And if he were beautiful. I'd be afraid to speak of

¹³⁹ See Xenophon's *Memorabilia* III.xi for a certain confirmation of this. Cf. *Phaedo* 60a.

¹⁴⁰ Though compare the beginning of the *Charmides*.

¹⁴¹ *Symposium* 217b-219d.

him with intensity, should anyone in fact get the impression that I'm desirous of him" (143e). Perhaps this, like his knowledge of the condition of Theaetetus' wealth (144d), is owed to his occupation as a travelling teacher of science, dependent in at least a minimal way on the cities he is visiting. Far more conspicuous than this slight sensitivity is his total ignorance of Theaetetus' name and parentage (144bc), and the already mentioned ignorance of Socrates' situation. And as he's demonstrated in this exchange with Socrates, "he doesn't even know that he does not know all those things." Socrates makes the connection to Theodorus almost explicit, when he attributes the "usual charge against philosophers" to one who "geometricizes the planes."

The comical appearance of the geometer-philosopher is to some extent amplified in the next section of the digression (174a-175b). The philosopher continues to appear most amusing: he can't tell his neighbour from an animal nursling (174b); he can't tell the difference between a king and a herdsman (174d). And there is a plethora of references to jesting, wittiness, and laughter. The laughter is not without direction, though. Socrates is clear that the geometer-philosopher is humorous to non-philosophers like the Thracian maid and "the rest of the crowd" (174c). Likewise, however—and this signals an important turn in the depiction of the philosopher—the philosopher himself begins to laugh at the crowd. This is prepared by Socrates' amusing presentation, from the philosopher's point of view, of the ridiculous character of human life: so-called kings are really just shepherds, "milking a more peevish and conspiratorial animal" (174d), and the conventional assessments of wealth and good-breeding are shown to be "the praise from those whose sight is

altogether dim and limited" (174e). The philosopher bursts out laughing at the genealogist who can't count, but who are certain of their lineal descent from the god (175b).

The transition here, shown by the reciprocal comedy played out by and for the philosopher and the crowd, is owed to Socrates' replacement in his sketch of the objects of the philosopher's gazing. Whereas in the initial presentation, the philosopher flew above and below the earth, now his concern is the human things: "what a human being is and in what respect it's suitable for a nature of that sort to act or to be acted on that's different from all the rest—he seeks that, and all his trouble is in exploring it" (174b). This is the second of Socrates' three stated objects of the philosophers' investigations.¹⁴² The appearance of the comical in the life of the philosopher begins when the philosopher turns back from his first flight to the human things. In doing this, the philosopher appears, then, as the one who binds the things above and the things below within the city—eros personified. He is initially perplexed, of course, and appears ridiculous. But this aspect of his appearance is not new; what is new is his shared experience with the crowd, that of laughter. The philosopher can flee the city on his own, but it is the character of his erotic connection to his fellow human beings that ensures that he remains attached to them. This attachment is signified by their similar experience in laughter. But that this attachment is not altogether without some tension is indicated by the fact that the philosopher and the crowd do not laugh at the same thing: they are laughing at each other.

¹⁴² Hemmenway, 334.

The transition to the third object of the philosopher's inquiry signals the possibility for a certain reconciliation between the crowd and the philosopher. This is accompanied by the philosopher's repair from the condition of utter perplexity; he can see the order or ratio (*logos*) in the human things—for instance, the connection between the particulars of justice and justice itself. As Socrates says:

whenever he gets to drag someone up, my friend, and he's responsible for someone being willing to leave off from "How am I wronging you, or you me?" and turns to the examination of justice itself and injustice, what each of the pair is and in what respect they differ from everything or each other, or from "Whether a king's happy in possession of mickle gold," and turns to an examination of kingship and of human happiness and misery in general, of what sort the pair is and in what way it's suitable for the nature of a human being to acquire one and avoid one of the pair... (175cd)

In dragging someone up, the philosopher begins, in the smallest way, the foundation of a more rational community. No longer does the crowd laugh only at the philosopher, "for they don't perceive" (175d) what has happened, nor does the philosopher join in laughing at the crowd, as with his initial return to the city. Instead, the philosopher is joined in laughter with his fellows, "all those who've been reared in a fashion contrary to slaves" (175d). That the humour is no longer directed mutually against each part of the city signifies the newfound concord. Between the freemen, the philosophers, this is the perfection of humour: they are in perfect harmony (176a).

This philosopher is not given over to the incipient violence of Theodorus' mathematicism. In the first place, he is not so prickly as Theodorus—"it is no matter of indignation for him to seem to be naïve and nothing" (175e). Rather than applying himself strictly to the elimination of evils, here Socrates recommends a second flight,

this time from the harmful things that “haunt mortal nature” (176a). This second flight is distinguished from the earlier description of the philosopher’s flight from the city in favour of geometricizing and such. It is characterised by “assimilation to a god as far as possible,” and requires that the philosopher has already familiarised himself with the human things, for he is “to become just and holy with prudence” (176a). After his initial instruction to flee “this region here,” Socrates’ description of this flight of the philosopher, as opposed to the initial one, pays no emphasis to the departure from the city or the separation from the body. Of the things of the city, Socrates mentions the opinions of the many and “the drivel of old women;” and he attributes to the god the peculiarly human virtues of justice and holiness, governed by the good sense of prudence. The “god,” instead of being a removed, ethereal entity seems rather to signal the strangeness of the philosopher among other humans. Socrates’ attention is given to the uncanny, and in this respect godlike, appearance of the philosopher among men:

It’s in his dealing with this that there’s the truly dreadful uncanniness of a man or his nothingness and unmanliness, for the cognition of this is wisdom and simply true virtue, and its ignorance folly and manifest vice, and all the rest of seeming uncanniness and wisdom that occur in the practice of political power is vulgar, and what occurs in the arts common. (176c)

Here is the depiction of the nobility of the life of philosophy. I suggest that the “dreadful uncanniness,” the “nothingness and unmanliness” is how the philosopher’s unfathomable neediness, his eroticism, appears to others: an awesome, god-like, and

beautiful power.¹⁴³ The philosopher is characterized by seeming always out of place, homeless like Eros.¹⁴⁴ His constant interrogations, an unrelentingly corrosive skepticism that reduces its objects to nothingness, are the exterior agitation of the erotic, interior lack. And the example of Socrates is demonstration enough of the feminine, or unmasculine, character of the perfectly erotic life: he understands justice as harming no one; he curses by Hera; he distinguishes himself in battle most especially in retreats; and here in the *Theaetetus* he describes himself as a midwife devotee-priestess of Artemis.

The digression ends by Socrates again invoking the daemon: "you extraordinary being!" (177b) And despite Theodorus' frequent and sometimes enthusiastic claims to agree with Socrates, we are left with the impression that he has not been "turned around," so to speak. He remains a simple interlocutor, and with no trouble Socrates gets him to agree that

about the good things, there is no one still so manly as to have the nerve to fight it out that whatever a city lays down for itself in the belief that they're beneficial, then these things also are, for as long a time as they're laid down, beneficial. (177d)

¹⁴³ Cf. Thomas Pangle, "Socrates on the Problem of Political Science Education," *Political Theory* 13 (1985): "to his students and to other appreciative onlookers, Socrates' soul seemed to be infused with an awesome, beautiful, and therefore god-like power. But such reverence depended upon an insufficient appreciation of the neediness, the lack or deficiency, which underlay all of Socrates' strivings. Socrates himself was fully aware of that neediness; and consequently his own attitude toward his eros is better understood as something like a respect for the preeminently useful than as a reverence for something noble or beautiful.... For those who could share or appreciate Socrates' passion, even to a small extent, to be in Socrates' presence was to experience something that is not improperly described in terms of the uncanny; as is the case with great teachers, his passion was contagious, his presence inspiring" 133.

¹⁴⁴ *Symposium* 203cd.

Consequently Protagoras' status has been reduced from the *sophos aner* doctor to that of "relish-maker" (178d).¹⁴⁵ Before long, Theodorus' instinctive mathematicism reveals itself again in the consideration of the philosophical Heracleiteans, discussed above. The digression has failed—and we suspect that Socrates is not surprised—to make Theodorus gentle like the uncanny philosophers. The more interesting subject is Theaetetus, for as Theodorus pointed out and as Socrates claimed of his patients, "youth truly is open to improvement (*epidoien*) in everything" (146b; Socrates at 150d: *epididontes*).¹⁴⁶ This is because he is erotic and Theodorus is not.

The education and courage of Theaetetus

I have discussed to some extent the vestigial trace of eros in the form of the playful with regard to Theodorus, above. And we have seen that the philosopher of the digression takes on the uncanny appearance of an erotic—bearing in mind that eros itself, as pure neediness or cavity, has got no "look" or *eidos*, properly so-called. Eros also appears as *thaumazein*, or wonder, the beginning (*arche*) of philosophy (155c). In considering the vestiges of eros as play and wonder together, we can tease out a third characteristic of eroticism in the dialogue; this might be called erotic or philosophic courage.

I suggest that the connection between *thaumazein* and laughter is that serious or philosophical eroticism is in fact perfectly, splendidly playful; play, of course, includes laughter and jesting. These references to laughter and wonder are vestiges of

¹⁴⁵ Hemmenway, 343.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 337.

this eroticism. The first important clue to this in the dialogue is visible in Theodorus' introduction of Theaetetus to Socrates. This is the only time where Socrates refers to his own desire. It is in keeping with Theodorus' apparently delicate sensibilities and the dialogue's suppression of eros that the reference is to *epithumia* rather than to any of the more dangerous or lively manifestations of eros. Socrates says he is "desirous of knowing (*epithumo eidenai*)" if there is anyone promising among the Athenian youth (143d). Theodorus thinks immediately of Theaetetus—"I'm aware of no one who's nature is so wonderfully (*thaumastos*) good" (144a)—but immediately distances himself from any vulgar erotic interest in the boy: "And if he were beautiful, I'd be afraid to speak of him with intensity, should anyone in fact get the impression that I'm desirous of him. But as it is...he is not beautiful" (143e). This exchange, and Theodorus' subsequent praise for Theaetetus' wonderful soul—"He goes so smoothly, so unfalteringly...and all with so much gentleness, just as a stream of olive-oil flows without a sound, as for it to be a cause of wonder (*thaumasai*) that someone of his age behaves in this way" (144b)—serve to prepare the erotic ground for the introduction of the theme of play. As Socrates puts it to the three youths:

The one who makes a mistake, and whoever at any time makes a mistake, will, as children playing ball say, take his seat, an ass; but whoever prevails without a mistake, he'll be our king and enjoin us to answer whatever he wants. (145e-146a)

This exchange illuminates for us the natural connection between playfulness, erotic wonder, and philosophical discussion in the form of questioning. Throughout the dialogue, even when this connection is not made explicit in the speeches of the characters, it is always borne out in the action.

The playful in the *Theaetetus* sometimes appears as jesting or mockery. It has already been discussed that Theodorus is sometimes the butt of jokes, but he is not alone. In the course of the dialogue, Socrates also teases Theaetetus and Protagoras, and he pokes fun at himself. When Theaetetus first offers a definition to the question “What is knowledge?” Socrates calls his answer “laughable” (147b). Socrates’ long and strange account of himself as a midwife is, at least at first, amusing at Theaetetus’ expense:

Socrates: The reason is, my dear Theaetetus, that you’re suffering labor pains, on account of your not being empty but pregnant.

Theaetetus: I don’t know, Socrates, what, however, I’ve experienced, I say. (148a)

When Socrates laughs *at* someone, it suggests that he is on a different plane than the one being laughed at, as in the digression where the crowd laughed at the philosopher, but the philosopher also laughed at the crowd. When Socrates is joined in laughter with someone else, they resemble the philosopher “being with” the one he has dragged up to join him in considering the human things (175d). Their laughter together is the stuff of philosophical friendship. That Theaetetus is more frequently included in the joke over the course of the dialogue is testament to his educability, which is to say, his erotic potential. His inclusion as an observer of Socrates’ amusing depiction of the first flight of the philosopher at Theodorus’ expense is an example of this. Nonetheless, even for one so jocular as Socrates, there is an unusually large number of references to laughter and the ridiculous in this

dialogue.¹⁴⁷ The overwhelming presence of the humourous in this dialogue is owed to the unusual absence of eros from where it should be most present, in the intercourse between a philosopher and the most promising kind of student.

For all the references to laughter and wonder, they are not often coupled together. The beginning of the reported dialogue is one place. Another is when Socrates remarks that the consequences of Protagoras' thesis compel them to say both "wonderful" and "ridiculous" things (154b). This example should suffice to illuminate the role that the laughable and the amazing play in the dialogue. The wonderful and ridiculous things that Socrates and Theaetetus go on to speak about—after Socrates' curse "by Hera" (154d)—is the greater and smaller numbers. As we have remarked above, in this argument Socrates is not a little duplicitous. It might well be, however, that Socrates' duplicity is for the sake of Theaetetus' education. It

¹⁴⁷ I am tempted to suggest that Socrates' famous irony is the reverse side of his jocularity. The Platonic Socrates is only ever called ironical by interlocutors who are more or less hostile: Calicles in the *Gorgias*, in the *Symposium* by Alcibiades, Thrasymachus in the *Republic*. Consider the argument of Ronna Burger, "Socratic *eironeia*," *Interpretation*, 13/2 (May 1985), pp. 143-49. I owe this reference to Catherine Zuckert. On the more strictly comical, consider Leo Strauss who, freely imitating Saint Thomas More, writes the following of Socrates in *The City and Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963): "Socrates left us no example of weeping, but, on the other side, he left us example of laughing (n.14: *Phaedo* 115c5; Xenophon, *Apology of Socrates* 28). The relation of weeping and laughter is similar to that of tragedy and comedy. We may therefore say that the Socratic conversation and hence the Platonic dialogue is slightly more akin to comedy than to tragedy.... Each dialogue, we venture to say, abstracts from something that is most important to the subject matter of the dialogue. If this is so, the subject matter as presented in the dialogue is strictly speaking impossible. But the impossible—or a certain kind of the impossible—if treated as possible is in the highest sense ridiculous or, as we are in the habit of saying, comical" 61-2. Stanley Rosen, in discussing the *Phaedo* and remarking that there is "something comical" about it (Socrates is said to laugh quietly twice, at *Phaedo* 84d8, 115c5), notes the following: "By way of contrast, cf. Heidegger's extensive remarks in *Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik, Gesamtausgabe, Bd. 29/30*, on melancholy (*Scwermut*) as the *Grundstimmung* of philosophy (pp. 270 ff.). Heidegger cites Aristotle's *Problemata* on the *melancholia* of Socrates and Plato. If this observation is accurate (I am not denying it), it raises the question as to why there is no trace of melancholy in the dialogues themselves (to say nothing of Aristotle's treatises). Stanley Rosen, *The Question of Being: A Reversal of Heidegger* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 53 n.2.

is medicinal, as is the kind of jesting referred to above.¹⁴⁸ As Socrates' degrees of jesting imply a difference in rank in the midst of a discussion of perpetual, ceaseless flux, so his duplicity is intended to provoke Theaetetus to a sense of stability retained amidst motion.¹⁴⁹ Such a sense would be marvellous; indeed, something like this is what happens in the present exchange. By Theaetetus' own testimony:

By the gods, Socrates, I wonder (*thaumazo*) exceedingly as to what in the world these things are, and sometimes in looking at them I truly get dizzy. (155d)

This experience of wonder expressed by this utterance is encouraged by Socrates:

The reason is, my dear, that, apparently, Theodorus' guess about your nature is not a bad one, for this experience is very much a philosopher's, that of wondering (*to thaumazein*). For nothing else is the beginning (*arche* – principle) of philosophy than this. (155d)

Socrates is encouraging Theaetetus to detect at least something that might be distinguished from the chaotic flux they have plunged themselves into. What has become immediately at issue is the stability or identity of themselves: at 154a, Socrates posited along fluxist lines that “you yourself are never in a condition to yourself; and after the more abstract example of the dice, Socrates returns the problem to themselves (155bc).¹⁵⁰ What Socrates is encouraging is not the spirited reassertion of the self as a self-grounding identity against the outside world in motion; the dangers of this are alluded to in Theodorus and thus anticipate Machiavelli.

¹⁴⁸ Rosen remarks in *Plato's Symposium* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 166, that when “Socrates describes the effect of his conversation on others in the Platonic dialogues, it is generally in flattering terms: the gnat who stimulates lethargic Athenians (*Apology* 30e4-5), or the midwife who tests the merits of her patients' offspring (*Theaetetus* 149a4 ff.). Frequently, however, the impression of the patients is the reverse: ... they detect in the midwife's drugs a narcotic rather than a stimulating effect. And indeed, as we have seen, Socrates sanctions the useful lie precisely on medical grounds (*Republic* 382c6-10).”

¹⁴⁹ Roochnik remarks of this numbers game that Socrates is “plunging Theaetetus into the flux, to intensify the boy's search for stability,” 39.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 47.

Instead, Socrates approves of the gentle, though stunning, openness to stability by persistent wonder, beginning with the strange identity of oneself with oneself through time and fluctuating space. It is wonder that permits one to keep one's place. This self-awareness is the beginning of the erotic sense of lack, whose outward appearance is the life of philosophy as depicted in the digression.

These intimations of ours are confirmed by the occasion of Socrates' most enthusiastic encouragement of Theaetetus in the entire dialogue. The discussion between Theaetetus and Socrates reaches something of a crescendo after the digression. The term "soul" (*psuche*) is slipped into the dialogue by Socrates (184d). And it is soon after this that Theaetetus distinguishes himself rather magnificently in his responses to Socrates' questions (185cd). This prompts Socrates to remark: "You're following exceedingly well, Theaetetus, and these are the very things I'm asking about" (185d). By this point, Socrates' ministrations and incantations have quite exercised Theaetetus, and he exclaims:

But, by Zeus, Socrates, I for one could not say, except that I'm just of the opinion that there's no peculiar tool of that sort [which clarifies being] at all for these things as there is for those, but the soul itself through itself (*aute di hautes phuche*), it appears to me, examines the common things about all of them [the beings]. (185de)

If I am not mistaken, this discovery on the part of Theaetetus survives the several refutations of the definitions of knowledge which follow. The effusiveness of Socrates' praise is evidence of the importance of this remark on the soul:

It's because you *are* beautiful, Theaetetus, and not, as Theodorus was saying, ugly. For whoever speaks beautifully is beautiful and good. And besides being beautiful you did me a favour, and freed me from a very large speech, if it appears to you that the soul itself through itself examines some things, and some things through the powers of the

body. For this, which was my opinion too, I wanted it to get to be your opinion as well. (185e)

The implications of these statements are several, and perhaps the most relevant for our study is that the description of Theaetetus as “beautiful and good” directs our attention back to the frame dialogue of Terpsion and Eucleides. But before following this indication, I should like to discuss the particulars of this exchange between Theaetetus and Socrates. The phrase “the soul itself through itself” (*aute di hautes he psuche*) is similar to Socrates’ pronomial expression from the digression, used to describe the encounter between one of the corrupt residents of the city with the uncanny philosopher:

Whenever they have to give and receive in private a speech (*logon*) of the things they blame, and they’re willing in a courageous (*andrikos*) way to put up with it for a long time and not to take flight in a cowardly (*anandros*) way ... then end up not being satisfied *themselves with themselves* through their speeches (*autoi autois peri hon legousi*)” (177b – emphasis mine).

It is the characteristic of becoming self-aware, of becoming sensitive to the lack within, that is most outstanding. In the course of the discussion, Socrates has enchanted Theaetetus with the possibility of steadfastness within flux, generating the experience of wonder in the boy’s soul. The maturation of this first erotic stirring, in the context of the constant flow of becoming in which they have immersed themselves, is Theaetetus’ awareness of the subtle permanency of his own, increasingly passionate interest in the discussion.¹⁵¹

In the act of correcting his earlier speeches with his thesis about the soul, Theaetetus exhibits the characteristics of the man who joins the philosopher in the

¹⁵¹ Cf. Ibid., 47-48.

digression who is characterized by his new courageous (*andrikos*) unwillingness to rest satisfied with his doctrines of flux. A word about the masculinity and effeminacy of the philosopher: Earlier in the digression, Socrates referred to “the truly dreadful uncanniness of a man (*andros*) or his nothingness and unmanliness (*anandria*)” (176c). The Greek is very peculiar in that it distinguishes the philosopher for his courageous manliness in designating him *aner*, and then refers to his effeminacy or cowardice, his “unmanliness.” In the context, Socrates is describing the bizarre appearance of the philosopher among the people of the city. The unmanly appearance of the philosopher before the people is fairly straightforward, and I have discussed it above. Slightly more perplexing is the reference to the courage of the philosopher, especially when part of Socrates’ attempted correction of Theodorus and education of Theaetetus is aimed at disabusing them of the violent inclinations of mathematical politics. I suggest that Socrates is giving the philosopher his due by referring to his courage, which is not at all—or certainly not in the first place—directed at the things of the city, but at retaining the fragile, subtle insight given by the flash of *thaumazein*. This is what is implied in Socrates’ many and conspicuous praises of Theaetetus’ courage. What is meant is the courage to turn inward, rather than outward, and face the enduring cavity in their soul—their erotic neediness for who knows what—and not succumb to despair, indeed, there to find the most enduring source of delight. This is at once painfully difficult and extremely delicate: the philosopher exposes himself to the constant buffeting of flux and becoming in the service of preserving the fleeting experience of wonder, that it might deepen into a more full-blooded erotic

awareness. That Theaetetus exhibits the character to do this in his reflection on the soul earns the high praise that he is “beautiful and good.”

Socrates’ remark raises again the status of the beautiful or noble (*to kalon*), the consideration of which had failed to entice Theodorus. This had something to do with Theodorus’ ignorance of Socrates’ impending death. It was this failure that led directly to the digression on the philosopher, in the course of which the philosophic life appeared as most noble, but only by inference: it was called most just and holy, but its nobility was implied only by the explicit contrast with the vulgar and the common (176c). There is nothing in the digression, however, which concerns death, or the final terminus of that noble life. Likewise there is no mention of *thaumazein*. In his quick work of Theodorus after the digression, Socrates has Theodorus agree to the permanence of the good, but there is no mention of the noble (177d). It is worth recalling in this context that in his introduction of Theaetetus, Theodorus, who is not aware of Theaetetus’ beauty or nobility, does not praise Theaetetus’ courage so thoroughly as his gentleness (144b). But at Theaetetus’ death, the courageous death of a soldier, Theaetetus is remarked as an *aner*, “noble and good” (142b).

This series of considerations points to the difference between the noble and the good. The noble, I suggest, is concerned with the finite and temporal, because it remains connected to the bodily things of perception. The good, as is suggested in a different context elsewhere, is eternal. Where the eternal appears within the finite things, it has the aspect of the playful or the wonderful—we might call these beautiful—these all have the character of being fleeting. As something of an aberration, the mathematician Theodorus is concerned exclusively with the eternal

objects of mathematical contemplation, having skipped over or more likely forgotten the beautiful intermediaries. He is ignorant of the requirements, imposed ultimately by the finitude of death, of nobility or of life as it is lived by human beings. Hence his deprecation of Theaetetus' courage, this being the virtue associated with facing death, and his ignorance of the noble as it is implied by the impending death of Socrates. In the digression there is no direct mention of the noble because Theodorus is largely incapable of seeing it; this is confirmed after the digression as well.

In the prologue, Theaetetus is apparently called "beautiful and good" because he met his death courageously. In the reported dialogue, Socrates calls Theaetetus "beautiful and good" because he spoke beautifully. What have these got in common? A clue is offered in the speech of Socrates: In Socrates' praise of Theaetetus, he is called beautiful because he speaks beautifully, but he speaks beautifully not, it would seem, because he is beautiful, but because he is both beautiful and good. Socrates thus signals that the beautiful derives at least in part from the good, that the beautiful alone is not sufficient to sustain the beautiful. This relationship clarifies what might be the link between the courage of the philosopher, the erotic retention of wonder in the midst of flux, and the courage recognized by the city, such as, presumably, that shown in the death of a soldier. The courage of the philosopher appears in his devotion to the good wherever it might appear to him; this is depicted in Socrates' digression, in the philosopher's attachment to the god, and in Socrates' scorn there for those who have no regard for the eternal (174e). The courage recognized by the city, should it be manifest in the philosopher, derives from this philosopher's encounter with his own death. When faced with this limit, the limit enforced in "this mortal

nature and this region here,” the region of the body, the philosophic courage of the good is rendered beautiful as well. The philosopher of the digression, who leads the good life, is completed and made both beautiful and good only in his death. The *Theaetetus* is framed by references to the death of Socrates and of Theaetetus.

The dialogue ends with Socrates’ expression of hope that Theaetetus will be “tamer, believing in a moderate way that you don’t know what you don’t know” (210d). That Socrates means tame or gentle to refer to the exterior condition of a courageous soul which is distinguished by its retention of the erotic awareness of its emptiness—the knowledge that it is forever yearning for knowledge—is what we have tried to show in this study.

CONCLUSION

This study of eros, philosophy, and the ground of politics as they are treated by Plato and Machiavelli might fittingly be concluded by a brief consideration of the different estimation of courage held by these two thinkers.

Our reading of the *Mandragola* concluded by teasing out from Machiavelli's play the conviction that men of quality could never remove themselves entirely from politics. The strife of the world and the fickleness of men make this impossible; hence, they must join with the tyrant in considering politics at its own level. This means not looking up, but looking down to the foundations, to the foundations or origins which are bloody, violent, and terrifying. Should the man of quality—the philosopher—do this, he would see that there is no consolation in the life of contemplation. The only consolation to be found is in political life, and only to be secured in the repeated glance to the origins and the repetition of the founding. This requires the courage to stare at the terror of the foundations, and to join in with this violence. Anything less amounts to cowardice. Marvelling at the stars, speculating about them is, quite literally, a profound dereliction of duty, and rather a foolish self-involvement. To make any other claims about this idle activity is an act of fraud. And fraud, perhaps to Machiavelli's chagrin, can proceed well enough on its own without force.

The action of that play concerns a most quotidian example of such a fraud: a love affair. Eros, in this characterization, is the human passion most given over to self-deception. It disguises itself as learning, and permits Callimaco to flee Florence for his studies in Paris. It enflames itself in idle contemplation, in speech, and in

looking, and glorifies all this in poetic musings on nature and God. This fraud culminates in the rampant activities of womanly men, priests, in an ordinary cycle of self-perpetuating lust. Only the most extraordinary man outside of that cycle might enter into it and disrupt it. In a comical affair as light as the *Mandragola*, there is little trace that this requires so grave a quality as resolute courage, but this much is implied by the overwhelming presence of its opposite: lying, priestly womanliness.

The *Prince* is distinguished for its graver subject, its emphatic supplementation of fraud with force, and its more forthright treatment of courage. Machiavelli's readers are invited to join him in discovering that chaos prevails, that Fortune is a raging river, and that humans are only a particularly duplicitous incarnation of this savagery. The manliest of his students will stake out their own ground, fabricating a den of forgery and fraud where the human animal can nest, carving it out of the wild world which is unremittingly hostile to their endeavour. These courageous few, it seems, must fashion even themselves, generate forms to apply even to their own accidental beings. What is most urgent is that they be resolute in facing, first, the terror of the chaotic world, and second, the terror that they consist of nothing which is any different.

As in the *Mandragola*, here Machiavelli is well aware of the perpetual danger that the human tendency towards love poses for the ferocity required to secure the city and the selves of its individual citizens. As such, he makes every effort to remind his students that with every taste for pleasure, for the cup or the table, they show a little flank and ask to be savaged by Fortune or by their supposed fellows. He warns that the slightest permission of pleasure, most especially the delight of the eyes, will

transform itself into lazy or cowardly neglect of the resolution required to maintain the city.

Here Machiavelli is most surely distinguished from the Presocratics with whom Plato treats. Protagoras as he is depicted in the *Theaetetus* is very attached, it appears, to the trappings of his status as a *sophos aner*. His depiction of the inconstancy of the world has more of an aristocratic *amor fati* to it than a real sense of turbulence and violence. As such, the preservation of the city is not a pressing concern, and his “political philosophy” amounts to little more than the primacy of a smooth rhetoric that is soothing and pleasant.

It is Plato who detects, and shows Socrates trying to correct, the incipient violence in an ontology that privileges motion. The temper of Theodorus, and the easy attachment of an abstract mathematicism to what is at bottom fluxism, point to the political dangers implied in the Protagorean doctrine and its like. Should such a teaching be true, it would be better for the mathematician-philosophers to flee from the city lest they become too involved with the fluxist orators. Cowardice, as it would appear, would be the better part of virtue.

Should it be the case, though, that one mathematician could detect in the Protagorean flux something wonderful that endured, what would be different? If this were so, and Plato dramatizes the possibility in the *Theaetetus*, wouldn't this philosopher be capable of offering a better account, and offering a better display, of the nobility that Protagoras enjoys? That Theaetetus and Socrates before him were sufficiently attentive to the pleasures of their soul, their deepest desires—of which the pleasures and desires of the body were only a reflection—to provide such an account

and an example of such a deed, is what Plato offers. These philosophers, submerged in the same terrifying flux as Machiavelli or Protagoras, discerned there, amidst the play of the beings, something wonderful. The character of their courage was such that they aspired to attend to that experience of wonder, to trust it and preserve it, without shrinking from the terror. The Platonic account of the beautiful things is that they are best understood as the fleeting appearance amidst the flux of the eternal or good. This is what the philosopher most longs for, what satisfies his erotic need.

Again, because Machiavelli was aware of and unsatisfied with the Platonic correction of the Presocratic aspirations to nobility, he allows for no trace of them or their attendant pleasures in his teaching. In his estimation, the Platonic correction of the motion men—the elevation of the good—amounts to a flight from this world and a cowardly surrender to the flux in favour of something only imagined. Machiavelli instead counsels a courageous reassertion against the world. But as the object of this activity—Fortune herself—is formless, so the character of Machiavellian courage is indistinguishable from a directionless resolve, except inasmuch as it is self-grounding. This corresponds to the Machiavellian characterization of eros, which is that it is a limitless, directionless, flurry of passions—as insatiable as it is inchoate. Platonic courage and eros are both directed by the stability that obtains through flux, appearing here as wonder and play and elsewhere ascribed to the Ideas. As such they may be measured by virtue of wisdom or prudence, with due sensitivity to what is beautiful and good.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Machiavelli and Plato: Editions, Translations, and Commentaries:

Machiavelli, Niccolo. *The Comedies of Machiavelli*. English and Italian. Translated by James B. Atkinson and David Sices. Hanover: University Press of New England, 1985.

———. *Discourses on Livy*. Translated by Harvey C. Mansfield and Nathan Tarcov. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.

———. *Mandragola*. Translated by Mera J. Flaumenhaft. Prospect Heights: Waveland Press, 1981.

———. *The Prince*. Translated, introduction, and notes by Leo Paul S. de Alvarez. Prospect Heights: Waveland Press, 1980.

———. *The Prince*. Translated and edited by Angelo M. Codevilla. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997.

———. *The Prince*. Translated and with an introduction by Harvey C. Mansfield. 2d ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.

———. *The Chief Works and Others*. Vol. 1-3. Translated by Allan Gilbert. Durham: Duke University Press, 1965.

Plato and Aristophanes. *Four Texts on Socrates: Plato's Euthyphro, Apology, and Crito, and Aristophanes' Clouds*. Translated with notes by Thomas G. West and Grace Starry West. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984.

Plato. *Complete Works*. Edited, with introduction and notes, by John M. Cooper. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997.

———. *Plato's Symposium*. Translated by Seth Benardete. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001.

———. *Plato's Theaetetus: Part I of The Being of the Beautiful*. Translated and with commentary by Seth Benardete. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986.

———. *The Republic of Plato*. Translated, with Notes and an Interpretive Essay by Allan Bloom. 2d. ed. New York: Basic Books, 1991.

———. *The Symposium of Plato*. Edited by R. G. Bury. 2d ed. Cambridge: W. Heffner and Sons Ltd., 1932.

———. *The Theaetetus of Plato*. Edited by Lewis Campbell. Reprint of the 1861 edition. New York: Arno Press, 1973.

Other Primary and Secondary Literature:

Aristotle. *The Basic Works of Aristotle*. Edited and with an introduction by Richard McKeon. New York: Random House, 1941.

———. *Nicomachean Ethics*. Translated, with introduction, notes, and glossary by Terence Irwin. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1985.

———. *The Politics*. Translated and with an introduction, notes, and glossary by Carnes Lord. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984.

Ascoli, Albert Russell and Victoria Kahn, eds. *Machiavelli and the Discourse of Literature*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993.

Atkinson, James B. and David Sices, eds. and trans. *Machiavelli and His Friends: Their Personal Correspondence*. Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1996.

Behuniak-Long, Susan. "The Significance of Lucrezia in Machiavelli's *La Mandragola*." *Review of Politics* 51 (1989): 264-280.

Benardete, Seth. *The Argument of the Action: Essays on Greek Poetry and Philosophy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.

———. "Theaetetus Commentary" in *Plato's Theaetetus: Part I of The Being of the Beautiful*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986.

Blanchard, Kenneth C. "Being, Seeing, and Touching: Machiavelli's Modification of Platonic Epistemology." *Review of Metaphysics* 49 (March 1996): 577-607.

Bloom, Allan. *The Closing of the American Mind*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987.

———. *Giants and Dwarfs: Essays 1960-1990*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990.

———. *Love and Friendship*. New York: Simon Schuster, 1993.

Bostock, David. *Plato's Theaetetus*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988.

- Coby, Patrick. *Socrates and the Sophistic Enlightenment*. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1987.
- Craig, Leon Harold. *The War Lover: A Study of Plato's Republic*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994.
- Cropsey, Joseph. "The Dramatic End of Plato's Socrates." *Interpretation* 14, no. 3 (Spring 1986): 155-175.
- . *Plato's World: Man's Place in the Cosmos*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.
- Flaumenhaft, Mera J. "The Comic Remedy: Machiavelli's 'Mandragola.'" *Interpretation* 7, no. 2 (May 1978): 33-74.
- Freeland, Cynthia. "Commentary on Rosen's 'Platonic Hermeneutics: On the Interpretation of a Platonic Dialogue.'" In *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy*. Vol. 1. Boston: 1985, 289-295.
- Gillespie, Michael Allen. *Nihilism Before Nietzsche*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.
- Grant, George. *Technology and Empire*. Toronto: Anansi, 1969.
- Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. Translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. New York: Harper, 1962.
- Hemmenway, Scott R. "Philosophical Apology in the *Theaetetus*." *Interpretation* 17, no. 3 (Spring 1990): 323-346.
- Herrick, Marvin T. *Italian Comedy in the Renaissance*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1966.
- Hexter, J. H. "Seyssel, Machiavelli, and Polybius VI: The Mystery of the Missing Translation." *Studies in the Renaissance* 3 (1956): 75-96.
- Howland, Jacob. *The Paradox of Political Philosophy: Socrates' Philosophic Trial*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998.
- . "Re-reading Plato: The Problem of Platonic Chronology." *Phoenix* 45 (1991): 189-214.
- Hullung, Mark. "Machiavelli's *Mandragola*: A Day and a Night in the Life of a Citizen." *Review of Politics* 40 (1978): 32-57.

Hyland, Drew A. *Finitude and Transcendence in the Platonic Dialogues*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995.

———. "Why Plato Wrote Dialogues." *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 1 (1968): 38-50.

Jonas, Hans. "The Nobility of Sight: A Study in the Phenomenology of the Senses." In *The Phenomenon of Life: Toward a Phenomenological Biology*. New York: Harper and Row, 1966, 135-156.

Klein, Jacob. *A Commentary on Plato's Meno*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989.

———. *Plato's Trilogy: Theaetetus, the Sophist, and the Statesman*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977.

Lenzner, Steven. "Author as Educator: Strauss's Twofold Treatment of Maimonides and Machiavelli." *The Claremont Institute*, www.claremont.org/writings/02apsa_lenzner.html, Spring 2003.

Lord, Carnes. "Allegory in Machiavelli's *Mandragola*." In *Political Philosophy and the Human Soul: Essays in Memory of Allan Bloom*. Edited by Michael Palmer and Thomas Pangle. Lanham: Rowmand and Littlefield, 1995.

Manent, Pierre. *An Intellectual History of Liberalism*. Translated by Rebecca Balinski. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994.

———. *Modern Liberty and its Discontents*. Edited and translated by Daniel J. Mahoney and Paul Seaton. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998.

Mansfield, Harvey C. "The Cuckhold in Machiavelli's *Mandragola*." In *The Comedy and Tragedy of Machiavelli: Essays on the Literary Works*. Edited by Vickie B. Sullivan. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000, 1-29.

———. *Machiavelli's New Modes and Orders: A Study of the Discourses on Livy*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979.

———. *Machiavelli's Virtue*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.

———. "Reply to Pocock." *Political Theory* 3, no. 4 (November 1975): 402-405.

———. *The Spirit of Liberalism*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978.

- Masters, Roger D. *Machiavelli, Leonardo, and Science of Power*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996.
- Najemy, John. *Between Friends: Discourses of Power and Desire in the Machiavelli-Vettori Letters of 1513-1515*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993.
- Newell, Waller R. "How Original is Machiavelli? A Consideration of Skinner's Interpretation of Virtue and Fortune." *Political Theory* 15, no. 4 (November 1987): 612-634.
- . "Machiavelli and Xenophon on Princely Rule: A Double-Edged Encounter." *The Journal of Politics* 50 (1988): 108-130.
- . *Ruling Passion: The Erotics of Statecraft in Platonic Political Philosophy*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000.
- Orwin, Clifford. "Machiavelli's Unchristian Charity." *American Political Science Review* 72 (1978): 1217-1228.
- Palmer, Michael. *Masters and Slaves: Essays in Political Philosophy*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001.
- Pangle, Thomas. "Editor's Introduction." In *The Roots of Political Philosophy: Ten Forgotten Socratic Dialogues*. Edited by Thomas Pangle. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987, 1-20.
- . "Socrates on the Problem of Political Science Education." *Political Theory* 13, no. 1 (February 1985): 112-137.
- Plutarch. *The Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*. Translated by John Dryden and revised by Arthur Hugh Clough. New York: The Modern Library, 1864.
- Pocock, J. G. A. "Prophet and Inquisitor: Or, a Church Built on Bayonets Cannot Stand: A Comment on Mansfield's 'Strauss's Machiavelli.'" *Political Theory* 3, no. 4 (November 1975): 385-401.
- Rebhorn, Wayne A. *Foxes and Lions: Machiavelli's Confidence Men*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988.
- Roochnik, David. "Self-Recognition in Plato's *Theaetetus*." *Ancient Philosophy* 22 (2002): 37-51.
- Rosen, Stanley. *The Ancients and the Moderns: Rethinking Modernity*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989.

- . *The Elusiveness of the Ordinary: Studies in the Possibility of Philosophy*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002.
- . "Ideas." *Review of Metaphysics* 16 (March 1963): 407-441.
- . *The Limits of Analysis*. New York: Basic Books, 1980.
- . *Metaphysics in Ordinary Language*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999.
- . *Nihilism: A Philosophical Essay*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968.
- . "Platonic Hermeneutics: On the Interpretation of a Platonic Dialogue." In *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy*. Vol. 1. Boston: 1985, 271-288.
- . *Plato's Statesman: The Web of Politics*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995.
- . *Plato's Symposium*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1968.
- . *The Quarrel Between Philosophy and Poetry: Studies in Ancient Thought*. New York: Routledge, 1988.
- . *The Question of Being: A Reversal of Heidegger*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993.
- . "Reply to Freeland." In *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy*. Vol. 1. Boston: 1985, 296-298.
- . "Socrates' Dream." *Theoria* 42 (1976): 161-188.
- Scott, John T. and Vickie B. Sullivan. "Patricide and the Plot of *The Prince*: Cesare Borgia and Machiavelli's Italy." *American Political Science Review* 88, no. 4 (December 1994): 887-900.
- Strauss, Leo. *The City and Man*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964.
- . "Machiavelli and Classical Literature." *Review of National Literatures*. 1 (1970): 7-25.
- . *Natural Right and History*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953.

- . *On Plato's Symposium*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001.
- . *On Tyranny*. Revised and Expanded Edition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.
- . *Persecution and the Art of Writing*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988.
- . "Plato." In *History of Political Philosophy*. Edited by Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey. 3d ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987, 33-89.
- . *Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983.
- . *Thoughts on Machiavelli*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958.
- . *What Is Political Philosophy? and Other Studies*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988.
- Tarcov, Nathan. "Machiavelli and the Foundations of Modernity: A Reading of Chapter 3 of *The Prince*." In *Educating the Prince: Essays in Honour of Harvey Mansfield*. Edited by Mark Blitz and William Kristol. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000, 30-44.
- Vatter, Miguel. *Between Form and Event: Machiavelli's Theory of Political Freedom*. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000.
- Zuckert, Catherine H. *Postmodern Platos: Nietzsche, Heidegger, Gadamer, Strauss, Derrida*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.